

The Conservative Frame

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In order to be productive in society we must either ensure we have compatible premises. We can talk about conclusions, such as should we make this law or that, but if we do not have similar premises, we will end up just talking past each other at best.

I believe these questions are some of the core premises of society:

- Is there truth and can we know it?
- Are humans selfish and limited? Are humans good and unlimited in nature?
- Should human life continue? Should human life thrive?
- What should be prioritized?
- What is justice in society?

Different answers to these questions can be found in different churches, friend groups, political parties, and families. The United Methodist church has different answers to these than Southern Baptist. The modern Jesuit has different answers to these than Eastern Orthodox. The US Republican party have different answers to these than the Democrats. Different atheists have different answers to these questions.

Questions of God, ultimate meaning, biological origin are important. But to live together, these questions reign supreme.

There is a distinct set of conservative principles that answer the above questions; they can be used to find commonality with other conservatives, even when they disagree on their theism, atheism or other aspects of fundamental beliefs. These principles can also show sharp divide between people who would otherwise be lumped together: if two Christians divide over these, they are radically different from each other and one is likely a wolf in sheep clothing.

The 5 Principles

- Reality is Real, knowable, and consequential. Truth is what corresponds to reality.
- Humans are limited and self-interested.
- Goodness must include human life continuing and human life thriving.
- Act with self-Anchored Tiered Priority.
- Respond with Procedural Symmetry.

These 5 principles must not be taken apart. These principles work together and describe a single whole that is distinct and greater than the parts. These 5 principles can be ordered into 3 groups. Human relationship to reality (Reality is Real, Humans are Limited). Human relationship to self (Goodness). Human relationship to others (Tiered Priority, Procedural Symmetry).

By articulating these principles and comparing ideologies to them, we can help prevent parasitic ideologies from taking root, or assisting conservatives to use a common language, a common framework, to identify and remove them. Parasitic ideologies are found commingled with healthier ideologies. So these principles should be applied within churches, within atheist communities, within universities.

These 5 principles when applied to society can also help direct future progress. True progress, not what passes as social progressivism today. This is not a conservatism that is rooted in the past, but rooted in principles grounded in reality. That which we want to conserve is grounded in reality, life, and proper relationships to each other.

Relationship to Reality

We first acknowledge that reality is real. It isn't a shadow on a wall but rather, it is what makes us and everything around us. Reality is also consequential: a pool ball hitting another ball acts in a way that conserves momentum minus friction. Reality is also knowable: we can observe reality around us through senses which are generally self-consistent. Self-consistent senses are the key to being confident in our ability to have knowledge of reality. My eyes can interpret blue differently than your eyes, but so long as our senses can differentiate differences in reality and do so consistently, we can create a model of the world with accuracy. LLMs (what we call AI today) demonstrate this: they interpret pixels and go through a much different pipeline. But so long as their training is consistent and their residuals resolve, they can read a picture and describe it as a human can, despite the differences in sensors.

We can also say that Truth is what corresponds to Reality. Some Christian sects and some Islamic sects disavow this explicitly. For instance Scripturalism as articulated by Crampton, explicitly excludes the notion that truth is what corresponds to reality. Crampton states "A Christian epistemology maintains that a proposition is true because God thinks it to be true." This is not compatible with these 5 principles. In Sunni Islam the concept of Ash'arite occasionalism, which is still common today in various forms, states that God (Allah) is the sole true and direct cause of every event in the universe." The key here is direct, that when fire is exposed to cotton, God directly causes the cotton to burn. This is also incompatible with these 5 principles. Lastly modern postmodernism (such as from Foucault and Derrida) also reject this and claim all reality, knowledge, and truth are socially constructed, which is also incompatible with these 5 principles.

But it is important to note that reason is not enough. You cannot reason

your way to reality. Reason that is not grounded in reality is little more than hallucination or imagination. Reason can surely guide our ideas, but reality has the final say on truth.

