

**Episode 2,377: The Angels vs. Devils History of American Conservatism**

**Guest: Paul Gottfried**

**WOODS:**  Paul, I want to talk to you today about an article you sent out to some friends, that you'd just written. And it's more or less a book review, but it goes beyond just the one author and the one book. And I thought we might do the same thing. But anyway, welcome back.

**GOTTFRIED:** Well, thank you for having me back.

**WOODS:** So, tell me, first of all, who is this author, and what is this book, and what famous person does this author have a connection to?

**GOTTFRIED:** Well, this person would not be famous were he not the son in law of Bill Kristol, who I think remains an iconic figure among establishment conservatives, as well as, I suppose, the *CNN* left right now.

And Matt Continetti, who's the son-in-law, comes as close as humanly possible to being a politically correct leftist without losing his establishment conservative credentials.

And last April, he brought out this book called *The Right*, which I've been assured by the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine, and a host of other publications, including so-called conservative ones, that this is the definitive work on the American right, going back about 150 years.

And there's very little in this book on the right that could not have been written by somebody on the left – that is, somebody on the left in a pre-woke era. There isn't much wokeness in this book. It has most of the stereotypes of left-liberals when I was in graduate school back in the mid and late 1960s.

And apparently it did pass muster with enough national newspapers to receive tremendous praise, which was also accorded to Matt in any number of conservative publications. It is full of all kinds of typical left-liberal fictions and myths that I would have remembered from my graduate school days in the 1960s.

**WOODS:** Well, you ask a pretty good question in this piece, which is, does the *Washington Post,* which loves this book – and all the establishment outlets love this book. Because, of course, this is exactly the tame bunch of losers they want to have in charge of the American right.

But you ask the question, maybe he could ask them, do you perform a similar policing role to the role that the *Weekly Standard* and *National Review* and I are trying to use to patrol the American right?

Do you have a similar thing where you are as nasty toward the left-wing side of your movement as we are, publicly, to the right-wing side, running to the *Washington Post* and assuring them that "we're not part of these extremists"?

The *Washington Post* doesn't seem quite so eager to run to *Chronicles* magazine and say: *Listen, we have nothing to do with these crazy lunatics in the streets in Portland*. You know, they just don't they don't do that.

**GOTTFRIED:** No, they don't. Nor would I expect them to do that. The conservative movement, of course, is an entirely different creature. I mean, they exist to be gatekeepers.

There's some group now called the Freedom Conservatives (who are basically Bush-ites by another name) who are very much concerned with all the white nationalism that is in this country, and wish to affirm their commitment to the civil rights cause and so forth.

I haven't been noticing all that. Apparently, they and Joe Biden have been noticing this lately. No, but the conservative movement is always willing to accommodate reasonable people on the left. That is, people on the left who will have them and won't require them to go all the way, I suppose, to become extreme woke leftists.

But the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are not required to police their side. They do occasionally. That is, they police people who become right-wing deviationists, but they're quite happy with the kookiest leftists.

I haven't gone back and checked. I'm sure they said nice things about Leonard Jeffries, Hakeem Jeffries's black, racist, anti-Semitic uncle who died with honors as a great scholar of the City University of New York, whatever it's called now.

But I doubt the *New York Times* went after them the same way the *National Review* went after, let's say, Pat Buchanan or Murray Rothbard. They obviously are permitted to have different standards from those that they expect from establishment conservatives.

**WOODS:** So, the book is *The Right: The Hundred Year War for American Conservatism*. And when they say "hundred year war for American conservatism", of course, what he really means by this is the war that respectable people have been trying to fight to make this thing respectable and friendly and against all the crazy kooks out there.

And it's interesting that – not surprising, given Continetti's background – that one of the litmus tests seems to be eagerness to sign on for whatever the war of the day is pushed by the regime. But that even includes World War One.

And I really felt like most of us by now, I think, have concluded that that was probably not such a good idea. I mean, there really are neocons out there who really still think that was a good idea.

