



Episode 1,372: Michael Malice on What Left and Right Mean

Guest: Michael Malice

WOODS: All right, I've had a lot of requests for a show like this. And I did one like this, but it was like Episode 14, so only the crazy people — and I say that with a tender tone — who have listened to all the episodes would even remember that.

MALICE: Not off the air, you don't.

WOODS: [laughing] Well, what's said off the air stays off the air. I want to have a conversation with you about the terms and categories, left and right, because of course, they have multiple meanings, but I do believe they have a meaning, and sometimes libertarians get a little carried away, saying either that they don't exist or they're phony or they're kind of made up to pit us against each other when they really shouldn't, or things of that sort, or that they don't apply to libertarians.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: No, no, no. Or that plumb-line libertarians are neither left nor right.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: And maybe that's true, maybe it's not, but I think it's more asserted than proved most of the time, and so I thought it would be useful to do that. So today, for instance — now, I can understand — let me just set this up a little bit. Back in the Ron Paul days, I understand why some people felt like the left-right divide is not that helpful, because sometimes by "left-right divide," people meant Democrats versus Republicans. And there, well, the US government with its two major parties, they tend to close ranks when there are dissenters. And the idea that these two, the Democrats and the Republicans, are where the real fight is to be found, well, it's more plausible today than it was ten years ago, but we just weren't buying it. We were thinking, we have more in common on some things with Ralph Nader than we do with Mitt Romney. In fact, maybe on almost everything. I don't even know.

But the point is, people thought there's something screwy about this. But I think that was just because the terms were not being correctly applied. I think there is something to it. There's no way you're going to tell me that there isn't a left in America. Okay, then we'll just use another word if it makes people feel better. But there certainly is. But yet within that term, within the left, there are divisions and stuff. What would you say, if you had to just kind of sum up for a complete newbie to politics, if you had to explain what is the fundamentals of what it means to be on the left and on the right, what would it boil down to in your opinion?

MALICE: Well, there's a few — I'm going to get to that in a second, but let's get a little bit more fundamental, because you touched on some things that I think are certainly important. There are people who have this — and this is not just exclusive to libertarians, although I think libertarians do tend to be often far more literal-minded than people from other political persuasions. And when you're dealing with literal-minded people, it's very hard to discuss semantics, because their minds simply don't work in those terms, and they also get very angry and very frustrated.

And there's also a big problem where people have this idea that I'm X, the bad people are Y, and therefore, they're going to draw this nice little line, and all the bad qualities are going to be ascribed to Y and all the good qualities are going to be ascribed to X. And the classic example of this with right and left is that left means government, right means freedom, so Hitler and Stalin are the same, and anarchism is right-wing. Well, when I ask them, well, do you think that there's no difference between right-wing anarchists like Rothbard and left-wing anarchists like Emma Goldman or Kropotkin or something like that — I don't even know if Kropotkin's an anarchist — or Proudhon or one of them, they'll say, yeah, they're the same thing. It's just like, okay, I mean, that is false. Certainly if you and I sat down with Emma Goldman, we would have our disagreements, although our analysis on certain things would certainly be very, very close and we'd be able to have a conversation.

But this just stems from taxonomy. On the one hand, you can say bats and sparrows are the same because they fly, or you could say ostriches and penguins are the same because they're birds that don't fly, but then you could say ostriches and lions are the same because they're predators. So there's different ways to slice the apple.

One thing that you can't say is, well, we're neither right nor left. That's not how an axis works. You have nowhere else to go. You have to be somewhere on this axis. And the problem also is sometimes libertarians have what are traditionally left wing elements and traditionally right-wing elements, so it's kind of a hodgepodge, but just because those elements are there does not mean this person defies categorization. That is a linguistic impossibility, in my view.

So there's certain things, and when people use these terms, they often use them instinctually. They don't really have coherent definitions, and that's why the conversations get messy. Well, most people don't use most words with coherent definitions; they just use them very loosely, especially as words are thrown out into the vernacular.

So the first distinction I would define in right versus left would be egalitarianism versus hierarchy. Do you aspire to equality — and any reference to equality is leftism. And now, a lot of people get triggered by this because they don't like leftism; they like equality; therefore, they don't like this definition. Well, too bad. Right-wingism historically means hierarchy and an understanding, appreciation, or even admiration of hierarchy. So that would be one very clear and easy distinction that is used, and I think that seems very commonly, although maybe not consciously.

WOODS: First of all, okay, we definitely want to go with it. I'm glad you mentioned the idea of the spectrum running from authoritarianism on the left and to freedom on the right, because I get this so often on social media, from people who are kind of sympathetic to my point of view, and they just think, well, what's the point of talking about it? It's really easy. You know, if you believe in freedom, then you're farther on the right side of the spectrum, and if you believe in authoritarianism, you're on the left.

But first of all, number one, that kind of big philosophical question is not the only thing that left and right are interested in, first of all. But secondly, that's not even really true, because there are plenty of people who clearly are on the right — there's no other way to describe them — who do think that the state — who would be appalled at the idea of anarchism, who think that the state has an —

MALICE: Or even minarchism.

WOODS: I beg your pardon?

MALICE: Or even minarchism.

