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FUSIONISM, RELIGION AND THE TEA PARTY

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Abstract: This article aims to explore two different but interrelated problems. The first objective, the more abstract one, is to discuss the plausibility of fusionism as a theoretical project of bridging the philosophical gap between libertarianism and free-market conservatism. Our thesis is that while fusionism could succeed, as a strategic alliance, in promoting specific policies, the differences between libertarianism and conservatism are irreconcilable at the level of fundamental intellectual assumptions. More precisely, starting from Hayek's objections to conservatism, we argue that the crucial divide is that between two conceptions about the prerequisites for social order. The second objective is to show how the differences between the policy prescriptions endorsed by conservatives and libertarians within the Tea Party (mainly with regard to religion-related issues) are illustrative for the theoretical point defended in the first sections.

Key Words: libertarianism, conservatism, religion and politics, social order, fusionism, Tea Party.

In American political culture, “fusionism” has become the label for a philosophical and political project aiming at the unification of the two major trends within the political right in the USA: conservatism and libertarianism¹. According to most commentators, the project started with the establishment of the conservative journal *National Review* in 1955 by William Buckley². While the highly energetic and polemical Buckley assumed the role of promoting fusionism on the political scene, it was senior editor Frank Meyer’s task to attempt constructing a political theory that was supposed to accommodate the major tenets of both conservatism and libertarianism³. However, a historical account of the way fusionism fared over the past half-century is beyond the scope of our article (although we shall appeal to the recent history of the movement to provide relevant background for more conceptual points).

Rather, we aim at reaching two different objectives. The first and the more theoretical one is to discuss some of the sources of tension between free-market conservatives and libertarians that pose a serious challenge to fusionism. The thesis we defend is that while fusionism can work as a functional alliance on specific policy issues, there is a deep division at the level of fundamental presumptions that make its success doubtful as a unification project. A second objective is to illustrate this conceptual point by considering the Tea Party movement. More specifically, we will show that the differences with regard to policy prescriptions in certain areas (mainly religion-related areas) held by conservative and libertarian tea partiers are just symptoms of the fundamental divide.

Reaching for the libertarian voter?

For its promoters, the stakes of fusionism are huge, on both theoretical and political levels. Libertarians are the direct philosophical descendants of the classical liberals whose ideas have helped shape the American society in its early stages, so getting their intellectual support for free-market conservatism could provide a very useful legitimacy boost. A less abstract (but not less important) reason is given by the big impact that the libertarian vote had over elections in the U.S. in the past 20-30 years.

At least one major difficulty needs to be addressed before moving on to a more in-depth analysis: what does the term “libertarian”⁴ stand for in this context? It might not be easy to find a common denominator for clusters of theories and attitudes that cover a wide spectrum and are quite often all labeled as libertarian: from the anarcho-capitalists of the Austrian School to the supporters of the minimal state such as Robert Nozick and then beyond, to the admission of (some) positive role for the government in the production of public goods (by, e.g., Milton Friedman or James Buchanan); from the natural rights approaches in the Lockean-Kantian tradition to all forms of utilitarianism or to a milder version of the

Humean non-aggregative consequentialism etc. Acknowledging the challenge, we might note that, fortunately, it is not necessary, at this stage, to identify an “essential libertarian” or to provide a description for such a fine ideal type. We will appeal to the rather functional or putative understanding proposed, among others, by Kirby and Boaz⁵, based on voting behavior. A libertarian voter (no matter what his/her detailed position is) would support “fiscally conservative and socially liberal” proposals.

The estimates concerning the proportion of libertarian-minded voters in the current American electorate vary widely, partly due to the difficulty in accurately positioning them on a traditional liberal-conservative two-dimensional continuum, and partly due to the reluctance of many voters that fit the profile to use the term as descriptive for their position. Kirby and Boaz calculated, starting from American National Election Studies, that since 1992 the proportion of libertarians among the reported voters has varied between 12 and 15%⁶. Calculations with a less restrictive methodology and starting from different polls have reached even higher figures. For example, according to the same authors, Gallup polls consistently found the percentage of libertarian voters to vary around 20% over the last 20 years, with 23% in 2009⁷. Even if the restrictive account of Kirby and Boaz is not actually restrictive enough and the real percentage were a bit smaller, it is obvious that libertarian voters are not to be discarded easily in any political strategy, not with them representing the potential swing voters.

At a first glance, the conservative (Republican) bid for the libertarian votes expressed by fusionism seems natural. There is an old and important pro-market strand within the American conservatism, which should act as an attractor for libertarian voters (since all other options, i.e. refraining from voting, voting independents or voting Democrats would be comparatively disadvantageous). In practice, however, as many polls have suggested (a point we will explore in more details in the second part of the article), the libertarian’s option, given his choice set⁸, might not be as straightforward as that. There are a fair number of circumstances in which the libertarian’s distaste towards social conservatism embedded with the mainstream Republicans might even trump his natural aversion regarding the fiscal *largesse* of the Democrats.

