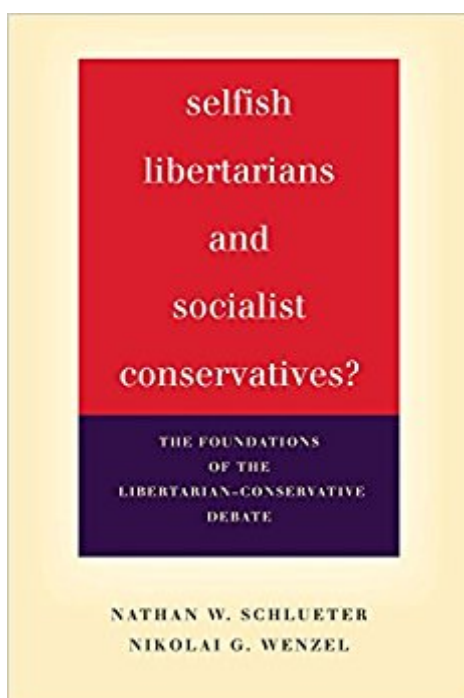


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Selfish Libertarians And Socialist Conservatives?: The Foundations Of The Libertarian-Conservative Debate



Synopsis

In *Selfish Libertarians and Socialist Conservatives?*, Nathan W. Schlueter and Nikolai G. Wenzel present a lively debate over the essential questions that divide two competing political philosophies. Wenzel is a libertarian who believes the state should be restricted to protecting life, liberty, and property and Schlueter is a conservative who thinks the state has a larger role to play in protecting public welfare, safety, and morals. They explore the fundamental similarities and differences between their respective positions. Over a series of point-counterpoint chapters, they lay out the essential tenets of their own stances, critiquing the other. This engaging dialogue introduces readers to the foundations of each political philosophy. To vividly illustrate the diverging principles underlying conservatism and libertarianism, the authors explore three different hot-button case studies: marriage, immigration, and education. Compact, accessible, and complete with suggestions for further reading, *Selfish Libertarians and Socialist Conservatives?* is an ideal teaching tool that places these two political perspectives in fruitful dialogue with one another.

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Customer Reviews

This book is a joy to read because it is filled with insight. It offers a rigorous and academic, though not inaccessible, introduction to and argument for each of the two main philosophies of limited government in our day. Anyone who loves human freedom, human rights, and/or good management will have to consider seriously one of these two positions, for their alternative is unlimited government -- unlimited in scope of authority over people; unlimited in bureaucratic size. While I am sure that, for many, limiting the government and allowing others to be free and civil society to breathe is a scary proposition; it is high time also to consider the alternative -- the ideological colonization of civil society by political authority driven by fear of human liberty. That alternative also has become scary, leading many to turn to thought, to reason, and to a time of soul-searching and trenchant questioning. That is why I sought out the book. There are rational grounds for limiting the government. What are those grounds? They are presented in two different and competing ways in the book. The book's two main strengths are, first, that it lays out the highly compelling arguments for conservative and for libertarian thought. Its second strength is that it is highly researched and documented, so it serves as a coherent and systematic introduction to two entire worlds of thought. Wenzel and Schlueter are great guides into those two worlds. I am grateful to them for the book and for their guidance into those worlds because I love life and human liberty, because I love the American democratic republic, and because I love to use my reason to pursue wisdom. I will not say which side I came down on in the end, but I will say that I did go back and forth as I read the book. It was a good journey.

I've always fallen towards the conservative side of the political spectrum. This book gets to the bottomline assumptions of both political philosophies with regards not only to political policy but interestingly with regard to human nature as well. In the end, I did not find Wenzel (the libertarian) to be convincing and actually made a contradictory statement which in my opinion undermines his whole libertarian philosophy. Schueleter essentially asked, "What about those who disagree with your vision of the common good ie., Conservatives like himself?" Wenzel ADMITS that they would be coerced into having to accept that state of affairs which is interesting as libertarianism is built on the whole idea of non-coercion. You really can't have a whole philosophy built on such a glaring contradiction. It goes against logical argumentation 101.

Dr. Schlueter and Dr. Wenzel provide an excellent treatment and overview of the fundamental issues at play in the libertarian-conservative debate. The particular phrase, "The Foundations..." in the title of this work is especially appropriate, as these two examine the various economic, historic, and philosophical thoughts which contribute to the framework of the debate; each examining particular strands of thought within their own respective traditions, defending a particular strand from their tradition, and critiquing their co-author's position. Throughout the work, each author builds their case for why conservatism/libertarianism is the best available (but still very much imperfect) political approach to ensure the protection of individual liberty and to promote the conditions for human flourishing. By means of impression more than analysis, it seems that Dr. Schlueter largely roots his case for conservatism in what he defines as the "Equilibrium of Liberty," the interdependence of the principles of liberty, tradition, and reason; as rooted and demonstrated in the American founding. Dr. Wenzel, for his part, seems to root his case for libertarianism in "Robust Political Economy," that political actors will behave according to their self-interest in the same way that they behave in markets; leading to the manipulation and abuse of any political system with the powers capable of central planning. In reading this book, I learned of the deep roots of the shared heritage of conservatism and libertarianism; the sharp realms in which they disagree (particularly in the areas of epistemology and anthropology); and the tremendous value that each ideology can have for the other, particularly in understanding their points of concern and emphasis for (and against) each other. It is well-written, with concepts defined and examples given along the way, so that even those unfamiliar with the philosophical and economic ideas at play, can still read and understand this work (still, as in most cases, any such background familiarity would help, in regards to the ease of following the arguments). I would recommend this work, then, to anyone interested in conservatism, libertarianism, political philosophy, whether they be a novice (in which this could work as an introduction, especially in pursuing the "further reading" recommendations of these authors at the end of each chapter) or an expert (in which this work would serve as an exemplary read for its quality of synthesis and critique, and respectful tone between the two authors).

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