WOODS: Or even minarchism. They believe in the — George Will has a book called *Statecraft as Soulcraft*. They believe that because man is fallen, the state needs to create the atmosphere in which he is most likely to be able to live a virtuous life. And if that means the state needs to intervene in family life, in censorship, in whatever, then they'll do it. And that's clearly right-wing, and that involves a considerable state. So that is wrong to think of it that way. Do not — as of this episode, stop thinking of it that way.

Now, your point about equality and hierarchy is very important. Back in the — and just in case everybody doesn't get this already, Michael and I talk a lot, and we're friends, and so when we are on each other shows, it's a conversation more than like a stilted interview. So I do want to have this in that kind of format.

We think about equality back in the 19 — it was either '70s or '80s, in *Modern Age*, which is the publication that has been I guess at least since the '50s, Russell Kirk founded, conservative publication, put out by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, scholarly journal. Harry Jaffa, who was a Straussian had a debate with M.E. Bradford, who was the guy who was put up to be by Reagan the head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and then the neocons smeared him, so he had to withdraw his name. And then we got Bill Bennett — thank heavens we had Bill Bennett.

But anyway, Bradford and Jaffa had a famous debate on whether Equality with a capital E was a conservative principle, and Jaffa said absolutely it is, and Bradford said no, it's not. And he had all his reasons, and his main reason was: because it is an engine of permanent revolution, which is the opposite of what a conservative believes. But let me ask you, though, about the hierarchy end of that question, because I guess it sort of depends on the kind of hierarchy you have in mind. I mean, if you go back way, way back in history, then the right wing would have been the people who favor the hereditary aristocracy and/or the traditional privileges of the monarchy and so on.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: Whereas Thomas Jefferson, who I know is not your favorite historical figure, he clearly did believe in a natural elite, but his idea of the natural elite was one that was voluntarily recognized by people, not one that had hereditary privileges. And in this day and age, nobody basically favors hereditary privileges for elite. So even people who believe in hierarchy, nevertheless, they don't believe in an enforced inequality, so that is kind of an evolution of the right wing, is it not?

MALICE: I mean, Jefferson was hardly a full-blown leftist, but in the context of that spectrum of the Founding Fathers, he and his group would be the left-hand group. He was the one we spoke about all men are created equal, and things like this, so equality was his kind of watchword. You don't really see Hamilton, who would be the aristocratic impulse, speaking in terms of those concepts. And Jefferson's idea of hierarchy — again, he's relatively left. These terms also are relative and are contextual. His idea of hierarchy wasn't these stratified levels like Hamilton would have. It would really be the dirt farmers, who he said basically are children of God, and then you have the landed gentry — and slaves, but he didn't really talk about them in his conception. So it's basically like two tiers. And even then, he wasn't particularly comfortable with the idea that some men are better than others.

Like, here's another example. John Locke, who obviously for everyone listening was the, I would say, most influential political philosopher of the Revolutionary era, he said in one of his treatises that people are basically the same and that the differences don't really matter. So you have to get to contemporary times or maybe Marxism to have this real full-blown leftism with the idea that human beings are inherently interchangeable and equal in that sense. And you see that nowadays. There's these attempts to make us all interchangeable, and kind of force the meat through the grinder and the cookie cutters.

But yeah, you made a reference, which I think is important. The concept of left and right historically comes from the French legislature, where the aristocrats sat on the right, the conservative aristocrats, and then the radicals and the men of the people sat on the left. So that is one of the bases of right and left, historically.

But other points are, there's another way to view right versus left, which is — and I'll put something else out. Regarding conservatism, Richard Ely — why don't you tell these people who Richard Ely is, one of the most evil men who ever lived in America?

WOODS: Well, my recollection is he was the head of the American Economic Association.

MALICE: Co-founder, yeah.

WOODS: Okay. And as somebody who lived around the early 20th century and turn of the century, I would think of him as being one of the architects of the modern American Progressive mind, that we're going to have an elite group of experts who, armed with these sheets of statistics, are going to administer things for the dummies. I mean, they don't quite put it that way —

MALICE: Oh, yeah, they do.

WOODS: — but that's more or less the way they think.

MALICE: Oh, yeah. I read one of his books. He was one of the founders of the social gospel, the idea that instead of individual salvation, you have to have a nation that is saved in the Christian sense. And he explicitly says: don't tell the masses their lives are going to be better or that they have opportunity. They don't. Make their lives better for them, and basically put some nice trimmings in their squalor. And the last chapter of his autobiography — and he was Woodrow Wilson's mentor. Woodrow Wilson is the archetypical Progressive, even more than Teddy Roosevelt or FDR. The last chapter of Richard Ely's book, his autobiography, which I

just recently got a signed copy of: "My Belief in the Equality of Opportunity." This was a progressive, left-wing concept. And you know my quote, Tom, I say this on Twitter every five seconds, that conservatism is progressivism driving the speed limit. All these ideas that conservatives fight for have their roots in progressive dogma, and they often don't even realize it. And let me say one more — can I give you another example?

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, go ahead.

