# The Unchanging Republic: Prospects for a New Conservative Fusion

by

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## Introduction

Conservatism is dead. It committed suicide by virtue of its own irrelevance, authoritarianism and hidebound extremism. What calls itself conservatism today is merely the gag reflex of an ignorant, willfully uninformed, bigoted and yet vocal minority of conspiracy-mongering, fascist-leaning, violent and anti-intellectual thugs, who have drowned out all the true, judicious and moderate-minded people who used to call themselves conservatives. These gentlemen understand that the enlightened modern State is now entrenched and here to stay, and waste no time seeking to excavate the dry, dusty bones of a reactionary, irrelevant social order. They are wise to do so, for the alternative is both quixotic and morally obtuse. It cannot win. It *must not win*.

Such was the liberal party line in the aftermath of the New Deal. It was refuted by the rise of National Review. So, also, did it find expression in the teeth of the millions of Americans who turned out to vote for Sen. Goldwater on Election Day, 1964. It was refuted 16 years later by Ronald Reagan and his army of grassroots supporters. This liberal narrative echoed dissonantly in the ears of the nation after Bill Clinton was elected in 1992. It was refuted two years later by Newt Gingrich. And now, in the aftermath of 2008 and facing the uncertainty of 2010, such is the liberal party line again, alleging that the newly resurgent conservative Tea Party Movement is nothing but a hateful collection of Birchers, Birthers, racists, and paid shills for the powers-that-be. Having heard the claim that conservatism is intellectually insolvent so many times before, and knowing its constant track record of refutation, conservatives could easily conclude that no part of it has ever been right. Yet the history of its

refutation shows precisely the opposite - that every time conservatism is declared dead, the reason it rallies is not because it was never weak, but because its exponents make some attempt at restating its principles. Such was the case after the New Deal, when Frank Meyer published In Defense of Freedom, a credo that unified the conservative movement. Such was the case after 1964, when even former Johnson liberals began to publish policy studies vindicating the positions first taken by Goldwater himself in his book Conscience of a Conservative. Such was the case in 1994, when Newt Gingrich released the Contract with America. Restatements and reexaminations are the lifeblood of conservatism, for as Richard Weaver first observed, "ideas have consequences," and while conservatism has never been outright revised, its reasoning and ideas have been restated, with the obvious understanding that a restatement need not, and should not, equate with an overhaul.

Not that you would know it from observing the debates over conservatism currently taking place. On the one hand, figures such as David Frum speak of the dangers which conservative ideology faces from within as though the entire enterprise has been compromised, arguing that "American conservatism has become a marketing demographic, not a politics." By contrast, the ever-ebullient conservative writer and activist Grover Norquist sees the perceived decline and fragmentation of conservative power as solely a creation of intellectual discontent. "People who say that the conservative movement can't work remind me of physicists who said the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Interview with David Frum. July 21, 2009.

bumblebee couldn't fly," Norquist scoffs. "They kept saying 'we can prove it' in the realm of theory, but once you leave the lab, you find that the bee can fly."<sup>2</sup>

The argument over whether conservatism needs restatement is fraught with perilous false dichotomies of this sort, when in fact, both men are right. A marketing demographic is not a politics, but the two will complement each other once politicians and intellectuals know the truth of what they are selling. At the same time, conservatism, in its present form, can fly, but it is too busy arguing over whether to flap its wings, and over which direction the wind blows. For evidence, one need look no further than the 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference, where attendees managed the stunningly inconsistent feat of simultaneously giving a standing ovation to the arch-Hawk Dick Cheney, and holding up the isolationist Ron Paul as the exemplar of conservatism in their annual Straw Poll. Speakers at the podium took positions which ran the gamut from denunciations of the Republican Party as nothing but big-spending, lighter versions of Democrats, to impassioned defenses of the spending-friendly George W. Bush. Activists cheered the aggressively traditionalist and pro-family former Senator Rick Santorum, and then booed an antigay speaker off the stage. Differences of opinion are natural in any group of thinking people, but for this many contradictions to manifest themselves in the official agenda of such a commonly unified event was stunning.

Matters were even more chaotic in the aftermath of the 2008 election. Barely a month after the election, the self-avowed "crunchy" conservative and frequent libertarian bête noire Rod Dreher wrote that "the greatest threats to conservative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Interview with Grover Norquist, July 15, 2009.

interests come not from the Soviet Union or high taxes, but from too much individual freedom," while the formerly noncontroversial conservative writer Kathleen Parker decried social conservatives as the "evangelical, right-wing, oogedy-boogedy branch of the GOP." Meanwhile, according to the controversial radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, all the problems the GOP had experienced in 2008 came from the machinations of interfering "wizards of smart" and "elitists" who wanted to reject conservatism for Neville Chamberlain-style appeasement of liberalism. "The conservative movement does not need to be rebuilt," Limbaugh thundered, "but it should be a lot easier than a lot of people think because a lot of so-called conservatives abandoned the movement in support of Obama and identity politics of their own and so forth. They got what they wanted. They got the candidate they wanted. They got the result that we all knew was going to happen when they got the candidate they wanted."

The intellectual problem here is, as Ronald Reagan might say, not easy, but simple. Conservatism began as a strictly academic two-pronged assault on New Deal liberalism, one prong economic (libertarianism), and one cultural (traditionalism). Those who believed in the economic claim, however, often disagreed sharply with those who advanced the cultural claim, because each school of thought believed that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Rod Dreher. "GOP's Path to Victory Still Goes Through God." <u>USA TODAY</u>. December 1. 2008. http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/12/gops-path-to-vi.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Kathleen Parker. "Letting Go of God." <u>Washington Post</u>. November 19, 2008. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/18/AR2008111802886.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Rush Limbaugh. <u>The Rush Limbaugh Show.</u> Show from November 5, 2008. Transcript at: http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site\_112808/content/01125106.member.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the other one undermined its views. This was the problem which the original fusionist work, Frank Meyer's In Defense of Freedom, successfully solved. But since Meyer's work, the character of liberalism has changed dramatically, and the number of combatants acting against it has increased from 2 (libertarianism and traditionalism) to 4 (libertarianism, religious conservatism, neoconservatism and paleoconservatism). Moreover, one of the original prongs (traditionalism) has been either absorbed by religious conservatism or rendered completely irrelevant. These four anti-liberal tendencies, much like the original two, are not predisposed to work together because each of them believes that at least one of the others is, or always has been, so corrupted by liberalism that it will only undermine effective opposition to the Left. Because the original fusionist work only dealt with the claims of two schools of thought, and because it was written in response to a liberalism that no longer exists, its incompleteness is glaringly obvious, thus leading its discontents to wrongly conclude that the entire project of fusion is a fool's errand.

Moreover, because each of the four sectors of the movement views their compatriots as potential traitors, each of them believes it is absolutely essential that the problematic elements be tossed out before ideological war can be made on liberalism, since traitorous urges will inevitably manifest themselves on the battlefield. This paranoia induces a state of ideological paralysis, in which each of the different factions of conservatism find it impossible to build upon each others' insights, for fear of accidentally accepting a liberal narrative. The only alternative is to break off and create one's own, presumably "pure," conservative ideology out of whole cloth. The result of this impulse is the proliferation of multiple different antiliberal communities (for instance, the Cato Institute, American Enterprise Institute,

Discovery Institute and Heritage Foundation), which either act in virtual isolation from each other, or coexist uneasily until one particular school appears weak in the face of insurgent liberalism, at which point, the whiff of ideological blood in the water compels its opponents to pounce, producing a new round of infighting which distracts from the need to destroy the real – liberal – foe.

All the practical reassurance, poll numbers, popular agitation and pleas for unity will not make this impulse to fracture the conservative movement go away, at the point where its exponents truly believe they are not attacking fellow conservatives, but closeted liberals. While the instinct to exclude toxic elements from one's movement is healthy, the current manifestation is neither healthy, nor desirable. Whatever the reasoning for such a claim, we reject wholesale the idea that the fundamental concerns of any school of conservative thought are mutually exclusive with the fundamental concerns of any other form of conservative thought, including, but not limited to, those schools with a history of poisonous disagreements. This does not mean that we differ with the claims made by individual wings that their rivals have been corrupted by liberalism – we simply find them too limiting. Partially as a result of the decades-long absence of a working fusionist consensus, and partially as a result of the aforementioned paranoia, we argue that all wings of conservatism have made the mistake, whether consciously or not, of drawing on ideas from the dominant liberal culture, which have embedded themselves in the bodies of thought espoused by conservatives like ideological shrapnel. Stripped of these impurities, the root concerns of the four wings of conservatism naturally reinforce each other as one unified political theory. Thus, the first task of any fusionist work is to expose the

liberal impurities accepted by the four wings, just as much as it is to advance a potentially coherent fusionist vision.

In accomplishing these tasks, we are confronted with several questions and burdens, which we aim to meet throughout the following analysis. Firstly, there is the question of whether the various schools of conservative thought actually need each other's insights, or if each of them has evolved sufficiently that trying to subsume them all under one ideology would simply be an exercise in crippling intellectual oversimplification. We aim to demonstrate that, contrary to whatever claims of completeness the separatist factions of different wings advance, these claims are only superficially persuasive, as all sectors of the movement inevitably end up in some variety of self-contradiction, or of paradigmatic confusion, when subjected to rigorous scrutiny. To that end, the titles of each chapter, besides being intended to amuse the reader, aim to provide a somewhat comical picture of the semi-ideological caricatures which otherwise sensible conservative thinkers can appear to become when defending their separatist ambitions.

Secondly, there is the definitional question of whether the various schools of conservative thought can properly be called "conservative" or "ideological" at all. In answering this question, we draw on a variety of internal movement critiques arguing for the exclusion of particular groups. These critiques are intended as more than foils for our analysis, however, as many of them, while not proving that the exclusion of an entire tendency is appropriate, serve to illustrate precisely where the liberal distortions already alleged to exist can be found. Furthermore, seeing as this question is one which renders the necessity of analyzing particular ideological groups moot if answered in a particular way, we begin each chapter with an argument for why the

particular group under consideration has historically been associated with conservatism, and an analysis of what it offers. This done, we then utilize the middle sections of each chapter to pinpoint the liberal fallacy(s) employed by whichever sector of the movement is under consideration, and to suggest ways in which these fallacies render the ideology under consideration not only incompatible with the wider movement, but also self-contradictory.

Thirdly, there is the broadest and most ominous question of all – is a conservative fusionist vision even conceivable, let alone defensible? We aim to answer this question in two ways: firstly, by pointing out the specific elements of each ideology under consideration which complement other elements (usually done in the third section of each chapter); secondly, by advancing the claim that, if even one such fusionist vision/paradigm can be imagined and plausibly linked to the concerns and aspirations of all conservative ideological groups, then the task of fusion, however difficult it may be, is by no means impossible, and thus necessary as a matter of ideological survival.

This last element may be read to dance dangerously close to an attempt at revision, rather than restatement, of conservative principles. There are two answers to this: firstly, the object here is not to manufacture a new paradigm for conservatism, but rather to enunciate with precision which paradigm conservatives currently follow. Secondly, and more importantly still, this analysis does not aim to change any of the substantive conclusions currently advanced by the conservative movement as a whole. It *does* challenge the positions taken by individual schools of thought and thinkers, but *only to the extent* that those positions conflict with the broader consensus. As such, it bears repeating that, far from attempting the monumental and misguided task

of "redefining" what ought never to be redefinable, the object here is much more modest – it is to provide a paradigm which explains the *already existing* classification of the disparate schools of thought and political positions under consideration as "conservative."

A little explanation is in order. While even the most basic political neophyte can identify which positions on which issues are "conservative" and which are "liberal," what is lacking in the movement is an explanation for why these positions should necessarily coalesce. While it is generally considered "conservative" to believe that taxes should be low, or that the Constitutional separation of Church and State is a judicially imposed mirage, or that American foreign policy should concentrate on maintaining American dominance and preemptively destroying threats, or that illegal immigration/multiculturalism are social cancers, there has to this date been no ideological explanation for *why* these four distinct opinions fall in the same "conservative" class. Thus, at the level of abstract ideology, rather than proposing to reinvent the ideological wheel, we are attempting to reverse engineer the reasoning/paradigms under which such already existing alliances could have been justified at the theoretical level. This is, in short, a *resynthesis*.

This task is essential, especially at a time when conservatives lack a dominant ideology or, indeed, a dominant figure of any kind. The closest figures currently available are Glenn Beck and Sarah Palin, both of whom are highly capable popularizers for ideas, but whose roles in the political division of labor (IE pundit and politician) do not lend themselves well to the systematic formulation and exegesis of paradigms. Thus, while conservatives may make short-term political gains, their ability to stand on principle becomes progressively weakened by their seemingly *a la* 

carte selection of policy positions, reducing genuine acts of principled moral courage to the appearance of politically-motivated nihilism. Moreover, in the absence of an understanding of why certain principles are worth defending, political actors generally and conservatives in particular risk falling prey to hidebound complacency and/or existential doubt in the face of political sea changes both favorable and unfavorable.

This cannot be allowed to happen. Conservatism today confronts both unprecedented challenges and unprecedented opportunities. It aspires to repeal one of the most consequential pieces of social legislation passed in the modern day, legislation which was passed in the teeth of overwhelming public opposition. If successful, this act would have implications extending far beyond the legislation in question. As conservative scholar Paul Rahe points out, "We have options that have not been vouchsafed to the friends of liberty for more than sixty years. For, if the Republicans manage to articulate, on the basis of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the rationale for limited government as that rationale is pertinent to the healthcare bill, they will at the same time have articulated the grounds for doing away with the administrative state, and everyone will recognize the consequences."

If the administrative state is to be destroyed, some vision must be articulated in its place, and the opportunity to formulate such a vision is too precious to allow ideological squabbling to ruin it unnecessarily, which it *will* if the experiences of previous conservative mass movements are any guide. The mass movements currently

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Paul Rahe. "A New Birth of Freedom." <u>Big Government</u>. April 3, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://biggovernment.com/prahe/2010/04/03/a-new-birth-of-freedom/">http://biggovernment.com/prahe/2010/04/03/a-new-birth-of-freedom/</a>>.

driving much of the conservative agenda are paralleled in ideological fierceness only by the Goldwater movement and by the New Right movement that ended up producing Ronald Reagan, and their goals are similarly ambitious. It is only with a serious ideological message that they will be able to both achieve these goals and consolidate those achievements into something lasting.

Therefore, having explained the burdens faced in this analysis, and those explicitly foreclosed by it, as well as the motivation underlying it, we thus turn to a more detailed preview of the structure of our argument:

In Chapter 1, "What Was Conservative Fusionism," we seek to construct an exegesis both for what we define as American conservatism and for how the political theory of conservative "fusion" can be understood. We refer to the original fusionist work, Frank Meyer's In Defense of Freedom, for an example of how theoretical fusionism was originally constructed, and present some of the criticisms which Meyer's work attracted during its time, and has since attracted, assessing each for its theoretical, political and practical soundness. We also attempt to detail the abstract metaphysical concerns which conservatives ascribe to liberals and Leftism generally, with the aim of foreshadowing both why the conservative ideological cluster is so inherently hostile to its liberal counterpart, and which portions of that rival ideology have managed to insert themselves into conservatism under cover of darkness.

This accomplished, we move in Chapter 2, "The Church of the Copybook Headings: Fiscal and Libertarian Conservatism," to an analysis of the first of four ideological subgroups which has begun to increasingly subdivide from the movement – namely, the Libertarian Movement, and its fiscally conservative fellow travelers. We assess the strengths of this group, and by extension, its purpose within

conservative discourse, while also noting the different roles played by libertarians throughout the long history of the conservative movement. We also investigate the fatally flawed manner in which libertarians view their relation to the conservative movement, and the false modesty which plagues the movement's political thinkers. Finally, we touch on the dangers to both conservative and libertarian discourses of increasing libertarian friendliness with the Left, with reference to case studies both past and present, while pointing out the theoretical differences between libertarian notions of personal responsibility and doctrinaire "social liberalism," and the difficulties of reconciling the two schools of thought.

Having dealt with the libertarian challenge to traditional conservatism, we move to consider their most frequently cited foes, the socially and religiously motivated wing of the conservative movement, in Chapter 3, "Wrapped in the Flag and Carrying a Cross of Gold: The Religious Right." In covering this group, we address the shift from the politics of complacency espoused by earlier traditionalist conservatives to the politics of moral crusade embodied by the contemporary religious right. We will also devote considerable exegesis to the ways in which theocratic/postmillennial Religious conservatives can fall prey to liberal notions of human perfectibility and intentions-based reasoning, and attempt to demonstrate that these tendencies are detrimental both to their Religious concerns and their political concerns. We close with an argument as to the reason for libertarian dissatisfaction with the Religious right, and vice versa, and attempt to offer solutions to these phenomena.

Having dealt with these two domestically-focused groups, we then turn our attention to the first of the groups interested in America's place in the global

community, and one of the most recently scrutinized, in Chapter 4, "The Protocols of the Elders of Main Street: Neoconservatism as Refuge, Relapse and Rootlessness." In addressing this group, we firstly explain their unique status as a group that shifte *en masse* into the conservative movement, and raise the question of how much use the term *neoconservative* now has for a group whose second generation is more "conservative" than "neo." This done, we then move to analyze the ways in which neoconservative pretensions to post-ideological thinking, as well as their tendency to construct legitimating myths for the sake of social cohesion, can obscure a tendency to relapse into liberal idealism. Finally, we close with a discussion of the critiques of neoconservatism from other sectors of the movement, and address the claims that neoconservatism is really a rootless form of weak consensus liberalism which has no place on the Right.

Having explored the neoconservatives, we then turn to their bitterest enemies in Chapter 5, "Red Blood, White Skin, Blue Collar: Paleoconservatism and the Purity of Culture." We begin with a discussion of what, if anything, paleoconservative ideology actually is, and the question of what, besides opposition to neoconservatism, gives this ideology coherence. This done, we then subject the paleoconservative argument to ideological scrutiny and argue that a pernicious form of particularistic solipsism has rendered the movement's central arguments either incoherent or contradictory, with an analysis of the effects which would occur if this solipsism were to be removed. Finally, we raise the sensitive question of whether paleoconservatism is code for bigotry, and also attempt to answer the question of whether the tendency is doomed to irrelevance because of its eccentric and antiquarian tendencies.

Having explored the internal rifts of the movement, we turn in our conclusion, "Whither Fusionism?" to briefly summarizing the contributions which each of the sectors of the movement has made to conservatism, and to suggesting one vision of what an ideal conservative world would look like, if the four elements were to be combined into one complete, complementary whole.

Before proceeding with our analysis, a quick note is appropriate. This analysis does not attempt to answer the questions of which specific policy solutions correlate most closely with the paradigms under consideration, or if those paradigms themselves are likely to be seen as attractive by a majority of people. We neglect the former because it is primarily a question of prudential strategy – of means, rather than of ends – and we take the assumption that acceptable means follow from acceptable ends. If one's desired end is the negation of all human suffering, for instance, this would naturally foreclose the means of torture and/or murder, and similarly, the means which conservatives are willing to accept follow from their desired ends, rather than the reverse.

We neglect the second question because it is quite simply irrelevant, both practically and philosophically. This is because successful politicians, whatever their underlying premises, are confined to a very limited set of rhetorical justifications, almost all of which are useful primarily because of their emotional appeal rather than because of any philosophical irrefutability, and none of which is seriously believed to reflect the entirety of a politician's philosophy, except insofar as that philosophy benefits by emphasizing one such justification over another. It may be, as Rush Limbaugh charges of Barack Obama, that a particular politician values nothing more highly than raw dictatorial power. It may equally be the case, as progressive

commentators shout back, that a particular politician values nothing more highly than the protection of the least vulnerable members of society. In either case, to expect such a yearning to be snuffed out by the simple fact of popular opposition is both logically fallacious and dangerously naive. The deepest yearnings and most fundamental moral premises of a political philosophy will never be subject to popular vote, and nor should they. The dominant question of this analysis, then, is the question of what those deep yearnings and fundamental moral premises actually *are* when it comes to conservatism, broadly speaking.

## **Chapter One: What was Fusionism?**

Much like the term "conservative," the term "fusionism" originates as a term coined by the concept's detractors, rather than its supporters. In 1955, Frank Meyer, then a contributing editor to National Review, published a lengthy scholarly polemic entitled In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo, which purported to offer a reconciliatory position for what were then only two schools of conservative thought: traditionalism and libertarianism. This position was dubbed "fusionism" by the archtraditionalist Brent Bozell, whom Meyer referred to in the book's original dedication as a "whetstone of the mind," and who remained one of fusionism's most influential critics for the duration of his life.

And indeed, there was much to criticize in the concept. Viewed from a contemporary prism, the idea of traditionalist (socially conservative/paleoconservative) moral ideas coexisting with libertarian economics seems to be an established fixture of conservative Republican thinking, but in Meyer's time, the idea was shockingly counterintuitive. Moreover, given Meyer's frequent previous clashes with other members of the conservative movement over matters of orthodoxy<sup>9</sup>, the idea that Meyer could be the author of any brand of reconciliation must have seemed either odd or disingenuous.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> William Dennis. "Foreword." In Frank Meyer. <u>In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays</u>. Chicago: Liberty Fund. 1996. P. xi

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> In a previous essay entitled "A Rebel in Search of Tradition," for instance, Meyer had savaged the don of the traditionalist school, Russell Kirk, for accepting the cardinal principles of liberal collectivism, leading to a refusal by Kirk to join the masthead of <u>National Review</u> so long as Meyer was also included.

There is no doubt that Meyer's own predispositions colored the blend of fusionism which he proposed, and as we will see, some of fusionism's critics attempt to claim Meyer as one of their own even as they savage him for being so willing to compromise. However, this does not by any means diminish the impact which Meyer's theory had, nor the substantial success it enjoyed as a project of conservative assimilation. Indeed, the strength of the principles arrived at by Meyer's brand of fusionism endure to this day, and to the extent that it can be criticized, it is only a failure by virtue of the anachronistic and incomplete character of its reasoning and, in certain cases, its lack of self-awareness.

#### I. The Political Theory of Fusionism

The first, and most obvious, proposition of Meyer's original school of fusionism is that traditional social/religious norms are not only reconcilable with libertarian economic principle, but that the two are inseparable and indispensable from each other."I believe that the two streams of thought, although they are sometimes presented as mutually incompatible, can in reality be united within a single broad conservative political theory, since they have their roots in a common tradition and are arrayed against a common enemy," Meyer wrote, arguing that the "common tradition" of European political thought, while it was contradictory in the context of European politics, actually sustained American political conservatism with one voice. Whereas European conservatives were concerned primarily with traditional notions of duty, order, community and authority out of reaction against the radical change of the French Revolution and out of respect for what were, in Europe,

<sup>10</sup> Meyer, p. 16

permanent social institutions such as Crown and Church, Meyer argued that because the American system was born from a revolution *against* radical change imposed by a tyrannically centralized system, the "tradition" which American traditionalists were fighting to conserve was actually one of liberal individualism wedded to natural conservatism, ie opposition to change.

Moreover, Meyer argued, the policies put in place by the Roosevelt administration threatened both natural conservatism *and* liberal individualism. "The tendency to establish false antitheses obstructing fruitful confrontation arises in part from an inherent dilemma of conservatism in a revolutionary era such as ours," Meyer wrote. "There is a real contradiction between the deep piety of the conservative spirit towards tradition, prescription, the preservation of the fiber of society (what has been called 'natural conservatism') and the more reasoned, consciously principled, militant conservatism which becomes necessary when the fibers of society have been rudely torn apart...to conserve the true and the good under these circumstances is to restore an understanding (and a social structure reflecting that understanding) which has been all but buried."

In other words, Meyer suggested that whereas the standard of "natural conservatism" did identify the traditionalists as the more literally "conservative" of the two schools, it was the libertarians who advanced a more practical program for rolling back the excesses of the revolution – in short, that this was less an issue of reconciling 19<sup>th</sup> century conservatives with 19<sup>th</sup> century liberals than it was an issue of preventing 19<sup>th</sup> century conservatism from becoming the unwitting ally of 20<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>11</sup> Meyer, pp. 17-18

revolutionaries against the systematic libertarianism of 20<sup>th</sup> century reactionaries. Still, despite his accusation that the traditionalist school's lack of principle had emasculated it and transformed it into "collectivism rebaptized," Meyer did not explicitly side with the libertarians. "The need in our circumstances for the most vigorous use of reason to combat the collectivist, scientistic, amoral wave of the present tends to induce in the libertarian an apotheosis of reason and the neglect of tradition and prescription," Meyer argued, whereas "the traditionalist...tends to recoil and in his turn to press a one-sided position. Too often he confounds reason and principle with 'demon ideology." In order to avoid this false dilemma, Meyer proposed that conservatism formulate its principles on the basis of "a history of reason operating within tradition." <sup>12</sup>

This particular formulation may strike the reader as confusing – how can reason operate "within" tradition? Surely, the hypothetical rationalist would argue, if tradition does not stand the test of reason, then it must be discarded, otherwise reason cannot operate at all, except as a crippled servant to arbitrarily privileged concepts. This is to mistake the nature of Meyer's prescription, which is founded not in a desire to see reason constrained artificially, but in a historicist vision of what reason actually is. For Meyer, and for fusionists generally, reason itself is at best useless and at worst distorted when deprived of premises grounded in historical experience. In short, reason *is* a tradition of sorts, a tradition born out of either historical/evolutionary necessity at some undetermined point in the past, and which, because of this

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Meyer, p. 19

chronological evolution, can only operate successfully within the context of socially constructed moral premises (ie "tradition").

Thus, political/historical revolution (according to Meyer) constitutes an ultimate failure of reason, for it must necessarily lack a grounding in socially constructed roots, given that it attempts to rip all such roots up and plant new ones. Against this nihilistic assault, the only possible epistemological arguments available spring from a reassertion of traditionalist prescription *and* rationality, both of which nourish each other to form one complete vision. "Abstract reason, functioning in a vacuum of tradition, can indeed give birth to an arid and distorting ideology," Meyer writes. "But, in a revolutionary age...what is required of us is a *conscious* conservatism, a clearly principled restatement in new circumstances of philosophical and political truth."

From this epistemological claim, Meyer can thus extrapolate the beginnings of a political program. If one takes New Deal liberalism as an inherently revolutionary, unprecedented and rationally indefensible ideology, as both Meyer and his critics do, then it is not sufficient to merely repudiate the political tone employed by the defenders of this new liberalism, as the most sentimental and unsystematic traditionalists would prefer, nor is it sufficient merely to attack the policies proposed by this new brand of liberalism, nor its irrationality alone, while leaving its root concepts of scientism and amorality intact, as the most aridly rational libertarians would prefer. Both the sentiments underlying the arguments and the arguments themselves must be combated and destroyed at once, because to destroy one without the other is only a temporary victory. Thus, from a libertarian perspective, a high degree of cultural exclusivity and the propagation of religiously/morally grounded

social norms is required for the maintenance of a free (that is to say, anti-"liberal") society. "We are victims here of an inherent tragedy in the history of classical liberalism," Meyer writes. "As it developed the economic and political doctrines of limited state power, the free-market economy, and the freedom of the individual person, it sapped, by its utilitarianism, the foundations of belief in an organic moral order...when such a belief is not universally accepted, a free society, even if it could exist, would become licentious war of all against all. Political freedom, failing a broad acceptance of the personal obligation to duty and to charity, is never viable." <sup>13</sup>

To help extrapolate this particular argument, it may be worthwhile to consider what would happen if a genuinely amoral society were to remove a law against murder. Surely, in the absence of any legal restraints, the number of murders would increase among such a collection of sociopaths, whether those murders were committed for the purpose of social advancement, revenge or for any other motivation. Such a "free" society, Meyer would argue, not only suffers morally as a result of this state of being, but is also not free by virtue of the unsustainable inability of the society to shoulder the responsibilities imposed by its freedoms. At some point, people are either going to leave such a society or cease having children on the off-chance that they or their children will be murdered for some non-identifiable reason. Moreover, the very notion of taking care of children would, in a genuinely selfish and amoral society, be utterly alien, as it requires a real sense of altruism where the child is concerned. However, lacking any communal morality, the very notion of "rights" would be alien to such a collection of murdering thugs, as "rights" necessarily imply

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Meyer, p. 23

the existence of "wrongs," both of which are concepts without meaning in the absence of any agreed-upon moral ground.

By contrast, consider what would happen if a society with harsh moral and religious strictures against murder were to suddenly legalize the practice. Because of the dangers of social disapprobation in such a society, those few people who did choose to murder others would be swiftly subjected to social exile (and by extension, possible danger to their own lives), meaning that, despite the absence of legal barriers, the principle animating those legal barriers would remain alive, allowing a substantial degree of negative freedom with respect to government control over the fate of murderers.

So it is, Meyer would argue, with capitalism. Stripped of morals and faced with what Meyer and co. see as the natural fact of inequality, the less well-off in a capitalist society will every earthly reason to pursue the forceful redistribution of wealth, whereas the well-off will have no earthly reason to anticipate such demands out of charity. Naturally, the argument could be made that for practical purposes, some equilibrium point exists whereby the rich could simply offer the poor money out of a desire for self-preservation rather than out of any genuine feelings of charity, but it is not clear that such an equilibrium point is directly measurable or ascertainable by human reason, except with reference to some sort of traditional notion of charity or warm-heartedness. Thus the absence of tradition deprives not only the morally inclined of a safe society in which to live, it also deprives even the genuinely amoral and psychopathically disabled of any communal standard behind which to mask their own malignance, leading to a situation whereby the latter exterminate any chance of success for anyone. Thus, for fusionists, social, economic and political freedom must

be held in equilibrium with social mores and traditions that govern what is acceptable in the social, economic and political spheres.

Thus, according to Meyer, it is precisely this equilibrium which the distorted rationalism of 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberals weakened. Seeking to make the economics and politics of one school of thought objectively verifiable by one form of tautological rationalism, the classical liberals, Meyer argues, undermined any standard by which to judge either economics or politics by forgetting the moral traditions which informed their rationalist inquiries. As a result, precisely those styles of economics and politics which classical liberals disdained – that is, the revolutionary ones – arose to fill the void.

This much of Meyer's analysis clearly concedes the argument over organic moral order to the traditionalists. However, it is in his description of the maintenance of that order where Meyer shows the triumph of libertarianism. "Nineteenth century conservatism, with all its understanding of the preeminence of virtue and value, for all its piety towards the continuing tradition of mankind, was far too cavalier to the claims of freedom, far too ready to subordinate the individual person to the authority of state or society," Meyer writes. 14 "Truth withers when freedom dies, however righteous the authority that kills it; and free individualism uninformed by moral value rots at its core and soon brings about conditions that pave the way for surrender to tyranny." 15

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Meyer, p. 22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Meyer, p. 17

In other words, Meyer argues that the necessity of tradition does not imply the consonant necessity of State-enforced tradition – in fact, it implies the opposite. Because of the necessarily forceful and violent nature of State control (which is effected through expropriation of either property, liberty or, in extreme cases, life), the choice to follow moral norms becomes not a question of morality but of amoral self-preservation when the arm of state power becomes involved. That is, when the sole reason for following a moral edict is the fear of being imprisoned or killed, then the organic moral order is just as undermined, if not more so, than when the moral edict is not followed at all, because society becomes accustomed to simply doing whatever the State asks it to do and conflates this obedience with moral action, rather than understanding that there is something transcendently higher than the State which motivates moral action, and being able to apply that transcendent ideal as a criterion for political and ethical action. As such, all possible normative moral grounds for judging the State disappear, along with the organic moral order, and soon the apostles of immorality become just as capable of using State control to pervert morality as the apostles of morality are of using it to enforce morality. In fact, given the general pessimism towards human nature to which conservatives of both libertarian and traditionalist stripes subscribe, it could be argued that the instant any even faintly democratic State gets its fingers on morality, the battle is already lost, as the natural inclinations of the population towards vice will override the cultivated inclinations of the few anointed towards virtue. This is a fundamentally conservative position – even in the European sense – for unlike the European system, which posited a virtuous aristocracy and clergy operating with the force of divine ordination to restrain the will

of the masses, democratically-elected leaders are borne of the will of the masses, and thus lack any ability to constrain that which gives them life.

Rather, in the context of the modern, democratic state, the fusionist conceives of the economic engine of capitalism as a restraint upon vice. Because the cultivation of money and self-reliance firstly requires the ability to provide things which society (or some segment of it) finds useful and secondly imposes no obligation upon individuals to look out for each other, the sole course of action useable by capitalist man is one defined by the capitalist work ethic of prudent asceticism. In order to attain the maximum amount of freedom, therefore, the hypothetical capitalist citizen must first show an unprecedented level of talent at fulfilling their civic duties while providing things which a substantial contingent of society finds indispensable. This concern with fiscal responsibility as the font from which moral responsibility can be drawn concedes the argument over government action to the libertarians, thus producing a philosophy which is, ironically, devoted to cultivating an ascetic, selfdenying and stoic ethic among the population via the greatest degree of economic and social liberation possible, thus throwing vulnerable individuals back on nothing but their resources and the standards of morality embraced by their respective communities as anchors in a world of uncertainty. Traditionalist society and morality is created using the powers of a self-denying, libertarian State.