This picture of the libertarian-minded voter as “torn between two aversions” (a phrase borrowed from Boaz and Kirby)⁹ and defined by his/her preferred policy prescriptions has, without a doubt, significant advantages. It is functional, operational and, most importantly, in line with the common usage of the term “libertarian” in popular political culture: a socially liberal, uncompromising supporter of the free-market.

However, if considered alone, this picture of libertarianism leads to conceiving the challenges that fusionism has to face in a manner that, to our mind, is over-simplifying at best and erroneous at worst. It is often

contended¹⁰ that the major obstacle that fusionism has to overcome in order to succeed lies in different policy prescriptions regarding social issues: libertarians being pro-choice, opposing the prosecution of victimless crimes (such as prostitution or drug consumption) and also opposing religious educational policies such as school prayer, teaching creationism alongside evolutionism etc.; while, of course, conservatives favor the opposites.

In the next section we will try to put forward an alternative hypothesis, aiming to explain the difference in policy preferences as stemming from two distinct and fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of social order. In other words, our thesis here is that policy differences are just symptoms of a deeper intellectual divide.

Prerequisites of social order

When the tradition to be conserved and/or defended is favorable to the free market and limited government (and this is the case with the US), it is small wonder that, more often than not, most libertarians and conservatives would share similar options concerning most of the issues on the political agenda. The problem is, of course, that when you find yourself repeatedly on the same side of the barricade with somebody, the differences begin to fade, especially in the eyes of the outsiders. Preserving your intellectual identity might require the strenuous and sometimes even unpleasant effort of delineating yourself from your allies, rather than from your opponents. It is along these lines that Hayek's famous essay, *Why I Am Not a Conservative* (which he printed as a postscript to his book *The Constitution of Liberty*¹¹), should be read. Hayek's essay can be seen as a paradigmatic instance of the libertarian's reservations towards fusionism (and conservatism more generally)¹².

The fact that libertarians and conservatives endorse a similar set of policy prescriptions (mainly in the economic realm), Hayek argues, should not be mistaken for a sort of isomorphism between the two positions: "This difference between liberalism and conservatism must not be obscured by the fact that in the United States it is still possible to defend individual liberty by defending long-established institutions. To the liberal they are valuable not mainly because they are long established or because they are American, but because they correspond to the ideals he cherishes"¹³. On the one hand, one might notice that there remain a fair number of policies regarding which two sides are still in serious disagreement. But, more importantly, this limited convergence is doubled by crucial differences at the fundamental level of intellectual assumptions.

Before moving to the core of Hayek's objections against conservatism, a cautionary note might be necessary. While being very careful with highlighting the strong intellectual identity of classical liberal (or libertarian) thinking in relation to the conservative one, he is by no

means disrespectful towards the object of his criticism. Hayek acknowledges that there are some important conservative contributions that libertarians would only stand to gain by taking them to heart. Closest to a libertarian mindset would be the conservative insistence on the study of spontaneously grown institutions, such as language, law or conventions (social norms). Hayek's own evolutionary theory of institutions takes some of its central insights from the works of Burke or Hume¹⁴ on evolving norms and institutions, this being one of the arguments invoked in support of the thesis that his overall outlook is rather conservative than liberal¹⁵. Be that as it may, the argument can easily be turned around: the fact that a libertarian thinker who shares so much with conservatism (probably more than any other major libertarian author) still felt it as a need and intellectual duty to distance himself from it should rather count as a reason for accepting a clear distinction between the two.

Among the objections that Hayek raises to conservatism (to name but a few of the blunter ones, its inclination "to use the powers of government to prevent change or to limit its rate to whatever appeals to the more timid mind"¹⁶, its fondness for authority or its lack of clearly stated principles), the fundamental one, in our reading, concerns the concept of social order. All the others can be reconstructed as deriving from the competing visions regarding the prerequisites for order.

The liberal (i.e. the "classical liberal", or libertarian) attitude, in Hayek's view, "requires an intellectual commitment to a type of order in which, even on issues which to one are fundamental, others are allowed to pursue different ends"¹⁷. As such, for the liberal (but not for most conservatives), the enforcement of moral or religious values is not a proper use for government power or coercion.

That is not to say, as sometimes crude representations on both sides imply, that libertarians are amoral heartless atheists, while conservatives would most accurately be portrayed as gung-ho bigots. It is not the personal adherence to a certain set of values that is at stake here: there are many deeply religious libertarians and extremely tolerant and open-minded conservatives (we could testify meeting quite a few of both!). Their respective preferred policies in religion or morality-related matters are just consequences of the commitment to different conceptions of order.

