



WOODS: We're talking today about a fairly familiar topic to the listening audience here, Jeff, that being libertarianism. Now, we're going to have a different take on it, given that that's what we talked about every single day on *The Tom Woods Show*. But I guess we sort of want to talk about libertarianism, like what it is, what it is in its fundamentals, and its current manifestation – not just the Libertarian Party, which in some ways is not really as interesting as the libertarian movement at large, but indeed, the libertarian movement at large. So where it stands, how it's evolved, where it's going, what the divisions in it are, I want to cover all that. So how do you want to start to situate us in the problem here?

DEIST: Well, it's very, very tough because libertarianism per se means very different things to different people. And let's not forget that a lot of people in America believe in the concept of positive rights, that you're not free if you have to worry about your rent or paying the doctor or buying groceries or whatever. And so *freedom, liberty* in their usage means some degree of freedom from want, and that's a very, very big distinction from what we would consider negative rights, the freedom to be left alone. And so those two world views are somewhat irreconcilable. I think that's just the nature of the beast.

So when you and I say *liberty* or *libertarianism*, a lot of people on the left roll their eyes and scoff and say, oh, you guys don't care about freedom. You're not free if you're sitting at home with no job and the rent's due in two weeks. So we have to, I think, get that out there right in front and say the left is always going to put quote marks around libertarianism, because they think it's just some sort of pseudo-intellectual cover for big business oligarchs or whatever it is. So there's a lot of different levels going on: the political discussion, the philosophical discussion, the ideological discussion, all different.

And of course, I don't claim and I don't care to claim some sort of overarching definition or purity test. I don't like that stuff. As a matter of fact, I mean, libertarianism per se is probably far less interesting to me than it was to, let's say, Murray Rothbard, who was developing a modern, mid-20th-century version of what it is. And Hans Hoppe took that I think further, well beyond just Rothbard's normative justification for laissez faire and got into other arguments for it. So it's obviously something that's in a state of flux, and as a result, none of us can just claim to be the arbiter.

I'll give you my version of it. My version of libertarianism is just private property. It just means organizing society around something other than government, which is the sole user of supposedly justified force in some sort of geographic area. So I just think libertarianism means nonpolitical. It means private. So I don't like to get much further afield than that. You know, when people talk about the nonaggression principle or violence, well, of course violence ought not to occur, and it ought to be rooted out of society to the extent it can be.

So I just view the state as inherently illegitimate, so I guess I go farther than some libertarians in that I'm an anarchocapitalist in my philosophical worldview or whatever, but we're so far from that, that it doesn't animate me. It doesn't interest me. I like to think of trying to eradicate criminality in a society. And you probably never will entirely. In any large-scale human society, there's probably always going to be some degree of organized crime and some degree of individual or petty crime. But hopefully, you try to shrink it down to where

you're not having murders and rapes and big thefts. You're having just small shoplifting or acts of vandalism or something like that.

So I think that's the way to view it, is just say, yeah, society without the state may well be a pipe dream, and it may be unrealizable, and just like society without crime or society without disease and illness may well be a pipe dream, but we still have cancer researchers out there trying to cure cancer. We still have police out there trying to figure out crimes and prevent them — well, police don't really do much preventing them, but you know what I mean. So the goal is to just reduce criminality, and so that's all it is to me.

And I think, regardless of your worldview, regardless of sort of your cultural outlook or the way you're wired or your preferences or your lifestyle choices, from my perspective, government always makes that worse, because it's taking money from you, it's forcing you to pay money to others. It's very inefficient, because it siphons a huge amount of the money it does take off into just paying for government bureaucracy. And it pits us against one another in a way that the marketplace doesn't. Every day we get up, and nobody cares what restaurant you go to, or what music you listen to, or what kind of house you want to live in. These are private choices, and we view it like that. But people care very much what kind of political views you have and who you vote for and who you give money to.

So it's just a form of criminality writ large, and I hate to participate in it. And this has always been I guess my lack of enthusiasm for third-party voting and all that. You know, I'm all for people participating in that if that's what they want to do. I don't think voting is per se immoral or anything like that. But to me, libertarianism is something pretty understandable. It's narrow in one sense, although I guess I'm a thick libertarian in that I do have cultural preferences. Libertarianism per se I think is easier and more saleable as a thin philosophy.