**GOTTFRIED:** Well, neocons think that. Some British Tories do. But I think in the case of the neocons, it may reflect their anger at the Nazis in World War II, which they typically read back into World War One or the Franco-Prussian War, maybe the Napoleonic Wars.

Matt Continetti echoes their sentiment. There was a piece I remember a few years ago by – not Jacob Siegel, his father (Jacob Siegel, was the one who attacked me in Tablet) Fred Siegel going after Mencken for being on the side of Germany in World War One after knowing that the Kaiser was going to invade the United States in 1909 or some date like that.

Because the Germans had contingency war plans, as did all the belligerents on both sides, as did the United States. So, they thought they were going to act on this, to invade the United States. But their view of World War One is that it's sort of a prelude to the final solution or something like that.

What I thought was remarkable was the moronic treatment of America First, which was associated with the far right. Most members of America First were on the political left.

They were not on the right. But there is this myth within the liberal establishment (which the neocons took over) that, well, Charles Lindbergh was sort of a conservative, but others like Wheeler Borah, Chester Bowles, Hamilton Fish, who was an early civil rights leader, were clearly not on the right.

They just were upset about America's being pushed into World War One, which turned out so badly.

**WOODS:** But also, I don't know the political views for sure of somebody like E.E. Cummings or Sinclair Lewis, but can't imagine they were super right-wing. Maybe I'm wrong.

**GOTTFRIED:** No, they were not. And there is a lot of scholarship, for instance, Wayne Cole's book and a lot of work done by Justus Doenecke discussing the politics of the American way.

This is known – you know, if you go on Wikipedia, you get every kind of American left-liberal lie about American first – as you do about McCarthyism, which is something else I'd point to.

And in this respect, the woke left simply is taking over the tradition from the older left, the anti-anti-communist left, which saw McCarthy as at least as bad as Hitler and also violently attacked the America First movement.

I suppose the communists would not be that critical because the Soviets were in alliance with the Nazis during the period that the America First movement was operating in the United States.

**WOODS:** I do want to just, if I may, spell Justus Donecke's name for people who might be interested in following up, because it is not intuitive, let's say. So, it's "DOENECKE" if I'm remembering this correctly off the top of my head.

Incidentally, on this question of McCarthy, I remember for years and years being told that Stan Evans, M Stanton Evans, was working on his big masterpiece on that subject. And then it finally came out. But I had heard over and over that he's working on it.

He's going to definitively establish what really happened and what the rights and wrongs were and so on. It's a huge book, and I have not, myself, read it. I don't know if you have, but – and maybe I'm putting you on the spot and asking you this question.

But do you know if he was merely summarizing information that was generally available for anybody who actually bothered to look, or did he really dig up new things we more or less hadn't known before?

**GOTTFRIED:** Oh no. It is a carefully documented work that shows original research. For instance, I thought I'd read just about everything on the subject, but then he discusses McCarthy's accusations against the Fort Monmouth, the Communist front.

And there really were people there who were openly sympathetic to the Soviet Union and in that military base. He may have exaggerated the extent to this, but where there was smoke, there was usually fire in the accusations that he made, even if one could deplore his drinking habits or histrionics.

Which, by the way, Stan Evans tries to show that his vices have been somewhat exaggerated. But even if I concede that he had them and that he often demagogued, most of his accusations were justified, and particularly when it came to security clearance.

So, the thing that really upsets me is how the woke left, which has turned America into a totalitarian society, are complaining about McCarthyism as being much worse. It was not much worse. There was far less thought control in the 1950s than we're experiencing right now.

The government was not as intrusive as it is now. And most universities remained on the left throughout the McCarthy period. And there were lots of people attacking him throughout this period. You were not invited to certain parties, or you did not count socially unless you publish something attacking Joe McCarthy.

The late Will Herberg wrote something on this at a time when he was still a social Democrat, pointing out that the uproar against McCarthy seems to be much worse than anything McCarthy was doing. And I think that's true.