For classical liberals or libertarians, the voluntary interactions between individuals, constrained only by the formal rules (in the sense that Hayek theorized in *The Road to Serfdom*¹⁸) are all the necessary prerequisites for the emergence and stability of a desirable social order. And this applies not only to economic processes, but to every aspect of human interactions. No special "glue" is needed to hold society together; enforcement of the formal "rules of the game" is enough. No particular ends are prescribed to be pursued by individuals. In a passionate attempt to add to the appeal and rhetorical force of this notion, Nozick describes it

as a “framework for utopias”¹⁹: individuals are free to (and according to Nozick they would) form clusters of cooperation, pursuing the life plans and values they happen to cherish in common.

Other more practical libertarian prescriptions are derived from (or at least are consistent with) this central theoretical tenet. Libertarians are against the use of governmental force to impose a particular religious or moral agenda not because they are atheists or amoral but because they hold that such an imposition would actually be detrimental to social order. To follow the metaphor that we proposed a few lines above, the attempt to forcefully add such a glue would only transform society into the kind of sticky mess in which individuals would find it extremely hard to move about.

This is surely not the way in which conservatives (not even the conservative promoters of fusionism) see order. Voluntary interactions within a set of formal rules are not sufficient to ensure it, the main fear being that such an order would be inherently unstable (that is, not orderly enough) in the absence of a shared commitment of the members of the society to a common axiological framework. The key assumption here is that value is objective, and only certain life plans are worth pursuing. The results of spontaneous institutional evolution are acceptable only provided that individuals who participate in the process share (at least partly) a common moral *Weltanschauung*.

A possible corroboration of the idea that the differences in preferred policies between libertarians and conservatives stem from the more fundamental divide concerning the necessary prerequisites of order could be found by considering a seeming inconsistency within the conservative view on economics: conservatives tend to oppose collectivist and directivist policies at home (so are market-prone), but many at the same time tend to favor protectionism against international free trade. Already observed by Hayek²⁰, this split appears to hold true also in today’s Tea Party (as we will show in the second part of this article). If our interpretation about the conservative concept of order is correct, then this need not be an inconsistency. The result of spontaneous order (free-market) can be accepted nationally because participants are assumed to be already members of the same moral community.

The competing conceptions of order were perceived as a major obstacle for fusionism as early as the first attempt to ground it theoretically. In Chapter 4 of his 1962 book (under the suggestive title “What kind of order?”), Frank Meyer attempts to put forward an alternative option, in the hope that it would represent a reasonable compromise between the two (a compromise that would require both parties to give up something). His discussion starts from the observation that questions of order are often asked in the wrong manner²¹. The choice is not between the presence or the lack of order, as some collectivists and conservatives would like readers to think. Some type of order is present in

all political societies. "What is important is not order as order, but what kind of order. The task of political theory is to develop the criteria by which differing political orders can be judged in the light of principle"²².

The real dilemma, for Meyer, is that of choosing between freedom and virtue, which seems to indicate a contradiction in the condition of man. "If virtue is the true end of man's existence; if it can only be achieved in freedom; and if freedom by its nature can lead to vice as well as to virtue: what, then, of the criterion of political order?"²³ The typical conservative response to the dilemma would echo Plato's solution, prioritizing virtue over freedom, and thus opening an unbridgeable gap with the libertarian idea of order. In Meyer's view, this answer is wrong, and conservatives should abandon it. The correct approach, one that he hopes libertarians could also embrace, would start from acknowledging that freedom and virtue should each be dominant in a different "realm of existence": political and spiritual respectively. "A good society is possible only when both these conditions are met: when the social and political order guarantees a state of affairs in which men can freely choose; and when the intellectual and moral leaders, the "creative minority", have the understanding and imagination to maintain the prestige of tradition and reason, and thus to sustain the intellectual and moral order throughout society"²⁴.

Meyer's solution is somehow appeasing, and it would facilitate fusionism as the kind of practical alliance between libertarians and conservatives that Hayek talked about. If conservatives gave up the idea of using government coercion to impose a set of moral or religious values (while still retaining the notion of a natural or social hierarchy), the main source of quarrel regarding policy issues would disappear. Practical fusionism, however, was never taken that far, and it remained mainly a common push on a defined set of issues for which the options of the two sides overlap.