This vision of the human condition as dominated in all social respects by epistemological uncertainty foreshadows a concern which we will see echoed throughout all the succeeding schools of conservative thought, and a concern that we will argue at the conclusion is a clue as to how these schools can be unified. That is, all schools of conservative thought begin with the desire for a politics of

predictability. Thus, while we grant the majority of Meyer's arguments to this point, he is guilty of ignoring one genuinely valuable distinction, possibly out of deference to subconscious libertarian leanings. That is, given the dynamic nature of capitalist economic systems, the conservative desire for a small and constrained State can be conceptualized not so much as solely motivated by the desire for freedom, but also, even in the case of the most doctrinaire libertarians, by the desire for security. Critiques of the State's arbitrary power, especially in the context of the "rule of law," often stress that a society where continually shifting conditions for economic exchange exist would be one of absolute chaos, like a game whose rules keep changing, and thus inherently incapable of prosperity. All conservative schools of thought conceptualize some external force as a means of imposing order on an epistemologically vague and frightening world, whether that force is the laws of economics (libertarians), the commandments of Biblical morality (the Religious right), dominant legitimating myths propagated by philosophical technocrats (neoconservatives), the unchanging essence of Western Civilization (paleoconservatives) or the United States Constitution, which most conservatives see as the classic fusion of all these forces into one political program. All branches of the movement thus urge the State to ground its actions in an easily accessible external reference source, from which State power can be easily evaluated as either permissible or tyrannical. And, given what most conservatives see as the overriding concern of the American Left, we will soon see just why this desire for predictability translates into such fierce opposition to every Left-wing regime which has existed historically. As such, a quick explication of just what conservatives see when they look at the American Left is not only appropriate, but essential.

### II. A Conservative Exegesis of the American Left

It is difficult to overestimate the degree to which conservatives view liberalism as an inimical force. Indeed, to the extent that conservative thinkers possess certain characteristics in common, reflexive and visceral fear and loathing for Leftist thought is a nigh-universal element of conservative thought. To some degree, this is a natural response by any rival political tradition, as a similar reaction exists among liberals. What is distinct, and ideologically significant, is the tonal quality of conservative fear and revulsion toward the Left. Quite unlike liberals, whose disdain of conservatism is often grounded on disdain for the personal qualities which they believe mark a conservative worldview (for instance, bigotry, intolerance and hidebound stupidity), the conservative fear of liberalism is almost universally grounded intellectually, and is not targeted at personal qualities, but rather at the ideology itself. Liberalism itself is seen by conservatives as the social equivalent of an autoimmune disease – a mass intellectual epidemic of virulent mental illness. As such, while the intellectual powers or elegance of individual liberals may be respected, or even admired, by conservatives, it is always an admiration tinged with pity, much the same way one would look with admiration upon works of art produced by madmen. The identity of particular liberal thinkers is almost irrelevant, except insofar as it can be used as a weapon to destroy the ideology itself, just as the personal failings of cancer patients are almost irrelevant to doctors attempting to wipe out cancer. In short, if conservatives view liberalism as a social disease, then individual liberals are simply the faceless, nameless, expendable carriers of that disease. <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> This attitude is evidence throughout conservative thinking, from Russell Kirk's denunciations of the faceless, uneducated, inhuman "mass man" to Jason Mattera's derisive characterization of young

Given this level of disgust, piecing together a coherent picture of what conservatives believe the Left represents is by no means easy, as most conservative descriptions of liberal ideas have tended toward the polemical, and a few have veered off into full-blown hysteria. However, if one aims to paint this picture in very broad strokes, such a task is eminently achievable, and may provide a window through which to view the way in which conservatives construct their ideology in opposition to the Left, a force which, at its more moderate levels, is almost always described by conservatives as "liberal," and at its most extreme, is usually explicitly identified with communism, "radicalism" or, especially in recent years, fascism.

Perhaps the most disinterested, as well as the most general, summation of the conservative view of Leftism comes from the conservative historian Daniel J. Flynn, who writes in his book A Conservative History of the American Left that "[the Leftist attitude] is, in its simplest form, scorn for what is and hopes for what could be. The ideology's appeal exists in neither the experienced past nor the concrete present, but in the imagined future. In the world dreamt, a universal human family replaces parochial nuclear families, benevolent men share burdens and bounty equally, conflict disappears, man becomes superman and earth becomes heaven." Yet perhaps a more honest description comes from the ex-communist and perennially pessimistic writer Whittaker Chambers, who described communism in the opening to his massive memoir, Witness, as "man's second oldest faith. Its promise was whispered in the first

Obama supporters as "Obama Zombies." Indeed, the "Zombie" metaphor is especially apt as a description of how conservatives view their liberal opponents, given its connotations of social apocalypse and epidemics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Flynn. <u>A Conservative History of the American Left</u>. New York: Crown Forum. 2008. p. 2

days of the Creation under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: 'Ye shall be as gods.' It is the great alternative faith of mankind. Like all great faiths, its force derives from a simple vision...The Communist vision is the vision of Man without God."

God."

Continuing on the religious theme, Jonah Goldberg offers this definition of fascism in his recent and wildly controversial book Liberal Fascism: "Both fascism and communism were, in their time, utopian visions and the bearers of great hopes...[Fascism] drew together the various strands of European politics and culture – the rise of ethnic nationalism, the Bismarckian welfare state, and the collapse of Christianity as a source of social and political orthodoxy and universal aspirations. In place of Christianity, it offered a new religion of the divinized state and the nation as an organic community."

Even William F. Buckley Jr. and Frank Meyer's traditionalist rival Russell Kirk felt the need to weigh in, with Buckley defining a liberal as "someone who believes that the human being is perfectible, and social progress predictable, that social and individual differences, if they are not rational, are objectionable and should be scientifically eliminated." Kirk, meanwhile, laid out five canons of "radical" thought as a sort of Satanic counterpoint to his six canons of conservative thought. These were, in short, "the perfectibility of man and the illimitable progress of society," "contempt for tradition," "political leveling," "economic leveling" and "detesting [Edmund] Burke's description of the state as ordained of God." Finally,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Whittaker Chambers. Witness. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing. 1980. p. 9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Jonah Goldberg, Liberal Fascism, New York: Doubleday, 2007, pp. 7-8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr. <u>Up from Liberalism</u>. New York: Bantam Books. 1968. p. xxiii

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Russell Kirk. <u>The Conservative Mind</u>. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing. 1985. p. 10

the recently released Intercollegiate Studies Institute's <u>American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia</u> defines modern liberalism this way: "Indeed, modern liberalism aims especially to free government from religious influence. It aims to free the individual from the tyranny of politicized Christianity."<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, these definitions are not in any sense as clinical or precise as might be scientifically preferable. However, despite the not entirely dispassionate nature of some of these definitions, certain recurring themes do emerge which are worthy of analysis – it seems universally agreed-upon that Leftist ideology wishes to undermine the moral claims of Judeo-Christian religious belief, for instance, and certainly elements of forced equality and forced community also factor into the definitions. However, one element which should be added to the above, and which will aid in constructing a full picture of the conservative critique of the Left, is the fact that the source of conservative contempt for liberal discourse has shifted since the two ideologies began their competition. Prior to the advent of the Left wing movements of the sixties, Frank Meyer had to actually defend the notion that conservative thought should be constructed in a systematic manner, and as one book alleges, Russell Kirk's disdain for the idea arguably marked him one of the first postmodernists. However, in the present, postmodernism-dominated climate, conservatives have shifted a full 180 degrees on the question of systemic ideology, now disdaining the Left's vision as more emotive than substantive and openly mocking the rhetorical excesses employed by liberal politicians and activists. In a characteristic summation of this disdain for what many conservative intellectuals see as a tendency toward anti-intellectualism on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Peter Augustine Lawler. "Liberalism." <u>American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia</u>. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books. 2006. p. 497

the Left, Joseph Epstein wrote "Disagree with someone on the right and he is likely to think you obtuse, wrong, foolish, a dope. Disagree with someone on the left and he is more likely to think you selfish, a sell-out, insensitive, possibly evil." Rush Limbaugh summed this up even more blunetly in 2007: "They [liberals] live to be offended, and they are not thinkers."

Taken together, what emerges as the conservative view of Leftist discourse is an image which, unsurprisingly, is terribly unflattering – an image of a collection of hysterically emotional, irrational, lazy thinkers who, on the grounds of a ridiculously optimistic view of human potential, either advocate or apologize for absolute government control for the sake of metaphysically dubious abstractions. At best (which is to say, at its least principled), it is an image which only allows its subjects to acts as the ideological equivalent of battered wives, constantly protesting that different forms of barbarity are not really all that bad, while ignoring the bruises which accumulate all over the body of civilization. At worst (that is to say, in its radical form), it is an image which portrays its subjects as engaged in a deliberate revolt against God, morality and nature itself, a movement which, much like the Joker in the most recent Batman film The Dark Knight, dedicates itself to the fostering of social and epistemological chaos simply because the latter concepts are more "fair" and "equal" than any ordered notion of society.

Now, while such an image raises the question of whether any Leftist actually fits the criterion above, our intention is not to comment on the truth or falsehood of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Joseph Epstein. "True Virtue." New York Times Magazine. November 24, 1985. p. 95

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Rush Limbaugh. <u>The Rush Limbaugh Show.</u> October 8, 2007. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site\_100807/content/01125107.guest.html">http://www.rushlimbaugh.com/home/daily/site\_100807/content/01125107.guest.html</a>

this picture, but rather to explore how it gives conservatives a useful construct against which to define themselves, and how that process of self-definition takes place. As such, in the most clinical terms possible, we take the conservative's hypothetical Leftist foe to be advancing by the following propositions:

Firstly, that socially constructed/religiously based norms and mores, due to their particularistic Christian/patriarchal/reactionary character are a more potent and normatively undesirable form of tyranny than any requirement imposed by a secular, multicultural State. Secondly, that all human beings are necessarily and innately equal, and that political/economic reality ought to reflect this truth, no matter the cost to "individual liberty," which is really a mirage, considering that it is nothing but the freedom to remain degraded by the corruption of society. Thirdly, that just as the innate equality of mankind can be exposed via State action, so too can mankind be perfected via State action, and all economic/political externalities which result from the pursuit of this perfection are inherently justified. And finally, that the criteria for human "perfection" can only be defined in the realm of personal intuitive emotional preference, rather than on the basis of either factual or reasoned premises, thus marking any attempt to arbitrarily privilege one view of human action over another as necessarily dehumanizing, hateful and degrading.

This definition of the Left, such as it is, will become a recurring theme throughout the discourse of the American Right, especially as a manner in which to discredit certain members of the conservative coalition. Conservatives search their own ranks for any and all traces of liberalism, being constantly worried that the dominant revolutionary culture will somehow corrupt their ideology and, rather like an invasion of ideological body snatchers, begin to undermine conservatism from the

inside out. Perhaps for this reason alone, conservatives subject almost every ideological change in their movement to rigorous, brutal scrutiny, and indeed, fusionism was no exception. As we will see, there were certainly troublesome traces of incompleteness and tacit liberalism in the system Meyer laid out. As we will also see, his critics had just as much to answer for as he did.

### **III.** Critiques of Fusionism

Intellectual Movement in America, notes that "For Meyer, [fusionism] abundantly demonstrated the intellectual cohesiveness of the resurgent conservative movement. The early responses of other right-wing intellectuals to Meyer's efforts, however, suggested otherwise. In the introduction to The Conservative Affirmation, for example, Wilmoore Kendall suggested that Meyer was a doctrinaire – a charge echoed by Russell Kirk in a blistering review of In Defense of Freedom in 1964."<sup>25</sup> As Nash notes, most of Meyer's critics came from the more government-friendly, traditionalist wing of the movement, and indeed, given Meyer's previous allegiances to libertarian conservatism, this was probably to be expected. However, what might not have been expected was the vehemence of the response and the almost instinctual repulsion which many conservative intellectuals evinced for Meyer's theory that moral questions were not, and never would be, the province of Government.

Some of the critiques which Meyer endured during his time, such as Kirk's accusation that he meant to "supplant Marx by Meyer" or Ronald Hanowy's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> George Nash. <u>The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945</u>. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books. 2007. p. 270

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Quoted in Nash, p. 270

dismissive remark that Meyer ignored "the crucial problem" of "the choice of which tradition to follow" have since become highly anachronistic; the first because of the fact that conservatism now identifies itself closely with systemic ideological thinking, and the second because, with the advent of a more explicitly religious form of conservatism, the choice of which tradition the traditionalists would like to follow has become explicitly clear – namely, the tradition of the bourgeois Christian work ethic. However, for the purpose of foreshadowing future challenges to fusionism as an idea, it is worth explicating the ideas of two specific critics of fusionist theory, one foreshadowing the traditionalist route which conservatism was soon to take, and one demonstrating the simultaneously dissatisfied and unconvinced libertarian view of fusionism which would eventually tend toward radicalism. The critiques which best embody these two forces are those voiced by L. Brent Bozell and Murray Rothbard, both of whom would eventually break from the conservative movement.

Let us begin with Bozell. Writing in the September 11, 1960 issue of National Review, Bozell sarcastically remarked that Meyer's "argument is fast, and we will do well to slow it down a bit." Specifically, Bozell took issue with two of Meyer's most explicitly libertarian claims – firstly, that moral freedom was the first concern of all political action, and secondly, that virtue was meaningless unless it was chosen in the context of maximum freedom. To counter the first claim, Bozell flatly denied that moral virtue was at all connected to external circumstances as, from a Christian perspective, the intention to be virtuous was itself sufficient to demonstrate virtue to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Quoted in Nash, p. 274

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> L. Brent Bozell. "Freedom or Virtue?" <u>National Review</u>. 11 September 1960. P. 181

God, and thus moral conscience was forever beyond the purview of the State. "The Soviet Citizen is every bit as 'free' to earn salvation as his American counterpart," Bozell thundered. "He will 'prove himself,' or fail to, in an area that is beyond the reach of the KGB. And while there is nothing arresting about this presumption – surely it is among the most ordinary of theological commonplaces – it must have tremendous implications for political theory. For if moral freedom is beyond the reach of politics, surely politics has better things to do than making the preservation of moral freedom its chief preoccupation."<sup>29</sup>

And this was the gentlest criticism Bozell made. In dealing with Meyer's argument that freedom was indispensable to virtue, Bozell used the test case of divorce laws to reduce Meyer's argument to a collection of socially subversive premises which surely seemed ill at ease with conservative staidness. "Meyer, one gathers from his writings, takes a sacramental view of marriage, and so considers the preservation of it to be a virtuous act," Bozell wrote, before posing the following thought experiment: Suppose X, an American, decides to stay with his wife despite liberal divorce laws, good remarriage prospects and the encouragement of his associates, while Y, a Spaniard, decides to stay with his wife simply because the society in which he lives would disown him if he did not. Who is more virtuous, Bozell asked, before answering for Meyer. "Meyer's answer (and who would disagree?): X of course. His decision was tougher by far; Y's choice was almost reflexive, was not therefore 'free' at all," Bozell wrote. "And it follows – does it not? – that if we are seriously interested in maximizing opportunities for virtue, something

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Bozell, p. 182

will have to be done about Spain. Her laws, traditions, customs interfere with freedom. They are 'crutches' – kick them away. And in the United States, conditions are not entirely satisfactory either. We will want to make our own divorce laws even laxer...a special fund could be set aside for periodic newspaper notices advertising dissatisfied spouses of the most convenient cut-rate agency or mail order house...It is not that we favor divorce, mind you; it is just that we want virtuous men."<sup>30</sup> Finishing off this sarcastic barrage, Bozell innocently inquired, "Is the reduction ad absurdum unfair? On the contrary: I submit that the inner logic of the dictum that virtue-notfreely-chosen is not virtue at all leads inescapably to the burlesque of reason just suggested...The libertarian may object that it is only *state* props that he wants to dismantle...but on his own showing he has no business making such a distinction. There are, of course, vital differences between 'state' and 'social' sanctions, but they have no bearing on the argument in question here."31 It was at this point that Bozell unveiled his brutally unflattering assessment of libertarian (and fusionist) concerns with freedom: "In short, libertarianism's first command – maximize freedom – applies with equal vigor to all of society's activities; and the meaning of the command, in effect, is this: virtue must be made as difficult as possible."32

Bozell's alternative was that, assuming the furtherance of the Christian virtue ethic was the end goal of conservatism, all restrictions of social behavior ought to be based not on an overriding concern with liberty, but rather on simple prudence – that is, could such restrictions be made without inducing substantial complications? "For

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Bozell, p. 183

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

now," Bozell wrote, "the [libertarian] argument is focused on the effects unlimited power is likely to have on those who exercise it, and derivatively on the damage they are likely to do the commonwealth they govern. And we are looking at nothing more than a restatement of Lord Acton's adage that 'power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' But note that Acton did not try to convert this essentially prudential judgment about the dangers of government power into an absolute rule for restricting government power." Indeed, Bozell even contested the idea that "free" choice was a factor in propagating virtue at all, returning to his earlier argument that moral agency, as a cosmic force, was forever closed to the State, thus allowing political forces to try to create inducements toward virtue. Indeed, for Bozell, such inducements were the sole purpose which the State ought to serve. "The urge to freedom for its own sake is, in the last analysis, a rebellion against nature," Bozell finally thundered, "it is the urge to be free from God... The story of how the free society has come to take priority over the good society is the story of the decline of the West." \*\*

As theoretical critiques of Meyer's fusionism go, Bozell's is doubtlessly one of the most piercing, and there is much in it with which the hypothetical Christian fusionist would find it very difficult to argue. However, what is even more notable about Bozell's essay than its polemical incisiveness is its almost wholly negative character. A few instances of rhetoric notwithstanding, Bozell devotes almost no time to defending his own vision of what conservatism ought to support, rather only doing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Bozell, p. 185

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Bozell, pp. 187, 206

his best to excommunicate Meyer, fusionism and libertarian from the movement entirely. Yet more interestingly, Bozell does not attempt to prove that humans are necessarily capable of constructing governments which impose God's will on their fellow man, only that the libertarians are wrong in their argument against the aesthetic desirability of such a state of affairs. Moreover, Bozell's disagreements with a libertarian program, far from being primarily theological, are in actuality deeply prudential. "While the libertarian disability comes from a different source, it is, I fear, no less crippling. For what the freedom-first people fail to understand is that the Communist proposal to 'change man' is an answer to a problem *they* have created. The Communist answer is to give man a nature, and thus a purpose outside of himself."35 In other words, Bozell argues that the great flaw in "freedom" as a first principle is the process-based nature of "freedom." Unlike "virtue," which can be enjoyed for its own sake, once one has "freedom," it is only a starting point. One may have the freedom, for instance, to walk down one of two roads at a fork, but, Bozell argues, this state of indecisive "freedom" is probably not the end point one desires – the most desirable end point is to walk down the correct road without the desire to turn back. In this sense, Communism poses a danger to libertarianism precisely because its end goal – the perfection of man – can be enjoyed for its own sake, whereas the freedom to choose between different options is relatively pointless unless one can also enjoy the choices themselves. With this much analysis, we agree, but as we will show in Chapter 2, the libertarian commitment to absolute freedom is not, in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Bozell, p. 206

fact, a logical corollary of their philosophy, but rather a distorted confusion of rhetoric with reality.

For now, all we note is that, despite Bozell's general contempt for Meyer's brand of fusionism, his essay hardly disproves the need for fusion – rather, it exacerbates it by demonstrating the ideological blind spots of both traditionalism and libertarianism. As Bozell's steadfast refusal to enunciate any sort of litmus test for government moralizing other than prudence demonstrates, the traditionalist is naturally inclined to presume that, despite the original sin inherent in every human being, the instant the hypothetical theocrat gains power, he suddenly gains a perfect sense of what is prudential for the State, as well as what will further virtue. As we will argue in Chapter 3, this innate faith in the power of authority figures to use their divinely ordained powers for good is a persistent symptom of ideological decay in traditionalist/religious conservatism. It is genuinely problematic that, absent a perfect sense of prudence, Bozell can offer no mechanism by which to check against abuses of either the spiritual or political variety, and he admits as much when he describes the Founding Fathers as "the only group of men in modern history to have set their minds to constructing a commonwealth on the basis of prudence, and therefore free from ideology."<sup>36</sup> By describing the founding vision as one "free from ideology" in this respect, it is worth noting that, besides making a very contentious claim upon its own showing, Bozell is also indirectly foreshadowing one of the key claims of neoconservatism, which will be detailed in Chapter 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Bozell, p. 186

However, these criticisms aside, Bozell's attacks on libertarianism also carry substantive weight. His assault on the transitory nature of freedom reveals a genuine paucity in the libertarian political vision, as does his humiliating and derisive reduction ad absurdum on the nature of marriage, which unveils the inability of libertarianism to defend any form of social cohesion at the point where it is collectively rational, but potentially inconvenient for the individual. Indeed, while Bozell concedes the potentially "prudential" nature of libertarian dogma through his approving citation of Lord Acton, it is indisputable that his analysis lays bare the essential moral weakness of the libertarian position, which seems unable to make definitive statements on what one *ought* to do with one's freedom, and thus lacks any sort of normative moral grounds upon which to prefer such a form of freedom to slavery. In short, Bozell exposes the areas in which libertarian dogma fundamentally collide both with human nature and established Christian mores, creating a critique of the ideology not so much for its incorrectness as for its incompleteness. Bozell thus vindicates the need for fusionism, even as he savages Meyer for incorporating unsustainable premises into the current version.

Yet if Bozell represented the most radically traditionalist critic Meyer ever encountered, he was almost certainly matched in extremism by Murray Rothbard, Meyer's most radically libertarian critic and, unlike Bozell, a willing defector from the conservative movement to – unsurprisingly – the radical Left. Rothbard, first in his essay "Conservatism and Freedom: A Libertarian Comment" (published a year before Bozell's piece) and later in his essay "The Fusionist as Libertarian Manque" (published in the early period of the 80's) argued that Meyer's brand of fusionism really placed irrational shackles on libertarian discourse by forcing it to operate under

greater constraints than simple logical correctness. "Meyer leans too far over on the 'conservative' side of this dialogue by emphasizing that reason must operate 'within tradition,'" Rothbard wrote in the former essay. "When Mr. Meyer recognizes that conservatives must employ reason to select between true and false traditions, he has placed himself above and not within tradition, and rightly so." In sharp contrast with Bozell, who attacked Meyer for being too willing to allow freedom to compromise virtue, Rothbard instead asserted that the entire notion of a "tension" between freedom and virtue was absurd. "Tension implies precariousness and an underlying contradiction which I don't think exist," Rothbard wrote. "Properly developed, the relationship between freedom and ethics is a peaceful and cohesive harmony, a harmony of a unified natural law, rather than a precarious tension. In the political sphere, that harmony comes about through the confinement of the coercive arm of society to the defense of individual rights of property." 38

Naturally, if Rothbard's differences with Meyer were so clear, his differences with Bozell were obvious. Unlike Bozell, who saw libertarians as logically required to demand that all possible restrictions, both political and social, be overturned, Rothbard instead argued that the libertarian concern with freedom stopped at the level of politics because only the State had the power of coercion, an argument which, as we will see in Chapter 2, was more than a little disingenuous, and which emerged as such even throughout the course of Rothbard's essay. "Meyer sees that the best libertarians have realized, with Lord Acton, that liberty is the highest *political* end,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Murray Rothbard. "Conservatism and Freedom: A Libertarian Comment." <u>Modern Age</u>. Spring 1961. p. 218

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

i.e. the highest end that is proper for government, the organized arm of coercion, to achieve,"<sup>39</sup> Rothbard maintained, while keeping a surprisingly measured tone. However, as he went on, the temptation to savage the Bozellian enconiums to the State as an example of Godly virtue seemed to become too tempting to resist. As such, in his second essay, while still maintaining that libertarianism was a solely political tradition, Rothbard instead conceptualized the state in starkly moral terms as basically immoral and vile. "It is bad enough, from the libertarian perspective, that the non-libertarian conservatives (along with all other breeds of statists) are eager to enforce compulsory virtue; but which group of men do they pick to do the enforcing," Rothbard sarcastically inquired. "Which group in society are to be the guardians of virtue, the ones who define and enforce their vision of what virtue is supposed to be? None other, I would say, than the state apparatus, the social instrument of legalized violence...Why should the sort of persons who are good at, and will therefore tend to exercise, the arts of shooting, gouging, and stomping, be the same persons we would want to select as our keepers of the moral flame?" To this question, Rothbard claimed, the traditionalist view was at best, completely oblivious, and at worst, complicit in liberalism. "Among traditionalist conservatives, Walter Berns has been particularly dedicated to the idea of the nation-state as moulding and controlling the education of the youth, even going so far as to laud the work of Horace Mann," he sniffed.41

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Rothbard, p. 217

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Murray Rothbard. "Frank S. Meyer: The Fusionist as Libertarian Manque." <u>Modern Age</u>. Fall 1981.
p. 354

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Rothbard's critique of fusionism, in other words, was not so much a critique of fusionism itself as an explicit call for Meyer to come out of the closet and join the libertarian ranks. As it was, Rothbard saw Meyer as complicit in propping up erroneous myths about the libertarian worldview, despite holding a basically libertarian position himself. "The libertarian agrees completely with Acton and with Meyer himself that freedom is the highest *political* end, not the highest end of man per se; indeed, it would be difficult to render such a position in any sense meaningful or coherent," Rothbard wrote. "The confusion here, and the basic problem with conservatives' understanding of libertarianism, is that libertarianism per se does not offer a comprehensive way of life or system of ethics, as do, say, conservatism and Marxism."42 Relentlessly, and despite his explicitly moral language earlier in the essay, Rothbard repeated the same maxim – that libertarianism argued for liberty only as a guiding philosophy for the most anti-libertarian institution in society generally – namely, the State. Rothbard also continuously declaimed that, unlike conservatism or Marxism, he was not attempting to construct such a systematic philosophy of life, the universe and everything. Rather, his only goal was to prove that the world would be better off if the State kept its hands out of as much as possible, and only exercised violence as a means of protecting its citizens from violence either by foreign powers, or from each other. As for Meyer, Rothbard argued that in attacking libertarians generally, he had chosen a poor set of targets, and ought rather to focus on the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ibid.

"utilitarian" school of libertarianism embodied by such "Chicago school" figures as Milton Friedman, James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock and Ronald Coase. 43

Rothbard's critique, while it makes for a generally less penetrating, and certainly less harsh analysis of Meyer's ideas than Bozell, still can offer a few clues as to how the libertarian dissent against fusionism would take form and how this would later inform libertarian dissent against the movement generally, as it gradually moved toward Bozellian notions of State power. Unlike Bozell, who devotes his piece almost single-mindedly to tearing down Meyer's argument for fusionism, Rothbard instead preoccupies himself with offering an alternate vision and only touching on Meyer where it becomes appropriate. And unlike Bozell, Rothbard's vision is both clear-cut and cynical.

To begin with, for Rothbard, the State is in no sense a propagator of virtue, divinely ordained or even necessarily desirable. Rather, it is only the most historically enduring protection racket available – a territorial monopoly on force which ruthlessly demands payment from its victims in exchange for the absence of violence. However, this entity is weakened by virtue of the fact that it depends on the consent of the governed, at least in the American context, and it must constantly seek approbation from these same individuals. Rothbard's claim, therefore, is that since the only universal interest available for a community of individuals is the protection of individual life and property, this ought to be the sole end of the State, with all else turned loose to the winds of fate, freedom and (perhaps most importantly) the free market. This latter concept is conceived as the most predictable, most rational and

 $^{\rm 43}$  Rothbard, "The Fusionist as Libertarian Manque," p. 355

indeed, most virtuous form of social organization, and as Rothbard gradually radicalizes his argument, it begins to drift closer and closer to an outright anarchocapitalist position. However, whatever the bizarre mutations Rothbard inflicts on his original claim, the original claim itself – that the market can organize society in a virtuous and, indeed, conservative fashion is, we will argue, essentially an apt one.

Still, the importance of this element to Meyer is only tangential, as it only enters the critique of fusionism at the point where Rothbard is rebuking Meyer for attempting to hide his essentially libertarian tendencies. Rather, the one serious concern which Rothbard takes up with Meyer's thesis is that Meyer informs his analysis with a less pure brand of rationalist epistemology from Rothbard. And despite its abstract philosophical character, this critique speaks volumes about Rothbard's source of contention with Meyer, for it unveils the manner in which his libertarian vision is explicitly situated to the epistemological Left of Meyer.

While Meyer accepts and embraces the fact of incomplete human social cognition, Rothbard takes some trouble to avoid accepting all the implications of this idea, and certainly objects to Meyer's attempt to escape from it by situating reason "within tradition." When the issue of tradition does arise, Rothbard stiffly snaps that "every intelligent rationalist recognizes the great value of studying past thinkers and past accumulations of knowledge; for no man is omniscient, and therefore it is an enormous time-saver and gain in efficiency, knowledge and clarity, to build on the best writings of the past, instead of trying to spin out all the laws of the universe de novo." It is difficult to not note the extremely dry, reluctant and utilitarian tone of

 $^{\rm 44}$  Rothbard, "Conservatism and Freedom," p. 218

this passage – tradition is a "time-saver," and a gain in "efficiency." In short, it is a tool, an instrument of process, with no inherent value of its own. There is nothing theoretically objectionable about viewing the legacy of Western civilization in this fashion, as Rothbard does, except that when it comes to integrating the most prominent elements of that civilization (such as, say, Catholic Christianity) into the theoretical framework of his argument, Rothbard immediately clams up.

Indeed, it is almost more educational to note the elements of *Bozell*'s argument that Rothbard does not address, than it is to try to explicate his sparse criticism of Frank Meyer. Perhaps most notably, Rothbard fails to disprove the idea that libertarian opposition to government intervention must also imply repealing established laws which may keep social virtue secure, and almost certainly comes close to confirming Bozell's fear that libertarians necessarily wish to infringe on the rights of virtuous people to exclude certain forms of behavior. For one thing, and we will expound on how this is a problem endemic to libertarianism as a separate ideology generally, it is not clear at what point coercion and violence begin for Rothbard, or how he would rebut Bozell's claim that moral reasoning is forever beyond the purview of the State because the afterlife provides sanctuary for those not willing to give up virtuous behavior. Rather, Rothbard leans heavily towards the materialist position that deprivation of life or property (or the threat thereof) constitutes an actual infringement on the manner in which someone's mind can function. This sets him exceedingly far apart from the idealism of Meyer or Bozell, and also exemplifies the manner in which his essay conveys a complimentary piece of the conservative philosophy, but in no sense its entirety.

To Rothbard's credit, he admits the shortcoming when he writes of how libertarianism is not given to grand metaphysical claims. Unfortunately, where politics are concerned, there are two areas in which this neglect penalizes his libertarian ideology and subjects it to a type of scrutiny which, we will see, comes to haunt the libertarian wing of the party on a sadistically recurrent basis – namely, Rothbard and his compatriots make no claims on the subject of whether human nature is compatible with their supreme political concern (liberty), or whether that supreme political concern is necessarily prudential in all cases. In other words, the flaw in Rothbard's critique of fusionism is precisely the opposite of the flaw exemplified by Bozell's critique of fusionism – that, far from being too grand in scope, Rothbard's vision is too disingenuously modest. That is, in neglecting the permanent things, it lays claim to a vision of political action which may well be the most utilitarian, but which lacks the theological weight to back up its assertions of natural rights, and the concern for the eternal which vindicates it in the realm of timeless aesthetics. To put the problems of both Bozell and Rothbard bluntly, each criticism suffers because by their very omissions, they acknowledge their need for the underlying philosophy of their opponents as counterweight, critic and reinforcement under fire. Traditionalism reduces itself to a pragmatically contentless vision of the State as ordained of God, with no practical political methods to ensure that the Godless do not tear the State from the grip of the almighty, and libertarianism reduces itself to the arbitrary aesthetic preference of a few misers and closeted eccentrics, who are too afraid to poke at the edges of truth for fear of being expelled forever into the outer darkness of political and philosophical irrelevance, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. The fusionist project is thus vindicated, even as its first incarnation is brought low.

We now move to the realm of serious ideological analysis to aid in constructing a new fusionism.

# Chapter 2: The Church of the Copybook Headings – Fiscal and Libertarian Conservatism

"I believe the very heart and soul of conservatism is libertarianism."

## -Ronald Reagan

"Perhaps you are a 'conservative' because you wish to conserve the 'western heritage.' But the Western heritage contains more quantitatively more bad than good from our point of view – more murder than laissez-faire. So what you really want to promote is not the heritage en bloc but part of it – which parts to be picked out by reason. So where can conservatism come in?"

#### -Murray Rothbard

In the long history of conservatism in America, no section of the movement itself has been more intellectually essential, more fiercely rational or more frustratingly intractable than libertarianism. With various libertarians having basically founded the conservative movement by writing the first substantive critiques of Roosevelt-era economic policy, as well as having rejected their ideological spawn in the heat of the 60's counterculture, and then having returned to prominence as the rhetoricians responsible for Ronald Reagan's speeches, and *then* having organized Newt Gingrich's army of grassroots foot soldiers, *and then* having led the mass conservative walk-out on the Bush administration, there is no question that libertarianism has left a mark on the conservative conscience. Moreover, libertarians have, perversely enough, been one of the groups which is most willing to accept certain premises of conservatism in order to reject the conclusions reached by employing others. For just a quick sample, libertarians have championed the rule of law while attacking the police, defended Constitutional originalism while protesting

the Patriot Act, and supported absolute deregulation of corporations while also suggesting that the same be applied to drug cartels. The perverse moral consistency of libertarians, to say nothing of their odd mix of caustic iconoclasm and absolute conviction, inspires many conservatives, enrages others and almost certainly baffles the lot.

