

Bitcoin Liberals vs. Bitcoin Conservatives: The Struggle for the Soul of the Chain

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Abstract

This essay examines the emerging division within the Bitcoin community between two paradigms:

- The “**liberals**,” who view Bitcoin as an expressive, cultural, and technologically open platform — capable of hosting art, tokens, inscriptions, and experimental layers.
- The “**conservatives**,” who defend the protocol’s pure monetary nature, rejecting any deviation from its original purpose as censorship-resistant digital money.

The discussion has reached a level of confrontation where technical debate has dissolved into ideology, identity, and conviction.

This work seeks to unpack the economic, technical, and psychological roots of this fracture — exploring whether reconciliation is possible, or whether Bitcoin is destined for a permanent duality between the monetary and the symbolic.

1. Introduction: The Chain as an Ideological Battlefield

Since its creation, Bitcoin has been interpreted both as **an economic tool** and a **political statement**.

With the rise of **inscriptions (Ordinals)** and the proliferation of **protocols built on Bitcoin** (token layers, rollups, “BRC-20”), the system has evolved from a purely monetary construct into a **cultural battlefield**.

Some celebrate this phenomenon as a creative renaissance — “*art on digital gold*.” Others see it as a **corruption of purpose**: an economic attack disguised as innovation.

2. The Technical Argument: “You Can’t Eliminate Spam”

Engineer **Adam Back**, CEO of Blockstream, summarized the conservative view bluntly:

“What makes you think a spammer would keep to one field? They can use multiple pushdata, multiple op returns, multiple fake pubkeys... It’s generically impossible to prevent spam.”

His analogy to the English language is brilliant:

“You can hide data in books. Thought exercise: what change to the English language would prevent that?”

The core message: **there is no technical way to prohibit expression without falling into censorship.**

Bitcoin, as a neutral protocol, cannot distinguish between *art* and *garbage*.

3. The Economic Argument: Miners, Space, and the Market

Miners are not philosophers; they are **providers of scarce space**.

Their raw material is blockspace, and their business model is to **sell it to the highest bidder**.

Expecting miners to act as moral guardians of the “proper” use of Bitcoin is **economically naïve**. As long as someone pays the fees, there is little incentive to censor or filter transactions.

Even if part of the community upholds purist ideals (“Bitcoin is only money”), the market does not operate on idealism — it runs on **incentive flow**.

True consensus is defined by the profitability of hashpower, not the arguments on Twitter.

4. The Cultural Argument: The Aesthetics of Dissent

The “liberals” of the ecosystem are not necessarily enemies of Bitcoin.

Many see themselves as **builders within Bitcoin, not outside it**.

Their narrative is:

“We are expanding Bitcoin’s boundaries, not attacking it.”

Their projects — inscriptions, generative art, tokenization — represent an **aesthetic reinterpretation of the block as a digital canvas**.

Rather than “hard money,” they view Bitcoin as **the most durable medium on earth — an immutable museum**.

Yet the paradox is clear: *art on Bitcoin becomes economically unsustainable as art itself drives up the cost of its own medium*.

The **NFT phenomenon on Ethereum** already revealed this: markets flooded with speculation and low-demand data inevitably collapse.

Thus, inscriptions can be understood as a **technological fad** with historical value — but not sustainable economics.

5. The Political Argument: Freedom vs. Order

The debate has turned toxic because it is no longer about technology — it's about **identity**. Liberals accuse conservatives of censorship; conservatives accuse liberals of being “elitist” or “maximalist.”

Both believe they are defending freedom:

- one side fights for **freedom of expression through code**,
- the other for **economic freedom through monetary purity**.

The result is a permanent stalemate:

“Every debate ends in stand-by — insults, irony, and no construction of consensus.”

The irony is that both sides share the same enemy: **centralization**.

Yet their lack of political intelligence prevents them from recognizing that the protocol, by design, **already allows coexistence**.

6. Partial Solutions and Temporary Oxygen

Proposals like **BIP-444** (transaction filtering and prioritization by node policy) or **PNF (Partial Non-Fungibility)** offer **intermediate mechanisms**:

they do not censor, but they **reorder incentives** to discourage inefficient use of space.

These ideas do not solve the core conflict, but serve as **pressure valves** while the ecosystem matures.

7. Conclusion: Bitcoin's Soul Between the Economic and the Symbolic

Bitcoin is simultaneously **a monetary base** and **a cultural language**.

To insist it must be only one of these is to deny its emergent nature.

However, **time and economics** will be the final judges.

Cultural fads fade; monetary scarcity endures.

When the cost of inscribing art exceeds its expressive value, **the market will purge it naturally**.

The monetary function will survive because it is the most resistant to noise.

Yet the symbolic function — the urge to create, record, and experiment — **will never disappear completely**.

Bitcoin, like any free language, will always harbor **poets, spammers, and prophets**.

Epilogue

Perhaps true consensus lies not in eliminating spam nor canonizing purity,
but in accepting that **Bitcoin reflects human nature itself — chaotic freedom shaped by incentives.**

And within that tension — between order and creativity — lies its strength.