Moreover, a compromise in such terms would fare even worse as an appropriate basis for a theoretical "fusion" (and the critical reaction from libertarians came swiftly²⁵). Meyer's proposal retains the idea that something exogenous to the interactions within the formal rules is needed in order to ensure social order. It is just the mechanism that is changed: instead of using the government to apply the glue, we should rely on the understanding and imagination of a "creative minority" of (morally superior?) beings. It is not the utopian flavor of the proposal that libertarians would primarily object to. Rather, the problem resides in the underlying conception concerning the prerequisites of order, which remain essentially conservative in nature.

The rest of our article will be devoted to discussing a large-scale grass-root movement in today's America that is qualified by many commentators as an important real-life fusionist project: the Tea Party.

A brief history of the new Tea Party. How it all started

The path we follow from this point could be broken down into a sequence of steps. First of all, we propose an analysis of the emergence and evolution of what is now called the Tea Party in present day America. We then set forth to show why we consider this particular grassroots social movement to be a relevant one in the current American cultural, religious and ideological context. Next we address the question whether the Tea Party represents a particular form of new fusionism. If the old fusionism between libertarians and conservatives had, as a common denominator, the aversion towards the communist menace, maybe this new type of fusionism has, as a common enemy, the ever growing expansion of the state. In other words, using data collected from recent studies and polls, our aim is that of providing a succinct overview of the ideologies of the tea partiers in order to see whether they represent a homogeneous or heterogeneous political and cultural phenomenon. Last but not least, we will assess the role played by religion in what we may or may not call a contemporary type of fusionism. Taking into account the essential role of religion as a political tool for conservatives, could the Tea Party grow into something more than just a strategic alliance between libertarians and conservatives on specific policy issues (such as reducing the tax burdens on entrepreneurs or cutting the national debt)?

Whether we refer to the events that helped them win their independence from the British monarchy such as the Boston tea party, or to more recent movements on the right²⁶ or on the left²⁷ of the political spectrum, the United States have always had a tradition of grassroots social movements. As John M. O'Hara reveals in his account of the birth of the new Tea Party²⁸ this social movement fits perfectly within this tradition.

The historical background of the evolution of this social movement should be traced back to the year 2009, in the midst of the economic and financial crisis which started in 2008. O'Hara actually parallels it with the original Boston Tea Party. If during the 18th century Americans opposed the British constraints on local public policy under the principle 'no taxation without representation', the new Tea Party could also be viewed as stemming or evolving from a tax revolt. But the issue at hand today is not taxation without representation but the president and the federal government's response to the financial crisis which started in 2008. Namely, the problem of modern day tea partiers resides in bailouts and economic stimuli in the face of deficits, but also in the expansion of the state towards what they perceive to be improper functions, such as president Obama's plan to socialize health care. As O'Hara puts it, "despite the repeated claims by the media, the tea parties are not anti-tax protests. The average American understands that taxes are a necessary for fundamental functions of government in a civil society. Just what those

functions are is the sticking point. Where protesters - and most Americans - draw a clear, straight line is at bailouts and handouts for irresponsible corporations, government entities and individual citizens”²⁹.

The event which turned out to be the final straw for numerous fiscal conservatives or libertarians was the Home Affordability Plan, a piece of legislation which was in tune with the US government’s response to the financial crisis. Prior to the Democrat President Barack Obama, George W. Bush also proposed and signed massive plans of bailout such as TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program), which was implemented through the ‘Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008’, a \$700 billion attempt to save the American financial system³⁰.

This prompted a spontaneous response from free-market conservatives and libertarians. Using social media tools such as Facebook or Twitter they managed to coordinate their actions and organize the first protest credited as ‘Tea Party’ in February 2009 in Seattle. Afterwards, protests spread nationwide. For example, a CBS/New York Times poll from April 2010³¹ states that 18% of Americans describe themselves as Tea Party supporters. Moreover, citing a poll from 2009 by NBC/Wall Street Journal³², Amitai Etzioni reveals in his article *The Tea Party is Half Right*³³ that the percentage of Americans who view the Tea Party favorably is larger in comparison to the traditional political forces on the American political scene. For example, 41% of Americans have a positive opinion regarding the Tea Party as opposed to only 35% and 28% looking favorably towards Democrats and the Republicans.

The ideology of the Tea Party. Towards a new fusionism?

Ever since its appearance in the spotlight, the Tea Party benefited from the attention of the traditional but also the new media. One of the commonplace critique stemming from more radical segments of the American left is that the Tea Party represents a new form of extremism, fueled by racism and xenophobia. But not all commentators from the Left agree with this point. For example, Michael J. Thompson, in his article *Suburban Origins of the Tea Party: Spatial dimensions of the New Conservative Personality* acknowledges that “far from being taken as extremist, the message of the tea partiers, in one form or another, may resonate with many Americans”³⁴. Moreover, as Amitai Etzioni puts it, “the Tea Party, reporters find, is not a party at all. Actually, it includes several organizations such as Tea Party Patriots and the Tea Party Express. It does not have a clear national leader but is run mainly by a bunch of local leaders. And the Tea Party followers are found to differ considerably from one another; some are radical libertarians, some are social conservatives”³⁵.