MALICE: Another example of right versus left is an emotional one. Do you sympathize with the weak, or do you empathize with the strong? So when people talk about law and order being right-wing and bleeding hearts being left-wing, this is a categorization that they're using. Do you want to be the strong man? You know, historically, political strong men are regarded as right-wing, whereas, you know, Mother Teresa and people like that are regarded as left-wing. So these terms also apply in nonpolitical contexts, but in social contexts.

WOODS: I can see that, but with that kind of approach, does that then place Ayn Rand on the right, just clearly?

MALICE: Oh, yes, of course. I mean, is that in dispute?

WOODS: No, no, no, I just want to make sure that everybody gets that these terms do in fact mean something. But in terms of hierarchy, though, how does that manifest itself today? I mean, almost nobody expressly gives voice to the idea of hierarchy in a favorable way these days. So how does it manifest itself?

MALICE: I don't think that's true. I think when people talk about how we need the people who graduated college to have opportunities to express their talents, and when they defend the CIA and the government, that in a sense is hierarchy worship. That's like kind of a right-wing concept. I don't know that they would use the term "hierarchy" because it's kind of a fancy word. And the Republicans certainly are scared to be — they've been so browbeaten for decades of progressive education, progressive cultural domination, that they're not going to speak of, you know, whatever. But the example I used when I was on Rogan — and this is my litmus test, and it works every single time — if you ask — this is how you can tell if someone's right-wing or not. You ask them a simple question: are some people better than others? And if you're on the right, you're going to say yes, and if you're on the left, you're going to deliver a speech. Those are the only two results for this question, because the left will have that cognitive dissonance where, on the one hand, that's against their core beliefs; on the other hand, they realize the absurdity of saying no, so they'll just start spurting out.

WOODS: But I've had people respond to your question by asking: what do you mean by "better"?

MALICE: Right. Then you just say: answer however you want. And they'll either say yes, or they'll start freaking out. Do not explain.

WOODS: Let me throw in an idea or two of my own about left and right. So first of all, the very idea of we're going to launch a national program to accomplish A or B, or we're going to take all these people with PhDs in political science and we're going to put them in charge of such and such: that's the left-wing mindset. Because the conservative or right-wing — in fact,

let's not even use "conservative." On the right, the idea is more: the prosaic pursuit of bourgeois life is perfectly satisfactory to these people.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: That is to say: they don't need to crusade against the latest outrage. They don't need to reprogram the way people think. They don't need to change ancient traditions. If these things are going to change, they'll change gradually and organically, not through some state-imposed scheme. And those two sorts of things, it's very hard for them to coexist peacefully.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: So we've got that.

MALICE: I don't know that — Tom, I think just because things have historically appeared in the left half of the spectrum and the right half the spectrum, I don't know if that they're inherently left- or right-wing in terms of classification, because there's certainly many right-wingers — I mean, Rand. The entire point of *Atlas Shrugged* is we should have these experts running everything. Now, they're not running everything through force, but she explicitly said that men of the mind should be listened to. So this kind of how to define culture in terms of what do we do with the experts and whatever, I don't know that that ports necessarily to left- or right-wing any more than, let's suppose, vegetarianism is inherently left-wing or right-wing. There's lots of reasons for it. I think it would depend on your reasoning for why you're going to be for left- or right-wing. But I agree with you completely. In America, this idea of the experts, the technocrats, are going to run everything, that very much came out of the progressive movement.

WOODS: Now, I'm looking right now at the so-called ten conservative principles —

MALICE: Oh, God.

WOODS: — that come — I know. I know. Heaven help us. But they come out of Russell Kirk, and I'm just going to read —

MALICE: [sighs]

WOODS: I know. But I'm going to read them, and I think it might be helpful as an exercise to evaluate them.

MALICE: But before you read them —

WOODS: Yeah.

MALICE: I would point out, I've seen these before. A lot of these are worded in such weaselly ways that they can be interpreted to mean anything.

WOODS: That is indeed the problem. And that's why I keep saying that conservatism is like nailing jelly to a wall. I don't know what — and that's why people are constantly arguing who's a real conservative. Now, it's true, you know, I know you don't identify necessarily yourself as

a libertarian, but you know that in the libertarian world, there are people who argue that this one's a better libertarian than that one.

MALICE: Sure.

WOODS: But at least there's some kind of standard we can measure it by.

MALICE: Oh, yes.

WOODS: Whereas this, I don't know what. So he begins with: "First, the conservative believes that there exists an enduring moral order."

MALICE: How is that inherent to — I mean, you're telling me that the evangelical left in this country —

WOODS: Does not —

MALICE: They're not moralists?

WOODS: Yeah, they are as moralist as you could be. The whole point is that you are a reprobate and you need to be morally uplifted.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: So, all right, now, I mean, on the other hand, maybe the weasel word here is "enduring," because he could say their moral order changes every three years as they discover new victims to rescue. But it's the same general principle.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: All right: "Second, the conservative adheres to custom, convention, and continuity." All right, well, then this is part of the problem that Rothbard saw with conservatism, which was, once leftism becomes the custom, then what does the conservative do?

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: We know what he does. He sits there and does nothing.