Because libertarians were the first to offer dissent against modern liberalism from what was, at the time, a nonexistent Right, it would seem a foregone conclusion that they are the oldest members of the conservative movement. But as we will see, this is not so obvious after all, considering that libertarians frequently take pains to distance themselves from the movement they created, or even outright reject it as a coalition of Statists who stole their ideas on the economy and grafted them onto an otherwise viciously authoritarian agenda which libertarians want no part of. This sort of passive aggressive behavior, as already discussed, often alienates libertarians from the rest of the Right and confuses even their defenders on a regular basis. Neither this unjustified hostility nor the attendant confusion of its recipients need exist, for in this chapter, we will argue firstly, that libertarianism is undeniably an ideology which belongs on the Right; secondly, that libertarianism uses problematic legitimizing myths to cover up its own insufficiency as an ideology; and thirdly, that the libertarian love/hate relationship with conservatism is, in fact, a symptom of a much deeper tension within libertarian ideology which, if allowed to exist, drags an otherwise convincing incomplete political vision into the very depths of incoherence.

### I. The Invisible Iron Fist: The Market as King

"Remember my friends, God is dead. Marx is also dead. But the market lives. The market must become your new God."
-Alan B'Stard, The New Statesman

The battle-cry of libertarians, from time immemorial, has always been, "leave it to the market!" One could justifiably observe that this *diktat* leads to radical prescriptions, and libertarians have taken no pains whatsoever to deny any of these results, some of which may sound positively Leftist to the unpracticed ear. Take the issue of prostitution – whereas many conservatives hastily condemn the practice with horror and cry for increased police on the streets, harsher punishments for Johns and a return to a culture of chastity, libertarians call for the practice to be legalized. <sup>45</sup> Their reasoning can be aptly summed up in a thought experiment related at CATO Institute lectures: Suppose that a man walks into the police and complains, "I had two crack rocks, and a girl stole one by pretending she would have sex with me in order to get it, and then never giving me the sex. I want you to get it back for me!" The police will arrest the man and not do anything about his loss of property. As such, in the absence of legal enforcement of property rights in victimless crimes such as prostitution, the only recourse for the hypothetical customer or provider is to use violence as a means of ensuring their "product." This means that, far from stopping crime or making the illicit sex trade more humane, anti-prostitution laws make it worse and increase the rate of crime surrounding the act, whereas if pimps were legitimate businessmen and Johns were legitimate customers, their ability to make a profit unencumbered by the need to also be violent would increase both the quality of the services offered and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> For a full-length argument for just such a position from a libertarian perspective, see also Walter Block. Defending the Undefendable. New York: Laissez Faire Books. 1991.

well-being of the participants. Moreover, there is no need to worry about the act becoming more prevalent as a result of it being illegal, libertarians argue, because social sanctions are sufficient that the profession will never service more than a fringe percentage of the population. In the words of William F. Buckley Jr., "It's perfectly legal to vote for Jesse Jackson. Doesn't make it respectable, now does it?"

At first blush, this sounds like a terribly permissive and liberal argument – in actuality, it is precisely the opposite. Though libertarians often write of the dangers of excessive *State* power, the cardinal aims of libertarianism are necessarily in opposition to the premises of every form of radicalism every conceived, whether it be the radicalism of the French revolution, the Russian revolution or the New Deal. Specifically, libertarianism aims to place the individual at the mercy of social sanction, relies on the natural inertia of socially constructed values in order to function, and rejects all ideas of substantive egalitarianism.

For a demonstration of the first goal, observe the reliance of libertarian thought on Adam Smith's market-based "Invisible Hand." As a political doctrine, one can easily see this belief as having fundamentally anti-State, or at least anti-regulatory, implications; but as a *theological* doctrine, to call it anti-authoritarian would be a terrible mistake. No libertarian, and certainly no economist (which most libertarians are) who believes in the invisible hand has claimed that the invisible hand of the market is a gentle master – in fact, it might be more accurate to call this concept the "invisible iron fist." Throughout the history of conservatism, at least as far back as Meyer, conservatives and libertarians alike have praised the ascetic fearfulness which the seeming unpredictability of markets inspires as a necessary check on the material urges of the ravenous multitudes. This very same fear of failure throws the individual

back on society for aid and support, which subjects the very survival of the individual to the prejudices, moral strictures and moral values of the social order in which they exist – prejudices, moral strictures and moral values which can offer either succor through (often) religiously motivated charitable institutions or can punish the individual with the threat of social ostracism and possibly death.

At this point, maintenance of the "Permanent Things" in society becomes divorced from the abstract musings of professors and takes on a vital role as the means of sustenance for every individual whose talent, adaptability and sense of personal responsibility renders them unfit to compete in the market, for only in a society which adheres to a certain set of moral values can the externalities of free markets be resolved privately through the injection of voluntary charity. Moreover, those who *are* responsible, talented, adaptable or otherwise lucky enough to thrive in the market do so with the constant awareness that the threat of obsolescence in the face of a more innovative competitor looms over their head, leading to a continually increasing commitment to the virtues required of a good market competitor. Not being conceptualized as controlled by any human hand, the market itself is immune from reproach as a conscious entity, and thus its decisions can more effectively be defended as natural, creating a perfectly authoritarian, and yet wholly spontaneous, system.

This leads into the last right-leaning element of libertarian ideology, which is its fundamentally anti-egalitarian nature. This element has been more explicitly recognized by many libertarian thinkers – for instance, the Jeffersonian notion of natural aristocracy takes the free market as its starting point, while the less gentle libertarianism of Herbert Spencer transformed the market into the mechanism of

Darwinian natural selection within society. Even the colorful Rothbard (about whom more in a moment) eventually acknowledged and embraced this element of libertarian ideology in his essay, "Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature." Rothbard sniffs, "In no area has the Left been granted justice and morality as extensively and almost universally as in its espousal of massive equality."

Rothbard's subsequent attack on egalitarianism is unremitting and fiercely conservative in its character. He accuses people who support the propagation of economic equality of not just impracticality, but immorality, comparing their goal to the nonsensical goal of humans being able to fly by flapping their arms. "The proper critique here is to challenge the "ideal" goal itself; to point out that the goal itself is impossible in view of the physical nature of man and the universe; and, therefore, to free mankind from its enslavement to an inherently impossible and, hence, evil goal," Rothbard writes. <sup>47</sup> "The egalitarian world would necessarily be a world of horror fiction – a world of faceless and identical creatures, devoid of all individuality, variety, or special creativity." Not only is this argument opposed to every Left-wing teaching on the subject of inequality, it echoes statements of the kind made by Russell Kirk touting the diversity of an unequal society.

Let us explicate Rothbard's argument a little further, for the sake of full clarification of libertarianism's role on the Right. Rothbard argues that trying to make everyone equal is a cruel joke on par with trying to make people capable of flight.

Moreover, Rothbard argues, even if perfect egalitarianism were possible, it would not

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Murray Rothbard. "Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature." <u>Lew Rockwell Online</u>. December 10, 2009. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.lewrockwell.com/rothbard/rothbard31.html">http://www.lewrockwell.com/rothbard/rothbard31.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid.

be desirable, for a perfectly egalitarian world would be filled with nothing so much as people who are exactly the same in every respect. This is a horrific, dystopian vision, and any move in its direction ought to be deplored. Moreover, in order for this vision to exist, one would necessarily have to abolish the market because, as Rothbard argues, in order for egalitarianism to exist, everything about human beings must be equal. But if everyone is to stay equal, this means that different choices must be somehow made irrelevant – either by ensuring that everyone makes the same choices, or by ensuring that all choices have the same consequences. Rothbard concludes:

"An egalitarian society can only hope to achieve its goals by totalitarian methods of coercion; and, even here, we all believe and hope the human spirit of individual man will rise up and thwart any such attempts to achieve an ant-heap world. In short, the portrayal of an egalitarian society is horror fiction because, when the implications of such a world are fully spelled out, we recognize that such a world and such attempts are profoundly antihuman; being antihuman in the deepest sense, the egalitarian goal is, therefore, evil and any attempts in the direction of such a goal must be considered evil as well."

To the liberal reader, this may seem insufficient grounds to place libertarianism on the Right – after all, opposition to pure, mind-numbing conformity is fairly widespread across the American political spectrum. We reply that our reason for using this test case lies not in what libertarianism opposes, but in what its opposition reveals. The title of Rothbard's essay is "Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature" and the implication is that anti-egalitarianism, or inequality (especially of the economic kind), is natural and - because Rothbard refuses to draw a distinction between what is natural and what is good – also morally good and praiseworthy. By this standard, any and all asymmetries of power between rich and poor, or between any pair of social groups, can be defended.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ibid.

So why the opposition to the State? The answer varies depending on which libertarian thinker one examines, but in general, the shortest answer is that the State is, in many ways, the only force which can unnaturally usurp the natural (read: rightful) power of the market – in short, to the extent that the State steps outside the bounds of what it properly ought to do, it usurps nature. Returning to the argument made by Whittaker Chambers that communism is the equivalent of promising mankind that "Ye shall be as Gods," the activist State is almost always seen by libertarians as promising to allocate resources which the market can not only allocate more efficiently (efficiency in this case translating to economic efficiency), but also more justly in a distributive sense. Moreover, the State is a more dangerous allocator of such goods because it is categorically unable to amass the information which spontaneously creates market interactions, due to the fact that State apparatuses are run in a top-down fashion by individual humans with frail brains, whereas the Market coordinates the distribution of resources either with a superhuman intelligence, or as a kind of hivemind comprised of all the economic choices of individual consumers and producers (this latter is usually the more popular option because it relies less on mysticism). Moreover, because the State is run by humans, the imperfect rationality and aesthetic weaknesses of those particular humans will color its behavior, leading to irrational exercises of tyrannical force at any point where the State attempts to do what it is incapable of doing – namely, anything the Market has already been able to do better. To use a Darwinist metaphor, for the State to attempt to fill the role of the Market is similar to humans attempting to dictate what course their own evolution will take, rather than leaving it to nature. The libertarian opposition to the activist State thus parallels, in many ways, the social Darwinist's objection to eugenics.

This is not to say that all libertarians trust the Market unreservedly. Many libertarians prefer the existence of a State-controlled police force, arguing that a minimal set of predictable laws and guaranteed legal rights will provide consumers and producers with the necessary infrastructure to engage in market relations with each other, just as laws of nature permit the existence of variation and competition throughout the natural world. Though the State is often an unwelcome partner in libertarian circles, it is widely acknowledged by all but the fiercest anarcho-capitalists that it is at least a practical one, and one that can be accommodated in the right circumstances, assuming that its laws do not hinder market interaction via either direct interference or frequent change. Moreover, along with the State, civil society acts as an important check on the Market for many libertarians, for as in the prostitution example cited above, the limits of what can be bought and sold on the market would ideally be entirely socially constructed, and thus would have to involve a constant and vigorous dialogue among members of society about what was and was not acceptable for resale.

Naturally, it may be objected that we are ignoring two of the fundamental elements of libertarian ideology: its concern with individual liberty and its preoccupation with the idea of natural rights. These ideas will be detailed in due time; and have not been presented yet because the substantive vision presented above (one in which any and all voluntary economic transactions are permitted, with only the checkbook and the socially constructed limits of permissible purchase as limits) represents a more authentic statement of the libertarian ideal, an ideal for which the ideas of liberty and natural rights are more often rhetorical defenses than substantive ones. Moreover, in the broadest sense, the libertarian commitment to maintaining

liberty against state incursion needs no defense as an element of conservative American thought due to its historical origin, as no authentically American conservative ideology could be constructed without reference to the highly libertarian suspicion of Federal power employed by the Founding Fathers. As Russell Kirk wrote, "If a person describes himself as 'libertarian' because he believes in an enduring moral order, the Constitution of the United States, free enterprise, and old American ways of life – why, actually he is a conservative with imperfect understanding of the general terms of politics."<sup>49</sup> In libertarianism proper, an enduring moral order is essential for preserving both the rule of law and the means by which society copes with its externalities, while free enterprise is taken for granted and old ways of life of any nationality fit in with the elements of the enduring moral order. As for the Constitution, at the point where it only details what the government cannot do (a fact of which certain politicians have been quite wary), it is pretty clearly a libertarian document in at least some respects.

In any case, it should be clear from the above discussion that the libertarian opposition to the State, even though it may lead to non-conservative conclusions, is grounded in fundamentally conservative premises. The attack on State action to regulate and/or supplant the market is grounded both in a deep and abiding conviction that the human animal as imperfect and imperfectible, especially where power is concerned, and also in a reverence for intelligence beyond human comprehension, opening the possibility of a Market operated as one hand of God. This idea of a virtuous Market is further defended by the idea on the part of libertarians that only

<sup>49</sup> Russell Kirk. "Chirping Sectaries." Modern Age. Fall 1981. Accessed April 10, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.mmisi.org/ma/25">http://www.mmisi.org/ma/25</a> 04/kirk.pdf>

responsible action can lead to success in the market, and that the distribution of virtue, talent and other positive attributes is naturally unequal, implying a hierarchical view of the world, as well as an organic one. Finally, the libertarian reliance on social constructs necessitates suspicion of social change or "liberation," because such change would necessarily change the conditions of market interaction and possibly lead to predatory behavior which would incur the risk of State intervention. Finally, though it has not been extensively demonstrated in this chapter, the libertarian desire to roll back the changes in American society since Roosevelt suggests a perspective which is necessarily counter-revolutionary, all leading to the conclusion that if libertarianism belongs anywhere, it is on the Right, and that any disaffection from the forces of the Right must be the result of a distortion in the ideology. It is to the major enabling factor for that distortion that we turn our attention now.

#### II. The Fatal Conceit of Libertarianism

"Yes, Murray Rothbard believed in freedom; and yes, David Koresh believed in God."

-William F. Buckley, Jr.

In his final scholarly work <u>The Fatal Conceit</u>, the avowed classical liberal (read: libertarian) economist Friedrich von Hayek savaged the notion on the part of utopians everywhere that their intelligence was superior to all others, and that they alone could foresee the road to earthly paradise, a tendency to which his title was intended as a caustic reference. We find nothing to quarrel with in Hayek's analysis of the general tendency in the breed, nor with his normative conclusions with respect to the undesirability of utopianism. Implicit in our analysis above was the understanding that, if libertarians excel at anything, it is the advancement of a realistic account of human nature, encumbered irrevocably by ignorance and self-interest which is only

rational within the narrow confines laid out by economics (that is, that even the most irrational preferences are consistent). To that end, much of the most cutting, sophisticated, and diverting attacks on Leftist social/economic theory have come from libertarian quarters, with writers as far back as the French Physiocrat Frederic Bastiat competing for the title of most caustic with the likes of H.L. Mencken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and P.J. O'Rourke and Penn Gillette in the present. What is more, due to the deceptive simplicity and commonsensical nature of libertarian premises, the ideology is itself an ideal one for a satirist to adopt as a means of savaging the status quo. To that end, many of the most economically un-libertarian figures in the present media climate – such as Jon Stewart and Bill Maher – have claimed the label for themselves. This high propensity among libertarians to adopt a biting rhetorical posture lends them inestimable tactical value to the Right generally, for it enables them to serve both as pit bulls and Socratic fools in the discourse with the Left.

But unfortunately, as is always the case with ideologies which specialize in placing their opponents on the defensive, the libertarian tendency to search out fatal conceits, self-deceptions and hypocrisies in their opponents lends itself simultaneously to a posture which at times becomes dangerously un-self critical. What is worse, when libertarians do find themselves placed on the defensive, they often show themselves to be loath to draw on other forms of conservative thought, instead preferring to trap themselves in arguments which often lead them to run in tautological circles, or relegate their otherwise airtight vision of economic philosophy to the realm of political outliers. Once more, as Russell Kirk put it, "the dream of an absolute private freedom is one of those visions which issue from between the gates of ivory; and the dreadful speed with which society moves today flings the libertarians

outward through centrifugal force, even to the outer darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth."<sup>50</sup>

Ironically, while Kirk's assessment of the libertarian condition in the above passage is correct, his pinpointing of flaws is terribly off. Far from being too metaphysical and abstract, it is rather true that if the fatal conceit of Leftist utopianism is excessive self-confidence and political ambition, then the fatal conceit of libertarianism is its false modesty, which only serves to obfuscate the gaping metaphysical holes in the ideology, and which necessitate other impulses for the sake of balance. As we will see, following our discussion of how this conceit manifests itself in libertarian discourse, this false modesty more often leads to otherwise sincere libertarians accepting genuinely un-libertarian ideas than it does to those same libertarians accepting their ignorance.

In the spirit of Meyer, we focus our analysis of this fatal conceit on its manifestations in one thinker – namely, Murray Rothbard, the don of the most stubborn and uncompromising school of libertarianism. Rothbard enjoyed not only a highly colorful and controversial career as an activist (one which veered from Left to Right with more frequency than a severely inebriated school bus driver), but also almost singlehandedly formulated a school of libertarianism distinct for its doctrine pacifism, shrill opposition to religion in politics and bewildering simultaneous commitment to pure anarchy and pure capitalism (though Rothbard later waffled on this second element). Two particularly representative essays of Rothbard's provide a particularly revealing views of his political psychosis, a psychosis which can be all

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid.

the more clearly understood when we consider the dialogue between Rothbard and Frank Meyer, a dialogue which manifested itself both publicly and privately at great length in both men's careers.

Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, in his essay "What Is Libertarianism," published in 1980, Rothbard lays out the fatal conceit of radical libertarianism in all its stunted glory: "The fact is that libertarianism is not and does not pretend to be a complete moral or aesthetic theory; it is only a *political* theory, that is, the important subset of moral theory that deals with the proper role of violence in social life." To be fair to Rothbard, this is an argument which had already been made several times over in different forms by previous libertarians, Frank Meyer among them. Unfortunately for Rothbard, repetition hardly suffices as a solution to the argument's many problems – problems which were all the more pronounced, given Rothbard's previous writings on the subject of libertarianism.

For now, let us ignore the specific problems with Rothbard's advocacy, and simply focus on the general proposition that libertarianism is solely a political theory – a "subset" of moral theory which can, presumably, be grafted onto any moral system available, from deontology to utilitarianism, and also onto any epistemological system, from religious inspiration to dialectical materialism. One has to ask the obvious question of whether the invocation of different moral/ethical/epistemological/aesthetic systems would in any sense change or color the "political theory" being advocated. To take one example, it must be true that, from a utilitarian perspective, the libertarian strictures against coercion are a bit less strict

<sup>51</sup> Murray Rothbard. "What Is Libertarianism." In <u>Conservatism in America Since 1930</u>. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. p. 263. Emphasis Rothbard's.

than they are for a deontologist whose moral system brooks no exceptions at all. The utilitarian, for instance, could argue that if a variety of coercion produces utilitarian results, it may at the very least be *less* evil than another variety of coercion which does not produce such results. In contrast, the deontologist would have to argue that no form of coercion, no matter how beneficial, was justified.

Naturally, either of these two lines of reasoning could lead to very unlibertarian results. Consider, for instance, the utilitarian position that there is a sliding scale of coercion – at what point does the positive utility of a coercive act outweigh the negative utility inherent in its coercive nature? In the absence of an objective measure of utility, this question is exceedingly difficult to answer without appeals to arbitrary, personal concerns. Yet even with this difficulty, aesthetically principled answers could be given to such a question, but because of libertarian's supposedly sub-aesthetic nature, none of the principles underlying such answers could actually be taken from libertarianism itself, unless it were admitted that libertarianism does have an aesthetic standard by which to judge results of policies. As such, utilitarian libertarians would find themselves perpetually stuck with a troubled conscience insofar as they would be continually tormented by various different public policy options, all purporting to offer positive utility in exchange for coercion, but in the absence of any idea of the utility-coercion "exchange rate" (that is, how much utility is worth a little coercion, and how to measure both concepts), these utilitarians would be reduced to picking their preferred State functions basically randomly from the theoretical hat.

Of course, it could be objected that in the absence of any clear standard, libertarian utilitarians ought to refuse any and all coercive acts for their inherent

potential disutility. The trouble with this argument is that there is no particularly obvious way to quantify or substantiate this argument within the consequentialist framework of utilitarianism, other than a rather circular appeal to the inherent evil of coercion. The idea that coercion is inherently evil is itself not necessarily established, as we will show, but for now, let us turn to the problems of deontological libertarianism. Assuming there is an objective, universally agreed-upon definition of "coercion," (which is rather like assuming the sky is red) how could a libertarian argument that all coercion is inherently evil result in un-libertarian conclusions?

The answer is that, if all coercion is evil, then it is also evil by definition to coerce people not to be coercive. And let us not make the mistake of assuming that because institutionalized coercion results in a lower level of coercion all around society, it is more justified. Any references to a lower level of coercion in society are irrelevant to this point, given that utilitarianism is a different moral system, and also given that deontology deals in absolutes. So what happens in the deontological world where no coercion is tolerable at all? Firstly, libertarians have to abandon any and all pretense to supporting minimal government and become anarchists. Secondly, and more importantly, they place themselves in constant danger of suffering subjugation and the unenviable position of perpetual slavery. It is easy to argue that, if everyone accepted that all coercion was immoral, libertarian paradise would ensue, but even in this utopian world, it only takes one amoralist to ruin the entire gig. Worse, once the hypothetical amoral person begins coercing others, libertarians have nothing to do to stop him. Self-defense would be impermissible, given that even self-defense is a form of coercion – that is, it is an attempt to force the other person to stop doing something against their will, through the use of force. The hypothetical deontological libertarian

thus has no option but to involuntarily become a slave to any robber band that happens along, and be gracious about it.

Moreover, returning to the previous assumption, just what is coercion? Libertarians, professional economists and political theorists often use the term, but their definitions are, to say the least, muddled. This is *especially* so from a libertarian perspective, where coercion is often defined, colloquially, as an act performed at gunpoint. This example has a neat emotional appeal, but it raises more questions than it answers. Why gunpoint, for instance? Is it alright if it's at knife point? Presumably, the answer is yes, because a knife could still kill someone. But why should killing be the standard of a coercive threat? What if one performs an act under threat of torture? Or simply under threat of being poked in the eye with a toothpick? Or being poked in the nose with a toothpick? And suppose one were to take the principled stand that death is the standard and physical pain alone is not sufficient to warrant coercion – what then? Then one would run into several undesirable effects for libertarianism. Firstly, such an argument reduces any state action where the penalty for failure to comply is less than the death penalty to voluntarism (hardly a libertarian result, given that most tax laws are enforced not through the threat of death, but simply through the threat of being fined or imprisoned). Secondly, such an argument raises the question of causation. Let us consider the following thought experiment:

Suppose person A lives in an ideal libertarian society where there is no welfare, and only private charity as a social safety net. Suppose also that this person is an unskilled laborer and that, as of yet, only one entrepreneur has decided to start a company where that person's skills can be put to work. Furthermore, this person lacks the capital, the intelligence and the vision to start their own company, and there are,

as of yet, no charities with sufficient capital to sustain this person's life. At this point, given that this person needs money to survive, the threat of firing them is as good as the threat of death, since it necessarily implies starvation under the present conditions. As such, it is clearly true that other entities besides Governments are *capable* of coercion (one need not prove that they will find it necessary to coerce under all circumstances), and could have acceptable libertarian motivations for being coercive. Undeterred, the radical libertarian response often takes one of two forms, neither of which addresses the underlying problem that radical libertarian doctrine has no meaningful check by which to prohibit *all* coercion.

The first response would be to suggest that, on balance, coercion will not necessarily *stop* with the removal of the State, but that it will lessen to the point of negligence. This would be an acceptable response, if one were arguing from a utilitarian perspective, and if one accepted the somewhat fetishistic assumption that businesses are less likely to coerce than governments, despite the fact that both entities operate, in some fashion, on the authority principle. Usually, in response to this latter issue, libertarians assert that, because of competition, businesses do not necessarily have the means to coerce, as the territorial monopolies of Statism do. This is not an argument for destroying the State, but for localism. If it were as easy as 1, 2, 3 to sell one's house and move to the next county the instant one's tiny, microgovernment passes a law one doesn't like, governmental entities would soon also become subject to competitive impulses. Moreover, in the absence of large, concentrated forms of capital, the potential for businesses to become coercive would be easily blunted.

However, the inherent utilitarian bias of this argument *ought* to trouble the deontological libertarians, Rothbard among them, given that it still tolerates some degree of coercion, but simply a lesser one. Against such an idea, many radical libertarians will employ shamelessly unfair analogies to attack the tactic of accepting a little of a bad thing in order to preclude the appearance of larger quantities. "Suppose a society which fervently considers all redheads to be agents of the Devil and therefore to be executed whenever found," Rothbard begins one of his more shrill examples, "The utilitarian-libertarian might well reason: 'While the murder of isolated redheads is deplorable, the executions are small in number; the vast majority of the public, as non-redheads, achieves enormous psychic satisfaction from the public execution of redheads...therefore, it is right and proper for society to execute the redheads." Such a deontological reaction seems to be the only consistent one for many radical anti-coercionists, and yet, put simply, such an argument leaves the hypothetical deontological libertarian in a double bind, because at that point, any society which allows even the possibility of coercion must be fought, meaning that unrestrained capitalism must also be fought since, as demonstrated above, coercion via the threat of death (or even the threat of inconvenience) is not logically impossible in such a society. The only way to avoid this problem is to define anything that is not done by a government as non-coercive, a shamelessly fetishistic and logically fallacious persuasive definition.

In making these arguments, we do not mean to imply that the libertarian vision of a world without government, or without all but the smallest governments, is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Murray Rothbard. <u>For a New Liberty</u>. New York: The MacMillan Company. 1973. p. 25

indefensible. We simply reject the idea that libertarianism can hide behind the notion that it is solely a "political philosophy," when certain ethical systems necessarily leave it stuck in a logical conundrum. Larger questions are at stake, no matter which way the libertarian turns – a problem which Rothbard recognized a good twenty or so odd years before he bothered to write his article clarifying the "myths" of being libertarian. In fact, at various points throughout his career, Rothbard made a habit of referring to a very metaphysical and not-strictly-political ethical system as the basis for libertarianism – the long-forgotten idea of natural law. Yet, far from refuting the necessity of countervailing influences, this particular idea only reinforced the problems inherent in Rothbard's thinking, and in the thinking of radical libertarians generally. Consider, for instance, Rothbard's assertion that libertarianism and natural law are a match because "natural law theory rests on the insight that we live in a world of more than one – in fact, a vast number – of entities, and that each entity can be investigated by man's reason, by his sense perception and mental faculties."53 In other words, one can make the claim that libertarianism is the only viable system not because it is just or virtuous, but simply because it is the most natural. At this point, we arrive back at Rothbard's earlier attack on egalitarianism as a "revolt against nature" – presumably, the same nature that libertarianism aims to promote.

But what is this "nature"? Rothbard argues by analogy that, just as we can tell certain characteristics of copper by observation, so we can tell certain characteristics of human action by observation. "The species man, therefore, has a specifiable nature, as does the world around him, and the ways of interaction between them," Rothbard

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Rothbard, <u>For a New Liberty</u>, p. 25

writes.<sup>54</sup> Naturally, there are a number of problems with grounding one's political philosophy strictly in scientific observation, the most obvious one being that it necessarily involves a fallacy of composition which generalizes from one set of behaviors to suggest that these behaviors are the defining elements of human action. For instance, if one has only ever encountered people who pick their nose, one might conclude (incorrectly) that it is part of human nature to pick one's nose. This fallacy need not be so obvious – one could have a serious debate about which point in human history properly qualifies as the beginning point of analysis. And depending on which point one picks, the formation of governments could itself appear to be a fundamental part of human nature.

Naturally, one could reply that the existence of multiple options does not necessarily negate a theory, if these options can be objectively assessed using reason. This is true, but in the case of Rothbard's natural law arguments, the problem is not that multiple options exist, but that they *cannot* be objectively assessed using reason, but rather require that one resort to subjective personal aesthetics. For an example, let us look at Rothbard's attempt to defend the notion that every individual has a "right to self-ownership" against the idea that "a certain class of people, A, have the right to own another class, B." Rothbard writes:

"The first alternative implies that while Class A deserves the rights of being human, Class B is in reality subhuman and therefore deserves no such rights. But since they *are* indeed human beings, the first alternative contradicts itself in denying natural human rights to one set of humans. Moreover, as we shall see, allowing Class

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Ibid.

A to own Class B means that the former is allowed to exploit, and therefore to live parasitically, at the expense of the latter. But this parasitism itself violates the basic economic requirement for life: production and exchange."55

The amount of assumptions in this passage are stunning – firstly, and most obviously, Rothbard assumes that one can generalize rights from natural law, which does not necessarily follow, unless one rejects the idea that what ought to be is divorced from what is (which Rothbard does). Yet, even if we assume that rights can be generalized from science, the necessity of aesthetics still presents itself. A quick look at the words used is instructive – "subhuman," "exploit," "parasitism." It is completely unclear why Rothbard believes that arguing for a difference of the rights that different people enjoy implies that one group is "subhuman." One could argue that the people who enjoy different rights are different, but it hardly follows that they are subhuman, as evidenced by the thinking of Aristotle (another theorist of natural law, by the way), who took precisely the position Rothbard is attempting to refute: "any human being that by nature belongs not to himself but to another is by nature a slave; and a human being belongs to another whenever, in spite of being a man, he is a piece of property."<sup>56</sup> Rothbard's appellation thus becomes not a matter of objective reality, but of cultural assumption, since it certainly could have been taken for granted in Aristotle's time that slavery was natural, whereas today it strikes the average person as unethical, barbaric and an indication of subhumanity. Moreover, the idea that owning a person involves "exploiting" them is also a loaded idea, since

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Rothbard, For a New Liberty, p. 27

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Aristotle. <u>The Politics</u>. London: The Penguin Group. 1992. p. 65. Emphasis mine.

"exploitation" implies an ethical and aesthetic judgment about a particular set of social relations.

Whatever one believes about slavery, the implication is clear – objective reason itself is value-blind, and thus *cannot* provide us with a set of normative prescriptions about what ought and ought not to be done, in the absence of aesthetic judgments. As such, any analysis of "natural law" applied to humans by humans runs into a gigantic ontological problem – that it cannot avoid being colored by the aesthetic judgments and emotional desires of the person in question, and thus runs the danger of becoming a post hoc, ergo prompter hoc fallacy, with the data selected to fit the aesthetically-defined conclusion. In the days of Aristotle, for instance, one can argue that because slavery is universal, it must be natural, whereas today, when the historical veil of ignorance which the Ancient Greeks suffered from no longer exists, we look back on the practice with horror. Neither position was fully logical, but both of them were definitely consistent with the social codes of the time, and the historical consciousness of the time. This suggests something not terribly politically important, but metaphysically devastating, for libertarians – that reason alone is insufficient to determine normative political goals, but rather that all forms of moralizing and normative strategizing involve the operation of reason within tradition. To quote Frank Meyer: "The essence of civilization, however, is tradition: no single generation of men can of itself discover the proper ends of human existence....[conservatism] insists, if civilization is to be preserved, that reason operate within tradition and that

political freedom is only effectively achieved when the bulwarks of civilizational order are preserved."<sup>57</sup>

At this point, it could be easily concluded that libertarianism, given that it rests on such thin metaphysical foundations, is in fact a red herring ideology, devoid of substance. Worse, some libertarians might conclude that the formulation of even more abstruse metaphysical justifications for their ideas are in order, and might venture even further down the road of madly attempting to define the indefinable. Both conclusions are misguided – the solution to the false modesty of the libertarian fatal conceit is not to embrace ambitious utopianism, but to embrace genuine modesty by accepting that libertarianism's fundamental claims – that markets are superior to governments, and that individual rights ought to be tantamount – are subject to, and borne out by, the vicissitudes of history, and ought properly to focus on the realm of the prudential here and now, rather than trying to stand alone as a secular religion which topples the throne of God. To that end, we contend that libertarian critiques of public policy and of Statist political theory are at their best when they seek rapprochement with a generalized conservatism aimed at the preservation of virtue, rather than at the preservation of a particular political agenda, and that libertarian critiques are at their best when they focus on the realm of the prudential, the economic and the polemical. A classic example of precisely this sort of genuine libertarian modesty comes from Grover Norquist, who remarked once that "it's not

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Frank Meyer. "Libertarianism or Libertinism?" In <u>Conservatism in America since 1930.</u> Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. p. 261

necessary for the members of the leave us alone coalition to agree on what to do in their spare time – merely that they agree that they want to be left alone."58

Such a claim will doubtlessly inspire criticism – indeed, one obvious objection that could be advanced, given the relative severity of our analysis to this point, as well as the peculiarly demanding argumentative burden we accepted at the outset, is that this entire project has been disingenuous in at least one respect – that is, despite our claims to impartiality and desire for an equal fusion, critics may argue that our analysis is actually biased in favor of (or against) one or the other schools of conservative thought. We obviously deny such a claim, but acknowledge the potential for its existence. It is easy to misread the structure of our argument as biased, when in fact, that structure, and the vision of conservative ideology it propounds, is more substantive than mere ideological bias – it is based on a particular understanding of the internal dynamics of the conservative movement.

As we have noted in previous chapters, there is an ideological division of labor at work in conservative thought, and there has been since the original fusionist project. However, unlike the original project, in which both schools entertained certain abstract values, which were made to play off each other, the current system is more complex, especially in the face of conservatism now being a philosophy which has proven itself capable of governance. As such, our analysis of each school of thought is primarily oriented toward demonstrating how that school's specialized role in conservative thought has become so entrenched by this point that it precludes any

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Grover Norquist. "Right Online Conference: Grover Norquist." <u>Hot Air Online</u>. July 19, 2008. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://hotair.com/archives/2008/07/19/right-online-conference-grover-norquist/">http://hotair.com/archives/2008/07/19/right-online-conference-grover-norquist/</a>.

attempt to reach outside that specialized role, and invited the introduction of liberal corruption into whatever ideology attempted to go beyond its set position. Thus, the strictness with which we chastise libertarians, or any other school of conservative thought, is based not on bias against them, but on a conviction that their particular concerns are indispensable in some respect to the conservative movement, and that those concerns have become dangerously muddled by an attempt to universalize them into a comprehensive ideology. We will have more to say about what the libertarian role in the conservative division of labor is in the next section, but for now, let it suffice to say that we believe libertarians are every bit as vital to conservatism as any other group, hence our desire to challenge erroneous permutations of their ideology. Were they truly worthless, we would have ignored them.