Where do Tea Partiers stand on issues such as tax cuts, government spending, or Obama’s health care reform? What about social issues with

religious aspects such as gay marriage? In other words, what is the ideology (or ideologies) of the Tea Party? In order to answer this question we propose an overview of recent studies and polls that will hopefully shed some light on this issue.

The starting point of the majority of studies and reports is the particular observation that most of the members of the movement are concentrated within the Republican party, share the conservative ideology, are white, male, belong to some denomination of Christianity and are older than 45. For example, these are the findings of a CBS/New York Times poll from April 2010. Writing about the same poll, Zachary Courser highlights that “73% of Tea Party supporters identified themselves as conservative”³⁶. The poll also reveals that the issues that have most angered the supporters of the Tea Party are the health care reform (16%), the fact that they are not represented in Washington (14%), government spending (11%) and the economy (8%)³⁷. Overall, there is a clear option for considering the economic issues more important than the social ones. These data are corroborated with the findings of a study by Scott Clement and John C. Green for the Pew Research Center, titled *The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues*³⁸. Their data show that 88% of tea partiers prefer a smaller government and also that 62% think that corporations make a fair and reasonable profit.

Are the supporters of the Tea Party thoroughly consistent with the political and economic philosophy of free-market conservatism and libertarianism? The CBS/New York Times poll for example also suggests that a lot of the tea partiers’ responses are similar to the general American public in many ways. For example, they consider that the tax amount paid in 2009 was fair and they also send their children to public schools. In addition to this, their position on free trade and its implications for the American economy is illuminating. As an NBC/Wall Street Journal poll³⁹ suggests, 61% of Tea Party sympathizers consider that free trade has had a negative impact regarding jobs in the US and also on the economy. This proportion of tea partiers against free trade agreements with other countries is consistent with the results at the national level. For instance, their position is shared by 69% of Americans and 65% of unionized workers. Only 18% believe that the benefits of free trade outnumber the negative consequences.

But when it comes to social issues, they manifest, according to the CBS/New York Times poll, traditional conservative attitudes. For example, their position on gay marriage is pretty straightforward. Being asked if they support gay marriage, civil unions for same sex couples, or if there should not be any recognition for a gay couple at all, only 16% of them agree that the state should grant them marriage equality alongside heterosexual couples, while 41% manifested their option for civil unions. On the other hand, 40% of Tea Party supporters dismissed the same sex community’s plea for marriage equality rights.

The findings of the CBS/New York Times poll are consistent with a recent poll from 2011, done by Public Policy Polling⁴⁰. Answering the same question posited by the CBS/New York Times poll, 17% of the supporters of the Tea Party agree that same sex couples should have the right to marry, while 30% consider that they should be allowed to form civil unions. The majority of them though (52%) reject this two institutional options.

On the issue of abortion, the findings are similar. According to Clement and Green, only 34% of tea partiers consider that a woman should have the right in all/most cases to have an abortion. In opposition to this 34% minority, 59% of the supporters of the Tea Party believe that abortion should be illegal in all/most cases.

From the data presented above, a question emerges: what is the particular place of religion in the ideological framework of this social movement? According to studies and polls, religion plays an essential and integral part in the position of tea partiers on the social issues discussed above. For example, the results of Clement and Green are quite illuminating in this perspective. From the collected data they conclude that, on the issue of same-sex marriage or abortion, religion is the top influence of their views. If 53% of Tea Party supporters claim that due to their religious convictions they have a particular position on same-sex marriage, 46% talk of the same influence of their opinion on the issue of abortion. These results are not surprising. For instance, Courser⁴¹ tells us that 39% of tea-partiers are Evangelical Christians, while highlighting the fact that only 35% feel that social issues are more important than the economic ones. On a slightly different note, Clement and Green document the support for the Tea Party from different religious groups. Interestingly enough, Protestants dominate the poll with 31% of them agreeing with the tea-partiers' proposals and stances. Also, within the Protestant group, the Tea Party draws most adherence from White Evangelicals, with 44% of them being in favor and only 8% against. Catholics and Jews are also taken into account, but their numbers are slightly smaller, with 29% and 15% having a positive opinion of the Tea Party's plea. What is the place of atheists and agnostics in this poll? The Pew Research Centre's study reveals that only 12% of them are on the same side as the tea partiers, with 67% of them being against. Last but not least, Clement and Green explore also the relation between the Tea Party and the Conservative Christian Movement. Their findings are consistent with what we previously discussed. For example, on the one hand, 69% of those who agree with the Christian conservatives also agree with the Tea Party, with only 4% of them having a different opinion. On the other hand, 42% of the persons who agree with the Tea Party also agree with the Conservative Christian Movement with 11% being on a different note.