When we look inwards at ourselves, we must find ourselves humbled at our own human limitations. We have limited time, limited understanding, limited reach. As organisms, we must admit we are biologically selfish. Yes, we can have altruistic impulses at times. I don't mean to say everything we do is for our own benefit type of selfish, but humans are self-interested by our nature. This stands in contrast to ideas they believe it is good if people are not self-interested and further believe that the current self-interest is a product of social conditioning. Even a quick look through human development and human history tells a different story. Self-interest is protective and fundamental. It isn't something to be worked around, but to be worked with.

On this note when discussing reality, we need to understand the difference between discovered and constructed technology. Money is a form of technology. The exact form of money, be that an electronic ledger line, paper, gold, shells, is indeed constructed. But the concept of money itself is just a streamlined form of bartering that comes about through social specialization. Furthermore, social specialization itself is necessary because humans are limited in time and understanding compared to the work required to bring order to the world and understand it. For example, the farmer who spends all day tilling the ground, planting, and harvesting, will have little time to cultivate how to sail and fish. As such money is fundamentally a discovered technology, not constructed, that is a product of human limits in a demanding and complex real world.

There is a similar tone with language. There are many languages, many have unique nuances. But they all facilitate communication, which again is required to cooperate in a world that demands specialization. Language doesn't create. Language takes on common, limited, meaning that refers to reality. Even though each individual language is constructed and changes over time, the concept of language is discovered and emergent.

Relationship to Self

We can describe what is. But what should we bring about in this world? This question is fundamental to what we call Good. What we call Good can be varied, but to be compatible with these 5 principles, what is Good must include that human life continue and continue well. In the Christian bible this command is present twice in the book of beginnings: God tells both Adam and later Noah to go into the world and multiply. This isn't the only Good in the Christian belief, but it must be a good they take seriously. However an atheist can also value human life and human thriving.

These 5 principles are about ideas that can work together and differentiating themselves from ideas that cannot work together. This is not tolerance. Tolerance is not a virtue in any meaningful sense. The problem with tolerance is that you

quickly find that there are people who wish you harm, sometimes directly or sometimes indirectly. This is sometimes called the paradox of tolerance. The solution to this paradox is clear: tolerance is not a virtue; it cannot be. Actual virtue is a positive vision bounding what you believe and clear boundaries of what is, and what is not compatible with it. What we do with this should take into account that humans are limited and seeking truth requires that we be able to change our minds about what we understand reality to be. So it is in everyone's best interest if we are able to set these compatibility boundaries wide. This doesn't mean truth itself is wide or reality many. Absolutely not. Tolerance is not a virtue, but knowing our own limits, humility, is a virtue.

In order for human life to continue and thrive, we must work within ourselves to align with truth and to seek excellence. These are attributes that elevates our craftsmen, our stone workers, our metal workers, our machinists, our factories, and our factories that make factories. This thriving is a recognition of reality and demands our own excellence it it's pursuit.

But true thriving isn't cold. We must also admire and create beauty. But what is beauty? Beauty is the conjunction order, truth, and vitality. A vase is just a vase. But a vase that has some wear, maybe it was once broken and it was pieced back together with gold seams. That vase now shows vitality. Or perhaps the vase has flowers, itself the vitality of plants joining order with propagation. Beauty is subjective, but that is perceived as vitality. Beauty is not without bound.

When we create brick from the dust of earth and water, we create a new form. That care and order required to create that brick must continue to be used about it; it must be cleaned, rejoined, uncovered. The ongoing work to keep order corresponds to the order that was used to create it in the first place, is called ownership and responsibility. Ownership is has a social component of who gets to use it. But more broadly you can own something socially (you own the deed to a house) but lack the actions to keep it ordered and useful as it was originally made. This aspect of ownership we call responsibility. Responsibility is the act of maintaining and corresponds to the act of creating it itself. You cannot create something without care and order. You cannot have full ownership without responsibility to continue that care and order.