Now, all that said, what's libertarianism today? Rothbard I think correctly pointed out that the term and the idea has its roots in the left to an extent and that in the 20th century that sort of morphed and changed into something that was more rooted in property and economics, even. And so today, from my perspective, admittedly biased, I think it's moved back leftward. I think today, libertarianism is not something I would want as a movement. I'm a big believer in issue libertarianism, and I wish to God we had some sort of parliamentary system here in the United States where we could have minor parties and we could coalesce around one thing.

I mean, look at the success that Nigel Farage had and Ukip had with just Brexit. You know, he didn't have to be Ron Paul and say, well, I'm against Obamacare and all these other things. No, he was just for Brexit and that's it. And so that that worked out. I mean, Nigel Farage, if nothing else, accomplished or appears poised to have accomplished some form of Brexit in the near future.

And so I really like the idea of different people coming together and coalescing around one thing, like maybe that's the drug war, or maybe that's getting out of the Middle East, or maybe that's civil asset forfeiture. But trying to create a broad scale political movement the United States, especially with this awful two-party, on-off-switch binary we've got is very, very tough because it means conjuring up 51% of the electorate, let's say, to elect someone president. That's 60, 70 million people.

So there's the political end of things, but I also am not a big fan of what I consider the movement of modern libertarianism towards self-actualization. It almost sounds like liberation theology when you listen to a lot of libertarians. Oh my gosh, all these things. It's not just state power you have to worry about or even corporate power, these tech giants for example, but it's any kind of power. We're opposed to any kind of hierarchy. If you've got some overbearing dad who's making his teenagers be home by midnight, that's a form of oppression. And if you're listening to some crazy, silly guy in white robes and a funny hat who calls himself a pontiff in the Catholic Church, that's just a form of oppression. And in fact, a lot of

libertarians are veering into a positive rights worldview, which means no rent, no groceries, healthcare, all these kinds of things.

So look, that's the nature of politics. It tends to bring out the acerbic side of us and the worst in us. And that's why, of course, there's so much infighting, if you want to call it that. So I don't like the idea that self-actualization is the be-all, end-all. I do think a libertarian society is one in which the conditions for one's own self-actualization, whatever that might be — you want to be an artist, you want to be a musician, you want to be an athlete, whatever — are best realized. Of course, there's no question about that. But that to me is a secondary effect.

What we want to do here is create a situation where there's limited criminality in society, which means a society that's not very political, that doesn't decide too many things or organize too many things around the state. And that's it. Once you do that, beyond that, I'm not buying into the idea of, oh my gosh, let's all go and just be individuals who pursue our own hopes and dreams without regard to any sort of society or civilization, and that all these outdated things like family and religion and marriage ought to be thrown out the window, and that if you're if you believe in any of those things, you're not a libertarian. You don't want people to be liberated.

Well, okay, but look, Tom, if thinking that we owe some debt of gratitude to people in the past and that we owe some obligation to people in the future, if that makes me a conservative, then so be it. Because I do think that. That sounds like Roger Scruton or something, but whatever. I do think that. I mean, I don't have much time for people who look around in the modern world in the West and all the things we have in our fingertips — and not just what kings and queens would have died for 200 years ago, hot and cold running water, very nice habitations over our head, automobiles, electricity, air conditioning, all kinds of antibiotics, all kinds of medical treatments, all kinds of pain-free dentistry, all kinds of alignments to our vision. I mean, all of these things — I don't have much time for people to look around at all this and don't at least wonder, *Hmm, Jeff, how did we get so rich? How did all this material abundance organize itself around us? And what if it all went away? Let's try socialism.*

I don't have much time for people like that. We do owe a debt of gratitude to people who came before us. We are standing on the shoulders of generations who worked much, much harder than us, under much worse circumstances, and had it much tougher. And I mean that in the literal, physical sense of the word. They did manual labor. They had worse health. They felt worse. They had far less stuff, far fewer comforts, far less fun and entertainment and pleasure. So yeah, I guess that all sounds traditionalist, conservative. Again, I don't care, because that's what I think. I think that we do owe the past something.