MALICE: I had Lauren Southern on my show, you know, the activist, right-wing activists, and we were talking about immigration. And I said, are you honestly going to tell me that progressivism isn't like American as apple pie — which apparently isn't that American — that Woodrow Wilson isn't as white it gets? I mean, it baffles the mind to think that progressivism is some kind of alien ideology, when it's very much a product of this country and its history, especially at this point. He was president 100 years ago.

WOODS: Well, then we've got: "Conservatives believe in what may be called the principle of prescription." All right, well, we could talk about that, but I think that would be boring. So then: "Conservatives are guided by their principal of prudence." Now, see, that's just not helpful.

MALICE: But that's not really a principle; that's just an approach.

WOODS: Right, because prudence applies in all — and plus, really, anybody could say that — almost anybody claims to be — well, I guess an outright revolutionary would not say he's —

MALICE: Sure.

WOODS: But on the other hand, they would say: but look, the prudent thing is like basically doing the right thing at the right time, and maybe overthrowing the bourgeoisie is the right thing.

MALICE: No, Tom, I'll give you an even better example. It's prudent to have socialized health care, because all these other countries spend less on healthcare than we do, right? That's an argument they use all the time with a straight face. Here's another thing just as a sidebar. These minarchist who say I want the smallest government that's necessary to be effective: would Hillary Clinton disagree with that? No. The left would say this with a straight face. *I also want the smallest government necessary. We're just haggling over what that is.* The principle is identical.

WOODS: And of course, we hear so-called conservatives talking about — like, I guess Rick Santorum the other day was saying, "It's time to have paid family leave." Of course it is. Why wouldn't it?

MALICE: Then the argument is: *Well, he's not a real conservative.* Okay. So a real conservative is a conservative you like? Okay, that's not how it works.

WOODS: Yeah, exactly, because he'll say, "No, no, the family is the bedrock of society and having a mother home with her children" — I mean, I already know the speech. I already know it. I don't even need to think about. Then he says: "Conservatives pay attention to the principle of variety." It's a very weaselly — again, another weaselly one.

MALICE: You're telling me the left — I mean, I know the argument is that these people all look like freaks and they all end up looking the same. I'm sorry. The left are the people who live in the cities who love foreign food and foreign films and all this weird stuff. So at the very least, it's a wash.

WOODS: It's a wash, because they believe in some forms of variety, but then when it comes to ideology, they do demand uniformity.

MALICE: But culturally, they are far stronger in terms of wanting variety, which is not necessarily always a good thing. You know, this isn't a celebration of the left. I'm saying, if you're going to put culturally who has more variety, the conservatives or the liberals, this is not going to be an argument that Russell Kirk is going win, the man who refused to get a car because he thought it would take people away from where they were born.

WOODS: Right, right. Or he never learned how to drive. He would let other people drive him around, but he never — sounds like a certain Russian immigrant I know.

MALICE: Yeah, it works well for me.

WOODS: [laughing] But anyway, number six — I remember my favorite time driving you was when you got in late to the airport, I had to get you to the Mises Institute, and I broke every law there was to zoom you back to Auburn.

MALICE: Yeah, that was a lot of fun.

WOODS: Yeah, that was good. All right, then this one I actually will give him. He says: "Conservatives are chastened to buy their principle of imperfectability." And of course, here he just means the idea that you could create a New Soviet man or that eventually through evolution — you know, education will make man perfect or abolishing alcohol will make man — all these sorts of things, a Russell Kirk guy would correctly roll his eyes at.

MALICE: I'm going to disagree a little bit, because again, this can be interpreted in several ways. I'm going to paraphrase Margaret Thatcher. Being humble is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't. So the idea that Russell Kirk and the *National Review* crowd are chastened by their imperfectability, are they really speaking softly? Are they being like, *Oh, maybe I could be wrong?* Or are they absolutely smug as or even more smug than the sensible left?

WOODS: Okay, but I —

MALICE: So there's two ways to read it: on a personal level, and then there's also the good sense, which is the idea that people are always going to be flawed, which also as a right wing idea, I don't necessarily agree with it, because if something's inherently flawed, then the term flawed doesn't really apply.

WOODS: I wonder about that, though. That I'd have to chew on a bit, because I could imagine — yeah, I don't know. That's interesting.

MALICE: If something's a part of your nature, it's not a mistake. It's just your nature. A mistake is a deviation from your nature.

WOODS: I think that's the way Rand would put it.

MALICE: Correct. I am quoting — this is very much Rand's idea.

WOODS: Because in other words, the idea would be: we're just not good enough for socialism —

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: — is what sometimes comes out of the right-wing. If we could be better, then we could have socialism, and I hate that line of argument.

MALICE: Oh, it drove her crazy. It drove her crazy.

WOODS: Then we get this: "Conservatives are persuaded that freedom and property are closely linked." Okay, but libertarians can go farther than that.

MALICE: But you're telling me liberals aren't?

WOODS: Well, they would say that —

MALICE: They would agree with that sentence as written —

WOODS: Well, as written.

MALICE: They wouldn't apply it, but they would agree with it.

WOODS: As written, but yeah, with modifications, that of course everybody knows that we have to put restrictions on it and we have to do this and that.

MALICE: *Right, but we still have to have a property-based society. I'm not a communist.* They would say it, and they'd be correct in saying it.