One further and, we think, persuasive, objection exists. There is certainly no point in suggesting that our primary target, Murray Rothbard, is representative of all libertarians, and at this point, a large number of libertarians who are, say, Aristotelians, or who follow the work of Robert Nozick, might object that Rothbard is nothing but a living, breathing strawman. We respond that this piece is aimed not at proving that *all* libertarians are incoherent thinkers, but rather that only those libertarians who have actual theoretical reasons for opposing an alliance with other wings of the conservative movement are incoherent. Rothbard, whatever else he may have been, was an insufferable thorn in the side of conservatives everywhere by virtue of his determination to turn his own, rather lazy brand of libertarian thinking into a political ideology independent of, and opposed to, its natural allies. Virtue libertarians and Nozickians have never been susceptible to this sort of stubborn separatism — indeed, they have tended to work very well with other members of the conservative

movement. And well they should, for libertarians cannot survive, either ideologically or practically, without alliances. The trouble is that often, they make the wrong alliances, and so we now turn to an analysis of the accusations of libertarian temptation toward complicity with the Left.

## III. Fellow Travelers With the Revolt Against Nature: The Libertarian Temptations

"Capitalism is the one system that requires absolute objective law, yet they want to combine capitalism and anarchism. That is worse than anything the New Left has proposed. It's a mockery of philosophy and ideology."
-Ayn Rand

Having just laid out the problems inherent in libertarian ideology, we now turn to two questions – what the role of libertarianism is, properly speaking, in conservative discourse, and whether libertarianism is truly social liberalism warmed over – a claim made with great frequency, especially by social conservatives and paleoconservatives. With respect to the first question, we argue that the libertarians are themselves hyper-aware of their ideological role – an awareness which has become so fierce that it has actually become part and parcel with their response to detractors. As we noted above, the "fatal conceit" of libertarianism is that it claims to be solely a political philosophy; or, to be more specific, it aspires to be seen as a full-scale ideology while using its supposed status as a political philosophy to avoid the responsibilities associated with ideological status (for instance, the formulation and defense of moral claims). The root idea that libertarianism is solely a political philosophy, however, is not incorrect, though we think the choice of label is imperfect – libertarianism is primarily an *economic* philosophy with some political and moral implications.

As such, our criticism of libertarianism for transforming into a sort of "Church of the Copybook Headings" (to use the title of this chapter) is grounded on a notion that the deification of economic theory leads to a willful moral, cultural and political obtuseness which is not only potentially undesirable, but a crippling blind spot at the level of philosophical consistency. Libertarianism is supremely gifted at answering questions of practicality, especially as they relate to cost-benefit analysis and the analysis of incentives. It is *not* gifted, nor should it be, at answering larger questions such as what the purpose of human existence is. This inability ties in with the second question we raise, since every stab libertarians have made at answering large philosophical questions questions has either been based on shallow mathematical tautologies, or has reduced it to the willing pawn of liberal social permissiveness, whose moral claims are clearer, and whose mission holds a greater emotional appeal than the dry libertarian concern with practicality. This concern is vital for any practical movement, but it needs cushioning with more abstract elements, lest it be seduced by the fever dreams of its enemies.

An example from literature is illustrative – much as Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge, who had sounded like quite the libertarian when he cited "the surplus population" as a reason not to give to charity, was seemingly completely convinced of a socialist "ghost of an idea" by his feverish dreams of a seemingly wasted and loveless past, a vibrant and authentic present, and a future dominated by unpopularity, libertarians are easily seduced by the appearance of ill-defined, ghostly abstractions. Had Scrooge had a paleoconservative on hand to extol the virtues of a traditional, ascetic and chaste past, he might have found the Ghost of Christmas Past a bit sentimental. What is more, had he had a neoconservative around to point out the

pervasive and unchanging nature of ignorance and want as necessary characteristics of the human condition, he might have told the Ghost of Christmas Present to go back to teaching sociology. Finally, had he had a religious conservative around to point out the rewards for a virtuous life in an afterlife, thus offsetting the fear of an ignominious death, he might have rejected the Ghost of Christmas Future as suggesting that he live by poll numbers. In short, libertarianism deprived of a moral foundation reduces to an arbitrary aesthetic and economic preference for what often looks like outright miserliness, and which can be swept along far too easily by whatever intellectual fad happens along. As Brent Bozell observed, "what the freedom-first people fail to understand is that the Communist proposal to 'change man' is an answer to a problem they have created. The Communist answer is to give man a nature, and thus a purpose outside of himself." <sup>59</sup>

Thus we come to the question of whether libertarianism is truly social liberalism warmed over, and while individual libertarians may suggest uncomfortable answers to this question, we answer that the ideology itself is not to blame. To be sure, libertarianism's conservative detractors have plenty of examples to use as test cases—certain libertarian thinkers (Murray Rothbard, Ralph Nader and Karl Hess, to name a few) have shown a disconcerting willingness to defect to the Left, and such a threat certainly remains vital today, as many libertarians have begun to openly question whether the Republican party and its conservative bas is really open to their concerns. <sup>60</sup> To be sure, some of the current enthusiasm over libertarian efforts to ally

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Bozell, p. 206

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Brink Lindsey and David Boaz are two such prominent skeptics within the mainstream libertarian movement.

with the Left springs from an understandable and correct instinct on the part of libertarians that the last Republican President was hostile to their concerns, but a more serious and more destructive urge is also present. To quote one very high profile defector to the Left:

"On social issues, we are seeing a government aggressively seeking to meddle in people's bedrooms, doctor's offices, and churches. They want to dictate when life begins, when life ends, and which consenting adults can marry. They want to pass a new Amendment eliminating the non-existent threat posed by flag burning—a serious effort to limit the freedoms protected by the First Amendment. And the long-time Republican dodge on such issues—that it merely wanted to let the states decide such issues—was exposed as hogwash by the Schiavo fiasco." <sup>61</sup>

Taken at face value, this passage appears fairly nonthreatening – after all, so long as the "churches" are kept in the mix, one could argue that it is indeed true that the government has no place in dictating the matters enumerated above. Libertarians will swear up and down that such is the case, and many Leftists appropriate the same rhetoric when making their case not just for flag burning, gay marriage and abortion, but for all kinds of other divergent tastes. What is bad is that some libertarians believe that, because Leftists appropriate their rhetoric, they automatically *believe it*. What is worse is when libertarians sometimes adopt a too-cavalier attitude not just toward government enforcement of morality, but *all* communal morality – an attitude which sometimes verges on irrationally hostile. Thus, while libertarianism need not imply social liberalism, to the extent that it emphasizes freedom without a consonant understanding of how the concept is checked by responsibility, it does verge into dangerous territory, as per Brent Bozell's objections, detailed in Chapter 1.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Markos Moulitsas. "The Case for the Libertarian Democrat." <u>Cato Online</u>. October 2, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/10/02/markos-moulitsas/the-case-forthe-libertarian-democrat/">http://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/10/02/markos-moulitsas/the-case-forthe-libertarian-democrat/</a>.

However, the left-libertarian hostility to the idea that social norms are a valuable source of restraint upon human beings is not only fatal to the libertarian doctrine, but it is utterly unnecessary as a matter of ideology. Assuming that government can actually enforce certain brands of morality through legislation (contra Bozell, not an unreasonable assumption), the problem with government enforcement of morality, as any libertarian will fondly and correctly point out, is that small numbers of imperfect human beings are in charge of deciding which morality to enforce. This is not an argument against morality being enforced by society itself, wherein the invisible hand of the market operates not simply at the economic level, but also at the social level, and weeds out the bad social norms simply by having them die out. However, because many libertarians invested themselves in the 60's counterculture as a reaction against their expulsion by the Right, they are far too eager to dismiss the idea that civil society (in contrast to the State) has a right to dictate what moral codes people ought to follow. This idea that freedom can exist even when people are totally unrestrained by society is emotionally appealing on some level, but ultimately terribly incoherent. Consider the following thought experiment from David Frum:

"Suppose a young couple in a conservative town believes that marriage is a hypocritical institution and determines to live together without it. They attempt to rent an apartment together – and no landlady will accept them. The young man is fired from his job; the girl is told to her face by her boss that she is a slut. When he hears about their immoral way of life, the owner of their favorite restaurant refuses to seat them any longer. Eventually the two have a son. When the boy applies to the local private college, he is denied a scholarship because of his illegitimacy. None of these manifestations of moral outrage involves any action at all by any branch of government. Every one of them would have been legal – and quite likely to happen – in the United States forty years ago. Every one of them would be illegal today...In other words, our young couple has been granted extraordinary protection against majoritarian morality – but only because the behavior and opinions of everyone around them have been subjected to the power of big government to an extent that

would have amazed Americans half a century ago. Virtually everything now described as discrimination was once seen as an expression of a fundamental right: the landlady, the restaurant and the man's employer were exercising their right of contract; the girl's employer was exercising his right of speech; and the college was exercising its right of freedom of association and (if a church school) freedom of religion. To liberate the young couple from the tyranny of the majority's morality, the government had to abridge the ancient common law rights of everyone else in the community."<sup>62</sup>

This little philosophical problem, naturally, does not mean that libertarians cannot have an argument with other thinkers/politicians over what forms of social sanction ought to be put into law by the State, as opposed to society at large, but it does raise a very serious problem with objecting to such morality-based laws simply because they are morality-based. The correct libertarian response ought to be that they are unenforceable and ineffective at their pronounced goal, as well as (if they are federal regulations) probably unconstitutional. However, this is not how social liberals attack such laws – rather, they argue that the laws in question prohibit conduct which is not actually immoral. Consider, for instance, the liberal argument that abortion is not murder, but "choice," or the argument that homosexuality is actually a valid expression of love, or the argument that drug use heightens the consciousness. Without passing judgment on any of these arguments as a matter of actual morality, the underlying trend is clear – liberals do not attack social issues on the grounds that legislation fails to address the issue, but rather by denying that the issue is morally relevant at all, and sometimes even by accusing those who disagree of being morally degenerate themselves.

This is *not* a libertarian position *at all* for a very simple reason – the libertarian attack on laws for being ineffective is not a claim about their overall

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> David Frum. <u>Dead Right</u>. New York: Basic Books. 1994. p. 163

relative injustice. Rather, it is a claim about their inefficiency in achieving their stated goals, which are presumed to be desirable as matters of morality, given that the libertarian is offering advice on how to achieve them more capably. By contrast, the socially liberal argument is a claim about justice insofar as it argues that any morally based law is itself unjust because it pursues an unjust end (ie the imposition of a particular form of morality – never mind that viewing moral sanction as immoral is a self-refuting claim). Moreover, given the fact that social liberalism, to the extent that it aspires to be liberalism, must dovetail with economic liberalism/socialism, it should be fairly clear that the underlying ideological concern is not actually with liberty at all, but actually with radical egalitarianism. After all, as Rothbard notes, holding egalitarianism as an ideal requires that all elements of the human condition be made equal, including the consequences of one's actions. As such, the social liberal would attack not only the law mandating a particular form of morality, but also the spontaneous social consequences of trespassing on that form of morality, given that for them, any and all social norms are inherently unjust because they violate the necessarily equal and benevolent nature of man by imposing arbitrary consequences for actions which are essentially equally valid.

Given how thoroughly such a doctrine refutes the libertarian concern for preserving natural inequality, the temptation of libertarians to fall for this highly hostile idea ought to appear bewildering. Yet such is the power of the tacit aestheticism of libertarian ideas, that it can be paradoxically moved to make common cause with principled opponents of civilization in the pursuit of what may appear as liberty, but often devolves to barbarity. This tendency has been nicknamed by various sources as the libertarian tendency towards "libertinism," but this term does not do it

justice, as it fails to capture the peculiar moral nature of the temptation. The term "libertine" tends to imply aimless hedonism, but as history shows, such behaviors tend to flower whether communal moral strictures exist or not, and sometimes become even more pervasive in the face of legal repercussions.

One thing is certain – genuine libertines do not seek to spoil others' fun, whether it is piously motivated or not. Only evangelists for libertinism, who see libertinism as a brave struggle of moral courage against the oppressive strictures of society and of nature itself, could do that. Of course, given that we have already established that libertarianism is cold to attacks on the spontaneous and natural strictures of society and the market, that it belongs on the Right, and that as an ideology, it must call on higher moral arbiters than the vicissitudes of an aesthetically-corruptible rationalism, such evangelism is out of the question, and can only lead to chaos and old night. Otherwise, to quote Russell Kirk, "the more intelligent and conscientious persons within the libertarian remnant will tend to settle for politics as the art of the possible, so shifting into the conservative camp. At the Last Judgment, libertarianism may find itself reduced to a minority of one, and its name will be not Legion, but Rothbard."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Russell Kirk, "Chirping Sectaries," <a href="http://www.mmisi.org/ma/25\_04/kirk.pdf">http://www.mmisi.org/ma/25\_04/kirk.pdf</a>>.

## Chapter 3: Wrapped in the Flag and Carrying a Cross of Gold - The Religious Right

"The Old Right's 'live and let live' idea is not reflective of Christian social teachings."

-Paul Weyrich

"In reality, theocracy in Biblical law is the closest thing to a radical libertarianism that can be had."

-Rousas John Rushdoony

On March 28, 1986, the musician Frank Zappa was featured as a guest on the popular TV show *Crossfire* opposite conservative Christian columnist John Lofton, to discuss the topic of music censorship. The broadcast hastily became heated, as Lofton accused Zappa of peddling "garbage" and of being "part of the problem," whereas Zappa snapped, "Kiss my a\*\*." "Are you an anarchist?" Lofton gasped. "I consider this national defense, pal, our families are under attack!" "The biggest threat to America today is not Communism, it's moving America toward a fascist theocracy," Zappa shot back, causing the entire studio to erupt. <sup>64</sup>

While Lofton's affiliation with the Republican Party would eventually end, leading to him professing to be a "recovering Republican" and joining the Constitution Party, his twin accusations of support for moral anarchy and destruction of the family would soon become favorite taglines of the religiously motivated elements of the conservative movement. Similarly, while Zappa *was* a self-described conservative and said do in the same broadcast, his twin accusations of fascism and

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 $<sup>^{64}</sup>$  Anonymous. "Frank Zappa on Crossfire." Youtube. April 10, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ISil7IHzxc">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ISil7IHzxc>.</a>

support for theocracy against a religiously inclined opponent like Lofton would go on to become highly popular and dubiously justified attack lines used by the Left against their opponents. As an example, during the Bush administration, two books came out, one titled <a href="Manerican Fascists">American Fascists</a> and the other titled <a href="Manerican Theocracy">American Theocracy</a>, both dealing with precisely the same subject matter: how the Religious right was allegedly attempting to summarily destroy the Constitution and wipe out religious pluralism in America. Even among some conservatives (*especially* libertarians), the Religious right developed a tendency to inspire revulsion, condescension and fear, despite the fact that it was often their existence as a voting bloc which kept the conservative movement solvent, especially during rough elections.

This particular controversy between libertarianism and religiosity is hardly a new phenomenon on the Right. As we already established in Chapter 1, the conflict between doctrines of moral absolutism and doctrines of moral self-determination inherent in American conservatism has deep roots in the original conflict between traditionalists and libertarians – a conflict which inspired the original brand of fusionism. Many conservative thinkers today, especially the ones who view the Religious right as a misunderstood asset of the Right<sup>65</sup>, will either point to the original fusionist conflict between thinkers such as Russell Kirk and Frank Meyer as evidence that the whole debate over the religious Right is simply a function of conservatives failing to understand their own intellectual history, or try to suggest similar commonalities between the libertarian agenda and the religious agenda to those offered by Meyer in his original formulation.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Grover Norquist, David Frum, Richard Viguerie and Ramesh Ponnoru, to name a few.

Of these two approaches, the latter is almost uniformly more successful at the tactical level, but it often fails to succeed as a doctrinal move because of the implicit assumption on the part of the hostile combatants that, by choosing to only concentrate on areas of common interest, the religious Right's inevitable drag-out conflict with the libertarians has simply been postponed, rather than stopped permanently. Such an assumption is common both on the libertarian side of the aisle, which immediately jumps to blaming the religious Right during times of trouble 66, and on the religious side, which jumps to blaming the libertarians in a similar fashion. 67 Such a response is not only tactically inconvenient for all participants but also, we argue, based on incorrect premises. Rather, the problem with the current discourse surrounding the religious Right relies, firstly, on a misunderstanding surrounding the shifting rhetorical character of modern religious moral traditionalism, and secondly, an intellectual failure to probe the programmatic elements of the religious Right's allegedly "theocratic" agenda, under the assumption that all theocracy implies the same divinely mandated requirements.

To that end, in this chapter we begin with an exegesis of the differences between the politics of moral complacency which originally constituted the traditionalist wing of conservatism and the politics of moral agency which forms the backbone of modern conservative Christian activism. Then, having demonstrated that

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> For a sample of such an argument, see Andrew Sullivan. <u>The Conservative Soul</u>. New York: Harper Collins. 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> A particularly egregious example of this attitude came from former Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, who told a reporter from the Huffington Post that "The greatest threat to classic Republicanism is not liberalism; it's this new brand of libertarianism, which is social liberalism and economic conservatism, but it's a heartless, callous, soulless type of economic conservatism." Source: <a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/will-mari/huckabee-on-the-next-repu\_b\_103556.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/will-mari/huckabee-on-the-next-repu\_b\_103556.html</a>>.

the religious Right is neither a necessary outgrowth of the old traditionalism nor a necessarily anti-libertarian force, move to a critique of the political "heresy" inherent in purely "theocratic" religious conservative thinking and suggest some areas of incompleteness for which the hypothetical Christian conservative must turn to other ideological fellow travelers for instance. Finally, we close with an analysis of the enduring conflicts between secular conservatives (especially libertarians) and religious conservatives, with a discussion of how these conflicts might be ideologically resolved.

## I. The Reconstruction Will Be Televised: Religious Conservatism and the Decline of Morality

"In the twentieth century, evangelical Christians in America have naively accepted the role assigned to us by an anti-religious, anti-Christian consensus in society. We have been relegated to a cultural backwater, where we are meant to paddle around content in the knowledge that we are merely allowed to exist."

-Franky Schaeffer

It is worth noting at the outset that, whatever their differences, one point on which the older school of traditionalists emphatically agree with the contemporary religious Right is the argument that contemporary society has either lost, or is in the process of losing, its sense of right and wrong - a sense of right and wrong which they assume derives from Judeo-Christian morality. The completeness of the evidence behind this claim varies depending on the thinker, and in many cases, the claim itself raises at least as many questions than aims to answer, both within conservative movement discourse and without.<sup>68</sup> Still, whatever the particular permutations, one

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> For instance, some thinkers provide no clear answer as to what event/idea precipitated the alleged slide into moral decay, or how fast this decay is proceeding.

cannot deny the fact that the same basic claim is being made by the two groups, though it colors them in very different ways. The simplest way to compartmentalize these many differences is to note that while the traditionalist school of conservative thought reacts to moral decline primarily with a complacent confidence that the decline will slow or reverse spontaneously, the religious school of conservative thought reacts to the same perceived phenomenon with a position of hardened resistance fueled by crusading moralistic fervor.

Firstly, let us deal with the traditionalists. Specifically, consider the two (arguably) formative works of the traditionalist school of thought – namely, Richard Weaver's polemical essay Ideas Have Consequences and Russell Kirk's massive intellectual-historical omnibus The Conservative Mind. While neither work expresses a total absence of passion, and later editions of both take a more optimistic tone, the original edition of Kirk's work is particularly revealing as to the author's sympathies. Though the despairing tone of the work's original title, "The Conservative Rout," has been mostly purged from the work, occasional flashes appear – the last chapter, for instance, is titled "The Conservative Retrogression," a far cry from the more optimistic title of later editions ("Conservatives' Promise"). The text is not much more sanguine, as the best hope Kirk can offer to conservatively inclined political thinkers is a vague rumination on the permanence of conservative poetry: "Not to the romantic liberal idealist, nor to the glowering proletarian poet, nor to the versifying nihilist, can a chastened generation turn," Kirk writes. "They must look, instead, to the poetic defenders of normality, though for a time such poets lay under a cloud."69

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Russell Kirk. <u>The Conservative Mind</u>. Washington, DC: Regnery Press. 2006. p. 499

Kirk offers no practical advice on how this "cloud" can be lifted, nor any reassurance as to how long such a lifting could take, and on his own terms, this is not necessary, given that he believes society will inevitably recoil from hedonistic liberalism, and takes this belief as a release from responsibility for hastening the process about. Kirk's ideal conservative is not a figure given to grand political gestures, for these destabilize the permanence of any existing order. Rather, the primary virtue which Kirk ascribes to his conservative subjects is an almost glacial political sense of patience and restraint. Rather than attempting to explode the foundations of liberalism, Kirk prefers to slowly whittle them down with the aid of the historical elements. This position frees him from the burden of enunciating precise qualifications for conservative actors — an appropriate approach, given that most of his definitions on are negative in character. Perhaps the most stunningly modest and complacent of all of Kirk's observations is his statement that "The conservative need not be a practical politician."

And if Kirk's dry dismissal of the danger posed by liberalism seems abstract, it is nothing to the almost anachronistic sense of detachment offered by Weaver, who argues that "it was Wiliam of Occam who propounded the fateful doctrine of nominalism" which led to the decline of Western civilization. <sup>71</sup> Uncharitable readers could charge that Weaver's pessimistic diagnosis of the philosophical fall of man as a phenomenon originating in the middle ages is evidence of nothing so much as complete alienation from modern society. At the surface, Weaver does much to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> Kirk, p. 497

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Richard Weaver. <u>Ideas Have Consequences</u>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1948. p. 3

bolster this notion, as he peppers his text with such lines as "the present is a line, without width; the future only a screen in our minds on which we project combinations of memory." Whatever the philosophical merits of Weaver's position, even the gentlest readers would amid that, as incitements to political action go, more effective examples could be easily formulated. Yet, this complaint would miss the point of Weaver's writing entirely, since inciting short-lived, violent and temporal passions would have been the furthest thing from his mind – more important was the contemplation of the permanent things which, by their very permanency, could not be undermined by the irascibility of passion-driven modern politics. Indeed, the traditionalist project of Kirk and Weaver could be easily described as the formulation of a politics of inertia whereby all the temporal failures of the human condition could be undone by the patient exercise of time.

While this patient style of philosophy doubtlessly seemed appropriate as a dissenting response to the highly popular, if equally revolutionary, New Deal, the powerless context in which it was formulated molded it such that it could easily be criticized for leaving too much to chance. As such, when evangelical activists of the late 70's movement known as the "New Right" began considering alliances with the conservative movement at a time when the latter *was* exhibiting symptoms of genuine political muscle, it was obvious that neither they nor the conservative movement generally were interested in a philosophical consolation prize. Whereas the original traditionalist vanguard had been fiercely anti-democratic, focused almost entirely on rhetorical criticism, and had come almost exclusively from the scholastic class, the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Weaver, p. 176

New Right generally, and evangelicals in particular, were a populist movement, interested mainly in cultural problems, and innately hostile toward the established intelligentsia. As such, two problems with the existing fusionist synthesis presented themselves coextensively with their rise.

The first of these problems was the aforementioned tonal shift. Because traditionalists were by-and-large supremely confident that their anti-abstract, timeless set of self-evident truths would eventually win over the majority of people spontaneously, the idea of concentrating their intellectual and political resources on rolling back the more permanent, structural/economic adjustments made by liberalism could be easily rationalized as a means to ensure that, once everyone *did* come around to their views, society would be unencumbered by harmful traditions passed down from the liberal revolution. Moreover, because traditionalists saw themselves as ahead of the curve amidst political adolescents, the idea of marshalling any sort of popular support was antithetical to their political interests, thus removing any potential for mob-enforced morality of the type libertarians feared. Thus, the teleological nature of traditionalist analysis negated any implied need for political activism and freed them up to provide the theoretical underpinnings for a conservative movement which was, in broad strokes, fundamentally libertarian.

However, both this tone of disinterested scorn for the masses and its attendant anti-activist bent were utterly alien to the New Right, who saw themselves as under attack from all sides, and were in no hurry to make nice about philosophy when their values and, in some cases, their sovereignty, were under assault. Paul Weyrich summed this philosophy up neatly when he wrote that "the Old Right could make its objections soundly and completely, in scholarly publications. The only

problem was that it was not speaking in the language of the ordinary man. The language was incomprehensible, and what is incomprehensible is politically irrelevant. We need intellectual discussions, and studies, and experts who know their field through and through...but we also need someone to translate the significant points and the ramifications, if we are to pursue truth in political life." More sternly still, Jerry Falwell wrote that "I do not believe that America will be turned around solely by working in the areas of politics, economics, and defense, as important as these may be. These are crucial issues that face us in the 1980's, but America can only be turned around as her people make godly, moral choices." In other words, the here and now was preeminent, and if it was a choice between doing what had to be done or being philosophically correct on all the particulars, the philosophy came second.

From the fusionist perspective, this difference in tone presented a practical problem, if not a philosophical one. Previous battles between libertarians and traditionalists had taken place almost entirely at the level of speculative theory, with Meyer alleging not that the theories of Weaver, Kirk et al led inexorably toward the forceful imposition of virtue, but that they implied such a necessity or, worse, offered no practical obstacles to such a forceful imposition. However, once these differences had been hammered out on the printed page, with the conclusion reached that neither libertarians nor traditionalists were theoretically opposed to morality in politics, the two groups could proceed with their shared goal of rolling back liberal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> Paul Weyrich. "Blue Collar or Blue Blood?" In <u>The New Right Papers</u>. Robert Whitaker, ed. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1980. p. 50

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Jerry Falwell. <u>Listen, America!</u> New York: Bantam Books. 1980. p. 7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> See Frank Meyer. "A Rebel In Search of Tradition." In <u>Conservatism in America since 1930</u>. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. P. 123

economic policies. The implicit theoretical understanding that traditionalist morality was connoted by the substantive economic policies of libertarianism had, for the traditionalists, been enough to justify the alliance.

Yet, when the new evangelical traditionalism entered the picture, the division of labor dramatically changed, as the question of theoretical beliefs was sidelined and the fusionist consensus found itself confronted by a new standard of political loyalty. Suddenly, the defining standard of whether someone was doing good work for the movement was not whether they defended the theoretical importance of the values of rival schools, but whether they actually put in practical effort to advance those values. This alone would not necessarily be objectionable, except for the fact that, when one looked at the means by which New Right activists advanced their values, many of them could have appeared positively un-libertarian.

For instance, when confronted by a set of textbooks which included items they found educationally suspect, New Right activists in Kanawha County, West Virginia tried to get the books banned. This alone wasn't necessarily an un-libertarian move — both localism and opposition to compulsory education are well-established elements of libertarian doctrine — but the demands of the activists in question, as well as the tactics they used, certainly could hardly have endeared them to libertarians whose primary concern was the lessening of coercion, as per our discussion in Chapter 2.

According to William Martin, author of With God On Our Side, "while the Textbook Review Committee formed and began its work, one school was dynamited, two others were firebombed, and several were damaged by gunfire and vandalism. Two men were wounded by gunfire, one as he tried to cross a picket line and the other, a protestor, shot through the heart by a pro-book demonstrator who said he thought he

was being attacked." Moreover, Martin quotes a preacher who supported the books as arguing that, "What we saw in that struggle…was a real religious crusade. If you stepped in front of it and challenged it in any way, you were immediately demonized and seen as the enemy, as the Antichrist." To be sure, this description is biased, given its liberal source, but it exemplifies one of many ways in which skeptical forces (especially libertarians who believed that choice was essential for virtue to exist) could view the New Right's tactics as dangerously authoritarian.

Still, all of this could have been fixed had it not been for the second problem which presented itself for the fusionist consensus – namely, the fact that the New Right viewed precisely this consensus as a reason for conservative failure. In fact, from the perspective of many members of the insurgent New Right, it is not a stretch to say that established voices of libertarian/traditionalist opinion were viewed as, at best, quaint academic political/journalist irrelevances and, at worst, as active parts of the entire corrupt establishment. Taking the more charitable view were thinkers such as Paul Weyrich, who argued that "The New Right differs from the old in its value-orientation, which translates to the 'social issues' in the current political jargon. The Old Right gives a primacy to laissez-faire economics. To be sure, we of the New Right believe strongly in free enterprise and individual initiative, and we oppose the expansion of government interference with individual lives. However...the Old Right's 'live and let live' idea is not reflective of Christian social teachings [and] a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> William Martin. With God On Our Side. New York: Broadway Books. 1996. pp. 128-129 and 131

common assumption of New Right activists is that government should support certain moral truths."<sup>77</sup>

However, on one point, Weyrich was ominously stern: "The Old Right was not taken seriously as a political force in Washington. To some degree that was the result of a self-fulfilling prophecy, since these conservatives viewed themselves as the last, futile fingers in the dike of rampaging liberalism. I emphasize the word futile." In other words, though Weyrich and his New Right brethren disagreed with the libertarians over priorities, their real targets were the traditionalists who had acquiesced in the trampling of their principles. The core premise of Weyrich's argument was an explicit challenge to the fusionist division of labor, if not to all its ideological claims. Thus, the New Right represented the first of many examples of the incompleteness of Meyer's fusionism, given its differing historical awareness in the face of the new issues of the 60's and 70's. Unlike their traditionalist predecessors, who saw, for instance, student rebellions as indicative of mere boredom, the Religious right saw them as a definitive and culturally entrenched threat to the moral urges which had produced a return to natural conservatism.

It should be noted that, despite our focus on the differences between traditionalism and New Right religious conservatism, there were truthfully very few substantive ideological differences – the shift was almost solely a matter of tone, a shift which many traditionalists (especially Russell Kirk, though he fretted about their

<sup>77</sup> Weyrich, <u>The New Right Papers</u>, p. 53

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Weyrich, p. 54

antipathy toward intellectual analysis <sup>79</sup>) welcomed warmly and with some measure of relief. In fact, though they did not say so, the traditionalists may have viewed the Religious right as the grassroots vanguard of the inevitable shift back towards conservative morality which they had predicted. The challenge to fusionism which Religious conservatives offered, grounded though it may have been in anger at the traditionalists for not throwing their weight around more, encountered almost none of its opposition from traditionalist circles, and indeed, by the late 80's, Russell Kirk was a fixture of Weyrich's Heritage Foundation. However, as we will see in the last section of this chapter, the tonal shift from a politics of complacent patience/metaphysical despair toward a politics of crusading moral revival was, and remains, a truly controversial element among elements of the movement which suddenly found themselves forced to cooperate with people for whom the maintenance of communal virtue was the preeminent, if not only, political concern worth having.

## II. Ye Shall Rule as God: The Heresy of the Religious right

"It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."

-C. S. Lewis

Though an unfortunate tendency exists in analyses of the conservative movement to view the Religious right either as a dangerous, theocratic and authoritarian anomaly or as a maligned minority voice constantly victimized by larger

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Joseph P. Duggan, Austin Bramwell, Daniel McCarthy, Lee Edwards, James Poulos, and Roger Kimball. "Is Conservatism Dead?" <u>Kirk Center</u>. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.kirkcenter.org/index.php/bookman/article/response-to-tanenhaus/">http://www.kirkcenter.org/index.php/bookman/article/response-to-tanenhaus/</a>.

special interests, we reject both narratives on the grounds that neither enables us to fully understand the movement's positive vision. The argument that religious conservatives are theocratically inclined does square with certain thinkers within the religious conservative canon, but the charge that this necessarily implies a vision grounded solely in big government authoritarianism fails to square with political history, as even some of the most seemingly authoritarian thinkers to be examined in this study have been forceful opponents of the Federal government and, indeed, have founded movements whose explicit mission is to weaken this behemoth. Given this stark dichotomy between theoretical commitments and practical political action, we argue that the forces which drive religious conservatives towards authoritarian posturing are uniformly products of distortion by *progressive* elements, rather than evidence of an excessive predisposition toward conservatism. In fact, we will show that these theocratic arguments form much of the basis for the earliest forms of the very ideology that religious conservatives currently labor to defeat. On their own terms, therefore, religious conservatives ought properly to view any and all arguments for centralized theocracy as the political equivalent of the apple of original sin.

However, this detail has not stopped conservative Christians from falling for the concept. Most notably, in the 2008 election cycle, Governor Mike Huckabee (at the time, the religious Right's chosen candidate) said, "I have opponents in this race who do not want to change the Constitution. But I believe it's a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living god. And that's what we need to do -- to amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than

try to change God's standards so it lines up with some contemporary view."<sup>80</sup> This statement, though it was dismissed by at least one conservative commentator as "very troubling,"<sup>81</sup> has its roots in a little-known, but nonetheless highly influential brand of conservative Christian theology known alternately as "Reconstructionist theology" and "Dominion theology." This particular school of thought takes its name from the notion that Christians must "reconstruct" society to be in line with God's standards or, more radically still, that they have been naturally vested with "dominion" over the entire world. Naturally, the easy response to these claims is to suggest that they are merely the ravings of a few crackpots with no political relevance – however, this particular approach is counterproductive for two reasons. Firstly,

Dominion/Reconstruction theology *is* influential. William Martin writes that "because [Reconstructionism] is so genuinely radical, most leaders of the religious Right are careful to distance themselves from it. At the same time, it clearly holds some appeal for many of them...Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy have endorsed Reconstructionist books." Martin also quotes the Jay Grimstead, an influential figure in the Religious right, as saying that "There are a lot of us floating around in Christian leadership – James Kennedy is one of them – who don't go all the way with the [theocracy] thing, but who want to rebuild America based on the Bible." <sup>83</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> David Edwards and Muriel Kane. "Huckabee: Amend Constitution to be in 'God's Standards." <u>The Raw Story.</u> January 15, 2008. Accessed April 10, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.rawstory.com/news/2007/Huckabee\_Amend\_Constitution\_to\_meet\_Gods\_0115.html">http://www.rawstory.com/news/2007/Huckabee\_Amend\_Constitution\_to\_meet\_Gods\_0115.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Ibid. The statement was made by Joe Scarborough.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Martin, p. 354

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Ibid.