Drawing on our previous analysis, what precisely could be said regarding the ideological tenets of the Tea Party movement? Is it a

homogeneous or heterogeneous movement from an ideological point of view? More to the point, could we identify an overlap between the economic and social options of tea party sympathizers, or is the Tea Party an ideological cover which might accommodate conservatives and libertarians without great difficulties? In other words, is the Tea Party the sort of fusionist movement which, say, Buckley or Meyer would have endorsed? We see this as being an issue since, as David Kirby and Emily Ekins point out, there is at least one study (from the libertarian think-tank Cato) which shows that a lot of Tea Party sympathizers have deep libertarian credentials. In support of their contention, Kirby and Ekins give the following example: "Just under half, or 48 percent, of tea partiers at the recent Virginia Tea Party Convention held views that are more accurately described as libertarian — fiscally conservative, to be sure, but moderate to liberal on social and cultural issues."⁴² They also focus on the fact that there are a lot of hypothesis regarding what the Tea Party movement is. In Ekins and Kirby's terms, "some embrace it as a revival of traditional conservatism. Many insist it is ginned up by billionaire funders as a means to fight regulations. Others view it as arch-social conservative Republicans, motivated by divisive issues like abortion, gay rights or even racial angst."⁴³

The data presented can hopefully lead to some answers to the questions above. The first conclusion that might be drawn is that on a wide range of economic issues the Tea Party supporters' options overlap. Most of them declare that they are in favor of the free-market. Also, they manifest not only skepticism but also distaste for the expansion of the government's size and scope in the economy. They also favor a more friendly environment for businesses when it comes to taxes. In this respect, we could talk about the conservative and libertarian supporters of the Tea Party as proposing the same type of policies regarding the economic realm, by favoring business and disapproving of the expansion of the state. If we were to confine ourselves only to this level of analysis, then the Tea Party movement could be described as homogeneous.

Such a perspective is not only slightly problematic, but actually straightforwardly wrong. Even though libertarians and conservatives agree with pretty much everything when it comes to market-based policies for the national economy, they disagree when it comes to international trade for example. Our findings regarding this particular aspect are consonant with Hayek's charge of the apparent inconsistency in conservative economic thought. It would seem that Hayek's objection is still valid today.

Besides the discussion regarding free trade, a more interesting fissure between the conservative and the libertarian supporters of the Tea Party resides in their views on social policies. The particular way in which proponents of the two ideologies view religion plays an integral role in this split and this is, as we stressed out in the previous section, a symptom

of a much bigger divide, namely the divide regarding the conditions for the existence of social order. Judging through the lenses of the data which we presented earlier, we could easily see that the social conservative positions are dominant. For instance, more than 50% of all tea partiers oppose same-sex marriage or abortion, which are paradigmatic conservative positions. In opposition to this majority we can observe that a minority assumes hard line liberal position (e.g. the 17% who agree with same-sex marriages or the 34% who think that a woman should have the right to have an abortion) or mildly liberal position like the 30 to 40% who think that gay couples should have the right to form civil unions. In this respect, we can see more clearly the distinction between social conservatives who favor free-market policies but who also oppose liberal policies on social issues who are the majority of Tea Party supporters, and a strong minority who shares a classical-liberal mindset and assumptions, namely a distaste for state intervention in the economy for example but also a more tolerant view regarding social policies. Another point worth mentioning is that while conservatives consider that religion should play an essential role in the public sphere, as a means of becoming virtuous, libertarians, far from being only atheists, or, more importantly against religion, think that a clear separation between Church and State is essential. Or as Kirby and Ekins put it: "Tea Party libertarians are somewhat younger, better educated and almost twice as likely to 'never' go to church than Tea Party conservatives. On the issues, tea party libertarians are less concerned than conservatives about the moral direction of the country, gay marriage, immigration, job outsourcing and abortion."⁴⁴

In other words, while the conservatives of the Tea Party share a presumption towards tradition, which manifests itself in religious aspects, the libertarians have, as a common starting point, the freedom to choose.

As a result, far from being homogenous, the Tea Party movement is actually a heterogeneous cultural and social phenomenon. And that is mainly because it hosts individuals with different assumptions regarding how social order can be formed and maintained and, as a result, individuals who will favor different type of policies in the social arena but who do share a similar option for the free-market.

Could the Tea Party evolve into a fusion between conservatives and libertarians?