**WOODS:** I don't know if you saw this, but the very morning which we're recording this, David Gordon actually released a piece on this. Now, maybe it was at Mises.org first and then it was on LewRockwell.com.

I didn't check, but it's the lead article on LewRockwell.com this very day that you and I are talking about this same book. And as you know, David, because of his encyclopedic knowledge, sometimes he's a big picture guy, but other times he is a small details guy.

And you do not want David Gordon combing through your manuscript looking for small details that you've gotten wrong. Which is why, my first couple of manuscripts, I sent to David before I dared publish them.

**GOTTFRIED:** I did look at the piece. He sent it to me before he posted it.

**WOODS:** Okay, great. But I love – he has a line that Continetti has a special talent for reversing the thesis of books he's discussing. He's got the exact opposite. So, just a couple of small things. I mean, referring to Chesterton and Belloc as "Anglo-Catholics".

You may think that's a small detail, but that reveals a lack of learning The term "Anglo-Catholic" doesn't mean they're Catholics who live in England. Anglo-Catholic is a term used to describe a movement within the Church of England where they have theological views that are closer to Catholicism.

That's what that is. So, they're not Anglo-Catholics. That's one thing. Also, I expect very little from the left when it comes to summarizing what my intellectual influences have had to say. But the same goes true for neocons trying to describe them.

So, I think on some level, Continetti knows he's supposed to at least grudgingly appreciate somebody like Ludwig von Mises, even though he was very harsh and uncompromising compared to the real-world nuanced Milton Friedman.

But nevertheless, he tries to he tries to summarize Mises's argument. Now, Mises's argument about why a socialist central planner can't accomplish his task is that there aren't any prices in the means of production.

And so, therefore you literally cannot economize because you can't make a choice between one course of action and another, one production process another, because there's no common unit to compare them.

So, you don't know if you're wasting resources, if you're doing well, if you're doing badly. There's no way to know. And his summary of this is: *Mises thought that nobody could account for all the variables in an economy.*

That is not his point. Mises said, even if you could account for all the variables, if you don't have a common unit to judge different courses of action, all that knowledge about the different variables doesn't do you any good. So, that's one thing.

So, he hasn't read that. Then also saying that Ronald Reagan was reading Mises in college when Mises had not been translated into English by then. And much as I can respect Ronald Reagan on some levels, I am doubtful about his foreign language skills, Paul.

**GOTTFRIED:** That's true. Another point that he should have made is that Mises and Friedman were different economists – I mean, they belonged to very different schools of economics. And Friedman was a monetarist, which Mises was not. And their premises were different.

So, it's not that one is more common sense than the other. They start with different premises as economists. But I wouldn't expect him to make that kind of distinction.

**WOODS:** Right. So, the story then of this hundred-year war for the American right, in a way, it calls to mind the way the progressives, I think, look at society. That society needs to be run by serious people with credentials who can keep the stupid rubes in line.

Now, I am not one of these vox populi, vox dei people. I think the masses are equally to blame for the situation that we're in. But at the same time, if I had to choose between the gender studies department at some university and 100 people chosen from the next town over, that's not a problem for me at all.

And also, I do think that on some of the big issues, that we're very deliberately (and not coincidentally) not really supposed to argue about, namely foreign policy. You can argue about it, but only within certain parameters.

You can argue about the Supreme Court a little bit, but we all understand that the job of it is to carry on the social revolution through other means. The masses tend to be better on those sorts of things. They tend to be better on social policy.

I think it's harder to trick them into falling for dumb guy gender theory. And so, I can see arguments on both sides. I do not see the argument for: *An enlightened elite needs to run society.*

Because in almost every case the enlightened elite that identifies itself and then puts itself in that position is always unworthy of it. But I do believe that's how he thinks. Am I right?

**GOTTFRIED:**  I think you're absolutely right. And of course, what he means is the liberal elite that's there right now. Which, he sees himself as part of, but he's sort of the conservative critic within it, or like Ross Douthat or someone like that.