This impulse has manifested itself in several ways, most of them dating back to the 90's. For instance, Randall Terry of Operation Rescue took a quite Reconstructionist line on abortion when he argued that "Intolerance is a beautiful thing. We're going to make abortionists' lives a living hell." <sup>84</sup> Granted, Terry's radical tactics (such as distributing Wanted posters for abortion providers) have alienated him from a larger portion of the conservative Christian community, but at the same time, as Martin notes, "most anti-abortion Christians accept Randall Terry's assertion that 'abortion is murder, period." <sup>85</sup> We thus see that, while the tactics employed/preferred by Reconstructionists and their allies are often viewed as radical by their counterparts, the sentiments they express are, at the very least, reflective of mainstream Christian values. In fact, it is possible to argue that Reconstructionist goals are the most honest statements of how these values would manifest politically in the absence of opposition.

This last argument leads neatly into the second reason why Reconstructionist thinking is relevant for our purposes: even if one assumes that actual Reconstructionists are few in number, their extreme tactics and strident support for theocratically motivated revolution represent a useful form of the Christian conservative id to analyze. Contrary to the caricatures of Reconstructionists by their liberal critics as backwards yokels who unwittingly support "clerical fascist politics," <sup>86</sup> the exponents of Christian Reconstructionism are, by and large, conspicuously

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Martin, p. 355

<sup>85</sup> Martin, p. 356

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Chip Berlet and Matthew Lyons. <u>Right Wing Populism in America</u>. New York: The Guilford Press. 2000. p. 248

scholarly and prolific, often citing hundreds of academic papers on sociology/history/political science in the same breath that they quote Scripture. The sentiments which motivate Christian Reconstructionists (for instance, their idea that abortion is murder) are more often than not mainstream elements of conservative Christian thinking, and certainly not the sort of Dark Age moral vision which their theocratic ideas imply. As such, a critique of the Christian Reconstructionist political/theological project is less a cheap shot at a group of harmless, depraved extremists than a sober analysis of how far the Religious right's arguably virtuous ideas can carry it towards complicity in precisely the evils it seeks to destroy.

The support of high profile Baptist figures like Falwell and Huckabee notwithstanding, by all accounts the most comprehensive – and most persuasive – case for "reconstructed" theocracy (or, in Biblical terms, "theonomy") in recent memory was made by the Dutch Calvinist theologian R.J. Rushdoony in his 1973 opus The Institutes of Biblical Law. In this work, comprised of several hundred pages of sermons, Rushdoony foreshadowed Huckabee's case that Biblical Law ought not only to be read in its literal meaning, but also that it should be considered binding across all historical time periods. "It is a modern heresy that holds that the law of God has no meaning nor any binding force for man today. It is an aspect of the influence of humanistic and evolutionary thought on the church, and it posits an evolving, developing god," Rushdoony writes. "But this is not the God of Scripture, whose

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> The Reconstructionist theologian Garry North, for instance, authored a critique of the economics of the Coase theorem from the perspective of Biblical law, and is currently working on a detailed analysis of the economics of every passage of the Bible. The project is currently roughly 11,000 pages long and still unfinished.

grace and law remain the same in every age, because He, as the sovereign and absolute lord, changes not, nor does He need to change. The strength of man is the absoluteness of his God." Rushdoony tied this heretical, "evolving" position to the philosophy of antinomianism – the notion that "faith frees the Christian from the law, so that he is not outside the law, but is rather dead to the law." From a conservative perspective, such a philosophy is politically, as well as religiously, objectionable because in a radically antinomian world, once someone professes to have faith in God, that person is effectively licensed to commit murder, rape and any other sin, so long as their faith does not abate. Such a notion becomes especially problematic in a theocratic world, wherein God's law is the only binding law enforced, thus making antinomianism an easy way to render oneself above both theological and legal law. So far, this particular element of Rushdoony's thought is both theologically and politically right in line with conservatism's root goal of predictable, uniform application of power. So far, also, its theocratic content is minimal.

However, once the political content begins to enter the equation, things become much more complicated. Rushdoony writes, for instance, that "the law is applied power, otherwise it ceases to be law. The law is more than power, but, *apart from coercion, there is no law*. Those who object to the coercive element in law are in fact objecting to law, whether knowingly or unknowingly." Rushdoony then takes this relatively noncontroversial description of government action and radicalizes it: "Lord Acton's dictum, 'All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely,'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> RJ Rushdoony. <u>Institutes of Biblical Law.</u> Craig, CO: The Craig Press. 1973. P. 2

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, pp. 2-3

<sup>90</sup> Rushdoony, Institutes, p. 59

is a liberal half-truth and reflects liberal illusions. First of all, power does not corrupt. The power of a godly husband and father to govern his family does not corrupt him; he exercises it under God and in terms of god's law-word."<sup>91</sup>

Needless to say, read as an outright apologia for unrestrained power, this view is problematic. To begin with, the quotation of Acton is incorrect – his actual dictum is that "power *tends* to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." However, even if one assumed Rushdoony's more extreme paraphrasing were correct, his argument that "the power of a godly husband and father to govern his family does not corrupt him; he exercises it under God and in terms of god's law-word," does not directly attack Acton's argument. 93 In fact, Rushdoony's "godly father," while he does enjoy some measure of power, is constrained just as much as those under his power by "God's law-word." Hence, the real power is not with the father himself, but with the law-word that allocates him that power. In other words, while Rushdoony is correct in the limited sense that power need not necessarily corrupt its holder, because someone who exercises power in *precisely the way God suggests* is not a corrupt person, this doctrine contains two interesting unexamined assumptions: firstly, that no person can ever truly gain absolute power, because that belongs to God, and secondly, that short of absolute power, any and all gradations of power are acceptable so long as they are practiced with some reference to God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton. <u>Essays on Freedom and Power</u>. Boston: The Becon Press. 1949. p. 364. Emphasis mine.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Emphasis mine.

To extrapolate these assumptions a step further, consider the following: surely a ruler who exercises his power under the laws of God is not a corrupt ruler and, by this definition, no one who assumes power in a theocracy can be corrupt unless they somehow disobey the laws of God. It is not clear who is to watch over these hypothetical rulers to ensure their furtherance of God's law. Obviously, God himself is one option, but given that the God of the New Testament usually reserves divine justice for after death, this does not solve the problem of what to do with corrupt rulers in the here and now. As such, Rushdoony, along with other Reconstructionists, offers a secondary check on their rulers in the form of limited suffrage. Rushdoony elaborates:

"People may complain about the unresponsiveness of their elected officials, and their subservience to their peers and superiors, but nothing will alter this fact other than a change in the faith of the electorate and the elected. Men will respond to and obey the dominant power in their lives, faith, and perspective. If that dominant power or god in their lives is the state, they will react to it. If it is man, or their own ego, they will be governed by it. If, however, it is the triune God of Scripture who rules them, then men will respond to and obey His law-word. Men will obey their gods." <sup>94</sup>

In short, Rushdoony argues that, if the voters and legislators in a theocracy (which is to say, those with power) all bow to the same God and the same faith, then corruption will cease to exist because those with direct legislative power will fear God, and if they don't, they will fear their Constituents, who will turn on them the second they put a toe out of line in legislating God's law.

This argument, while persuasive within limits, raises one gigantic question – if the sole function of law is to mandate morality, and everyone enforcing/living under a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> RJ Rushdoony. "The Meaning of Theocracy." <u>Chalcedon Institute.</u> April 7, 2007. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article.php?ArticleID=2718">http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article.php?ArticleID=2718</a>.

theocracy believes in the same moral code, then why does one need a coercive legal institution at all? Surely, fear of God alone would be sufficient to keep the people in line, and no police force would be necessary. Rushdoony, however, rejects this alternative explicitly, writing "the state as a 'higher' but not highest power represents God's ministry of justice, the fullness of which is seen in heaven and hell. For the state to culminate, together with church, family, school, and calling, in the Kingdom of God in the new creation is no more its finish than the time of birth is the death of the foetus. Rather, it is truest life." There are two ways to read this – the first is that the State must exist simply because God says so. While this would stop the argument on political grounds, it is not clear that it would resolve it theologically, especially in light of the arguments advanced by libertarian theologians that I Samuel mandates anarchism. More probably, Rushdoony's argument can be read the following way: sole allegiance to the laws of God is not sufficient as a check on human evil – in fact, to argue such is "the essence of humanism" – rather, a network of human associations, including family, church, school, calling and coercive state is necessary to keep man from sinning.

This is not a position with which most conservatives would disagree, at least insofar as it is combined with the limitations of constitutional government. However, taken together with Rushdoony's argument that human power need not be structurally limited so long as it is practiced with reference to God, it is a position with potentially dangerous implications. If Rushdoony claims that the sins of corrupt officials will be nonexistent in a state administered entirely by Christians because those Christians

<sup>95</sup> Rushdoony, Institutes, p. 240

will ferret out anybody who is corrupt, to simultaneously acknowledges that the State is necessary as one of several checks on the natural tendency to sin *even within Christians*, he faces as unanswerable question of why Christian leaders cannot sin by tolerating corruption within themselves. The existence of such a danger thus resurrects the necessity for a suspicion of power even within Christian theocracies, for arguably, the agency vested in rulers to sin against their subjects becomes less tempting to exercise the less broad their authority is. Moreover, the greater the absence of pride-inducing power, the more necessary humility becomes in the face of God.

This sort of political corrective to Rushdoony's solely theological argument is especially necessary when one considers that Rushdoony's root desire for a theocracy comes from an eschatological theory that is conventionally associated with the Left – namely, postmillennialism. This theory, which states that Christ's return will be brought about after a golden era of Christian world governance, stands in stark contrast to its premillennial rival, a view which states that Christ's return will come after the worst of sins and evils, and that Christians must prepare their own souls for salvation rather than trying to enact Godly government. As liberal scholar Sara Diamond documents, "most contemporary evangelicals were pre-millenialists who believed that Christ would return to earth *before* establishing a 1,000 year reign by believers. [Reconstructionists] were post-millenialists who believed that their mandate was to establish God's kingdom on earth now; only after believers' millennial reign would Christ return." Taken on their own merits, each theory has

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Sara Diamond. Roads to Dominion. New York: Guilford Press. 1995. P. 247

very clear, and very different, implications for politics. Whereas pre-millennialist theory suggests that the sole responsibility of Christians is to look out for their individual and localized prospects for salvation, given the inevitable assault of the Satanic rebellion, postmillennialism is an explicitly global and ambitious program which aims to literally reshape society. Moreover, whereas the premillennialist view sees the responsibility for ultimate divine victory as falling solely on God/Christ (who will, presumably, decimate the Antichrist after his rebellion), postmillennialists see the responsibility for ultimate divine victory as falling on everyday human Christians. At this point, to call the theory "reconstructionist" could be seen as a euphemism for what is in effect a revolutionary political vision.

Naturally, most Christian reconstructionists would disavow their intention to commit any form of violent revolution – rather, they would argue that, by the time a genuinely Christian society is possible, most people will accede to it voluntarily because of the incredible amounts of evil that will have been rolled back by the forces of God. This viewpoint is not only consistent with mainstream libertarian and conservative doctrine, but it could be substantiated and even strengthened by libertarian economics and the Hayekian notion of "spontaneous order," which, when combined with postmillennialist theology, would suggest that the hand of God and the "invisible hand" of the market are one and the same, and that God's "invisible hand" is slowly but surely driving society towards a Christian world via spontaneous ordering. However, this is not the approach taken by most Christian reconstructionists – Rushdoony himself, for instance, explicitly disavows any intention to link libertarian economics with divine will, instead once more placing his faith in the ability of Christian statesmen to restrain themselves from becoming corrupt:

"The state, as the ministry of justice, does have a duty to maintain justice in the market-place, but it cannot confuse justice with charity. True, the state as the policeman can be corrupt; in fact, if the society as a whole is corrupt, the state will also be corrupt. In a healthy and godly society, the state will function successfully to restrain the minority of evil-doers." <sup>97</sup>

At later points, Rushdoony is even more condemnatory of *laissez-faire*, writing that under a system constructed around it, "there is no protection for men and society from the sin and rapacity of men."98 However, with the exception of a few followers of Ayn Rand, this is not the world that exponents of *laissez-faire* envision. Rather, they agree with Rushdoony's earlier statement that "the key to the situation is not the state, but the religious health of the society." Thus, the ultimate form of protection for those wronged under the market is the prevailing sense of morals which, via spontaneous mechanisms of social sanction which would arise naturally in a deeply religious society, punishes those who use their economic power in a predatory fashion. The only cogent alternative to such a system is what Rushdoony calls "the new liberalism as well as socialism [which] affirms the rule of the state," a state of affairs which Rushdoony himself defenestrates, writing that "there is no defense for men against the power and depravity of the state" under socialism. 100 However, Rushdoony's top-down vision of postmillennial redemption prevents him from seeing the lack of mutual exclusivity between *laissez-faire* and godly morality, leading him to posit the following in lieu of a "third way" between capitalism and socialism:

<sup>97</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, p. 470

<sup>98</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, p. 472

<sup>99</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, p. 470

<sup>100</sup> Rushdoony, Institutes, pp. 472-473

"Third, Biblical law declares the rule of God and His law. God's self-interest is alone the true foundation of law and order.<sup>101</sup> God as all-holy, righteous, and just, does most wisely decree and govern all things. Only as men are redeemed and submit, by grace and/or by compulsion to God's law-order can there be justice. If God's law is not respected, then neither men's self-interest nor the state's self-interest can preserve the social order."<sup>102</sup>

One can agree with this position, however, and still have no idea how this respect for God's law would manifest itself practically in the political order. In the absence of such clearly defined prescriptions for State power, nothing is to stop the hypothetical theocratic State (assuming it is composed of well-meaning Christians who believe themselves to be operating under God's law) from imposing precisely the laws which Rushdoony opposes politically under a different theory of Godly morality. As evidence, one need only look at the work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century theologian and economist Richard Ely to see such a train of thought. Jonah Goldberg of *National Review* explains:

"Religious conviction animated Richard Ely, to the extent that he believed every aspect of life should have Christianity injected into it. He held that Christians made a fundamental error by holding that salvation lies in the next life. When Jesus says that his kingdom is 'not of this world,' the correct translation, according to Ely, is 'not of this age.' And it was Ely's core conviction that the age of salvation could be reached through the judicious application of welfare-state politics...the Christian doctrine of 'service' became a divine injunction to advance a non-Marxist national socialism." <sup>103</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Given Rushdoony's rejection of a centralized Church, it is never made clear how one should know what "God's self-interest" is at any given moment, or who has the authority to decide this.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, p. 473

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Jonah Goldberg. "Richard Ely's Golden Calf." National Review. 31 December 2009. Pp. 33 and 36

To his credit, Rushdoony rejects this view at great length in his shorter, polemical works <sup>104</sup>, but one still has to ask what in his programmatic writings would prevent an earnest theocrat leader from coming to the conclusion that a welfare state was Biblically justified, short of limiting the leadership of all theocracies only to Rushdoony himself (which would be unsustainable if only because Rushdoony, and any other theologian, is either already dead or will die). One possible answer would be to reference Rushdoony's defense of the tithe as the only acceptable form of income tax aside from a "head tax," <sup>105</sup> but given that Rushdoony only stipulates that this head tax shall be "minimal," without specifying just *how* minimal it shall be, such an argument still leaves some degree of wiggle room. Moreover, while Rushdoony writes that "education, welfare, the church, and all other godly social functions are maintained by the two tithes," he does not specify how the Church is to collect its tithes, which leaves open the question of whether the state could absorb this source of income, or if the Church would be permitted to become an *equally* coercive institution, at which point all the dangers of corruption once more enter the picture.

So far, however, the worst that Rushdoony could be accused of is being excessively vague. Yet it is a vagueness which obfuscates wider issues, just as the rhetorically oriented work of figures such as Brent Bozell did. As such, the simplest way to sum up the political "heresy" of Rushdoony and his top-down view of postmillennial reconstruction is to point out two inconsistencies: firstly, it trusts human good intentions to an extent which is inconsistent with its mistrust of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Cf. RJ Rushdoony. <u>The Mythology of Science</u>. Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books. 2001.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Rushdoony, <u>Institutes</u>, p. 283

spontaneous ordering of market economics, which is driven by human action; secondly, it aims to directly "immanentize the eschaton," in the words of Eric Voegelin, which leads it to skirt dangerously close to progressive theories of one-world government and activist government as a sort of "crutch" for God. The first of these "heresies" can be broadly classified as a political one, whereas the latter is almost entirely a religious one.

Now, once more, one could object that these critiques are excessively focused on one thinker/school of thought. In response, we contend that, while Rushdoony does the most skillful job at masking these flaws with theological analysis, they are not unique to his thinking – rather, they are endemic, sometimes in a more secularized form, in many major arguments endorsed by figures on the Religious right. As an example of the former, Robert Bork, in his classic work of socially conservative social theory, Slouching Towards Gomorrah, devotes chapter upon chapter to a defense of censorship before ending with the conspicuously ironic admission that, "given the overwhelming likelihood that the Left would have more success in suppressing the expression if ideas and attitudes than would the rest of us in suppressing obscenity, it might, under present circumstances, be the part of wisdom not to endorse the concept of censorship." 106 At issue is the trouble which a nonhomogenous system induces for people who hold great faith in people with power, and the twists in argumentation which said faith can induce, and which render the formulation of practical political ideas very difficult. It is precisely the illusion that one can trust a theocratic authority figure (or any combination of them) to bring about

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Robert Bork. Slouching Towards Gomorrah. New York: HarperCollins. 2003. P. 358

the revival of morality/the return of Christ more completely than a market economy dominated by moral consumers and a society dominated by moral participants which leads Bork to thus recant himself.

This tendency, however, has less dangerous implications than the tendency to see human action as a "crutch" for God, and thus to make immanentizing the eschaton necessary, which makes for a much more deadly heresy, given how infrequently it is acknowledged. The most prominent example occurs in an article by the postmillennialist theologian Kenneth Gentry, who argues that postmillennialism, and its attendant idea that Christians will seize control of world politics, is "both wishful thinking and a certain hope." Writing on the "wishful thinking" side, Gentry argues convincingly:

"By every godly measure postmillennialism should be wishful thinking for the believer. That is, it should be the Christian's wish that the Gospel of Jesus Christ make overwhelming and victorious progress in the earth. It should be our wish that the world be overflowed with the righteousness of God through our diligent, God-blessed labor. It should be our wish that peace arise as a result of the gracious transformation of human nature under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Why would a Christian wish for anything less?" <sup>108</sup>

However, at the point where Gentry begins to describe the idea that postmillennialism is a "certain hope," he begins to make arguments which are not just dubiously persuasive, but potentially blasphemous in their implications. For instance, Gentry describes the premillennialist school of thought as "fundamentally pessimistic regarding the progress of contemporary history," adding that "As Christians retreat from culture in anticipation of society's collapse, humanism has been sucked into the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Kenneth Gentry. "Postmillennialism: Wishful Thinking or Certain Hope?" <u>Covenant Media Foundation.</u> Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt568.htm">http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pt568.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Ibid.

void left by Christianity's leadership absence." For Gentry, this absence is wholly unwarranted, for the proof is in the scriptural pudding that postmillennialism must happen, and, therefore, Christians must assume a position of leadership so as to herald the coming of Christ. "Why is it so difficult to think that God's creative intent will not be experienced in the course of history which He created?" Gentry asks rhetorically. "Perhaps 'the best laid plans of men often go astray,' but surely this is not the case with God!" 110

At this point, one is justified in asking a rather sharp question: If man is not supposed to question the "creative intent" inherent in history, then what possible theological justification can Gentry claim for the sort of "Christian leadership role" he envisions? Moreover, if the kingdom of God is destined to exist without any tribulations whatsoever preceding its return, then what incentive do Christians have to bother voluntarily assuming a "leadership role," rather than having it foisted upon them by God, in the first place? Surely, from a postmillennial reconstructionist position, the mortal forces of humanism cannot defeat God, however they strain to do so, but can only corrupt Man. Yet this seems less sure in Gentry's writing, as he argues that "despite struggle in history between Christ and Satan, Christ will win the victory." This view resembles the view of traditionalists far more than the view of the New Right insofar as it gives Christians great license to be complacent. And as if in a crescendo to prove his point, Gentry writes, "By creation God establishes the world in which righteousness is to dwell. By covenant He structures the legal framework of

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Ibid.

universal righteousness. By prophecy He engages the power of His all-controlling word to direct the spread of His righteousness in history. And by the establishment of the kingdom, He begins the actual progress to universal righteousness." To which any activist could easily ask, "if God can do all this, why does he need us?"

To be sure, from a conventional premillennialist perspective, this question is irrelevant, as many Christian leaders (Jerry Falwell among them) once argued that Christian involvement in politics inevitably would lead to compromises with sin and would damage the Christian cause. But on postmillennial terms, that sort of argument is clearly heretical at the point where "Christian leadership" is required in order to bring about Christ's return. And if that argument is heretical, then how does one justify the notion that human Christians must consciously decide to bring about God's kingdom through activism and the assumption of political power, a la Rushdoony?

There are two answers to this question, neither of which is fully satisfactory. The first is that God will act through humans, but while this is undoubtedly true from a Christian perspective, the question of how one is to know which Christian activists to trust and why Christians need to be activists in the first place, if God can spontaneously move them into an advantageous position against the devil, is still left open, inviting the potential for political abuse. The second, and more cogent, answer is that God has been weakened to such an extent that Christians must step in and defend his laws and fill his shoes on their own. But this is, by all accounts, an almost blasphemous and certainly contradictory view, since the reason to side with God is that, by definition, he is the all-powerful and inevitable cosmic victor, as Gentry

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

himself enunciates. Furthermore, if God is insufficient, who is to do his job while he recovers his strength? The answer is obvious: humans, through the power of the State. Thus, rather than strengthening the case for Christian activism, the postmillennialist attempt to consciously and forcibly immanentize the end of days only weakens the case for activism, or reduces it to a quasi-humanist assault on God, wrapped in the guise of a pro-Christian crusade.

None of this is meant to denigrate the power, or importance, of the Christian Right's involvement in politics, but rather to reinforce it against the possibility of corruption via liberal assumptions about the nature of authority/divine will. Moreover, as we will see, stripped of the liberal corruption described above, the religious Right's supposed conflict with their libertarian brethren vanishes in thin air, for when the smoke of misanthropic paranoia surrounding the power of moral autonomy is blown away, both libertarians and Christians can be seen to fight the same implacably antithetical concept.

## III. By What Right? The False Antithesis of Religion and Liberty

"The moral is the chosen, not the forced; the understood, not the obeyed. The moral is the rational, and reason accepts no commandments."
-Ayn Rand

-Robert Bork

During the aftermath of the 2008 election, several especially contentious articles appeared in major newspapers attacking the fusion between religious conservatives and libertarians, often written from one side or the other. From the religious side, one heard the former Presidential candidate Huckabee make his

<sup>&</sup>quot;When it comes to pornography or addictive drugs, libertarians all too often confuse the idea that markets should be free with the idea that everything should be available on the market."

aforementioned infamous statement that "The greatest threat to classic Republicanism is not liberalism; it's this new brand of libertarianism, which is...a heartless, callous, soulless type of economic conservatism." From the libertarian side, there was the accusation that "compassionate conservatism" (read: social/religious conservatism) had destroyed conservatism from the inside, and that it was basically a soft form of statism which was designed to appease the forces of the Left. And unlike many postelection recriminations, this one was hardly new – indeed, its origins dated back at least to the fall 1981 edition of *Modern Age* magazine, wherein both Murray Rothbard and Russell Kirk each attempted to excommunicate each others' brand of conservatism in separate essays. <sup>113</sup> Ironically, sandwiched between both articles was a peacemaking attempt by the scholar (and sometime Libertarian Party Presidential Candidate) John Hospers, noting that "the popular mythology has it that libertarians agree with conservatives on economic matters but differ from them on personal liberties. Although there is some truth in this formulation, it is an oversimplification; it conceals the many nuances of likeness and difference that exist." <sup>114</sup>

Naturally, one could defer to Hospers on this point, since his perspective obviously triumphed for the duration of the 80's, but to adopt his view unaltered would be a fundamental error. The aftermath of the Bush presidency has left the task of reconciling religious and libertarian conservatism severely complicated, so while

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Rod Dreher. "Huckabee Contra Libertarianism." <u>Beliefnet</u>. May 29, 2008. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://blog.beliefnet.com/crunchycon/2008/05/huckabee-contra-libertarianism.html">http://blog.beliefnet.com/crunchycon/2008/05/huckabee-contra-libertarianism.html</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Cf. Murray Rothbard. "Frank S. Meyer: The Fusionist as Libertarian Manque." <u>Modern Age.</u> Fall 1981 and Russell Kirk. "Libertarian: The Chirping Sectaries." <u>Modern Age</u>. Fall 1981.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> John Hospers. "Conservatives and Libertarians: Differences of Theory and Strategy." <u>Modern Age.</u> Fall 1981. P. 369

Hosper's thesis may still be basically correct, we argue that his descriptive analysis is badly dated, given that the new brand of traditionalism under consideration in this chapter shares more points of convergence with libertarian doctrine than the old brand, and also given that the nature of the enemy faced by libertarians and traditionalists has shifted such that most differences between the two schools can be more accurately characterized as flailing at ideologically dead phantoms.

To begin with, the different cases for a religious/libertarian schism should be stated. Of these, the libertarian argument is far more well-rehearsed, though not more grounded in substantive political theory. Primarily, much of libertarian anti-religious doctrine takes its inspiration from the Russian émigré and libertarian polemicist Ayn Rand, who argued that religion was not only an illogical remnant of past human society, but an ineffably evil one. Writing in her opus *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand's hero opines: "All [Religious] identifications consist of negating: God is that which no human mind can know, they say-and proceed to demand that you consider it knowledge-God is non-man, heaven is non-earth, soul is non-body, virtue 'is non-profit, A is non-A, perception is non-sensory, knowledge is non-reason. Their definitions are not acts of defining, but of wiping out." Similarly, the libertarian argument against the Religious right effectively takes the line that the supposedly illogical, totalitarian nature of religion and its absolute requirement that people follow the same unreasonable moral rules to avoid damnation are fundamentally unlibertarian in their implications. Pluralism and moral self-determination seem

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Ayn Rand. "John Galt Speech." Amber and Chaos. Accessed April 10, 2010. http://amberandchaos.com/?page\_id=106

especially problematic in light of these ideas, which would seem to naturally lend themselves to a powerful central government in the model of the Almighty himself.

Moreover, especially for economics-minded libertarians, the idea that an arbitrary, non-measurable standard of morality should take precedence over the rational actions of *homo economicus* is positively frightening, for it implies an antiscientific world in which no objective truth is permissible if it fails to coincide with the aesthetic standards of a particular Church. It is thus no accident that the first group on the Right to accuse the Religious right of regression toward the tactics of the Salem Witch Trials, or the Spanish Inquisition, are the libertarians. Finally, given the fact that some libertarians (though certainly not all) view the acquisition of wealth as an exercise of Nietzschean will allowing the truly great to transcend petty codes of lower-class slave morality, the idea that all humans must ask forgiveness from a God rather than display their own native greatness is galling, insulting and degrading. From the most extreme libertarian perspective, therefore, an alliance with the Religious right is nothing less than an alliance with an intolerant, irrational, self-hating cult of mediocrity.

The implicit condescension in this critique is not unnoticed by members of the Religious right, who have responded to libertarian critiques with a rebuttal which can practically be boiled down to one word: "Elitist." In short, especially given the grassroots origins of religious conservative activism, the condescension of scholarly libertarians has been seen not only as an intellectual attack, but one motivated by

<sup>116</sup> Unfortunately, this is not a world which Rushdoony seems in any hurry to avoid creating, given that his work includes certain passages which smack of Holocaust denial (<u>Institutes of Biblical Law</u>, 586), and also given that his shorter work <u>The Mythology of Science</u> defames all contemporary science as the

equivalent of witchcraft.

class, status and, by extension, complicity in the reigning secular humanist corrupt establishment. As such, the Religious right argument against alliance with the libertarians is usually motivated by the conviction that libertarians are fair-weather allies, who will jump to their natural cousins within the liberal establishment the instant the going gets tough, or morals begin to enter the picture. Ironically, this basic resentment compels Religious conservatives to actually offer assaults on libertarian ideology for undermining itself rather than simply bemoaning the implications of that ideology. To that end, like Huckabee, religious conservatives will generally make claims to the effect that libertarians who disagree with their inclusion are simply liberals in conservative clothing, to the point that their ideological claims should be treated as unserious rationalizations for elitist condescension.

In making this case, Religious conservatives make several points. Firstly, they argue, like Paul Weyrich, that libertarianism's "live and let live" idea is a Satanic red herring, designed to allow subversion into American society under the cover of freedom. For instance, many religious conservatives will bemoan the libertarian ambivalence on abortion, claiming that it shows the hollowness of their commitment to "natural rights" (especially the right to life), thus demonstrating that these "natural rights" are simply a way for libertarians to rhetorically avoid being constrained by morality at all. This type of particular argument on issues is thus framed as emblematic of the problem with libertarian ideology exposed at the end of the last chapter – namely, that it wants to have all the freedoms with none of the responsibilities associated with that freedom.

Moreover, religious conservatives argue, in *refusing* to make value judgments, many libertarians undercut the very system of *laissez-faire* capitalism which they aim

to promote, since they provide no alternative theory of morality which can compete with God, absent the rational actor model of economic thought. Randianism is rarely treated as a serious alternative, and when it is, it is derided as Satanic sociopathy for its absolute rejection of the concept of altruism, which social conservatives argue is not only basically evil, but unsustainable, given Rand's circular reliance on reason and its nihilistic infinite regressions. Finally, religious conservatives argue, libertarians are ultimately uninterested in any brand of social order at all, preferring to exist in a world of Chaos than face any constraints on their whims by concerned majorities — a view so inherently radical that it is impossible for it to attain sizable followings, and thus a politically irrelevant one. In short, if libertarians fear capitulation to what they see as conformist intolerance on the part of a stupid mob, the religious Right fears seeing their moral values undermined by what they see as a small cabal of depraved, amoral, eggheaded freaks.

Both arguments, thus stated, contain kernels of truth, but also unfortunate tendencies toward misinterpretation and more than a little hyperbole. As we established in Chapter 2, libertarians do draw on tacit and unjustified aesthetic premises in making their seemingly value-free assessments of society. More importantly, though, we think the libertarian critique of the religious Right is marginally perceptive insofar as it recognizes at least one critically truth about the religious right's role in the conservative division of labor. Namely, the religious Right serves primarily as a generator of moral standards for the conservative movement, rather like the traditionalists of yore. But unlike the traditionalists, the moral standards propounded by the religious Right actually have the potential to serve as a check on

conservative politics - a power which libertarians rightly observe is potentially dangerous.

We do not think this is power which the Religious right has any wish to intentionally abuse. Rather, we think most arguable perceptions of abuse on their part spring from the two heresies already described. It is true that the Religious right has a tendency to trust good people excessively with power, ignoring the corrosive effects which the pride born from power can have on those people, and that this faith is offset by a bizarre lack of faith in free markets, which serve to rank order and prioritize human wants/needs in such a way as to encourage asceticism and risk-averse prudence, as we demonstrated in Chapter 2. Neither element is essential, but it arises as a result of the fundamental heresy of the Religious right, which is its desire to immanentize the eschaton, even though this is a task best left to God, and not to his imperfect human interpreters. If God is truly an omniscient, all-powerful being, the full extent of his motivations would surely be beyond human comprehension, but at the same time, the laws he has laid down, as Rushdoony points out, can be taken as objective moral truths, in the sense that they are the only laws humans can understand. However, we think libertarians are correct to point out that these are not laws which modern Governments are in any position to enforce, and trusting modern Governments to do so, even under the rosiest rulers, is more likely to result in either discreditation via corruption or in overly restrictive, unenforceable legal structures which weaken the fabric of Christian morality by making it appear legally obsolete.

This once more raises the question of religious "fascism" implicated in our foreword to this chapter. Upton Sinclair once observed that when fascism came to America, it would be "wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross," a line which

religious conservatism's detractors have used as an argument against its existence with nauseating frequency. Having analyzed the movement, we argue that the usage of the word "fascist" to describe religious conservatism is absolutely incorrect, for while there is the potential for the movement to become such a thing if it attempts to reduce politics simply to questions of whether a particular law is Biblical, this seems extraordinarily unlikely, especially at the point where the formulation of any substantive political system by religious conservatives has been all but nonexistent, with only vague bits of aspirational rhetoric standing in.