WOODS: Yeah, because I would say most of them don't want somebody — you know, if somebody comes to rob their house, they're going to call the police.

MALICE: And in all seriousness, they don't want full blown communism where the government owns everything. They don't.

WOODS: Yeah, they don't. That's true. That's true. But there are some who do, and he would say that a conservative disagrees with that, but your point would be it's not only — you're not excluding enough people —

MALICE: That doesn't make it an inherently conservative value.

WOODS: Well, then he says — and this one, I mean, this does kind of speak to some stuff that I've written — "Conservatives uphold voluntary community quite as they oppose involuntary collectivism."

MALICE: Okay.

WOODS: So that's fair enough.

MALICE: That's fair.

WOODS: And particularly, if you want to go start your little socialist community, as some people did in the 19th century, go ahead, knock yourselves out.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: But to tell people in, I don't know what it was, somewhere around a dozen time zones that, *You are now Soviets, which is an identity that did not exist ten minutes ago, but that is the identity you have now, and we're all going to act as if that's all you have*, you know, we object to that. But again, even remember the Social Democrats in America, like Arthur Schlesinger wanted to fight the Cold War as much as anyone. So again, it's not enough to — I think these are not enough.

So then he says: "The conservative perceives the need for prudent restraints upon power and upon human passions."

MALICE: Who doesn't? The left does too.

WOODS: Yeah.

MALICE: The whole point of civil rights legislation is that.

WOODS: Well, then we get: "The thinking conservative understands that permanence and change must be recognized and reconciled in a vigorous society." Again, this is not helpful, because most people I know on the left, they don't genuinely want to overturn everything. They don't want to turn Broadway into a strip mall, for example. I mean, there are things that — they don't want to abolish Shakespeare in the Park. So the question is: how much permanence and how much change? This particular principle is not a guide.

MALICE: Obama quoted this principle himself. He said, look, if we were starting from scratch, I would want single-payer, but we have a system now, so we have to work with what we have and try to get there. That's exactly the Russell Kirk principle that he's quoting right here.

WOODS: So I think this is part of the reason, *part* of the reason that conservatism just hasn't really gone anywhere in terms of successes. If you have a book of conservative successes, it's pretty darn small.

MALICE: Correct.

WOODS: I don't understand — I don't see what's so attractive — and then in the political version, the slogans for it are not particularly attractive. And so all they can come up with is: the left is much worse. And the left is very bad on a lot of things, but I still maintain you can't beat something with nothing. What is it that you want? You don't want this program, you don't want that program. What do you want?

MALICE: And hold on —

WOODS: It's so hard to get an answer.

MALICE: Saying someone else is worse is not a principle. A principle exists independently of other people or other actors. Many of these principles are comparative to the left in the sense of, *They're bad; we're not as bad*, but they're not really coherent in and of themselves. For example, the conservative politically, historically, the principle is: we should have a balanced budget. Okay, does that mean you raise taxes — according to that, that is your principal, right? If that is your principal, then raising taxes and thereby revenue and cutting spending would both be principely identical. So you could have 70% taxes and a \$7 trillion budget, or 10% taxes and a \$10 trillion budget. They'd be the same. That's not a guide to action in terms of what you're going to do. It's just for equality in an economic sense.

WOODS: If I would have tried to define it, and I've done a lot of talking about this, it's easier for me to define what the left is all about than it is for me to define what the right is all about, because they're —

MALICE: Because they have principles.

WOODS: Yeah, they do. Whereas with the right, basically there's this sense — well, partly, it's that the right, if they really are authentically right-wing, there's a part of them that really does not want to be political, does not want to have to formulate a program, because formulating a program is kind of the opposite of what the right is all about. The right is supposed to be about maintaining what they believe to be the basic building blocks of civilization that you just don't mess with, and that you proceed with caution when you want to implement change, and there are certain ways society works that can't be messed with without major problems. And one of those is the economy, but not the only one. You can't have state ownership of the means of production and expect that to work. There are certain — private property is one of many aspects of society that is essential to its proper functioning, and there ought to be some deference given to traditional practice. It doesn't mean that tradition is always right. There can be horrible traditions. But that before you go knocking something down, you need to give it serious thought about what function it performs.

MALICE: Chesterton's fence is the best example of this: before you knocked down a fence, make sure you know why it was put up.

WOODS: Right.

MALICE: It's an asymmetry. It's easier to destroy something than to build something; therefore, the cost might be pretty high to tear it down, as opposed to the cost being or even a benefit being there if you leave it.

WOODS: Whereas, see, the thing is that when we just boil it down to, *Well, we believe in liberty and they don't*, to some degree, depending on how you define liberty, there is something to that. Like libertarians believe in it, and these people don't. But the thing is the way the left would look at it, they would say — because for instance, I do believe that a good portion of the history of libertarianism is actually a case of the left developing — I mean, I think libertarianism more less begins as a left-wingish movement, because what else could it be in the context of that time? But what happened was, what I think happened, you know, obviously, that the term "classical liberal" refers to something very different from modern-day American liberalism.

MALICE: Sure.