And I also believe that with respect to our philosophical or ideological debts. I don't like people who are dismissive of Mises or Rothbard or Hazlitt. Are they right about everything? Are their views dispositive? Of course not. Could they be proven wrong? Of course they could. Could some 16-year-old on Facebook be right and Mises wrong? Well, yes, that's certainly possible. But the idea that we don't owe them anything, that every day we wake up with a clean slate, a tabula rasa, and sort of restart society, because everything that happened in the past was wrong and bad, and there were all kinds of things like slavery and women weren't treated too well and religion was very intolerant and oppressive? No. That's not me. That's not something I agree with.

I consider myself very, very fortunate to have been born in the West when I was, and I don't consider myself any great shakes walking around. I'm not any smarter than some guy in India who makes a fifth of what we make here simply because of the circumstances of his birth. I'm quite cognizant of that. And so as a result, I'm very, very interested in what makes us wealthy and what might keep us wealthy, because recall, Tom, on the normative or ethical side of things, it's a lot easier to be moral and upright and upstanding when you have food and rent and we're not at war and life isn't a series of really difficult choices in an environment of

extreme scarcity. It's a lot easier for us in a materially comfortable society to talk about things like abortion, or to talk about things like God, or to say how should women be treated or how should children be treated? These are luxuries provided to us by the material magnificence all around us.

So I take this stuff very seriously. I think liberty is the precondition for real material wealth, and we're constantly screwing with that. We have a lot of bad ideas about how to provide education and health care and how to regulate markets, and we ought to fight against those things. So my libertarianism per se is I suppose thin, but my worldview is pretty thick. So I'll leave it there, Tom.

WOODS: And just to clarify for people, maybe the 20% who have not heard this term before, by *thin* you mean parsimonious in the sense of making as few demands on the person as possible. Just simply private property, perhaps nonaggression, and not requiring that they also be feminists, egalitarians, or vegetarians or any of these other things, which they're free to be but it's not inherent in libertarianism. It's not a strict requirement. That would be a thick commitment.

All right, Jeff, let's talk a little bit about the topic of nationalism, which is basically on everybody's mind, because we see this phenomenon being revived and growing throughout certainly the Western world, and we even see some of it in the United States. Now, incidentally, basically the United States since the Civil War has not stopped being nationalist. Everybody's a nationalist in the US. The neocons were very nationalist in the sense of they hated regionalism, they hated the states, they hated localities. They want central direction of society, just like the progressive left, which is why, although they fight with each other, they can at least tolerate each other. Whereas the progressive left can't tolerate you and me and the neocons can't tolerate you and me. But having said all that, the kind of nationalism that we see today is somewhat different, but still basically everybody favors central direction of society, and regionalism is very unpopular. So it's just a different kind of nationalist, but it's a nationalism that the media does not like and has taken notice of. Now, you gave a talk some time ago at a conference in Malta, where — or was it Malta? I can't remember. Was it Malta?

DEIST: It was delivered to an audience in Malta.

WOODS: Oh, that's right, but because of the miracles of technology, you were in the United States when you were delivering it. All right, and you used the expression "blood and soil" in it. And I want to say something here about that. The response to that from left-libertarian critics was so unbelievably stupid, that I played your entire speech as an episode of *The Tom Woods Show*. It's not *The Jeff Deist Show*, but it was for one day. I played the entire speech because I thought my listeners are going to think, *All right, Woods, maybe he exaggerates people who criticize the Mises Institute, so I maybe have to take this with a grain of salt*. No, I wanted them to hear the whole speech so they could hear the kind of mental defect someone would have to have to have interpreted it the way these people claimed. Now, obviously, none of them listened to the speech. They heard the one phrase, and they didn't listen to the speech. *Is that the speech where he advocated blood and soil?* No, because there is no such speech, you idiot.

So anyway, I would like to talk a little bit about that, because people might say: are you favoring, defending, calling for nationalism of any kind? And isn't that on some level not compatible with libertarianism?

DEIST: Yeah, it's interesting. I think —

WOODS: Oh, and by the way, by the way, Jeff, before you — I knew what I was forgetting to say. Before you start on your answer, I do want to point out, I'm not saying that every single criticism that people might make of you or me is a dumb one. They're not all dumb. I mean, even though I disagree with him, I don't think Patrick Deneen is just an idiot in his criticisms of libertarianism. I think he's not correct, but I think it's an intelligent — I think it's a

reasonably informed position. This guy R.R. Reno from *First Things*. I don't think he's a moron. So I don't think everybody with a criticism is a moron. I just think that *these* people are morons. There you go. Now you can talk.