Undoubtedly, the social movement which started in February 2009 and grew into the Tea Party has had a great impact on the ideological landscape of modern day America. But could it evolve into something more? Would libertarians, in the face of the ever growing power and scope of the American federal government become wholehearted allies of the majority of the conservative Tea Party, or, the movement could be better

described as just evolving into a strategic alliance stemming from more pressing economic policies?

The position that Kirby and Ekins opt for is the second one. Namely, in the above cited article, they consider that the Tea Party represents an interesting opportunity. While conservatives, they observe, tend to be more organized around churches or the Christian Coalition, libertarians on the other hand seem to be a less visible force in contemporary American political life. Their hypothesis is that, if the Tea Party has a very strong libertarian minority, this may allow them to become more present, more manifest in the ideological and cultural landscape of the US.

As we can observe, Kirby and Ekins as well as other modern day libertarians have noticed that the Tea Party might represent an interesting and maybe fertile ground on which to grow and gain momentum. One particular reason for considering this is the heterogeneous character of the movement.

If the above considerations are correct, what does the emergence and evolution of the Tea Party prove? Our opinion could be summed up as follows: mainly the fact that a strategic alliance is possible between libertarians and conservatives on certain policies, such as economic actions for cutting the deficit or lowering taxes. Full-fledged fusionism within the American right, on the other hand (assuming of course that libertarianism is part of what we may call the right of the political spectrum) seems close to impossible, one of the most important difficulties to overcome being the fact that quite an important part of free-market conservatives also fully embrace social conservatism. In this context, even though a libertarian voter may side with an evangelical republican on certain aspects regarding economic policy (such as the rejection of Obamacare or of large scale bailouts), he may also favor in an election a Democrat candidate who would stress the importance of the notion of separation between Church and State on a wide range of social policy issues ranging from gay marriage to abortion or the rejection of teaching creationism alongside evolutionism in the public schools of America. Some libertarians have a similar perspective regarding even the Tea Party. For example, even if he acknowledges that most of the conservative tea-partiers have similar options with libertarians concerning the sphere of economics, Brink Lindsey rejects from the beginning not only the possibility of a fusion with conservatives but also a strategic alliance with them. In a debate entitled *Where do Libertarians Belong*, hosted by the magazine *Reason*, he states emphatically that he firmly rejects both approaches, the fusionist and the strategic one, because "the spirit of freedom is cosmopolitan. It is committed to secularism in political discourse, whatever religious views people might hold privately. And it coolly upholds reason against the swirl of interests and passions. History is full of ironies and surprises, but there is no rational basis for expecting an outlook as benighted as the contemporary

rights's to produce policy results that libertarians can cheer about.”⁴⁵

Lindsey's response is consonant with the approach of an important section of libertarians in the US. As mentioned earlier, one of the most important reasons for the dissatisfaction of many libertarians with Republican conservatives or Tea Party conservatives resides in the emphasis they place on religion as an integral part of tradition. In effect, for some libertarians even a strategic alliance is doomed to fail because, as Brink puts it, the spirit of freedom is cosmopolitan. On a more philosophical note, we could translate this 'cosmopolitanism' as resulting from the libertarian assumption that social order does not need cultural and more precisely religious isomorphism. But other libertarians, while not going all the way to regard the Tea Party as representing a possibility for a political fusion of the type discussed by Meyer or Buckley, are ready to concede that it may turn out to be a well-timed opportunity for libertarians to become more vocal and present in the public scene.

Notes:

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² For two very recent accounts of the role *National Review* played (and continues to play nowadays) in promoting the fusionist movement, see Andrew Busch, "Social Conservatives and Economic Conservatives", *Society*, vol. 49, no.1 (2012): 13-23 and the excellent synthesis by Tudor Glodeanu, "Fuzionismul", in Dragos Paul Aligică and Ionuț Sterpan (eds.), *Curentele drepte*, (București: Humanitas, 2011).

³ The result of this attempt being Meyer's *In Defense of Freedom*, a highly discussed book in the 60's, which still provokes comments and replies. See Frank Meyer, *In Defense of Freedom. A Conservative Credo* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1962).

⁴ For an encompassing analysis of the full range of classical liberal and libertarian thought see Norman Barry, *On Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987).

⁵ David Kirby, David Boaz, "The Libertarian Vote in the Age of Obama", *Policy Analysis*, no. 658 (2010): 1. The article is a sequel to a previous one, co-authored by the same, in which a more detailed discussion can be found on the difficulties in describing and identifying the libertarian voter. See David Kirby, David Boaz, "The Libertarian Vote", *Policy Analysis*, no. 580 (2006): 1-26.

⁶ Kirby and Boaz, "The Libertarian Vote in the Age of Obama", 4.

⁷ Kirby and Boaz, "The Libertarian Vote in the Age of Obama", 5.