We do, however, think the danger of religiously motivated fascism exists to the extent that the Religious right becomes "wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross of gold," with the liberal element being the cross of gold symbolizing the populist theory of government first propounded by the fundamentalist progressive William Jennings Bryan. Religious conservatism can combine with populism, but it is an uneasy combination, given that religious conservatism is grounded in immutable truths not subject to popular vote, whereas populism is grounded in the notion that the people are always right. In order to accommodate all the varying theological differences (even among their most radical wings), the religious Right is thus forced to posit vague, rhetorical claims of consensus Biblical morality rather than substantive political philosophy as a guide for their ideal State so as to not offend their parishioners. To attempt to immanentize the eschaton with such vague guidelines will almost surely lead abuses of power and the interjection of liberalism into even the most devoutly religious state. As Daniel Flynn points out, the Puritans were arguably

the first socialist communes in America. <sup>117</sup> Given the Religious right's unique and indispensable status as the conservative movement's moral compass, any theology which seems to even vaguely incline toward socialism and/or human perfectibility will become a virus in the bloodstream of the entire conservative movement.

Naturally, this assertion may be apt to raise some eyebrows, as well as some potential objections. If one supposes, as liberation theologians do for instance, that Christianity is in fact a socialist religion, then to say that it must mask this nature in the name of staying acceptable in American conservatism might seem to some Christians to be dangerously backwards. Indeed, even nonsocialist Christians might find it troubling that their religion is being treated as but one element in a diverse consensus, when the other schools of thought lack their inherent tie to divine will, and thus must surely be considered secondary. To paraphrase the argument made by Governor Huckabee which we already cited, surely conservatism must be altered to conform to God's will, rather than the reverse? Meanwhile, libertarians, even those sympathetic to conservatism, doubtlessly find this question important as well, seeing as it relates to the balance of power in the conservative movement.

However, the topic of whether God comes before ideology is not, and should not be directly confronted by our analysis, seeing as it is too large. The most we can say is to make the rather libertarian observation that obviously, from the perspective of the individual, God must come first, which is why if somebody does believe that Christianity mandates socialism, they obviously can have no place in the American conservative movement, nor in the Churches associated with it. As such, our analysis

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> See Daniel J. Flynn. A Conservative History of the American Left. New York: Crown Forum. 2008

is meant only to apply to those religious thinkers (most of whom, but not all, are Christian) who have already decided that their religion's claims line up with conservatism, and thus can speak as both religious thinkers and conservative thinkers.

It would be dangerous indeed if every Christian were assumed, prima facie, to be conservative, just as it would be dangerous if every conservative were assumed, prima facie, to be Christian. It may be, as one impolitic religious conservative once observed, that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew," but those whose prayers God does not hear can still be heard at the ballot box. Religious conservatives need not view this as an obstacle to their concerns, since even a purely secular American conservatism, having grown up in a civilization defined as much by Christianity as by Ancient Greek Philosophy, and also having defined itself as the protector of that civilization against its discontents, would by its very nature be more likely to further the claims of Christianity, intentionally or not, than the Leftist ideology of revolution, which requires the overturning of all governing paradigms, the religious one included.

Thus, the religious critiques of libertarianism for being too secular are arguably irrelevant to this analysis. Nevertheless, the religious critique of libertarianism is an important argument to tackle, so we turn our attention to it now. To begin with, the Religious claim that libertarians are sociopaths, or that their ideology lends itself to the sort of social atomization that promotes sociopathy, is highly dubious at the political-theoretical level. As we demonstrated in Chapter 2, the

dyn/content/article/2007/05/15/AR2007051501197.html>.

Marjorie Hyer. "Evangelist Reverses Position on God's Hearing Jews." Washington Post. October 11, 1980. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-">http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-</a>

libertarian conception of a free market, understood from the perspective of economic libertarianism, is hardly the sort of Nietzschean paradise which many Randians would like it to be. Rather, it is an environment where a strong culture of charity is demanded for the maintenance of social institutions which preserve stability among the underclass via voluntary charity. In fact, it was precisely these social institutions which Marvin Olasky, the original "compassionate conservative," argued for as a counterweight to government welfare, rather than an ancillary of it.

It could be argued that a non-Christian culture could exist which would allow for the flourishing of such institutions. While this is an interesting counterfactual, it is not relevant in a discussion of American conservatism. Copious sources exist documenting the fundamentally Judeo-Christian character of American political culture, the most notable one being the over-a-century-old, thousand page omnibus Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States, whose author, Benjamin Morris, argues that "We have a noble nation, full of the evidences of the moulding presence of Christian truth, and of the power and goodness of Divine wisdom in rearing up a Christian republic for all time." And while Morris's systematic historical treatise is virtually unknown due to its advanced age and prodigious length, the contemporary scholar Willis Glover has made a similar argument, pointing out that, "The Christian faith has only partially recovered from the crisis of the Enlightenment, but it has so deeply influenced the development of culture from the early Middle Ages that it is a powerful instrument in the interpretation of

B. F. Morris. <u>Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States</u>.Philadelphia: George W. Childs. 1864. P. 5

human experience in the West."<sup>120</sup> In short, given the pervasive influence of Christianity on Western civilization, it is impossible to abstract the seemingly arbitrary aesthetic preferences of libertarians from that influence, especially given their unpopularity with conventional humanists.

In fact, we argue that not only are these seemingly arbitrary aesthetic preferences not mutually exclusive with the Christian influence on society, but they are actually indistinguishable from it. Ironically, the two greatest exponents of this proposition come from the radical sectors of both libertarian and Religious conservatism – namely, Ayn Rand and RJ Rushdoony. Rand, while she bemoaned the fact that Christ had preached a code of altruism to his followers, noted approvingly in one of her private letters that "Jesus was one of the first great teachers to proclaim the basic principle of individualism -- the inviolate sanctity of man's soul, and the salvation of one's soul as one's first concern and highest goal; this means -- one's ego and the integrity of one's ego." <sup>121</sup> Moreover, though Rand sold her work Atlas Shrugged as a daring statement of new morality, it is not difficult to read the work as a closeted Christian allegory, given that the hero, John Galt, almost allows himself to be tortured to death and stubbornly refuses to lash out at his captors, even to the point of giving them instructions on how to fix their torturous machines. In the same sense, it is not impossible to hear echoes of libertarian disdain for the lazy and incompetent in the Christian parable of the talents, in which Christ's protagonist demands that his

Willia Gla

Willis Glover. <u>Biblical Origins of Modern Secular Culture</u>. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press. 1984. P. 242

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Ayn Rand. "Rand Excerpt: On Christianity." Objectivism Research Center. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.noblesoul.com/orc/texts/jesus.html">http://www.noblesoul.com/orc/texts/jesus.html</a>.

lazy, profitless slave be thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." <sup>122</sup>

Rushdoony, meanwhile, in a pithy but powerful essay entitled "The Meaning of Theocracy," denied explicitly the notion that Christian theocracy implied a Statist, dictatorial agenda. "Few things are more commonly misunderstood than the nature and meaning of theocracy," Rushdoony wrote. "It is commonly assumed to be a dictatorial rule by self-appointed men who claim to rule for God. In reality, theocracy in Biblical law is the closest thing to a radical libertarianism that can be had." Rushdoony even extended an olive branch to libertarians by describing the protolibertarian work Our Enemy the State as "one of the most important books of this century." This conspicuous attempt at peacemaking only further demonstrates that, as the journalist M. Stanton Evans documents in his book The Theme is Freedom, the notion of freedom inculcated in Western civilization exists almost solely thanks to the interference of Christian doctrine, rather than in spite of a few misapplications of it. 125

So why the dogmatic enmity on the part of these two traditions? The answer is that each misinterprets the other to be arguing for something they mistakenly type as an inimical tendency. In the case of the libertarians, the religious Right's promotion of theocratic communal moral standards and objective codes of behavior smacks dangerously of Statism, in spite of the fact that most of these standards and codes are

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Matthew 25: 30

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Rushdoony, "The Meaning of Theocracy," http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/article.php?ArticleID=2718

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> See chapters 2, 15 and 16 in M. Stanton Evans. <u>The Theme is Freedom</u>. Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing. 1994.

meant to be enforced through non-coercive social sanction, rather than though the arm of the tiny local governments promoted by Rushdoony and his ilk. By contrast, for the Religious right, the libertarians are mistaken for enemies given their argumentation that humans are not necessarily competent to decide which forms of evil should be stamped out via legal fiat, even though this is a conclusion which Christ himself must have reached the instant Pontius Pilate made the decision to bow to public pressure. Interestingly, what neither side seems to realize is that the problems they see in each other are precisely why they need each other the most as allies against their true philosophical *bête noire*.

And what is that true enemy? Put simply, it is radical egalitarianism, an enemy which both the Religious right and the libertarians vigorously oppose. After all, absent the desire by egalitarians to render all moral choices equal, the relativism which threatens the traditional codes fostered by the Religious right would be severely weakened, as would the temptation of libertarians towards the sweet poison of social liberalism. Moreover, absent the desire by egalitarians to render all economic conditions equal, the sort of frenzied mob politics and class-driven irrationality which libertarians fear so much would be a non-issue, as would the concern over irrational moral codes getting drunk on the drive to perfect humanity, thus stopping people from living in freedom. There may be an enemy who wants human potential stifled in the name of abstractions and human perfectibility, but it is not Christ and his parable of the talents. Similarly, there may be an enemy who wants all of life reduced to a heartless, soulless and callous economic struggle over resources ending in bloody, paradigm-destroying moral suicide, but it is not the libertarians. It is thus only fair to conclude, as we move into our discussion of battle between neoconservative and

paleoconservative political factions that, rather than giving comfort to their radical foes, the Religious and libertarian conservative movements must unite as defenders of the invisible hand of a morally omnipresent God, a hand whose iron fist will someday be brought down with full force upon the revolutionary hordes of the egalitarian Antichrist.

## Chapter 4: The Protocols of the Elders of Main Street: Neoconservatism as Refuge, Relapse and Rootlessness

"A neoconservative is a liberal who's been mugged by reality."

-Irving Kristol

"Neoconservatism...has never referred to as a set of doctrines to which a given group of adherents subscribed. Rather, it was invented as an invidious label to undermine political opponents, most of whom have been unhappy with being so described."

-Seymour Martin Lipset

Writing in 2003, at what some would consider to be the height of Bush-era triumphalism, *National Review* columnist Jonah Goldberg wryly observed, "The neocon label gets folded, spindled, and mutilated in any number of ways, every day. But there are four enduring misapplications of the word. These myths are: (1) the idea that neoconservative means "pro-war"; (2) the idea that neoconservative means "foreign-policy hawk"; (3) the idea that neoconservative means Jewish; and, (4) the idea that neoconservative refers to ex-liberals. Some of these used to be true, none of them are reliably so anymore." Quoting Inigo Montoya from the film The Princess Bride, Goldberg addressed the persistent dissenters against this so-called "neoconservative" ideology thusly: "You keep using that word; I do not think it means what you think it means." However, as Goldberg proceeded in "debunking"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> Jonah Goldberg. "The End of Neoconservatism." <u>National Review</u>. May 21, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://article.nationalreview.com/268891/the-end-of-neoconservatism/jonah-goldberg">http://article.nationalreview.com/268891/the-end-of-neoconservatism/jonah-goldberg</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Ibid.

these myths, it swiftly became clear that what he was really debunking was not the notion that neoconservatives supported these ideas, but rather the more substantive claims that non-neoconservative conservatives did not. "The fact that the neoconservatives won this argument helps to demonstrate why it's silly to talk solely of the influence of a small group of 'neocons' these days. If there is a consensus among the larger conservative community, why cherry pick a few Jewish intellectuals?" Goldberg asked. 128

Why indeed? Of all the labels within conservative discourse, none is so presently divisive as the dreaded "neocon." Labeled variously by dissenting commentators as warmongers <sup>129</sup>, a deadly movement opposed to the ideals of the Founding <sup>130</sup>, anti-intellectual propagandists for war with Iran <sup>131</sup>, a conspiratorial group of closeted elitist nihilists <sup>132</sup>, and most hyperbolically, as closeted fascists <sup>133</sup> devoted to "unmitigated evil," "neoconservative" has swiftly become less a designation with any substantive ideological content than an intellectual epithet. Interestingly, this shift in perception is both highly cyclical and arguably, for while the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Scott McConnell. "Among the Neocons." <u>The American Conservative</u>. April 21, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/apr/21/00007/">http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/apr/21/00007/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> John McManus. "Neoconservatism's Deadly Influence." <u>The New American</u>. Jan 22, 2007. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\_m0JZS/is\_2\_23/ai\_n24999554/">http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\_m0JZS/is\_2\_23/ai\_n24999554/</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Sam Sedaei. "The Anatomy of Neoconservative Propaganda." <u>Huffington Post.</u> May 21, 2008. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-sedaei/the-anatomy-of-neoconserv\_b\_102706.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-sedaei/the-anatomy-of-neoconserv\_b\_102706.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> Shadia B. Drury. "Saving America: Leo Strauss and the Neoconservatives." September 11, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6750.htm">http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article6750.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> Justin Raimondo. "Today's Conservatives are Fascists." Antiwar.com. January 4, 2005. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2005/01/03/todays-conservatives-are-fascists/">http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2005/01/03/todays-conservatives-are-fascists/</a>.

original intellectuals who formed the backbone of "neoconservatism" from the 1950's through the 1980's managed to endow the term "neoconservative" with meaning after much effort, the term has its roots as one implying not just general undesirability, but also intellectual treason, and has always been used by those outside its circle with some sort of disdain – either by liberals condemning the "neocons" as turncoats, or by paleoconservatives disdaining the "neos" as usurpers.

Yet, despite the generalized disdain in which the original "neoconservatives" and their ideological offspring are held, it would be wrong to argue that neoconservatives are wholly a fringe or minority group within the conservative movement. Rather, we argue that while neoconservatism has always had a few problematic philosophical offshoots, those offshoots have little-to-no effect on the conservative program, whereas the policy ideas (especially in the realm of foreign policy) and critiques of liberalism offered by neoconservatives have become nothing less than accepted dogma within conservative circles. So pervasive is this ideological osmosis, we argue, that even the aforementioned Conservative Political Action Conference of 2010, whose straw poll identified the highly non-neoconservative Ron Paul as the most ideologically popular contender for the Presidency, tacitly accepted the root assumptions of neoconservatism even as its attendees sought to distance themselves from the grossest excesses of this school of thought by labeling it as "neoconservative," and thus, by implication, illegitimate. On this note, we argue that because of its uniquely powerful position in the conservative ideological division of labor, neoconservatism only becomes dangerous to the extent that it accepts the legitimating myths it crafts to induce popular support for conservative ideas more broadly as truth rather than ideological convenience, and to the extent that these

legitimating myths mask abstracted romanticism under the guise of post-ideological thinking. Finally, we close with an analysis of how the schools of thought already examined in previous chapters can be reconciled with neoconservatism, and where existing conflicts have originated.

## I. "Come On In, the Water's Fine": The Neoconservative as Refugee

"A few years ago I said (and, alas, wrote) that neoconservatism had had its own distinctive qualities in its early years, but by now had been absorbed into the mainstream of American conservatism. I was wrong."

-Irving Kristol

Due to the explosive interest in neoconservative thinking in the post-Bush era, copious amounts of detailed history has been written documenting the rise of the movement. However, because of the hyped nature of the subject matter, many of these pieces face the unfortunate burden of either apologizing too extensively for neoconservatism or trying to bury it too polemically. What they all establish, however, is the incontestable fact that neoconservatism began not as an attraction to the right, but as a repulsion from mutations within liberalism itself. Mark Gerson, one of the few intellectual historians to treat neoconservatism at length *before* it was sensationalized, explains:

"From the early 1950's to the present day, neoconservatives have castigated liberalism for the same failures – ignoring the complexity of human action and the wisdom of human systems, a lack of resolve in confronting evil, a laissez-faire attitude toward human virtue, and an unwillingness to defend the critical ideas of American civilization from its discontents. Practically every neoconservative argument can be seen as a reaction to one of these left-wing ideas." 134

Naturally, the notion that the conservative movement could be home to Leftist refugees is nothing new – Whittaker Chambers, Frank Meyer and James Burnham all

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Mark Gerson. The <u>Neoconservative Vision</u>. New York: Madison Books. 1996. P. 23

started their ideological careers as communists – but what is perhaps most notable about the neoconservatives, as Gerson once more documents, is that theirs was a mass exodus from liberalism both institutionally and personally, rather than a slow trickle of individual dissidents. 135 As such, adherents of neoconservatism can be distinguished from other former Leftists-turned-conservatives in that they came to the Right as a genuine refugee *movement*, with its own distinctive magazines and leading figures. This status as a movement has granted neoconservatives two attributes which have alternately gratified and annoyed their traditional counterparts. Firstly, the fact that neoconservatism is a group movement has all but negated the chance of personal defection, given that none of its members have had to renounce their former ideological allies with anything approaching the frequency which figures like Burnham, Meyer and (especially) Chambers had to. However, just as this community element has tightened neoconservatives' allegiance to neoconservatism, it has also produced an ideological distance and independence from the wider conservative movement which causes more traditional conservatives to fret about whether neoconservatives are really loyal to the Right generally, or simply their own sect. Indeed, rather than deliberately moving to the Right and not looking back, neoconservatism shifted its allegiances by fits and starts, sometimes even ignoring explicit invitations from the wider movement to assimilate. For instance, in 1971, National Review editorialized, "Come on in, the water's fine," and yet, as Gerson

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Gerson, pp. 13-14

documents, many neoconservatives still reluctantly voted for George McGovern, he of "acid, amnesty and abortion" out of dying loyalty to the Democratic party. 136

The reluctance of neoconservatives to be drawn into the conservative fold, and to reject the idealism of the Left more generally, is perhaps best summed up in Irving Kristol's iconic quote, "A neoconservative is a liberal who's been mugged by reality." The verb choice ("mugged") is especially revealing, for it implies force, violation and theft. Ordinarily, one would expect discovery of the truth to be greeted by words like "enlightenment" or "clarity," but Kristol identifies his "mugger" by the more mundane term "reality," implying not only that the realization was an unwelcome and forced one, but rather that it represented a disappointment at how mundane and (presumably) non-ideal the "realistic" view really is. This tone of disappointment most likely has its origins in equal parts historical experience and ideological discomfort, for while the neoconservatives unqualifiedly denounce the Left for abandoning everything they saw as valuable in liberalism (abandonment which many of the original neoconservatives experienced firsthand), they have never renounced the notion that any parts of liberalism (albeit a different liberalism than the modern form) are valuable at all. As we will see in more detail in the discussion on paleoconservatives, this has led to the neoconservatives being denounced as fairweather conservatives without an ounce of respect for the permanent things, for there is always the fear that many neoconservatives will forget their "mugging" and return to the blissful unreality of their liberal past.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Gerson, p. 191

This suspicion could have been justifiably made about several of the older neoconservatives <sup>137</sup>, and to some extent, it is a timeless concern for any ideology which attracts disaffected former foes. However, modern developments in what is thought of as neoconservative ideology have begun to lessen the validity of such suspicions. For one thing, "neoconservatism" in the modern day has acquired several spokespeople and adherents whom neoconservatives of the old school would never have expected to be thus labeled – Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, both Ford-era realists, are the two highest profile examples – and the addition of these figures has complicated the picture as to what neoconservatism stands for in the modern day, if it ever stood for anything <sup>138</sup>, and also on what issues neoconservatives feels qualified to take a stand.

Part of this shift was a necessary step to take in order to perpetuate the existence of neoconservative thinking at all. The journalist Jacob Heilbrunn, for instance, describes the neoconservatives as originally "an obscure band of policy intellectuals, left for dead in the 1990s...[who] suddenly [rose] to influence the Bush administration." Implicit in this rise from being "left for dead" to becoming the top of the conservative pyramid was a necessary restructuring of the ideology's focus away from being the dreaded "moralists" of David Frum's <u>Dead Right</u>, who wanted to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> For instance, the sociologist Daniel Bell openly maintained a "socially democratic" (read: socialist) position long after he became part of the "neoconservative" establishment.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> As we will see, the record is very unclear on this question. Gerson, for instance, quotes James Q. Wilson as saying that "there is no such thing as a neoconservative manifesto, credo, religion, flag, anthem of secret handshake," (Gerson 15) but then lays out a four point credo to which all neoconservatives supposedly adhere. Moreover, Irving Kristol, perhaps the only person to openly identify as a neoconservative, frequently wrote lists of principles.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Jacob Heilbrunn. "They Knew They Were Right: The Rise of the Neocons." <u>Powell's Books.</u> Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.powells.com/biblio/1-9780385511810-1">http://www.powells.com/biblio/1-9780385511810-1</a>.

use the welfare Leviathan to impose conservative values, rather than abandoning it altogether – a position which became increasingly untenable as an opposition strategy against the centrist Bill Clinton. Indeed, one could almost call the Clinton administration a period when neoconservatives became victims of their own success, for with the titanic rightward shift of political discourse post-Reagan, it suddenly became a lot less necessary for conservatives to defensively defend certain functions of the welfare state, as Americans began to doubt not its efficacy, but its necessity, especially in the face of the budget-slashing neoconservative policies Reagan himself had embraced. This skepticism of welfare arguably reached its height when President Clinton himself declared the era of big government to be over after signing welfare reform, a move which took a lot of the air out of the sails of moderate defenders of welfare qua welfare, even as it emboldened the GOP to push for further reductions.

But another, and arguably more important element of the shift in neoconservative emphasis was generational. Unlike the elder Kristols, Podhoretzes, Bells and Novaks, this new generation had no Trotskyist youth to look back on <sup>140</sup>, little to no experience of liberalism as a monolithic and dominant force, and no need for a cautious foreign policy position, given the fall of the Berlin wall and of Communism generally. Moreover, having reached their full political commitments with the fall of Communism to United States might, this younger generation experienced the triumph of conservatism as primarily an *international* phenomenon, with the realm of the domestic soon to follow. In other words, while elder

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>140</sup> In fact, some of them had already visibly clashed with New Leftist students while in college and defensively moved Right as a result. See the writing on William Kristol in Nina Easton. <u>Gang of Five</u>. New York: Simon and Schuster. 2002.

neoconservatives concerned themselves with maintaining the legacy of the liberal realism they had advocated under Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy, younger neoconservatives concerned themselves with maintaining the legacy of the conservative idealism they experienced through the Presidency of Ronald Reagan. It is fair to say, then, that their default ideological loyalty was no longer split in nearly the same respect as that of their elders, for it was with conservatism that their great political triumphs arose.

None of this is to suggest that the contributions of elder neoconservatives are negligible. Indeed, as we will see, many of the policy ideas that earlier neoconservatives advocated for have either already been implemented or accepted as prominent elements of the conservative policy canon generally. Moreover, with respect to at least one ideological influence, younger neoconservatives have much in common with their elder peers, and in some cases, the optimism of these younger neoconservatives could stand to be tempered by a bit of the disillusionment of their elders. Nevertheless, the point stands that neoconservatism as it stands now, while it bears traces of its refugee past, stands in many ways as an exemplary instance of ideological assimilation, the best elements of which have largely been incorporated into conservative discourse already. It is, therefore, only with the intent to speed the assimilationist project further toward completion that we embark on assessing the flaws of this school of thought.

## II. Becoming the Glittering Mask: The Relapse of Neoconservatism

"Behold, a light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers."

-John Claggart, Benjamin Britten's Billy Budd

In the first issue of the neoconservative journal <u>The Public Interest</u>, Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell wrote:

It is the nature of ideology to *preconceive* reality; and it is exactly such preconceptions that are the worst hindrances to knowing-what-one-is-talking-about. It goes without saying that human thought and action is impossible without *some kinds* of preconceptions - philosophical, religious, moral, or whatever - since it is these that establish the purposes of all thought and action. But it is the essential peculiarity of ideologies that they do not simply prescribe ends but also insistently propose prefabricated interpretations of existing social realities - interpretations that bitterly resist all sensible revision. <sup>141</sup>

In other words, at least Kristol and Bell wanted it completely clear that under absolutely no circumstances would they be sucked into the temptations of any ideology, "liberal, conservative or radical." Neoconservatism would, instead, be a solely policy-related project, aimed at achieving the common good, with precisely what the common good *was* left undefined under the assumption that everyone agreed as to what it was. However, as they did accept that "some kinds of preconceptions" were acceptable, this left neoconservatism in a rather delicate position with respect to its positions. Just which kinds of "preconceptions" were ideological and which were not?

The answer Bell and Kristol provided – that ideology insisted on a specific interpretation of reality, whereas their "preconceptions" did not – was and is exceedingly evasive. On the one hand, one could interpret it as conforming to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol. <u>The Public Interest</u>. Fall 1965: 4

definition of ideology offered by political scientist Kenneth Minogue – that ideology refers to all systems of thought which posit a super-scientific reality which has only failed to be universally accepted because of the obstructionism of an oppressor class. <sup>142</sup> However, on the other hand, one could interpret Kristol and Bell's notion as applying to almost any religious or moral vision which presumed to pass general, abstract judgments (ie "interpretation") on particular elements of society. Given the historical context of Bell and Kristol's essay, it is likely that they would concur more with Minogue's definition, but the problems with alternate definitions arise the instant one considers what they intended to be the goal for the publication: "We feel that a democratic society, with its particular encouragement to individual ambition, private appetite, and personal concerns has a greater need than any other to keep the idea of the public interest before it." <sup>143</sup> And though Kristol and Bell acknowledged that the notion of what "the public interest" was is not settled, they explicitly foreclosed the question of whether such a thing even existed, with almost no reasoning given as to why the inquiry was cut off.

This tendency to ignore certain alternatives seemingly without good reason is a recurring theme in neoconservative thinking. Gerson writes of the early neoconservatives that "because the neoconservatives assumed without question the need for a minimal welfare state, the legitimacy of labor unions, and the justice of civil rights, they never felt the need to argue with those who doubted these things.

Talk from conservative politicians, writers, and publicists of the welfare state as the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Firing Line, Episode 642, aired April 11, 1985.

<sup>143</sup> Kristol and Bell, 5

beginning of the road to serfdom, the inviolable right to contract, and 'states rights' more or less bored the neoconservatives from the start. So, too, did the conservative intellectuals from the 1940s through the early 1960s, some of whom harbored an almost theocratic opposition to economic progress and the democratic politics of modernity." 144 This issue of "modernity" will become more and more pressing as we move into the question of paleoconservative opposition, but more interesting is the reflexive disdain for the ideas of early libertarians. One sees a sample of this disdain in Irving Kristol's scoffing remark at a Heritage Foundation talk, "Great, you're against the State. The State doesn't care." <sup>145</sup>

There are a likely number of reasons why libertarians would come in for this sort of criticism from Kristol, one of which is that, unlike other schools of conservative thought, its absolute insistence that government is at the root of every evil comes the closest to fitting the Minogue definition of ideology. However, this is not true of all libertarians, nor indeed was it true of the type Gerson mentions (such as Friedrich von Hayek, who accepted notions of a minimal welfare state even as he savaged the current one as "The Road to Serfdom"). It is not easy to accuse the neoconservatives of being intellectually lazy, so once more, one has to ask why this reflexive refusal to consider options manifested itself so clearly in the older movement, and why it still, to some extent, manifests itself in the current one.

We argue that the cause of this behavior, far from being intellectual snobbery or simple close-mindedness, is tied to a very specific, much-discussed and little

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Gerson, p. 20

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Ronald Bailey. "The Voice of Neoconservatism." Reason Magazine. October 17, 2001. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://reason.com/archives/2001/10/17/the-voice-of-neoconservatism">http://reason.com/archives/2001/10/17/the-voice-of-neoconservatism</a>.

understood element of neoconservative thought: its affiliation with the ideas of Leo Strauss. Strauss, who influenced no small number of neoconservative thinkers as students, is described by Irving Kristol thusly:

"Encountering Strauss's work produced the kind of intellectual shock that is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. He turned one's intellectual universe upside down. Suddenly, one realized that one had been looking at the history of Western political thought through the wrong end of the telescope... What made him so controversial within the academic community was his disbelief in the Enlightenment dogma that 'the truth will make men free.' He was an intellectual aristocrat who thought that the truth could make *some* minds free, but he was convinced that there was an inherent conflict between philosophic truth and the political order, and that the popularization and vulgarization of these truths might import unease, turmoil, and the release of popular passions hitherto held in check by tradition and religion – with utterly unpredictable, but mostly negative consequences." 146

Kristol's description, relative to those who disagree with Strauss, is delicate in the extreme. Shadia Drury, a political scientist with critical views of Strauss, argues that "Leo Strauss was a great believer in the efficacy and usefulness of lies in politics...How could an admirer of Plato and Nietzsche be a liberal democrat? The ancient philosophers whom Strauss most cherished believed that the unwashed masses were not fit for either truth or liberty, and that giving them these sublime treasures would be like throwing pearls before swine." Polemical as this description may be, combining a few of its elements with Kristol's acknowledgment of Strauss as an "intellectual aristocrat" yields a very different reason why neoconservatives would choose to ignore libertarianism, especially at the point where it denies that there is such a thing as a "public interest." That is, far from being wrong about the idea that no such thing as a "public interest" exists, if the masses were to

 $<sup>^{146}</sup>$  Irving Kristol. New York: The Free Press. 1995. p.  $8\,$ 

Drury, "Saving America," <a href="http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5010.htm">http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5010.htm</a>.

ever realize just how correct this libertarian critique actually is, social chaos would ensue. The choice of neoconservatives to ignore certain ideas rhetorically is thus arguably a compliment of the highest order, for it means the idea is potentially too dangerously persuasive for the social order to survive its exposure. Gerson calls this school of thought an offshoot of "ideological determinism," or the idea that the future will be determined by the spread and acceptance of particular ideas, rather than by economic transactions, as Marxists and certain brands of libertarians suggest.

Does this mean, then, as some detractors have suggested, that the neoconservative inclinations to defend religion (sometimes even going so far as to attack Darwin's theory of evolution) is merely an attempt to preserve the efficacy of various "lies?" Probably not. To begin with, using the term "lies" to describe what neoconservatives defend is unfair, since it implies willingly arguing for things one knows to be false. But this is not at all what neoconservatives are doing, for, as Gerson points out, one of the core tenets of neoconservative thought is that "while social institutions may not seem rational to the human eye, they embody inherited wisdom gathered as a result of their longevity." <sup>148</sup> It is more fair, then, to call the claims for institutions such as organized religion which neoconservatives defend "legitimating myths," since the root assumption on the part of these defenders is that the human mind is necessarily insufficient to pass judgment on whether or not the claims made by these institutions are correct. To put it bluntly, we can't know for sure, so we'd better defend whichever option has been proven by history to be more conducive to civilization.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Gerson, p. 17

So far, this sounds like noncontroversial fusionist notions of "reason operating within tradition." Where it becomes more complicated, however, is at the point where neoconservatives seek to change policies (or defend ones they have changed in the recent past) using legitimating myths of their own creation, rather than ones which have survived through the centuries (such as religion). This was a problem which the arch-traditionalist Strauss never anticipated, and probably would have viewed as irrelevant, given that the ancients provided all the answers anyway. Dangerous as this tendency to use Straussian means toward non-Straussian ends may be, however, worse yet is when neoconservatives (or, in frequent cases, their allies) begin to mistake legitimating myths for ends rather than means, and fight, missionary-like, to extend the values behind the myths beyond their historical function into areas where those myths become less and less sustainable.

To understand the former problem, one need only contrast the rhetoric employed by neoconservative advocates of American hawkishness during the War on Terror with the actual policy justifications they gave in scholarly journals/anthologies both prior to and during the war. Writing in 2000, long before terrorism was even an issue, neoconservative scholar James Caesar opined that, "the new liberalism of the nineties has begun to show its internationalist face. While it has become clear that in practice this entails a vigorous use of American national power and military might, the older liberal reservations remain strikingly evident in the half measures, the fecklessness, and the unwillingness to assert decisive American leadership that have characterized foreign policy in this decade." <sup>149</sup> More strikingly still, Robert Kagan

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> James W. Caesar. "The Great Divide: American Interventionism and its Opponents." In <u>Present Dangers</u>. Kristol and Kagan, ed. San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books. 2000. p. 26

and Bill Kristol summed up the neoconservative view of American foreign policy in an essay titled (naturally) "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy" this way:

"The aspiration to benevolent hegemony might strike some as either hubristic or morally suspect. But a hegemon is nothing more or less than a leader with preponderant influence and authority over all others in its domain. That is America's position in the world today. The leaders of Russia and China understand this. At their April summit meeting, Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin joined in denouncing 'hegemonism' in the post-Cold War world. They meant this as a complaint about the United States. It should be taken as a compliment and a guide to action." <sup>150</sup>

Contrast this with the rhetoric employed by President Bush during his 2003 State of the Union address, during which he claimed, "Now, in this century, the ideology of power and domination has appeared again, and seeks to gain the ultimate weapons of terror. Once again, this nation and all our friends are all that stand between a world at peace, and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility." The next year, Bush claimed, still more sweepingly, that "As democracy takes hold in Iraq, the enemies of freedom will do all in their power to spread violence and fear. They are trying to shake the will of our country and our friends, but the United States of America will never be intimidated by thugs and assassins. The killers will fail, and the Iraqi people will live in freedom." 152

William Kristol and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy." <u>Foreign Affairs.</u> July/August 1996. Accessed April 10, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=276">http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=276</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> George W. Bush. "State of the Union." <u>The White House: President George W. Bush.</u> January 28, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/print/20030128-19.html">http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/print/20030128-19.html</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> George W. Bush. "Transcript of State of the Union." <u>CNN</u>. January 21, 2004. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/01/20/sotu.transcript.3/index.html">http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/01/20/sotu.transcript.3/index.html</a>>.