WOODS: Well, how did that come about? Well, what seems to me what happened is, they wanted to get rid of restrictions, they wanted to get rid of state restrictions, tariffs, restrictions on commerce, all kinds of restrictions of this kind. And they thought that this would have a good effect on all of society, which indeed it did. But I think some of them thought it would have a more equalizing effect than it actually did. So when removing state restrictions turned out to have disappointing results from their point of view, they thought, all right, well, now we need to go to the next level, which is now we need to get the state involved to continue the equalization process. And I think it developed from that kind of liberalism to modern liberalism, just saying that, *Well, you guys are just unreasonable. Look, we tried that, and it had some good effects, but the state was used to hurt the average man in the past; now we're going to use it, supposedly, to help them.* And so what they're thinking is, the individual will be helped and will have more liberty, because we will use the state to

give him more opportunities, more wealth, and thereby more flexibility to live his life the way he wants to, and isn't that more freedom? That's the way they think of it.

MALICE: Yeah, it's the sarcastic, *Oh, you mean I have the freedom to starve?*

WOODS: Exactly.

MALICE: So that's what they're fighting. There's two other ways to look at left versus right, one of which is — and this sounds like a criticism, and it's not — the right is for the — inclusionism versus exclusionism. Should everything be made as accessible to everyone as much as possible? That's a left-wing idea. Or are there some things just for me and that's not really something we should be fighting for. That is very much a very left-versus-right divide.

And that ties into another way to look at left and right, which is veneration of the outsider or us-versus-them. That's a left-versus-right-wing idea. Now, again, when people hear that, they have these quick reactions of like, blah, blah, blah. Sometimes a veneration of the outsider is good. You want to let people into your society, because they're going to add value. Sometimes it's really bad, the Trojan horse being a great example of things of that nature. So these divides are not one side is inherently good, one side is inherently bad. There are situations where one principle would apply and one wouldn't.

And another way to look at left-versus-right is: are you someone who is attracted to the new and something that you haven't seen before, or, you know, this conservative, like, I like what I have, and that's fine. That second group, although I don't belong to it, you need those very, very, very much to have continuity in a society. If you had every 20 years a revolution and things getting overthrown, that is not a country you want to live it.

WOODS: Agreed, agreed. So all right, so here's why I think it's possible to look at libertarianism today, and in a way, I could see both sides being right in trying to classify it. Like for instance, you could be extremely traditional, and say: look, I don't like any aspect of the modern world. I don't like being told what I'm supposed to believe about families or gender or any of this stuff, and I just want to secede from it. I want to be left alone. I don't want any of these impositions placed on me. I don't want to be forced to say I believe something I don't believe I don't want my kids educated that way. I just want to be left alone to conduct my life as I want. That person can be perfectly good libertarian in good standing. There are libertarians who will hate that person, but that's their private, petty hatreds. That has nothing to do with the ideology.

On the other hand, there are libertarians who say, I want to be free from the state so that I can live unusual lifestyles. And okay, but given that politics is not all of life and therefore does not sum up entirely what it means to be left or right, those people who believe that it's their duty to knock down traditional institutions and ways of thought, those people belong on the left. What binds them together is that, if they are people of goodwill, they can say, "Look, I don't really like the way you plan to live your life, and you don't like the way I plan to live mine. But this is a big world, and there's plenty of room for both of us, as long as we just agree to leave each other alone and have that much goodwill toward each other." And yet, even the libertarian movement can't seem to show that kind of goodwill toward each other half the time.

MALICE: Yeah, and I also want to point out one thing. My question about left versus right, there was someone on my Facebook, I forget who it was, and he was went on for half an hour, like literally half an hour, walls of text in reaction to my simple yes-or-no question. And he said, "I assure you that if you met me, you would consider me right-wing. And I just said the data says otherwise. So I think in a sense, this is like the trans issue, where they don't like — they're like, well, I'm right-wing, this classification will put me on the left wing, therefore the classification's wrong. It's like, no, no, you just have this idea of yourself, that doesn't port to how this classification makes you feel, and this is causing you some kind of psychological distress. That doesn't necessarily mean the classification's wrong. It could be that your self-image is wrong, and that in certain contexts, you would be regarded as left-wing. And that's okay. Neither of these terms are loaded in terms of moral or in terms of a quality of a person at all. They are classification terms.

WOODS: Let me ask you this. First of all, when you hear the terms, "right-wing" and "conservative," I can distinguish between those mainly because when I hear "conservative," I just think of the official conservative movement in the US with its think tanks and its media personalities.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: Is that how you distinguish between these terms? And is there one of those terms that you're more drawn to than the other to describe yourself?

MALICE: I don't describe myself in either these terms, because I think people use them in such incoherent ways that when you start describing it, it's very — because politics is being made binary in our country, right? All someone needs to hear is, "Oh, he's right-wing," or, "Oh, she's left-wing," and they don't need to listen anymore. So there's no benefit, in my view, unless you're trying to build an audience with one of these two tribes to use one of these two terms. And it's very clear to me and I think to you, in certain ones of these classifications, I'm right-wing. In certain ones, like being a New Yorker, I would be culturally very, very left-wing. And I have no problem, and nor do I care, nor do you care, in which — like, in some contexts, he's on the right, some contexts he's on the left. That's fine. I'm someone and you're someone who's interested in taking ideas and people as they come and not putting them necessarily in a box as a mechanism of knowing whether to give them either another second of my time.