So, he is not a threat to the establishment. He wants more of the establishment. By the way, he did sign on to that Freedom Conservative statement of principle, which is basically a reaffirmation of Bush Republicanism and attacks the "dangerous populists" and "white nationalists" and so forth.

So, he is a Washington establishment figure who has cultivated the same friends as his father-in-law, and he's receiving predictable praise for having these things.

By the way, you would not want to pick the first 100 people in the next town if you were living in Boston and the next town was Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**WOODS:** [laughing] I know, I know. And as it happens, Paul right now – I think was a bit cryptic in my email about the time difference. I'm actually in Honolulu at the moment as I record this with you.

And so, as it turns out, I actually have to record an episode with somebody in Wales who's, I believe, 11 or 12 hours ahead of where I am. So, there's almost no time that works. There's a couple hours' worth of time we can make that work.

But anyway, this has actually been an interesting, because I've spent a little over a week here, and this is culturally, a mixed place. I mean, of course there are Hawaiians, I suppose, but there are very large Chinese, Japanese, and Korean populations that came here back when sugar was the main product.

These days, things are very different. Even pineapples are not really being produced here anymore because Hawaii was pushed out by the Philippines, which could just produce them so much more inexpensively.

And then I've just been told Hawaii, they've just closed down one of their coal-fired power plants and replaced it with nothing, as far as I can see. And that's just going to continue. So, this is a place where the politics are very left-wing. The people who asked for this are going to get it good and hard.

But it is interesting to observe, though – I mean, I suppose this is a kind of a multicultural society where more or less everybody kind of leaves each other alone from what I can see. There is a Hawaiian sovereignty movement, but it's so scattered and divided internally that it can't get anywhere.

**GOTTFRIED:** I think what they have are unchanging component parts. Japanese are among one of the most radical voting blocs, by the way, sort of similar to Jews. They're professionally successful and politically on the far left.

And you sort of wonder why that pattern is common to two very, very economically and professionally successful groups.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I wonder if it's guilt. Because I saw it when I was an undergrad. It was very obvious even then that Asians were being discriminated against in admissions. And not one of them – or let's say a very small handful felt like this was an outrage.

And instead, they wanted to go around and say: *It's not fair to compare us to black students because they have suffered in this way or another.*

They couldn't say: *Look, we worked really, really hard, and half our parents were psychotic making us work hard, to get to this point.* They couldn't say that.

**GOTTFRIED:** They're also conformists. It's a conformist culture. You don't make any waves. You just work very hard. Though in the case of the Japanese, I think it's different. They're very angry about what happened to them in World War Two, but they typically blamed this on the right, although it was done by the left.

But then you have people like Jesse Helms who are proud of what was done to the Japanese Americans in World War Two. But I think that does explain a lot of their radicalism. They see themselves as having been victimized, and the victimizers are identified with the right, in their minds, American nativists.

**WOODS:** But yet, what's interesting is they seem to be surprisingly willing to forgive and forget the atomic bombings. Whereas I could imagine some other populations who would – for the next 3,000 years, that would be all we would hear about.

And I do think it was a moral enormity to have done that. But another thing that somebody just told me – I'll verify this this week.

I actually – believe it or not, I was not planning to go to the Pearl Harbor Memorial thing they have here until my own children said: *Wait a minute, we're not going to go to Pearl Harbor? And we're in Hawaii? What's the matter with you? What kind of historian are you?*

So, we are going. I'm being cajoled by my own children into going.

**GOTTFRIED:** I would probably feel obliged to go because my great aunt when I was a kid – and this goes back to the late 1940s – had a big sticker on the window of her front door: *Remember Pearl Harbor!*

I remember that as a kid. I'd have to visit Pearl Harbor.

**WOODS:** Oh, how about that?

**GOTTFRIED:** Even though I know that the real story is much more complex.

**WOODS:** Right, of course. Well, the reason I brought it up was that I've been told that in the little presentation that you get, he said it moves very quickly and you could easily miss this.