"Democracy." "Freedom." "Safety." These terms are unquestionably a far cry from terms used by neoconservative scholars such as "hegemony," "authority" and "leadership." Indeed, an unkind critic could suggest that Bush's earlier line criticizing "the ideology of power and domination" makes very little sense in the context of a movement whose ideology seems to be one oriented toward *American* power and domination, but this seems to us to suggest an unfair brand of moral equivalence <sup>153</sup>. A more substantive question, though, is even if the goal of neoconservatives was American power and domination, why did they bother to hide it, and why, when the lines about "freedom" and "democracy" began to tank in the polls, did they not simply switch to the more cynical, but simultaneously less easily disputed, claim that the world is better off when America is a dominant power, and that the war in Iraq was a goal oriented toward increasing that dominance in a problematic region of the world?

This is not a question which has gone unasked. Indeed, no less a figure than William F. Buckley Jr asked it in a February 2006 column, writing, "One can't doubt that the American objective in Iraq has failed...Mr. Bush has a very difficult internal problem here because to make the kind of concession that is strategically appropriate requires a mitigation of policies he has several times affirmed in high-flown pronouncements. His challenge is to persuade himself that he can submit to a historical reality without forswearing basic commitments in foreign policy." Later, on a *National Review* sponsored cruise, Buckley publicly feuded with the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> One could argue, for instance, that the hegemony advocated by neoconservatives is merely an unofficial form of international dominance, whereas the forces Bush denigrates are largely totalitarian regimes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> William F. Buckley Jr. "It Didn't Work." <u>National Review.</u> February 24, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010.<a href="http://old.nationalreview.com/buckley/buckley/200602241451.asp">http://old.nationalreview.com/buckley/buckley/200602241451.asp</a>.

neoconservative Norman Podhoretz, and acknowledged to a reporter that, had Reagan handled the Iraq war, he would have installed a dictatorship, rather than a democracy, in Iraq. <sup>155</sup>

Buckley's complaint didn't go far enough, for it is arguable that many of the older neoconservatives would have advocated a similar treatment of the troublesome principality. Writing in the November 1979 issue of *Commentary* magazine, for instance, neoconservative diplomat Jeanne Kirkpatrick complained that,

"Although most governments in the world are, as they always have been, autocracies of one kind or another, no idea holds greater sway in the mind of educated Americans than the belief that it is possible to democratize governments, anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances. This notion is belied by an enormous body of evidence based on the experience of dozens of countries which have attempted with more or less (usually less) success to move from autocratic to democratic government. Many of the wisest political scientists of this and previous centuries agree that democratic institutions are especially difficult to establish and maintain-because they make heavy demands on all portions of a population and because they depend on complex social, cultural, and economic conditions." <sup>156</sup>

Rather than encouraging Democracy, then, Kirkpatrick argued for a much more cynical and realistic view of how American interventions should proceed in domesticating hostile countries. "The foreign policy of the Carter administration fails not for lack of good intentions but for lack of realism about the nature of traditional versus revolutionary autocracies and the relation of each to the American national interest," Kirkpatrick wrote. "Only intellectual fashion and the tyranny of Right/Left thinking prevent intelligent men of good will from perceiving the *facts* that traditional authoritarian governments are less repressive than revolutionary autocracies, that they

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Johann Hari. "Reshuffling the Deck Chairs on the National Review Cruise." <u>The New Republic.</u> June 21, 2007. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/sloth/2007-07-01.html">http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/sloth/2007-07-01.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>156</sup> Jeanne Kirkpatrick. "Dictatorships and Double Standards." Commentary. November 1979: 37

are more susceptible of liberalization, and that they are more compatible with U.S. interests. The evidence on all these points is clear enough."<sup>157</sup>

More damningly still, even President Bush's infamous advisor Karl Rove publicly regretted the strategies employed in the Iraq War, though he still argued (as Buckley, but not Kirkpatrick, also did) that undertaking the war itself was the right decision. Rove writes, "I didn't pretend to be Carl von Clausewitz or Henry Kissinger, but I knew the Iraq War wasn't going well, that the Bush presidency was in peril, and that unless we made changes, public support would crater. If that happened, we would lose not only Iraq but our ability to prevail against terrorism." <sup>158</sup> So once more we arrive at the question of why, rather than following a genuinely "neo-Reaganite" foreign policy, the Bush administration chose to not only talk the talk of freedom and democracy, but to actually try to implement it, and to prop up their experiment with costly measures once it began to look like a failure, rather than simply institute a new political strategy at the same time they implemented a new military strategy, assuming that political strategy would have, in fact, produced a friendly regime at a lesser cost than democratization? Given that neoconservatives all the way up to Vice President Cheney have, since the inception of the Obama administration, either explicitly or implicitly disowned the concept of nation building even as they argue for the (in conservative circles) relatively noncontroversial notions of strict counterterrorism and preemption, this latter assumption seems fair.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Kirkpatrick, 44

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Karl Rove. <u>Courage and Consequence.</u> New York: Threshold Editions. 2010. p. 477

No definitive factual answer has emerged – however, one can piece together a fairly coherent ideological explanation if one looks to the writing of one of Bush's primary speechwriters, who was tasked with defending his policies: Michael Gerson (no relation to Mark Gerson). Indeed, Gerson's post-Bush book, Heroic Conservatism, could well be read as a definitive guide to every way in which neoconservative "legitimating myths" can be taken too far and transformed into nothing but a bellicose, self-righteous brand of liberalism. Gerson's chapter on Iraq, interestingly titled as "Has Iraq Killed Idealism" (tacit premise: that Iraq was an idealistic venture) clearly shows (and at some points, implicitly admits), evasive language aside, that the true problem with throwing idealistic legitimating myths around as an excuse for policies with generally cynical goals runs the incredible risk that someone selling the myth will actually believe it and start crusading for it.

Gerson writes, "History, unfortunately, is unconcerned with our weariness – indifferent to our exhaustion. And the hardest duties may lie ahead. The mortal threats of our time may require new commitments, new sacrifice and new courage. If the lesson drawn from Iraq is that the world is too complex and uncontrollable for America to act decisively in its own interests, then the American decline will have already begun – and there will be no peace or respite or safety on our long retreat." Elsewhere in his essay, Gerson cautions that, "an imperious contempt for the Shia – a belief that barbarians will always be barbarians – is neither fair nor helpful…Iraq does not demonstrate that democracy is impossible in the Arab world; it demonstrates that founding a new democracy is difficult in a nation overrun by militias and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> Michael Gerson. Heroic Conservatism. New York: HarperCollins. 2007. p. 217

insurgents."<sup>160</sup> It is worth noting that Gerson never says such a goal is impossible, nor does he ever question the notion of whether the United States' mission in Iraq was to spread democracy, or if it was any of the manifold other goals which neoconservatives have historically adopted, including the weakening of America's enemies. For Gerson, the rhetoric (where legitimating myths can easily hide) is taken for reality.

Does this problem afflict neoconservatives generally? Yes – though, ironically enough, not usually in the realm of foreign policy. Michael Gerson's pages on Iraq, ironically, are some of the most restrained in the book, as elsewhere, he savages the pre-Bush Republican party for emboldening "the advocates of isolationism, nativism, and a libertarian indifference to the poor." <sup>161</sup> This sort of hysterical demonization should, properly speaking, be out of place among neoconservatives, for as Irving Kristol points out, "unlike previous such currents of thought...neoconservatism is antiromantic." 162 Yet Gerson is not alone in indulging in it, as Penn Kemble, a more explicitly socialist leaning neoconservative, has written that "We have a great message to tell the world about how spectacularly our system has succeeded, and how well others who have adopted that system have succeeded. I fear the spirit of a return to 'orthodoxy,' as Irving Kristol put it, and the tendency to belittle new social or political visions of possibility taking hold among some 'neoconservatives.' That inclination towards pessimism could prevent us from carrying forward our message...It is a message of hope, and, if argued with spirit, it could have an

<sup>160</sup> Michael Gerson, pp. 212-213

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Michael Gerson, p. 177

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Irving Kristol. Reflections of a Neoconservative. New York: Basic Books. 1983. p. 76

enormous impact on the world. Our mixed political and economic system, part capitalist and part social democratic, is, despite its familiarity for us, *still a* revolutionary enterprise."<sup>163</sup>

What Kemble fails to acknowledge is that the ideological issues with accepting this sort of tacit romanticism and/or optimism as a neoconservative are substantial, both from the perspective of appealing to the wider movement, and from the perspective of ideological consistency. Firstly, from the perspective of a conservative movement which, as we have demonstrated, is overwhelmingly concerned with the maintenance of predictability and order (whether enforced or spontaneous), any such "revolutionary" messaging would necessarily lead to a broadbased reaction against the messenger. For all the talk of a "conservative revolution," conservative ideology has never approved of revolution – at least not as it has come to be defined since Rousseau – and so neoconservatives with a romantic desire for revolutionary social change would easily fall prey to the attempts by jealous conservative compatriots to paint all neoconservatives as closeted liberals.

But more substantively, the romantic and optimistic vision proposed by

Gerson and Kemble is itself at odds with both the original definition of

neoconservatism as liberalism, mugged by reality, and the implicit posture of the

Straussian view of the world. At the point where neoconservatism proposes to be the

ideology of Platonic guardians of society, it must necessarily be a vision which is

without illusion itself, and which is aware of the areas where human knowledge fear

to tread. The myths which are intended to mask the existence of such areas, therefore,

<sup>163</sup> Penn Kemble. "A Social Democratic View." In <u>Capitalism and Socialism</u>, Michael Novak, ed. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute. 1979. p. 182

must constantly be regarded with suspicion by those who propagate them, and never as excuses for a crusade, unless that crusade is undertaken in the interests of proving their legitimacy. This is precisely the opposite stance of romanticism, and were romanticism allowed to corrupt it, then soon the dry, utilitarian calculus of which traditions keep society well-ordered could easily give way to a Rousseauistic fervor which would seek to manipulate legitimating myths so as to induce particular social behaviors for the perfection of mankind according to standards which were originally acknowledged as myths. This is not conservative, and more importantly, it is unsustainable, which means that neoconservatives ought to jealously guard against it by seeking not to craft their legitimating myths in a vacuum, about which we will say more later.

And finally, the problem of neoconservative romanticism as a rejection of Kristol's "mugging" by reality cannot be ignored, for if romantic visions of spreading democracy a la Woodrow Wilson, or of using the Welfare state as a corrective to human nature, are embraced fully by neoconservatives, then the mugging itself may as well have not happened. It is essential, the root natural and moral premises of liberalism having been refuted by this mugging, that neoconservatives draw on other views for the crafting of both their legitimating myths and their (by some standards) ideology. We now turn to a study of how the factions discussed thus far provide that framework, and to a preview of how paleoconservatism, discussed in the next chapter, will also contribute.

## III. Reasoning Within the Myths of Tradition: Neoconservatism as Rootlessness

"Neocons feel at home in today's America to a degree that more traditional conservatives do not. Though they find much to be critical about, they tend to seek intellectual guidance in the democratic wisdom of Tocqueville, rather than in the Tory nostalgia of, say, Russell Kirk."
-Irving Kristol

In an article criticizing neoconservatism from the libertarian perspective, *Reason* magazine contributor Ronald Bailey complained about a talk by Irving Kristol that, "In the end, what revealed the most about neoconservatism in Kristol's talk was a notable absence: He never once mentioned individual liberty." <sup>164</sup> Similarly, Reconstructionist author Gary North writes of the neoconservative movement that, "The conservatives' full-scale rejection of the modern state did not motivate the founders of neoconservatism. In the words of Irving Kristol, they gave at most two cheers for capitalism. Some of them had been advocates of Marxist revolution or socialist take-over in their early years. All of them were liberal Democrats in their middle age. Then they saw the error of their ways. Or did they?" <sup>165</sup> Another religious blogger, going by the name of Spengler, observes caustically that "the neoconservatives play at faith rather than live in the world of faith, a stance that eliminates their relevance to a world in which faith politics dominate." <sup>166</sup> And, naturally, every paleoconservative under the sun has at some point written an attack

 $^{164}$  Bailey, "The Voice of Neoconservatism," <a href="http://reason.com/archives/2001/10/17/the-voice-of-neoconservatism">http://reason.com/archives/2001/10/17/the-voice-of-neoconservatism</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>165</sup> Gary North: "An Introduction to Neoconservatism." <u>Lew Rockwell Online</u>. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north180.html">http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north180.html</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> Spengler. "The Unmaking of the Neoconservative Mind." <u>Asia Times Online</u>. February 23, 2005. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\_Page/GB23Aa01.html">http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\_Page/GB23Aa01.html</a>.

on neoconservatives for being rootless, closeted modernists with no soul or, worse yet, anti-Constitutionalists.

All of these critiques carry an ounce of truth for every pound of polemic they otherwise carry – indeed, neoconservatives have been extraordinarily hesitant to include other elements of conservative thought into their thinking, and have in some cases even outright disdained these other strains. <sup>167</sup> This sort of mutual antagonism is hardly helpful from a political standpoint and, more importantly, it is unnecessary from an ideological standpoint.

It is at this point that we think another accusation of bias is likely to surface. That is, it may be argued that, in chastising neoconservatives for failing to live up to their (Straussian) roots, we never actually question the notion of whether Straussianism itself is liberal - not an idle critique, when you consider how some might view its fondness for legitimating myths - and that this shows a bias on our part toward the Straussian worldview. In response to this, we advance two arguments: firstly, Straussianism is demonstrably illiberal. Strauss himself was one of the original conservative thinkers, and given that his thinking relied almost exclusively on looking at Western civilization through the lens of Ancient Western philosophy, while mixing in a pessimistic critique of the enlightenment idea of universal rationality, it is not difficult to see why he belongs on the Right. Indeed, one need not be a neoconservative to be a Straussian, as Strauss' thought could be equally at home in traditionalist quarters, or even libertarian ones.

<sup>167</sup> See our previous discussion of libertarianism.

Secondly, the critique of neoconservatives for failing to live up to Straussian is in itself connected to the role which neoconservatives play in the ideological division of labor - a role for which Straussianism uniquely suits them. It has often been argued, especially by disgruntled paleoconservatives, that neoconservatives set the limits of permissible dissent within the conservative movement. The neoconservatives, naturally enough, respond that they do no such thing, and wouldn't be interested in filling such a role, even if they could do so. Still, it cannot be denied that neoconservatism has acquired a disproportionate level of political power and influence relative to the other schools of conservative thought, at least in the context of relations with Washington, D.C. This would undoubtedly be a dangerous situation for other schools of conservative thought, if neoconservatives had a coherent ideological vision. But they do not. Indeed, their founding figure, Irving Kristol, though he has tossed out the occasional list of "neoconservative principles," explicitly mocks the notion of a detailed ideology based on "utopian" ideals, claiming that "all that precision turns out to be self-defeating."

Ironically enough, if Kristol had stopped here, we think the paleoconservatives would probably have welcomed him as one of their own, given that this is precisely the sort of thing Russell Kirk believed about "demon ideology." However, perhaps one reason why neoconservatism has attracted such mistrust from both libertarians and their paleoconservative brethren is that, unlike their religious brethren, neoconservatives do not resemble either libertarianism or traditionalism fully. Like libertarians, they rely on reason, statistical evidence and utilitarian calculi to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Irving Kristol. Neoconservatism: Autobiography of an Idea. New York: The Free Press. 1995. P. 344

formulate policy ideas; like traditionalists, they are skeptical of ideology, support a homogenous culture and tend to trust authority more than liberty as the organizing principle of society. Thus it is fair to say that what traditionalists aspire to defend with rhetoric, neoconservatives aspire to defend with reason and social science. This is not likely to endear them to either the more scientistic libertarians or the more philosophical paleoconservatives, given that it cannibalizes both systems in a way which neither one would endorse.

But of course, this does little to refute the charge of usurpation, or the fear thereof. Specifically, as the Encyclopedia of American Conservatism points out, "Many paleoconservatives believe that the conservative movement has been taken away from them...that [they] may be swallowed by the neoconservatives as conservative activists adopt the social science-based arguments of the neoconservatives in place of their traditional reliance on a more philosophically based point of view. Many paleoconservatives have come to resent the influence of neoconservative publications and the neoconservatives' ability to obtain foundation money to support their programs." <sup>169</sup> Even supposing all these charges are true, if the substantive doctrine which neoconservatives are advocating is still indistinguishable from that advocated by other conservatives, then one must be justified in asking what the ideological trouble is. Moreover, supposing all these charges are true, it may tell us something about what the neoconservative role in the ideological division of labor is. Again, quoting from the Encyclopedia, "neoconservative ideology had four major characteristics. First, neoconservatives remained wedded to the social science

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> John Ehrman. "Neoconservatism." <u>Encyclopedia of American Conservatism.</u> Wilmington, DE: ISI Books. 2006. P. 614

approach. Neoconservative analyses were marked by rigorous research and careful writing and south to identify the true causes of problems." This approach, while it is well-suited to dispassionate problem-solving, and thus very much at home in the halls of power, is obviously not suitable for the crafting of paradigms, and indeed, given neoconservatism is mistrustful of paradigms, there is no particular reason why it should be. However, this presents a problem which we have discussed in preceding sections - all policy improvements require a moral/abstract notion of what constitutes a problem. As such, in the absence of paradigms, neoconservatism is left adrift, with no particular reason to view particular policy results as problematic. This suggests that, while neoconservatives hold most of the obvious indicators of power, the relationship between them and the broader conservative movement is a little more codependent than the paleoconservatives believe.

The implicit arguments advanced by neoconservative policy studies and books bear this notion out - indeed, most of the domestic policy suggestions which neoconservatives have made, while their suggested means of improvement are more incremental than those favored by more traditional conservatives, are quite derivative of the philosophical concerns of their fellow schools of thought. The neoconservative critique of the education system, for instance, owes much of its substance to libertarianism<sup>171</sup>, whereas one does not have to be particularly insightful to notice the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Ehrman, p. 612. Emphasis mine.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Especially Milton Friedman's defense of vouchers.

paleconservative traces in the works of neoconservatives such as Charles Murray. This suggests that the role neoconservatives play in the movement is less that of ideological originator than of translator - that is, they take the broad, free-floating philosophical concerns of the three other schools of thought, and concretize them into actual policy. This is a position that, while it is more likely to gain political power/influence, is necessarily philosophically unimaginative, thus marking neoconservatives as a negligible threat to the domestic concerns of their fellow conservatives.

It is also a role which demands philosophical flexibility, hence our willingness to accept Straussianism as the neoconservative predilection. If one is to translate the concerns of a movement whose balance of ideological power shifts as much as the conservative movement's does, one must retain a certain sense of distance from the claims of the various different schools, so as to be able to call on each of them with equal levels of command, depending on which one is most cogent at any given time. This need not be a distance grounded in utter cynicism - as the Encyclopedia of American Conservatism points out, "the Platonic teaching concerning the 'noble lie' certainly cannot be understood as providing blanket permission for opportunistic political dissembling." However, the "noble lie" claim does permit one to at least entertain the possibility that a particular claim could be philosophically wrong, but socially correct, which provides just enough distance to allow the hypothetical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Murray has, at times, sounded tones which are both libertarian and paleoconservative. His infamous work <u>The Bell Curve</u>, for instance, manages to combine a libertarian defense of the cream rising to the top with a paleoconservative mistrust of universal human potential.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>173</sup> Mark Henrie. "Straussianism." <u>Encyclopedia of American Conservatism</u>. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books. 2006. p. 825

ideologist to take advantage of political opportunities. Even given that the different schools of conservative thought are all reconcilable, their differences of emphasis will necessarily make one or the other more relevant, depending on the issue. As such, the complaint that neoconservatives are occasionally guilty of accepting their own rhetorical defenses as mandates for positive action is more than simply a slap on the wrist - it is as deadly a problem, given their place in the conservative division of labor, as any other form of conservative heresy, for it places them in precisely the position which they accuse the Left of patronizing - that of being detailed exponents of a utopian, abstractly-generated, ahistorical fever dream.

This is especially problematic in the realm of foreign policy, where neoconservatives have made perhaps their most enduring contribution to conservatism. This is no accident, for unlike domestic policy, wherein the assumptions of the dominant culture/religious ethos/economic system must be controlling, foreign policy is the closest thing to a non-philosophical, purely practical, Hobbesian study in the social sciences. Western notions of freedom cannot be expected to be controlling in the minds of dictators, just as Christian morality is surely irrelevant to the thought processes of Islamic extremists, and just as allusions to the Permanent Things of Western European culture would be when dealing with explicitly anti-colonial, anti-European strongmen. Thus, neoconservatives are successful at the foreign policy level because they speak in the only universal tongue the language of force. But speaking in such a tongue is by its very nature antiromantic, which makes the idea of blind adherence to an abstract ideal inherently dangerous. Written in 2006, the aforementioned Encyclopedia of American

Conservatism contained the observation that "Most neoconservatives, on the other

hand, not only supported the Gulf and Iraq Wars but also, as exemplified by Joshua Muravchik, have advocated a neo-Wilsonian policy wherein the United States has a moral obligation to assist by whatever means necessary the globalization of democracy."

Had Muravchik maintained this view, even in the face of the excesses of the Bush administration, he would have made a classic case study for the potential failure of neoconservative legitimating myths. As it turns out, he is a case study for precisely the opposite - that is, the triumph of neoconservative realism. Writing just before the 2006 election, Muravchik sounded Buckleyite notes as he observed, "Recent elections in the Palestinian territories and Egypt have brought disconcerting results that suggest democratizing the Middle East may be more difficult than we imagined. That parties unappealing to us have done well should not in itself be a surprise. (After all, it happens in France no matter who wins.) But there is plenty of reason to wonder whether Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, once empowered by democracy, will simply turn around and crush it." Such an observation cannot have been easy for Muravchik to make, and yet it shows how neoconservatism's root skepticism and distaste for political illusions can render it a genuinely useful and adaptive element of the conservative consensus. In summation, then, what some may interpret as a bias toward neoconservatism in our analysis was really a recognition that neoconservatism, unlike its counterparts, is necessarily ill-suited to the formulation of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Ehrman, p. 614

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>175</sup> Joshua Muravchik. "The FP Memo: Operation Comeback." <u>Foreign Policy</u>. October 10, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/10/10/the\_fp\_memo\_operation\_comeback?page=0,1">http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/10/10/the\_fp\_memo\_operation\_comeback?page=0,1</a>.

ideological content, and thus not intelligible via the same elevated level of philosophical scrutiny, given that it explicitly limits itself to practical suggestions, which by their nature make for sparse philosophy.

Still, the specific concerns over neoconservative heresy remain, and must be answered. Let us begin with the view proffered the libertarians. Summing up the libertarian critique of neoconservatism, Jonah Goldberg wrote, "I know I'm pretty far afield at this point so I'll bring it back to Big Brother. There are lots of conservatives — good, smart, serious folks — who think Big Brother is a very real threat (and therefore they believe I am a 'dangerous fool' — in the words of many — for having written otherwise). These are, for the most part, the same conservatives who look on the war on terrorism with a great deal of distrust. Early on, they denounced the military commissions intended for terrorists. They ridicule the new secrecy of this already secretive White House. These conservative civil libertarians distrust an expansion of federal power by liberals or conservatives." Of course, by contrast, Irving Kristol believes that "the State doesn't care" whether people oppose it.

Generally speaking, libertarian opposition to neoconservatism takes three forms – either the libertarians object to the neoconservative growth of executive power, or they object to what they see as Bush-era attacks on civil liberties, or they object to the bellicosity of neoconservative thought on the grounds that "war is the health of the State." None of these are idle critiques, and much could be said about

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Jonah Goldberg. "Left v. State, Again." <u>National Review.</u> March 25, 2002. Accessed April 10, 2010.

 $<sup>&</sup>lt; http://article.national review.com/print/?q=NjE0NTA0MmNlOGNhMWFlMGNjNTM0MGU5NDE3 \\ MzBjNTI=>.$ 

any of them at the level of policy details. However, at the level of pure ideation, they can be resolved.

To deal with the first two problems libertarians express over neoconservatives – that executive power has been expanded too far afield and that Civil liberties have been too eroded – one must ask whether this expansion/erosion was the symptom of an actual ideological commitment to extreme executive power, or rather a pragmatic decision in the face of a larger belief that crises nullify the usual rules of political philosophy. If it is the latter, then one can dismiss the libertarian argument that neoconservatism and libertarianism on the grounds that no principles are at stake, but rather different interpretations of where political expediency must flow. However, if it is the former, then there seems to be a direct ideological clash.

Or does there? Contrary to the complaints of anti-executive power civil libertarians, the libertarian position on the desirability of executive power, as opposed to, say, legislative or judicial power, is rather unclear, as is the position they hold on the importance of civil liberties in times of crisis. Milton Friedman, for instance, advised and supported Augusto Pinochet, the very image of the strong executive, in order to save the Chilean economy and government from Communism, while the contemporary libertarian scholar Hans Hermann Hoppe has argued that societies actually tend toward greater freedom and fiscal restraint under *monarchies* than under democracies. At this point, we seem to be thrown back on a more basic question – that is, *which* schools of libertarianism cannot be reconciled with neoconservatism?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> See Hans Hermann Hoppe. <u>Democracy: The God that Failed</u>. New York: Transaction Publishers. 2001.

But even if we assume that there are schools of libertarian thought with principled objections to executive power, why do these objections exist? Presumably, given the Goldberg quote above, the answer is that libertarians dread the potential for abuse of said power. In fact, some believe this abuse has already happened, as Michael Tanner of the CATO Institute writes in his book, Leviathan on the Right, "many of the Bush administration's executive orders have had wide-ranging effect. They include executive orders authorizing warrantless wiretapping and creating military tribunals for trying suspected terrorists...as with signing statements and other tools of the 'unitary executive,' the Bush administration has not used executive orders only in regard to foreign policy or the war on terror." Tanner's objection bleeds somewhat into the second libertarian objection to neoconservative ideas (they blur the lines on what is constitutionally acceptable), but it is worth noting briefly that, at the level of pure political philosophy on Executive power, libertarians will have a difficult time opposing expansions of power for various reasons at the point where, as documented in Chapter 2, their root value of individual liberty is grounded on aesthetic and intuitive definitions, rather than systematic ones. Moreover, as Rushdoony argued contra Acton, the mere possession of power is not itself an evil, unless the power is abused in some way. Therefore, if one accepts that, in the post-Bush era, the exercises of power undertaken by neoconservatives in the past are now so unpopular as to be highly politically risky, then it is just good politics for neoconservatives to eschew them. One can also presume, given the Straussian predilections of neoconservatives, that anything which erodes their ability to manage

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Michael Tanner. <u>Leviathan on the Right</u>. Washington, DC: CATO Institute. 2007. pp. 192-193

the State will be necessarily avoided, and given that abuses of power are generally unpopular, there are sizable incentives for neoconservative rulers to avoid them.

Moreover, on the issue of civil liberties, there is at least one way to complicate the libertarian critique on these grounds. John Locke himself accepted, for instance, that toleration and civil liberties were not appropriate for all members of a society, especially those with foreign allegiances and/or the inability to accept communal morality. While this hardly proves that all libertarians should accept Locke's view, it does suggest that a libertarian case could be made for the Bush-era restrictions on civil liberties, especially at the point where they failed to effect constitutionally protected American citizens, and were only designed for crisis. Moreover, given that the administration responded to Constitutional rebukes by the Supreme Court through already established channels or accepted them, rather than employing Andrew Jackson-style indifference, it's difficult to argue that neoconservatism is necessarily in opposition to the Constitution. It is thus the third objection – that war is the health of the State – which seems the strongest from the libertarian perspective, and also the most instructive from the neoconservative perspective.

Before proceeding, it must be observed that the elements which neoconservatism and libertarianism offer to the conservative movement are fundamentally different. Libertarianism, for all its grand claims about morality and natural rights, is fundamentally an economic doctrine and, more importantly, a doctrine of human nature – one which posits that human beings will use whatever

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> John Locke. "Letter Concerning Toleration." Accessed April 10, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm">http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> For instance, the McCardle clause of Article 3 of the Constitution.

power/money/resources they are given to their fullest extent in the pursuit of individual goals and, to the extent that they can afford to do this, will ignore the needs of others. It is not a romantic vision, but it is certainly one which is consistent with the neoconservative distrust of romanticism and mass democracy. On the other hand, neoconservatism is, as Irving Kristol says, not "any kind of 'movement.' It holds no meetings, has no organizational form, [and] has no specific programmatic goals."

What neoconservatism is is a style of thinking which takes as its premises detachment from abstraction and solipsism, in favor of a God's eye view of policy and social conditioning. Libertarianism thus aspires to spontaneity, while neoconservatism aspires to dominance. Libertarianism, like all economic philosophies, is based on what the economist Charles Lindblom calls the "exchange relation," whereas neoconservatism is based almost entirely on what he calls the "authority principle." It is only natural, then, that a person interested in exchange would object to a process which is the "health of the state," while a person interested in authority would brush this off as mere naivete.

Neither diagnosis, however, is fully accurate, because neither principle can really give an account of the other. It is revealing, for instance, that the libertarian opposition to war is grounded not on any opposition to conflict, but simply to any process which has the potential to aggrandize the State. This is because, while libertarians all agree that increased government control over economic affairs is a bad thing, their stance on government war making is, at best, ambivalent. Indeed, many libertarians believe that war is the *only* legitimate function of the State, suggesting

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>181</sup> Charles Linblom. Politics and Markets. New York: Basic Books. 1977. P. 18

that libertarians really only have an objection to the "butter" side of the "guns and butter" welfare-warfare system they oppose. Moreover, if any given libertarian does concede this, then it becomes progressively less clear why the "health of the State," as opposed to the *growth* of the State, is necessarily a bad thing. Small government is not mutually exclusive with strong government – indeed, a small government may be *more* ruthless and effective than a large one because of the limited area in which its resources can be used.

As such, it must be observed that the beauty of the "health of the State" critique is that it simultaneously showcases a weakness in libertarian ideology at the same time it points out a blind spot in neoconservatism, for if neoconservatives are too quick to go to war and unable to understand human nature well enough to justify it, libertarians may be too hesitant, or too cavalier with the costs to relative power and prestige which war can envision. As such, one can only affirm that, yes, war *is* the health of the State, but the question is, *which State*? No one could argue that the United States is structurally at all similar to, say, the Soviet Union or Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and it is surely the case that both of these systems are unfriendly to libertarian principles. The question, then, is whether libertarians have an *interest* in waging a war against radically Islamist and/or terrorism-funding regime, and the answer is clearly yes – ironically, on the basis of a neoconservative's writing.

In the anthology <u>Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry</u>, edited by Michael Novak, one essay is dedicated to the Muslim perspective on the dispute between capitalism and socialism. The essay contains passages which libertarians would find, to put it mildly, troubling. For instance, the author, Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, writes, "Islam was first pronounced through the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca

in 610 AD. For the next thirteen years, the Prophet had to struggle against the polytheist inhabitants of that town, a trading class of aristocrats who exploited for their selfish interests a large number of serfs and slaves and rejected Muhammad's egalitarian teachings as vigorously as they did his monotheistic beliefs." Further on, Abdul-Rauf writes, "real ownership of wealth, consumable or productive, belongs to God. Man's temporal possession is limited and is granted by God: man is a 'trustee' for a term. Realization of this dual ownership mitigates against selfish and dishonest tendencies that often result from the deceitful notion of absolute ownership...implicit in the notion of 'trusteeship' and testing through wealth and worldly success is the idea that material superiority does not equal higher merit. All people are created equal, as equal as the teeth of a comb." 183

To those familiar with Rothbard's scathing attacks on egalitarianism, or Ayn Rand's denunciations of religious altruism, or even Rushdoony's assaults on a top-down model of theocracy and support for a 10% tithe, this type of teaching should be absolutely antithetical. Does this mean that Islam is incompatible with conservatism? In the more moderate form which Abdul-Rauf presents it in later in his article, hardly. However, what should be noted is that it is not moderate Muslims who are being fought by neoconservatives, but rather radical theocrats who would put even Rushdoony to shame, for whom the above notions are mandates for socialist Jihad, rather than mild endorsements of a mixed economy. At this point, libertarians and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Muhammad Abdul-Rauf. "The Islamic Doctrine of Economics and Contemporary Economic Thought." <u>Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry</u>. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute. 1979. p. 129. Emphasis mine.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

neoconservatives share, at the very least, a common enemy, thus suggesting that while war is the wealth of the State in general, defeating certain States is worth accruing that wealth, if the risk is that one will be subsumed under those States. As William F. Buckley said of the war against Communism, "We have to accept big government for the duration." <sup>184</sup>

Neoconservatism, then, can draw on libertarian understandings of human nature in crafting its legitimating myths to blunt the dangers of that nature, and libertarians can rely on neoconservatives for a consistent account of the authority principle which their ideology cannot explain. What, then, do religious conservatives add to the mix? The most obvious answer is that religion can be taken as a giant legitimating myth, and to some extent, this has already been accepted by the neoconservatives, just as some libertarians have taken the Christian doctrines of the individual as their starting point. However, this seems to be an insulting alternative to us, and not one which, if it were the only rationale, would seriously undermine the ability of religious conservatives to offer a coherent and grounded theory or morality which can inform the policy decisions of neoconservatives, and which can reinforce the libertarian strictures against perfecting the individual. As such, the point must be made that, even if certain neoconservatives persist in viewing religious conservatism as a legitimating myth, it should nevertheless be assumed that the claims of religious conservatism are claims to take seriously, and which have the distinct possibility of being objectively true. As Irving Kristol wrote on this latter point, "What impressed me most about Christian theologians was their certainty, derived from the Bible, that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> W. James Antle. "Conservative Crack-Up." <u>The American Conservative.</u> November 17, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/nov/17/00008/">http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/nov/17/00008/</a>.

the human condition placed inherent limitations on human possibility. Original sin was one way of saying this, and I had no problem with that doctrine." <sup>185</sup>

Moreover, unlike libertarians, religious conservatives tend to have a lesser degree of animosity towards the neoconservative movement, given that many of them (especially figures like Falwell and Robertson) share the neoconservative commitment to the protection of Israel. The need to reconcile religious conservatives with the neoconservative tendency is thus significantly smaller than the need to reconcile libertarians with this same tendency, though not entirely nonexistent. The reconciliation between religious conservatives and libertarians has, of course, already been dealt with in Chapter 3. Summarily, then, as demonstrated in the foregoing passages, though neoconservatism was once an isolated and self-selecting group of ideological refugees from the Left, its root ideas and premises have begun to work their way into conservative discourse, while at the same time, the newer generation of neoconservatives has enthusiastically engaged with the wider forces of the Right. Moreover, that engagement has given wide exposure to some of the weaknesses of neoconservatism, especially its potentially disingenuous reliance on legitimating myths as a mask for unquestioned liberal assumptions. Finally, whatever other sectors of the movement think of it, neoconservatism is here to stay, and has much to offer to any movement thinker who chooses to engage its literature. It is, then, only appropriate that we now move to a discussion of precisely those thinkers who refuse, seemingly as a matter of principle, to engage, or even acknowledge, said literature.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Kristol, Neoconservatism: Autobiography of an Idea, p. 5

## Chapter 5: Red Blood, White Skin, Blue Collar: Paleoconservatism and Purity of Culture

"While paleos sometimes like to characterize their beliefs as merely the continuation of the conservative thought of the 1950s and '60s, and while in fact many of them do have their personal and intellectual roots in the conservatism of that era, the truth is that what is now called paleoconservatism is at least as new as the neoconservatism at which many paleos like to sniff as a newcomer."