WOODS: Right, right, right. I just like interesting people.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: And I find somebody like Kirkpatrick Sale, who was part of the New Left, to be infinitely more interesting than any neocon I might encounter at some conservative conference. It would just be mind-numbing, because Sale would be more interesting, more original, more well read, it would just be embarrassing even to compare them. Let me ask you about something —

MALICE: Just one more thing just to build on what you just said, I'm sorry.

WOODS: Yeah.

MALICE: This is I think an Achilles heel of the right, which is, because of the right-wing psychological – you know, and I think a lot of times many aspects of politics are based on psychology. Jonathan Haidt talks about this a lot. I think the culturally conservative psychological aversion to what is new – you know what I mean? Like, *I haven't seen this before, it's weird, I don't like it* – this gives the left the biggest possible cultural advantage, because by them embracing all the new – embracing the freaks, but also embracing the geniuses, right? If you were in the middle, a genius and a lunatic are equidistant from you and you can't tell the difference between them, because they're both something you've never seen in several standard deviations from that which you know – the left gets the front row seats, and they get to be the ones who welcome all the innovators. And that is a huge competitive advantage that the right hasn't even articulated, let alone grappled with.

WOODS: All right, as we wrap up, let me ask you something about something I said in a recent episode. It was just something that came out. I was thinking about, when you drive around, you see the occasional car with a bumper sticker, once a while you see a car with two bumper stickers. But once in a great while, you see a car covered in bumper sticker.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: And 99 times out of 100, that's a car full of left-wing bumper stickers. Almost always.

MALICE: Well, it depends where you are. If you're in certain places in the Midwest, it's going to be right-wing. But yeah.

WOODS: Hmm, okay, that could be. I mean, I put in my time in the Midwest for a while, and I don't remember seeing that many that would – I mean, you saw a lot of cars that had right-wing messages on them, but in terms of –

MALICE: Topeka is going to try to position itself as left-wing against the rest of Kansas, right, so it's going to be a relative –

WOODS: That's true. Yeah, that's definitely true. I mean, it was the capital city and all that.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: But I think in general, I think it's fair to generalize that most of the time, when I see, let's say, a backpack that's covered with pins or a car that's covered with bumper stickers, they seem to have a left-wing message. And I was arguing that's not a coincidence.

MALICE: Of course, it's not a coincidence.

WOODS: So why do you think it's not a coincidence? How does that sum up – how does that reflect the left-wing way of thinking?

MALICE: I don't know if we it reflects – it reflects left-wing cultural dominance. If you walk around somewhere with a MAGA hat and you walk around somewhere with a pussy hat, what are going to be the reactions to you? The MAGA hat, you're not going to have much benefit, but you might actually be physically assaulted. And the pussy hat, people are going to roll

their eyes, the right-wing or whatever, or they're going to cheer you. So the cost-benefit analysis is completely asymmetrical.

WOODS: Okay, now, that's an interesting insight. I hadn't thought of it that way. I was thinking more along these lines. Thomas Sowell is a guy you and I both like, and one of the themes of his books is that it can take two paragraphs or three paragraphs to refute a one-phrase slogan that you see on a bumper sticker or you hear in politics. So for instance, the idea that, well, there must be racism or discrimination at work if this group is doing better than that group. And Sowell says life is so unbelievably complicated. There are cultural and many other reasons that one group — how about the fact that Polish-Americans are 25 years older on average than Puerto Ricans? Well, that alone is going to make them — why would you think there would be absolutely equal outcomes between these groups?

MALICE: Sure.

WOODS: So what he would do is, instead of just saying, "Well, I've looked at it for five seconds, and I think I understand all of reality," he would take it apart, take it apart gradually. Whereas I have found that — I mean, when I look at the modern-day Democratic Party, I don't see any sense that, well, we'd like to provide these goods to the people, but there are unintended consequence. There's no sense of that. It's just, there's clearly one way that non-reprobates should think about this issue, and it's just: *Give people X*. And it can be fit on a bumper sticker. And so I feel like that's not the way a right-winger looks at the world, that a lot of meaningful things can be summed up on bumper stickers.

MALICE: Are you serious?

WOODS: Yep, and I'll defend that to the death.

MALICE: Okay, well, the death's imminent. You spend ten seconds on Twitter, you're telling me there aren't right-wing bumper stickers from here to the moon? "From my cold dead hands," that's not a right-wing bumper sticker?

WOODS: Yeah, but I'm talking about why is it that —

MALICE: "The Second Amendment defends the First?" There's a million of them. What are you talking about?

WOODS: Yeah, I get it. I know. But I'm talking about, why is it that people who seem to live as if the world is bumper stickers, as if — why is it that the overwhelming majority of people — and everybody who's listening to me has seen this, where you see that car full of bumper stickers and it's always "Coexist," and it's always —

MALICE: No, it's not the overwhelming majority; it's the fact that those are the ones you're registering because those are the ones that make you roll your eyes. The other ones — maybe they're not literal bumper stickers, but the right-wing and NPCs on the right have plenty of bumper stickers in their psychology.