The narrator – and this is, like, produced by, I don't know, the Parks Department or some kind of official agency – just happens to put in there that the US was obviously trying to manipulate Japan into firing the first shot.

And that's actually in there! So, I am going to have my ears peeled. I have to hear that for myself.

**GOTTFRIED:** I mean, at the same time, we've taken over all of these far-left narratives about the Civil War, the Evil Confederacy, whatever else we're supposed to believe, World War One or World War Two.

But when it comes to the Japanese, we're told the kind of stuff that conservative revisionists were saying, in, like, in the 1940s and 1950s. An exception is made. By the way, the Japanese in Hawaii were not rounded up and put in concentration camps during World War Two.

They were spared that. It would have been very hard to do since there were so many of them there. They did not suffer the indignities that other Japanese Americans did.

**WOODS:** Actually, I had never even thought about that. It hadn't occurred to me to think about the Japanese population of Hawaii. That is very interesting.

Let's go back to Continetti and what we might call, I don't know, like, a sanitized or establishment approved view of American conservatism. Where does Ronald Reagan fit into the picture for him?

**GOTTFRIED:** Ronald Reagan is very well liked by neoconservatives, and for very good reason. They took over his foreign policy. They fashioned the rhetoric of his administration.

And that rhetoric did not really start with Bush II. It started with Reagan and people like Elliott Abrams and Podhoretz's family and so forth. Nor did Reagan do anything very daring in domestic policy. Like, he said he would get rid of the Department of Education, which he didn't do.

There weren't any kind of right-wing surprises. He always used neoconservative language. Even, if you remember, he ditched Marcos in the Philippines very quickly, because the neoconservatives wanted him to do that.

They were opposed to right-wing dictators. They also didn't like the apartheid government in South Africa, they wanted to replace it. In the end, he sort of went along with that. So, Reagan is one of their heroes.

Eisenhower, on the other hand, is not. Which is interesting, right? I mean, you think of Eisenhower as a more centrist politician. But Reagan is someone they like a great deal, as they do FDR and, I suppose, Woodrow Wilson.

**WOODS:** And yet, you would think they would have a modicum of respect for Eisenhower, if for no other reason than he pushed aside Robert Taft.

**GOTTFRIED:** [laughing] I don't think they're that sophisticated.

**WOODS:** Oh, sorry. Okay, I'm coming up with arguments they haven't thought of.

**GOTTFRIED:** No. That we owe him a debt of gratitude because he got rid of somebody who was to the right of him, I don't think they think in those terms. They just don't seem to like – it may be sort of, you know, the liberal democratic prejudice of their youth.

Probably, their parents were for Stevenson in the 1950s, so Eisenhower was seen as a kind of alien presence. You'd think they'd admire him because he won World War Two, or was the commander, but apparently he doesn't rate very high with him.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Well, so, suppose you have the kind of outlook on things that somebody like Continetti has – and there are a lot of people who have that outlook. In 2023 are you going to hitch your wagon to Ron DeSantis as an opponent of Trump or are you just going to stick with Mike Pence come what may?

**GOTTFRIED:** Well, I am a DeSantis supporter.

**WOODS:** I mean, as a Continetti kind of guy.

**GOTTFRIED:** Oh. Continetti would probably vote for him reluctantly. I don't know. I think probably Pence or Nikki Haley would probably be his preferred candidate. Neocons like Haley, They also like Pence.

**WOODS:** It's very, very interesting, though, just how fast the party went from nominating Romney in 2012 to the point where Nikki Haley hasn't got a prayer, has no chance whatsoever. And it happened just like that.

Now, on the other hand, whatever winds up happening with Trump and all his legal troubles, maybe the neocons come triumphantly back, wagging a finger, telling everybody they told us so. But I don't know, think there's enough of an infrastructure that's Trumpian now that it might be hard to clear it all away.

**GOTTFRIED:** No, I think you're right. They're going to be stuck with this guy and they might even declare a truce. And of course, the older generation of neocons have been on the Trump bandwagon for a very long time.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that's been interesting, too.