DEIST: Well, of course they aren't all morons. I think there are very valid criticisms to the idea that wait a minute,, you're not going to have any military or government courts or government police? That sounds crazy. I mean, they're obviously intelligent people who say that about anarchocapitalism.

Yeah, the nation-versus-state thing is really interesting to me, because of course, Americans aren't "blood and soil" nationalists. We're a bunch of mongrels. People here don't care about old money, particularly. They used to, of course, more than they do now. People here are pretty open. You can kind of move into whatever neighborhood you like if you've got the money. People are pretty welcoming. I think America is actually a very welcoming and not particularly racist place in the relative sense of the term.

But the use of "blood and soil," of course, got me into a lot of hot water, and it's obviously an ancient phrase, an ancient concept, and it goes back to the idea that people are somehow rooted in a place or they're rooted through kinship. And so a lot of modern libertarianism is a bit about jettisoning that human impulse and saying, oh, no, no, no, we all have to be these deracinated individuals who just sort of came into the world without any family or prior modes of thinking or culture or civilization. That's obviously bunk. And it's also obviously a bad way to sell libertarianism, because that's not how people are wired. People do care about all kinds of intermediate things between themselves as an individual and the state as this gigantic, monolithic thing. So I thought that that was interesting, that critics painted me as a nationalist. Well, okay. Paraphrasing Orwell, he said patriotism is loving your country; nationalism is wanting to impose it on others.

So is there a difference between nation and state? Rothbard thought so towards the end of his career. I think there is. I think there are natural constituencies that coalesce around, let's say, Barcelona area and the Catalonians. That's probably a nation. And it's also interesting to me when it comes to left-libertarian critics: who's allowed to have a nation and who isn't, Tom? This is a very interesting concept. How about the Lakota Sioux Indians after Wounded Knee? Are they allowed to say, *Hey, we're the Lakota Sioux and we kind of have an identity, and you can't just move here tomorrow from Switzerland and knock on our front door and say, "Hey, I'm going to come in and join you and be a Lakota Sioux"*? I think we'd all recognize that that's absurd, and no, the Lakota Sioux are a nation of sorts. And as far as I'm concerned — I think they're in North and South Dakota, mostly — give them, literally cede the land to them and get the federal government out of there. No federal jurisdiction whatsoever. I think that would be a really cool experiment.

But I mean, how about the Poles? They spent a lot of the 20th century squeezed between the Soviet bloc and Germany. They lost something like 5 or 6 million people during World War II, which was about 20% of their population. Are they allowed to have a Polish Catholic identity and consider themselves a nation after all that? Well, of course they are. Or you can say the same thing about the Irish, who spent so much of the past few centuries just being absolutely steamrolled by the English. Are they allowed to say, *Well, okay, UK or not, I'm an Irishman and the UK is a secondary affiliation for me*? Well, of course. We understand that. We understand that Ireland is separate and distinct. So this whole thing was so overblown and —

WOODS: And not to mention, the whole speech was about decentralization. It was all about tiny units, and I mean, that was your whole — to say, *Oh, he's calling for nationalism*, first of all, you weren't calling for anything. You were saying libertarians should recognize certain obvious facts about the world. People feel certain ways about certain things. We need to reckon with this. That's all. You were not calling for anything.

DEIST: Right.

WOODS: But of course, again, these people don't listen. They don't listen to anything. They don't read anything. When it comes to me, apparently over my 25-or-so-year career, I've said five things that really upset them. Now, none of these people have ever listened — not once. They have this cheat sheet they keep in a desk drawer with the five forbidden things from Woods, that whenever somebody mentions me in a favorable light, they trot out the five things. They don't know what the context is. They don't know where these things are drawn from. They don't know what I meant by any of them. And that's the entirety. So of course they haven't listened to what you said. They haven't read the transcript. I mean, I don't know what to do with these people.

But one thing I have done with them — and I know you don't do this as much, and it would be a little bit off-putting, I think, as, let's say, an institute president to be doing it — but I've monetized the heck out of these people. I just make money off these people constantly. Sometimes they see me doing it. Sometimes they don't know how I'm doing it. But one way or another, I figure out ways.