That same care, that same responsibility, we must also use for humanity's survival. Just as our parents had children, and their parents had children, goodness includes having children. We are not atomic individuals. Just as our parents gave us life, and that goodness includes life continuing, there is a fundamental responsibility to have children, or if that is not physically possible, raise up children. When you do raise up children, do not try to control them. Guide them, teach them, but you must allow them failure if they insist on it. Show them consequence, either natural or imposed, but let your children fail. Some may fail, some may choose life. Have more than one child and do not hold on to them too tightly.

Of all these things, it is only our own actions that we can control. So while we may bemoan society or politics our actions and responsibility begin with ourselves.

Relationship to Others

We control our self, but we must still relate to others in society. The first step in that is, unless other factors compound, have a general dispositional love to others. That is, have general good will to others in society around you. This doesn't imply any actions, but general attitude. There is a second, type of love: action-based love. But we have a problem here. Humans are limited, we only have so much time and energy. This is where our Self-Anchored Tiered Priority kicks in.

Self-Anchored Tiered Priority dictates that we first care for and take care of ourselves, our spouse, and our family. Then neighbors and our community. Then the strangers in our state and country. Lastly there is a general priority of our world and beyond. It is also the recognition that some people actively wish to do us harm. They are enemies. Enemies are real. Some enemies may come to physically assault you. Other enemies just work against your interest and seek to destroy the society you live in, to remake it into what they see as a better image.

So when do we use action-based love? We act loving to our selves, our spouse, and our family first. Then we care for and act with love with a lesser, but real priority to our neighbors. If you have someone who is just a friend but your caring actions towards them is greater then towards your spouse, then it is time to stop and either rethink how you embody your relationships.

Similarly there are two different types of forgiveness: we can have personal release by choosing to let go or just ignore hurt or someone's wrong against us so we can continue to move on. We can also have social reconciliation but that requires the person who did the wrong to genuinely recognize what they did was wrong and make a commitment to avoid it in the future.

Generally love is holding on and forgiveness is letting go. Both are useful in long-term personal and social relationships. But society is more then personal relationship. Outside of a limited number of people (sometimes called Dunbar's Number) society consists of what amount to strangers.

The key to working with broader society is Procedural Symmetry. Procedural Symmetry works with Self-Anchored Tiered Priority so that within a given tier, we offer the same procedures to each person. In a country each citizen (citizen tier) is bound by the same laws under procedural symmetry. We act towards others in the same manner, the same procedure, that you would want them to act to you.

We contrast Procedural Symmetry with Value Symmetry and Outcome Symmetry. Value Symmetry is where equal actions are returned in-kind. If someone chops off

your hand, you get to chop off their hand. If someone hurts your child, you get to hurt their child. Some Islamic cultures still practice this type of symmetry. More common today is the practice and extolment of Outcome Symmetry. Outcome Symmetry is where the same outcome is desired for each person. If the same outcome is not observed, then that is given as proof of some deeper injustice. Outcome symmetry ignores that people can be different, it ignores that people's situation can be different. Outcome symmetry can ignore people's choices and creates perverse incentives, it fails to protect the innocent from their aggressors and breeds corruption.

Within procedural symmetry and reality, we recognize that power is real. An HOA president has distinct power that can improve lives, or make lives harder. A parent has real power over their child. I've heard it said that liberalism is the practice of balancing a bat, where no one willingly picks up the bat of power and uses it to hit people. This is a foolish and dangerous idea. Power is real. Power is necessary. It is a teacher's power to preside over their students, ideally to teach them what they know. Teachers don't have equal power with their students. Procedural symmetry is paired with Tiered Priority. The teacher should follow the same procedures for each student. But the teacher and student are in different tiers. The same follows for parents and their children. Children should have a voice, but their voice is not equal to their parents in power. They are different tiers and parents rightly hold power over their children. This is a good and necessary thing to protect and care for children.

Encouragement

Memorize these 5 principles: Reality is real, humans are limited, goodness is life and thriving, tiered priority, and procedural symmetry. When you hear an idea, take that idea and break it down on these axes, see if it lands fully within it. Guard your self, your community, your church, your ideas with care. Use these 5 principles as an anchor. Do not let yourself become subverted or useful to parasitic individuals and parasitic ideas.

Live well.