**GOTTFRIED:** Conrad Black, Norman Podhoretz, most of the older neocons have been Trump supporters. And of course, Giuliani was a neocon at one time.

**WOODS:** Yeah, I always wondered about that. But I thought part of it was that Trump himself is not as much of an ideologue as he's made out to be. He's obviously just a guy with some instincts. And so, a guy like that, maybe you could work with.

**GOTTFRIED:** You would think so. The younger neocons though, really seem to hate him, which is interesting. I mean, Norman Podhoretz, my guess is probably pushing 90 by now, has been a strong Trump backer. His son John absolutely hates Trump.

I think you find this split among the neocons, the older generation. Victor Davis Hanson is a very strong Trump supporter. Roger Kimball from the New Criterion. I mean, I write for the same website with a lot of these people now.

But the older generation of neocons probably would make overtures. I mean, they not only make overtures, they're pro-Trump. But it's the ones who have taken over who seem to be much more hostile to Trump.

And also on social questions, clearly to the left of where the older generation were. They're generally pro LGBT. I'm sure Continetti is.

**WOODS:** Right. Yeah. And that's another matter. Although that certainly wouldn't be an issue for them approaching Trump because Trump has not been super reactionary on that issue himself.

**GOTTFRIED:** He's for gay marriage, Trump. You know, he's been very frank about that. He thinks it's great and so forth. Which, sort of must raise problems for the religious right, even if they like his stand on abortion. But on other social issues he's not all that conservative.

**WOODS:** I mean, he's a New York Democrat turned Republican. What would you expect, more or less?

So, given that this book we've been talking about may not be the best introduction to its subject, can you, Paul Gottfried, recommend an alternative title we might read if we are curious about the real story?

**GOTTFRIED:** There are lots and lots of good books on the American right without having to read my books, which I admit are biased. I go after the neocons.

**WOODS:** Oh, but let me say in parentheses. I don't know if it's hard to get now, but your book, *The Conservative Movement,* was really helpful to me back years ago when I read it, and I recommend that. And yes, you can tell that the author may have a particular axe to grind, but don't we all?

**GOTTFRIED:** Yeah, but the book comes – I wrote three different books called *The Conservative Movement*. The first I co-authored with Tom Fleming.

The second one was more critical of the neo conservatives than the first one, and also contained what are now outdated figures on the amount of money taken in by neoconservative foundations.

The third book, which is hardly read, it's just published on demand at this point, called *Making Sense of the American Right*, is extremely critical of the conservative movement from its founding in the 1950s, the modern conservative movement. And of course, I point to the fact that there are antiwar conservatives in the interwar period.

There's all sorts of people on the right, including antebellum Southern political theorists and so forth, New England Brahmins, who were conservatives before Buckley created a movement around *National Review* and proceeded to throw out Murray Rothbard and a whole bunch of other people they didn't like, and the Birch Society.

But the third volume is extremely critical of the modern movement. But I think it should be read if you can obtain a copy as an antidote to Continetti's book *The Right.*

**WOODS:** Well, I'll see what I can do. I can probably find at least a link to used copies, but I'll put that up at TomWoods.com/2377. And incidentally, a piece of advice (and maybe you can also use this, Paul) to anybody listening.

Obviously, Amazon very often will have used copies of a book, but Amazon doesn't have everything. So, there is a resource I highly recommend that more or less brings together small booksellers from the UK and the US.

And I have found that pretty much any old book I want to find, out of print, obscure, forgotten, I can get a copy on it. And it's BookFinder.com. So, Bookfinder.com is now your last resort website when Amazon or some other place big place fails you.

Bookfinder.com almost always has what you're looking for. So, with that bit of wisdom for everybody, I'll thank you Paul and again remind people, ChroniclesMagazine.org.

You can read some of their pieces online but you should also get the physical magazine so you can be a civilized human being sitting in his chair and not looking at another screen, which you've been doing all day anyway.

So, there's my recommendation. Thank you, Paul.

**GOTTFRIED:** Thank you very much for having me.