WOODS: Believe me, I know. There are times when I say to myself sometimes like, "You're the people I'm trying to defend against unjust attack?" I mean, half the time — [laughing] it's very, very frustrating, because I —

MALICE: And just attack.

WOODS: And just attacks, that's true. But I don't defend people against just attacks. But I don't know. I still think that there is — I mean, for instance, the very argument about the minimum wage. Now, okay, the average, let's say, grassroots right-wing guy is not probably super reliable on the subject of the minimum wage. That's true. But in terms of the philosophy, I can understand why somebody says, "Yeah, well, of course, we should have the minimum wage be \$15. People need to earn more money." It takes much more thought to say, "Well, hold on a minute" —

MALICE: No, no, it doesn't.

WOODS: Of course it does. The most obvious thing in the world is, if somebody doesn't have something, well, we'll give it to them. What possible consequence could there be? We'll give it to them.

MALICE: This goes back to the earlier classification of right-wing versus left-wing, which is sympathy for the weak versus empathy with the strong, right? There's going to be far fewer people at the very top. There's going to be a lot of people at the very bottom. So if you're going to sympathize with the weak, with the minimum wage — minimum is as low as it gets, by definition — you're going to be a lot more popular. It's going to be much more of a common thing where you could say out loud, for one, especially in a culture that's dominated by the left. As we said earlier, it's the pussy hat versus the MAGA hat. There's an asymmetry in terms of the costs and benefits of speaking these views, because how many CEOs are going to be on the street defending you with that bumper sticker, as opposed to how many people who make minimum wage are going to be ready to key your car?

WOODS: So are you saying there's an insincerity at the heart of it?

MALICE: At the heart of what?

WOODS: So when they say, "I favor the minimum wage," it's not because now they actually —

MALICE: No, they believe it; they just — there's different types. There's the bumper sticker types; then there's the type to say, "Look, there's many places where they raised the minimum wage, and it didn't hurt jobs. I understand your argument. You're full of crap." Then there are ones who say, "Well, the minimum wage is a lie, because we're paying the welfare benefits of those people who are making the current minimum wage who can't afford a living wage, so we're subsidizing the wages of your employees. And that's not fair."

WOODS: Right, but again, you're already arguing at a much higher level than most people would.

MALICE: All I'm saying is that there are two kinds of — I mean, there's going to be the smart people on the left, and there's going to be the stupid ones, just like on the right.

WOODS: But to me, that — that's true, there are stupid people on the right, but I'm talking about on the highest level — when I listen to the Democratic Party, when I listen to these people talk these days, it really is: *We need to help people, so therefore, we should do X or Y.* Now the thing is — like, for example, if you raise the minimum wage \$15, all right, we all know there's a possibility that some people won't be worth \$15 and all that. But what you also do is you increase the size of the labor pool, because more people are going to be attracted to get into the market or are going to be attracted to those jobs who wouldn't have been attracted before, so you're now going to have the most vulnerable people competing with people who are more skilled than they are. So there's no way you can tell me that that's going to help these people, and they don't take the time — there's no sense to me that they've said, "Well, I considered that and I rejected it." It's more: "You are a reprobate fat cat if you don't see that my one-sentence analysis of, *These people lack something? Why we simply mandate it*, is the correct way to go." I think that is the way they look at the world. And I think a lot of Make America Great Again people probably see the world roughly that way, and probably some of them think the minimum wage should be raised. But the point is —

MALICE: I think it should be raised.

WOODS: — as a collective, like if we look at people on the left and people on the right, I think there is much more often a jump to, *Well, there must be an immediate solution here*, whereas the right, precisely because it views society the economy as being more complicated than a moralizing schoolmarm, thinks there could be unintended consequences to it.

MALICE: Or it could be that because so much of the right has leftist principles, they can't coherently articulate an alternative.

WOODS: Well, we'll leave folks to adjudicate this one for themselves.

MALICE: And I'm for raising the minimum wage, as I was first on your show many years ago, as I dropped, because I want those cashiers to be out of business so I don't have to interact with them, so I can interact with a machine.

WOODS: I know [laughing]. I follow you on Facebook.

MALICE: And it's happening, and I'm delighted. Every time I see those one of those touchscreens put up in the McDonald's or whatever, I want to cry.

WOODS: [laughing] Well, look, all right, that's Michael Malice, folks. There you go. There is Michael Malice. This conversation is one of these things that leaves you thinking, leaves you asking more questions. That's great. That's great. Come discuss them in our private groups. I have a private group for my supporting listeners, and Michael has a private group of his own, and you can get in there through his Patreon, [Patreon.com/MichaelMalice](https://www.patreon.com/MichaelMalice). You should support him. He does great and interesting and important work every week. And he makes it look easy. It's effortless, it seems, but it's really hard to do what he does. So Michael, I appreciate your time. I already told people at the beginning of the episode about *Your Welcome* and *Night Shade*, which they should be watching and listening to. And I guess I'll be seeing you in New York pretty soon.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: Thanks a lot.

MALICE: Thanks, Tom.