⁸ And assuming he/she would vote.

⁹ Kirby and Boaz, "The Libertarian Vote in the Age of Obama", 1.

¹⁰ For more details see the debate hosted by the libertarian magazine Reason, entitled "Where do libertarians belong?", available online, <<http://reason.com/archives/2010/07/12/where-do-libertarians->

belong/singlepage#commentcontainer>. The debate tries to frame pro fusionist options such as Jonah Goldberg's, in opposition to Brink Lindsey's dismissive attitude from a libertarian standpoint towards any type of alliance with social conservatives.

¹¹ Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 1960) (reprinted 1999).

¹² Many libertarians and classical liberals have followed on Hayek's footsteps, feeling the need to delineate themselves from conservatism. The most recent famous example is James Buchanan. See James Buchanan, *Why I, Too, Am Not a Conservative: The Normative Vision of Classical Liberalism* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2005). While the title of Buchanan's book is, obviously, a direct reference to Hayek, his theoretical aim is different, namely to lay down the set of ethical (normative) assumptions of classical liberalism, based mainly on the notions of natural equality and reciprocity.

¹³ Hayek, 399.

¹⁴ Towards the end of his life, Hayek sometimes referred to himself as a "Burkean Whig".

¹⁵ For example, by Oxford philosopher John Gray. See John Gray, *Post-Liberalism. Studies in Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 1993), 32sq (chapter 3 of Gray's book is even entitled "Hayek as a conservative").

¹⁶ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 400.

¹⁷ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 402.

¹⁸ Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (ed. Bruce Caldwell), (London: Routledge, 2007), 113.

¹⁹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), part III

²⁰ Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 403.

²¹ Frank Meyer, 64. Although Meyer does not refer to Hayek directly, his argument can be seen as a conservative response aiming to accommodate the kind of objections that Hayek raises. The next few paragraphs are only a very schematic sketch of Meyer's argument that does not deal with a number of important details and steps, but hopefully can shed some light on a possible fusionist strategy.

²² Frank Meyer, 65.

²³ Frank Meyer, 66.

²⁴ Frank Meyer, 69.

²⁵ See Ronald Hamowy, "Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism: Is A Synthesis Possible?", *Modern Age*, vol. 8, (fall.1964): 350-359.

²⁶ For a concise account of conservative or populist social movements in America see Zachary Courser, "The Tea 'Party' as a conservative social movement", *Society*, vol. 49 (2012).

²⁷ The paradigmatic example of a left leaning grassroots social movement is the protests against the Vietnam War in the 1960's. For a detailed analysis see Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics, The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²⁸ John M. O'Hara, *A New American Tea Party. The Counterrevolution against Bailouts, Handouts and Reckless Spending and more taxes* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010). O'Hara's book, although written as an exercise in first-person journalism, represents one of the first systematic accounts of the birth and evolution of the Tea Party. For more details see pages 1-21.

²⁹ O'Hara, p. XXV.

³⁰ For a detailed account of the specific bailout plans starting from 2008, see O'Hara, pp. XI-XIX

³¹ CBS/New York Times poll, April 5-12, 2010, quoted in Courser, 43.

³² WSJ/NBC poll: Tea Party tops Democrats and Republicans, quoted in Amitai Etzioni, "The Tea Party is Half Right", *Society*, vol. 48, no.3 (2011): 197.

³³ Etzioni, 197.

³⁴ Michael J. Thompson, "Suburban Origins of the Tea Party. Spatial Dimensions of the New Conservative Movement", *Critical Sociology*, 38(2012): 4.

³⁵ Etzioni, 199.

³⁶ Courser, 43.

³⁷ CBS/New York Times poll: National Survey of Tea Party Supporters, available online, <<http://documents.nytimes.com/new-york-times-cbs-news-poll-national-survey-of-tea-party-supporters>>

³⁸ Scott Clement, John C. Green, "The Tea Party, Religion and Social Issues", available online <<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1903/tea-party-movement-religion-social-issues-conservative-christian>>

³⁹ 53% in US Say Free Trade Hurts Nation: NBC/WSJ poll, available online, <<http://www.cnbc.com/id/39407846>>

⁴⁰ The Public Policy Polling's study, "Nation split in thirds on gay marriage", is available online, <<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/01/18/936946/-Nation-split-in-thirds-on-gay-marriage>>

⁴¹ Courser, 50.

⁴² David Kirby, Emily Ekins, "Tea Party's Other Half", available online, <<http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/tea-partys-other-half>>

⁴³ Kirby and Ekins, "Tea Party's Other Half".

⁴⁴ Kirby and Ekins, "Tea Party's Other Half".

⁴⁵ Lindsey, "Where do libertarians belong?".

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