Like when this jerk Talib Kweli, the rapper, was going after me on Twitter — this is a guy who thinks the Nazis built the Berlin Wall. I mean, the guy doesn't have a full deck, but he was going after me, very nasty. So I had a two-hour sale over at my Liberty Classroom website, and I said use the coupon code Talib and you get \$200 off. So I exploited the situation. I used his name as the coupon code. I probably pulled in a few thousand dollars in two hours, and I went and had a nice all-expense-paid trip to New York and had a great old time. I do that constantly with these people, and I have to say, that may sound juvenile to some people. I'll tell you something, as the guy doing it, it is deeply and profoundly satisfying.

All right, that's that. That was a little bit of a tangent. Let's get back to the whole "blood and soil" thing. So you guys at the Mises Institute had published Joe Salerno talking about Mises' thoughts on this subject. Ben Powell then actually did a study on Mises that more or less corroborated what Joe had said, and what I often find is people say, *Oh, you folks at the Mises Institute, you are besmirching the good name of Mises*. Because why? Because some people at the Mises Institute in their private lives have some conservative views, is that what it is? Because it turns out, if you study Mises, you read Mises' own words, he also had those views. So the more they look at Mises, they realize, *Wait a minute. I guess I don't like Mises, either*. I mean, are you talking about the same Mises who sat on the editorial advisory board of the magazine of the John Birch Society? That Mises?

DEIST: Right, well, of course, we have to look at all these things in context, and that's really what the speech itself was talking about, is that people want to be part of something bigger than themselves. And our job is to make sure that's not the state, because that's all Bernie-ites and Elizabeth Warren supporters have today to think about, because we've said, okay, God is dead, marriage is dead, family's dead, the chamber of commerce is dead, the Kiwanis Club is dead. It's all sort of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* scenario now.

And I think libertarians ought not to fall for that. I think we ought to say, hey, we are people who understand that all these intermediary institutions are important, and that includes for a lot of people, family, God, whatever it might be. And more importantly, we're the people who say that we ought to have less external governance. Well, that I think by definition requires more internal governance. So a lot of people who don't like religiosity — and I understand that sentiment entirely — I think it's important to recognize that that's an attempt to frame a worldview and to have a philosophical approach to how one conducts oneself and live one's life. And we ought to generally applaud that, as long as it's a peaceable world view, of course.

So whether it's, you know, Mises was this modern L liberal who would never have approved this stuff, well, okay. Go back and read *Socialism*. Read what he really thought about the family and feminism and things like that. And again, you don't have to agree with him. He's a brilliant man but not dispositive on all modern issues. No one's saying that. But I don't back

down from saying that the Misesian worldview comports with the idea of radical decentralization and secession. There's no question about that. If you read *Liberalism* and, more importantly, if you read *Nation, State, and Economy* carefully, those are highly decentralized books, or pro-decentralization books.

And so this is just the nature of it. People like to argue and fight, and I don't mind that. I'll accept any criticisms of the Mises Institute or myself on content. I won't necessarily accept them on motivations, because I do think there are people out there ascribing bad motives when none exist and, more importantly, when they have no right or no business to ascribe bad motives.

So part of me, talking to you, obviously you and I are fairly simpatico on issues and the way we see the world. But for the most part, my particular philosophy is: never explain, never apologize. I mean, we're out there doing what we do. We're, sitting down here in Auburn, Alabama, at a southern SEC college, talking about getting rid of the government. We're going to have some detractors, Tom. That's just the nature of the beast.

WOODS: No kidding. It's just the nature of the detractors. I wish I had somebody like an H.L. Mencken as a detractor, because then I could be proud. Even H.L. Mencken eviscerates me, I'd say: well, look, hey, that's an honor to be on the receiving end of that. Whereas the people — I don't even know who any of these people are. Like I have the bad fortune of having my detractors all be people of no distinction whatsoever. It's profoundly disappointing. But on the other hand, if that's my worst disappointment, perhaps my life is fairly successful after all. All right, we're up against our time so that we cannot trespass too terribly much on poor good-sport Jeff Deist here, so, Jeff, we're going to call it quits for today. We'll pick this conversation up and take it in a few different directions tomorrow. Thanks again.

DEIST: Okay.