-Samuel Francis

"It is splendid when the town whore gets religion and joins the church. Now and then she makes a good choir director, but when she begins to tell the minister what he ought to say in his Sunday sermons, matters have been carried too far."

-Stephen Tonsor

In early 2003, a firestorm hit the conservative movement. David Frum, formerly known as an ideologically agnostic but generally reliable columnist, published a brutal essay titled "Unpatriotic Conservatives," in which he savaged prominent members of a group known only by the awkward name of "paleoconservative" – a group who, to that point, had been moderately successful in propagating their ideas, but were, on their own, a relatively small tendency within the conservative movement. This, however, did not stop Frum from seeing a threat in them. "These conservatives are relatively few in number," he admitted, "but their ambitions are large. They aspire to reinvent conservative ideology: to junk the 50-year-old conservative commitment to defend American interests and values throughout the world — the commitment that inspired the founding of [National Review] — in favor of a fearful policy of ignoring threats and appeasing enemies.

And they are exerting influence." <sup>186</sup> Utilizing acidly worded analysis and explosively damning quotations, Frum then proceeded to charge this small number of antiwar conservatives with the evils of cowardice, racism, conspiracy-mongering and everything short of intellectual treason. "The antiwar conservatives have gone far," Frum asserted, "far beyond the advocacy of alternative strategies. They have made common cause with the left-wing and Islamist antiwar movements in this country and in Europe. They deny and excuse terror. They espouse a potentially self-fulfilling defeatism. They publicize wild conspiracy theories. And some of them explicitly yearn for the victory of their nation's enemies. "<sup>187</sup> Why? According to Frum, the cause was severe ideological resentment: "They began by hating the neoconservatives. They came to hate their party and this president. They have finished by hating their country." And what was to be done? "In a time of danger," Frum closed ominously, "they have turned their backs on their country. Now we turn our backs on them." <sup>188</sup>

The reaction was immediate – and furious. Writing on the paleoconservative-leaning website VDARE, Sam Francis, himself one of Frum's targets, opined that "the Likudnik neo-conservatives who have dragged this country into war are fighting back by attacking the patriotism of the real conservatives who have questioned the wisdom of going to war and exposed the neo-cons as the political poseurs they are.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> David Frum. "Unpatriotic Conservatives." National Review. April 7, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://old.nationalreview.com/frum/frum031903.asp">http://old.nationalreview.com/frum/frum031903.asp</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

But now the Likudniks have succeeded in manipulating even *National Review*." <sup>189</sup> A year later, Francis characterized the article as an "unpleasant gob of spit" and asked, wryly, whether William F. Buckley Jr could also be considered an "unpatriotic conservative" by Frum's definition. <sup>190</sup> Frum, for his part, was never allowed to forget the essay, as every even vaguely paleo-sympathetic writer would consistently mention it while reviewing his work, which only perpetuated the opprobrium slung at him by the paleoconservatives. Yet Frum was unrepentant. "There was a possibility that [they could] communicate [their] degree of alienation to the rest of the larger conservative movement [and] contribute to the self-banishment of [their] political movement from American politics," Frum argued. 191 When pressed, Frum especially sticks to three of his core charges – that paleoconservatism is nothing but a collection of personal grievances dressed up as an ideology, that paleoconservatives see no reason to defend American interests, and that the whole tendency is irretrievably scarred by Southern/white nationalism. It is, therefore, appropriate that in investigating the movement, we address each of these three arguments individually as a series of challenges to the legitimacy of the paleoconservative tendency, and also consider the defensive and offensive arguments made by paleoconservatives in response. Therefore, we argue that while paleoconservatism may have started as personally motivated, many of its core ideas have entered conservative discourse divorced from their personal context to such an extent that an ideological orientation can now be

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Sam Francis. "Francis on Frum: Good Riddance to National Review." VDare. March 27, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.vdare.org/francis/frum.htm">http://www.vdare.org/francis/frum.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Sam Francis. "William F. Buckley - Unpatriotic Conservative?" VDare. July 5, 2004. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://vdare.com/francis/unpatriotic conservative.htm">http://vdare.com/francis/unpatriotic conservative.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Interview with David Frum, July 21, 2009.

extrapolated from them; secondly, that in making its offensive critiques of liberalism, and just as often its internal critiques of conservatism, paleoconservatism often falls prey to a stultifying particularism indistinguishable from the cultural relativism they despise; and thirdly, that while racism is not a necessary element of paleoconservative thought, nor one which could be imparted to the wider conservative movement, the tendency to celebrate anachronism and political irrelevance among paleoconservatives is a substantive danger both to themselves and the movement, and something which can be checked through the substantive influence of other conservative schools of thought. In other words, Frum is partially correct on the first claim, wholly correct on the second one, and wholly wrong on the third one. With this argument made, we proceed to explanation.

## I. "Irritable Mental Gestures": Paleoconservatism's Quest for Ideology

"The conservative impulse and the reactionary impulse...do not, with some isolated and some ecclesiastical exceptions, express themselves in ideas but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas." -Lionel Trilling

Perhaps uniquely among the wings of conservatism, paleoconservatives have been highly successful in naming themselves. Quite unlike, say, Friedrich Hayek's impotent assertions that the correct terms for libertarians is really "Old Whigs," the "paleoconservative" label, conceived by its originators as a more pithy and defiant way of demarcating "anti-neoconservative" conservatives, has stuck fairly well, both among the tendency's supporters and among its detractors. However, the meaning of the label ("Old conservatives"), like its implicit foe, neoconservatism ("New conservatives"), is surprisingly uninformative, and, for that reason,

paleoconservatives have been at pains to explain just *what*, precisely, they stand for, and, simultaneously, *why* its "old" character precludes it from an alliance with the "new" conservatives. As such, paleoconservatism, properly speaking, really refers to two currents of thought within conservative discourse, the first one being a constructive formulation of a political theory, and the second one being merely an internal critique of conservative movement politics, with the two strains having very little theoretically to do with each other.

Depending on which paleoconservative one is reading, one of these two strains tends to be emphasized more – for instance, writers such as Sam Francis, Pat Buchanan and Thomas Fleming tend to focus on the constructive portion, whereas writers such as Paul Gottfried, Justin Raimondo and Lew Rockwell tend to focus on the internal critique. Of these two, the Francis-Buchanan-Fleming school has been undeniably more successful, and also more clearly a theoretical departure from the wider movement, so we concentrate our analysis on that, bearing in mind that the internal critique is implicit in many elements of this school's core arguments.

So what is this substantive paleoconservative vision? Perhaps the most representative essays are Sam Francis's pre-Reagan piece "Message from MARs: The Social Politics of the New Right" and his post-Reagan piece "Beautiful Losers: Why Conservatism Failed." Though the two essays are written from dramatically different rhetorical positions (one from a position of optimism and strength, and the other from a position of pessimism and defeat), two massive common threads connect them – the embrace of populism as an end in itself, and the rejection of multiculturalism as the truest definition of barbarity. Ironically, though Francis would become one of the leading writers in the paleoconservative school, the first of these essays refers to the

movement by the name "New Right," validating the notion that, while paleoconservatism hearkens back to an older conservatism, its actual contributions may be newer than even neoconservatism. Francis writes, "What the New Right has to say is not premeditated in the inner sanctums of tax-exempt foundations or debated in the stately prose of quarterly or fortnightly journals. The contents of its message are perceived injustice, unrelieved exploitation by anonymous powers that be, a threatened future, and an insulted past...They are, in the broadest sense, a political class, and they aspire...to become the dominant political class in the United States by displacing the current elite, dismantling its apparatus of power, and discrediting its political ideology." Thus far, the populism is explicit, but then Francis continues on to attack what he calls the "cosmopolitan ethic":

"The life-styles, aspirations, and values of the current elite are bound together, rationalized, and extended by what may be called the 'cosmopolitan ethic.' This ethic expresses an open contempt for what Edmund Burke called the 'little platoons' of human society – the small town, the family, the neighborhood, the traditional class identities and their relationships – as well as for authoritative and disciplinary institutions – the army, the police, parental authority, and the disciplines of school and church. The cosmopolitan ethic, reversing a Western tradition as old as Aesop, finds virtue in the large city, in the anonymous (and therefore 'liberated') relationships declassed, de-sexed, demoralized, and deracinated atoms that know no group or national identities, accept no given moral code and recognize no discipline and no limits. The ethic idealizes material indulgence, the glorification of the self, and the transcendence of conventional values, loyalties, and social bonds. At the same time, it denigrates the values of self-sacrifice, community, and moral and social order." <sup>193</sup>

The "enemy," in this formulation, is obvious. It is anything which aims to dilute, let alone nullify, the power of a homogenous Western culture, and the people who cling to that culture are the footsoldiers in nothing less than a war. And,

<sup>192</sup> Sam Francis. "Message from MARs: The Social Politics of the New Right." In <u>Conservatism in</u> America since 1930. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. P. 302

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Francis, p. 304. Emphasis mine.

according to Francis, that war will necessarily be won by the forces of cultural purity, if the strength of its ideas are the testing ground. He writes, "Liberalism barely exists as an independent set of ideas and values. Virtually no significant thinker of this century has endorsed it. Internally, the doctrines of liberalism are so contrary to established fact, inconsistent with each other, and immersed in sentimentalism, resentment, egotism and self-interest that they cannot be taken seriously as a body of ideas." <sup>194</sup>

So how, then, can conservatism have lost against it, as Francis alleges in his later essay? Because conservatism itself was corrupted from within by wobbly cosmopolitans (read: neoconservatives). Francis writes, "The movement that came to be known in the 1970s as neoconservatism, largely northeastern, urban, and academic in its orientation, is now the defining core of the 'permissible' Right – that is, what a dominant Left-liberal cultural and political elite recognizes and accepts as the Right boundary of public discourse. It remains legally possible (barely) to express sentiments and ideas that are further to the Right, but if an elite enjoys cultural hegemony, as the Left does, it has no real reason to outlaw its opponents." In other words, rather than have the battle of ideas out in the open, conservatism more broadly (if not paleoconservatism particularly) simply bowed in "silent acquiescence in the premises of the Left" and settled for arguing over small matters like how far the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Sam Francis. "Beautiful Losers: Why Conservatism Failed." In <u>Conservatism in America since</u> 1930. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. P. 415

Welfare state, or multicultural education, would go, rather than whether it should even exist. 196

It is at this point that the internal critique becomes relevant to the substantive ideology offered by paleoconservatism, for as will become clear, one cannot define paleoconservatism without talking about neoconservatism. Interestingly, while many neoconservatives and paleoconservatives will polemically accuse each other of anti-Americanism while shouting across the ideological barricades, when one actually looks at what they each purport to defend, the items are virtually identical. Both want American interests defended, want the intentions of the Founders respected, view liberalism as fundamentally wrongheaded and evil, and want traditional moral values preserved. Where they differ is almost entirely in the interpretation of what these goals entail – for neoconservatives, defending American interests requires an assertive foreign policy of preemptive war against hostile nations; for paleoconservatives, defending American interests requires shielding American workers from rapacious foreign competition through trade limits and only engaging in war when American interests are truly at stake, so as to conserve life. <sup>197</sup>

For neoconservatives, respecting the intentions of the founders means understanding that even the Founders anticipated times when the Executive branch could assume temporary power in response to international crisis, and that the prosecution of war was always understood to require sometimes drastic sacrifices of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Francis, p. 416

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> See Pat Buchanan. "A Republic, Not an Empire." In <u>Conservatism in America since 1930</u>. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. Pp. 401-414

civil liberties<sup>198</sup>; for paleoconservatives, respecting the intent of the founders means not compromising their surviving writing, even in the face of national crisis, and always being wary of an aggrandized Federal Government which oversteps its limits and dilutes Federalism.<sup>199</sup>

For neoconservatives, liberalism is a cowering wreck of an ideology which should be left to refute itself through bumbling, only worth the occasional mockery over its constant apologies for America; for paleoconservatives, liberalism is a hegemonic, bullying force which systematically tears families apart, destroys countries, wrecks communities and renders independent people serfs.

For neoconservatives, defending traditional moral values can be done by using the Welfare state to encourage virtue through positive incentives, and encouraging dominant institutions to defend themselves with literary and artistic works<sup>200</sup>; for paleoconservatives, defending traditional moral values must be done firstly by asserting the value of the culture from which those values spring, and to do that, immigration must be tightly controlled, outside cultural elements utterly eradicated, and the criminal code enforced with as much brutal efficiency as possible.

Not all of these visions are mutually exclusive, but they are strikingly different in their assumptions. The internal critique which paleoconservatives make of

Neoconservative legal scholar John Yoo made a similar claim when questioned about the rights of the American Presidency, asserting that there were times when the President could, if he so wished, order the slaughter of a village of civilians. See David Margolis. "Memorandum for the Attorney General." Department of Justice. January 5, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/politics/20100220JUSTICE/20100220JUSTICE-DAGMargolisMemo.pdf">http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/politics/20100220JUSTICE/20100220JUSTICE-DAGMargolisMemo.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> One sees this in the paleoconservative enthusiasm for the otherwise dogmatically libertarian Presidential candidate Ron Paul.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> See Irving Kristol. <u>Two Cheers for Capitalism</u>. New York: Signet Press. 1979.

neoconservatives thus has a cyclical relationship with its own distinctive ideology – the ideology originates from differences with neoconservatism, but once the ideology has been formulated, all other conservative ideas are judged in accordance with it. And especially given the content of that ideology thus described, it is no surprise that neoconservatives would wish to pretend it does not exist, for it is aesthetically polarized in every stance. For instance, while neoconservatives claim to speak for a supremely enlightened elite, which is capable of spotting the noble fictions which hold society together, paleoconservatives argue forcefully from the perspective of an angry, disenfranchised middle and lower class which denies emphatically that those noble fictions are fictions at all. Even more differently, while neoconservatives subject each and every cultural artifact to intense rational scrutiny, and reject those elements of the dominant culture which they judge to be ineffective in preserving the dominant civilization (for instance, segregation), paleoconservatives jealously guard every cultural artifact against the meddling of self-appointed cultural guardians whose elite vision is so far removed from reality that it ceases to be relevant. Finally, while neoconservatives reject all ideologies which posit an oppressor class and attribute their failure to that class' machinations, paleoconservatives label liberalism and its "cosmopolitan ethic" as precisely such an oppressive system, and accuse all who accept even one part of it of ideological heresy. The question presented by their dispute, then, is almost Marxist in character – can an effete, distant vanguard and a snarling proletarian mob actually stand to coexist under the same umbrella?

The paleoconservative answer to this is obviously "no," and so, one can see that this rejection of a vanguard lies at the root of the paleoconservative thirst for populist uprising. The reasons behind this rejection, however, are complicated and

tied implicitly to the paleoconservative jealousy of Western culture. Sam Francis writes, for instance, that "To have freedom on a stable political basis, you have to have a homogeneous culture and society, composed of people who share the same values and beliefs. If they don't share them, you can hold them together only by force... Unwilling to control immigration and the cultural disintegration it causes, the authorities instead control the law-abiding."<sup>201</sup> Francis calls this defensive reaction by multiculturally obsessed societies against those who follow the older, more sustainable ways of homogeny "anarcho-tyranny" in the sense that it goes so far in endorsing anarchy that anyone who refuses to rebel is automatically treated as a criminal. Moreover, the problem at the root of this drive to anarcho-tyranny – the cosmopolitan ethic – is endemic in modern Western society to such an extent that any member of the established elite will have been corrupted by it, no matter how much that person tries to reject their indoctrination. It is this fear which is at the root of Francis' more sober rejection of the neoconservative support for capitalism on the grounds that "the conservatism of managerial capitalism was entirely distinct from the bourgeois conservatism of the Old Right. The former sought merely to conserve, rationalize, and legitimize the new managerial establishment in state, corporations, and mass medi and cultural institutions...Neoconservatism was thus the heir of the consensus liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s and served the same stabilizing and legitimizing functions for the managerial regime."<sup>202</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Sam Francis. "Anarcho-Tyranny: Where Multiculturalism Leads." VDare. December 30, 2004. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://vdare.com/francis/041230\_multiculturalism.htm">http://vdare.com/francis/041230\_multiculturalism.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Sam Francis. <u>Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism.</u> Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press. 1993. pp. 105 and 110

In other words, paleoconservatives would probably argue, much as the Straussians try to look at the world through the right end of the telescope (ie that defined by the Ancients, and thus the one aligned with Western culture), their immersion in the elite educational system and the cosmopolitan ethic-dominated culture that implies has all but hardwired their minds to be incapable of actually understanding what it is they are seeing. It is this corruption, paleoconservatives, would probably suggest, which causes Straussian neoconservatives to view religion, morality and other traditional institutions as merely "legitimating myths," rather than ironclad facts. This "false consciousness" means that the only vanguard paleoconservatives can accept is one that comes from within their ranks, which may explain the tolerance on the part of otherwise acidly anti-intellectual figures like Francis for the likes of Paul Gottfried, Jeffrey Hart, Thomas Fleming and Jeffrey Raimondo, none of whom could be accused of being particularly hardscrabble or sympathetic to populism in their rhetorical stance. It may also explain the usage of the term "paleoconservative" to describe the tendency, despite the fact that the Old Right carried some explicitly anti-populist and Aristocratic figures in its wake. Old Right figures, having never subscribed to liberalism of any kind, can claim to be untainted by the cosmopolitan ethic, and are thus acceptable leaders for the paleoconservative army of "Middle American radicals." Former liberals and communists like the neoconservatives, on the other hand, simply will not do.

The same fear of cosmopolitan infiltration doubtlessly lies at the root of the paleoconservative attacks on free trade and immigration, for with the introduction of such disparate, foreign elements, which do not necessarily share the same values and cultural understandings as America, the necessity to reconcile understandings between

the foreign "invaders" and the dominant American culture becomes necessary. This requires, at bare minimum, that assimilation be enforced strictly and that only legal immigrants be accepted, since one of the root signs of good faith in accepting a new culture is doubtlessly respecting that culture's laws. A more extreme version of the argument might go that even legal immigration had better be halted altogether, because attempting to argue values with any disparate culture is necessarily futile, since the premises from which the two different cultures start are potentially so distinct that there would be no common ground for argument, and that the challenge might induce such doubt in defenders of the dominant culture as to give rise to cosmopolitanism. Francis himself makes precisely this claim in an article on immigration, arguing that "National security and economics are significant parts of the case against immigration, but mainly Americans don't like their nation being colonized by an alien, Third World mass that speaks a different language, imports different values and is often loyal to a different country." <sup>203</sup> Pat Buchanan, meanwhile, asks a question with a similar philosophical premise – "Does it matter who was the 300 millionth 'American'? Indeed, it does. If it was a baby born to an American, that is wonderful news. If it was a baby born to an illegal alien, it means we have lost control of our borders. And as Ronald Reagan said, a country that can't control its borders isn't really a country anymore."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Sam Francis. "Immigration Policy Bad for America! - Not Just GOP." VDare. January 13, 2005. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://vdare.com/francis/050113\_immigration.htm">http://vdare.com/francis/050113\_immigration.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Patrick Buchanan. "Was That 300 Millionth American Really American?" VDare. October 19, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.vdare.com/buchanan/061019\_america.htm">http://www.vdare.com/buchanan/061019\_america.htm</a>.

Yet it would be deceptive to claim that the paleoconservative orientation is one solely of negativism. Thomas Fleming anticipates just such an objection in an article wherein he writes:

"We cannot organize a political party or movement on the limited basis of immigration or even anti-globalism. It is always fairly easy to cobble together single-issue coalitions on the basis of what people are against. The harder task, though one that is an absolute necessity, is the formation of a movement based on what we are for. I make no secret of what we stand for: the civilization of the West, the Christian religion that sustained and revived that civilization, a limited and decentralized constitutional government that would vigorously defend American interests while preserving and leaving in peace the real communities in which people work, rear their families, and create whatever is useful, true, and beautiful."

However, Fleming sees problems with this approach. "Far too few of the people who share our views on immigration and globalism are willing to take their stand with us on the broader questions," he writes. "Many of them make no secret of their loathing of Christianity as a 'Jewish cult.' The very people who should be defending our civilization would like to tear it up from its roots and wipe out the last 1500 years... why can't they keep silent about their little fantasies and avoid alienating the overwhelming majority of European Americans who describe themselves as Christians. In other words, why can't they grow up?" This pair of quotes suggests something very important – that while paleoconservatives generally agree that they *support* the Western heritage, they seem to have difficulty agreeing more specifically on what that heritage is, and which elements they really support. This is a question which will return in our discussion of the accusations that paleoconservatism is a nice

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> Thomas Fleming. "The Thirty-Year War For Immigration Reform - Thomas Fleming Replies to Peter Brimelow." VDare. December 2, 2001. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.vdare.com/letters/tl">http://www.vdare.com/letters/tl</a> 120201.htm>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Ibid.

word for racism. For now, Fleming's summation of what the paleoconservatives are defending will suffice as a statement of their positive intentions, and also what they see as being corrupted by the "cosmopolitan ethic."

To return, then, to the accusation made by David Frum that paleoconservatism is nothing but a collection of personal grievances against neoconservatives dressed up as ideology, while we maintain that he is correct in suggesting that the root of paleoconservative thinking is a reaction against neoconservatism, we differ with his assessment that this reaction was solely personal. There is a substantive ideological issue at stake for paleoconservatives, and it is the principle of anti-vanguardism, which manifests itself in a general suspicion of any ethic which produces selfproclaimed vanguards as necessarily "cosmopolitan," and thus corrosive. Moreover, paleoconservatives have a positive vision of society as necessarily better when homogenous cultural values are enjoyed, and more free when the state does not need to worry about punishing culturally unacceptable practices, and can thus be genuinely smaller, even if GDP will be weaker, or if the workforce will be smaller. This ideology need not be perfect – in fact, as we will demonstrate in the coming section, it is riddled with contradictions – but it is an ideology, and the neoconservative temptation to dismiss it as merely "irritable mental gestures," to use Lionel Trilling's phrase, should be avoided as much as possible. Having demonstrated that these "irritable mental gestures" are more than irritable, but rather ideologically impassioned, and more than gestures, but rather sweeping movements, we now turn to a discussion of their flaws.

## II. Mongrelized by Particularism: Fear as a Substitute for Contempt in Paleoconservative Thinking

"In the last analysis, provincialism is your belief in yourself, in your neighborhood, in your reality. It is patriotism without belligerence. Convincing cases have been made to show that all great art is provincial in the sense of reflecting a place, a time, and a Zeitgeist."

-Richard Weaver

Returning to Sam Francis' essay on the subject of why immigration reform is bad for the United States, quoted briefly above, a rather odd element jumps out at the reader. Francis writes, "Security, economy and party interests are all well and good, but the fundamental issue in the immigration debate is who we are and what sort of nation we want to be." Elsewhere, paleoconservative writer Marian Kester Coombs observes, "Not all 328 tongues threaten English equally. Spanish, of course, takes the lead by a wide margin." Coombs continues, "Almost all population growth in this country is due to immigration and immigrant fertility. If such trends continue, it is only a matter of time before a Spanish-*mestizo* one replaces the English-based civilization of America." Finally, Paul Gottfried cites the French counterrevolutionary author Joseph de Maistre approvingly in an essay criticizing Jonah Goldberg, noting that "Maistre had noticed that it might be more useful to try to understand people as Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, or members of other national or ethnic groups than simply as human beings... Since Maistre did not believe in such rights, or in the universalist assumptions that they presuppose, he therefore

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Francis, "Immigration Policy Bad for America,"

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.vdare.com/francis/050113\_immigration.htm">http://www.vdare.com/francis/050113\_immigration.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Marian Kester Coombs. "High Noon for the English Language?" VDare. May 22, 2004. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://vdare.com/misc/coombs">http://vdare.com/misc/coombs</a> english language.htm>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Ibid.

made war against something Goldberg calls 'conservatism.'"<sup>210</sup> Moreover, Gottfried argues, analogizing neoconservatism to support for the French Revolution, the problem with "universalist assumptions" is that they create "a perpetual pretext to meddle beyond their own borders in the affairs of other societies. And in [Edmund] Burke's view, this was what made [The French] particularly pernicious iconoclasts."<sup>211</sup>

Pugnacious rhetoric aside, there is something really peculiar about these quotes. Despite maintaining, in the teeth of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, that a homogenized Western society is, in fact, the highest form of social order, and that it ought to be defended, Francis, Gottfried et al seem to be arguing reasons for why such a society should *retreat* from conflict. In other words, going back to Francis's argument that "Americans don't like their nation being colonized by an alien, Third World mass that speaks a different language, imports different values and is often loyal to a different country," the problem with this "colonization" seems to be, according to Francis, that Americans are having difficulty resisting it. Implicit in this argument is the highly problematic tacit premise that Western culture, despite being ostensibly the best form of culture yet conceived, is incapable of defending itself against foreign influences — so incapable, in fact, that it's better to avoid going to war altogether simply so our boys in uniform won't have to encounter the evil forces of foreign cultures.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Paul Gottfried. "The First Universal Goldberg?" VDare. June 26, 2001. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.vdare.com/gottfried/first\_universal\_goldberg.htm">http://www.vdare.com/gottfried/first\_universal\_goldberg.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>211</sup> Ibid.

Needless to say, this is a highly problematic and contradictory assumption, and it has its roots in an element of paleoconservative ideology which goes back to Gottfried's quotation of Maistre; that is, blatant particularism. Despite believing firmly that Western culture is worth defending with everything possible, paleoconservatives seem unable to fathom the idea that Western culture ought to go on the offense because, at bottom their argument for *why* it is worth defending is entirely circular, and goes as follows: Just as Englishmen live in a different culture from French men, these cultures color their respective perceptions so much that they are, in some sense, incapable of seeing anyone who lives in the other culture as a human being because of how different their assumptions are. Therefore, anything and everything paleoconservatives argue about the desirability of Western/American culture is colored by the fact that its values are specifically *American*, and thus non-applicable anywhere else. In short, Western culture is good because Western people say so.

Without a doubt, this argument not only goes further than even Maistre would have <sup>212</sup>, but also renders almost every other paleoconservative argument much weaker due to its tautological nature. Suddenly, rather than being objective denunciations of multiculturalism as an evil and of the cosmopolitan ethic as essentially the autoimmune disease of society, the admonitions against these concepts become nothing but sheer provincial fear of outside influence, argued from an endlessly

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> For instance, Maistre defended the Spanish Inquisition on the grounds that it was intended to root out the objectively evil heresies of Manicheeism, Gnosticism, etc. Moreover, his entire St. Petersburg Dialogues is devoted to proving the logical unassailability of Christian morality. See also: Joseph DeMaistre. "Letters to a Russian Gentleman." University of Manitoba. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/history/maistre/LetterOne.html">http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/history/maistre/LetterOne.html</a>>.

circular position that anything the speaker says is bad is bad because the speaker says so. Not only it this argument disappointing rhetorically, but it is a crucial weakness in that it is no different from the root premises of multiculturalism, the paleoconservative bête noire. The only distinction is the conclusion reached from the argument – for multiculturalists, the idea that different cultures imply different forms of humanity is an argument against any sort of dominant culture, least of all one enforced by an active state, because such a thing amounts to intellectual genocide. For paleoconservatives, by contrast, the idea that different cultures imply different forms of humanity is an argument against the feasibility of a society which accommodates multiple different forms of humanity, given that the different forms will find it impossible to recognize each other as human or as worthy of respect. Better to just cut one's society off and live in perpetual cultural solipsism.

It is no accident that this particularistic, defensive approach has been adopted — it is, in fact, the only defense possible for paleoconservatism being antiwar. In the hands of any other movement, more committed to grounding its claims of superiority in universals, the notion that one's culture is inherently superior to others and is being eroded by a cosmopolitan set of decadent elites would be a justification not just for populism, but for outright imperialism. Such a doctrine would, far from the fearful strictures of paleoconservatism, be at best neutral on the question of whether war, free trade and immigration are evils, and would rather involve a more substantive intellectual debate over which wars, trading relationships and immigrants it is in the interests of the powerful dominant culture to accept. That is, it would be a more hawkish, Machiavellian brand of foreign policy realism which aims at keeping the dominant culture dominant in every conceivable way, and at demonstrating the

inferior cultures just how inferior they actually are, and how to escape that inferiority. Such a doctrine would not, contra Gottfried, even have to accept the notion of universal humanity to make sense – indeed, wars against terrorist-supporting states and post-9/11 CIA intelligence-gathering techniques would, ironically enough, be easier to defend in the context of non-universal humanity, since there would be no need to concern oneself with casualties inflicted on the other side, or with their "human rights" in interrogation rooms. What this doctrine *would* have to accept, however, is a notion of universal *morality*, even if that morality was only applied to those who were members of the dominant culture.

In other words, if paleoconservatism's notions of cultural superiority were actually backed up by a universal moral standard, they wouldn't lead to paleoconservatism, but rather to Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Irving Kristol's notions of hardheaded realism in the face of enemies. This, naturally enough, is unacceptable to paleoconservatives, seeing as the idea of surrendering the defense of their much-guarded culture to such (as they see it) *cosmopolitan, eggheaded elitists* is nothing short of revolting. Thus, even if paleoconservatives were willing to junk their sizable commitments in the realm of foreign policy for agnosticism on the issue, one would still have to contend with their firm commitment to anti-elitism, and to suspicion of anyone with previous allegiances to cosmopolitanism, before fusion would be possible. It is to these notions, then, that we now turn.

Assuming that one junks the particularistic elements of paleoconservative ideology in favor of a universal standard of morality, then, what effect does this have on their denunciations of the "cosmopolitan ethic" and the elites that support it? For one thing, it suggests that there are more robust defenses against this ethic, and

universal premises through which the elites can themselves be persuaded of their ethic's error, assuming that those elites are actually citizens of the same nation/people raised in the same culture as the populace. At this point, the neoconservative shift to the Right could conceivably be labeled an asset, as Stephen Tonsor does in his otherwise very sharp-tongued essay, "Why I am not a Neoconservative." For Tonsor, the problem with neoconservatism is not that it is unalterably corrupt, but rather that it cannot seem to get all the liberalism flushed out of its system. Tonsor writes, "Now it is a matter of fact that most of those who describe themselves as neoconservatives are or have been cultural modernists. They have been, to use Peter Berger's telling phrase, baptized in the 'fiery brook'...All of which is not to say that the rejection of Marxism is unimportant and that the piecemeal rejection of various articles of faith shared with Left-liberal modernists is unimportant. Nor do I wish to imply that the assistance of neoconservatives is unwelcome in the work of dismantling the failed political structures erected by modernity. Conservatives have made common cause with classical liberals, and there is no reason why they should not make common cause with neoconservatives." 213 Yet, Tonsor maintains, "halfway from modernity is not enough. Politics has always been inseparable from culture, and both ultimately derive from religion. It is absurd to believe that one can remain a modernist in culture and reject the implications of modernism in politics."<sup>214</sup>

This more modest, incremental critique of neoconservatism as distinct from the "anti-modern" paleoconservatism of, say, Russell Kirk certainly makes a better

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Stephen Tonsor. "Why I am Not a Neoconservative." In <u>Conservatism in America since 1930</u>. Gregory Schneider, ed. New York: New York University Press. 2003. pp. 375-376

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Tonsor, p. 376

statement of the revised paleoconservative critique than some earlier passages, but it still raises a question: Do neoconservatives necessarily accept modernism in politics as an end in itself, or do they rather make the tactical decision to employ modern means to meet antimodern ends? One potential answer to this question is that, following the reasoning of figures such as Michael Gerson and the "moralists" in David Frum's book Dead Right, one can only conclude that neoconservatives have embraced modernism wholeheartedly, to the point of accepting the modern notion of big government as a social good, assuming it enforces a mildly more Christian and compassionate agenda than other forms of big government. Or, alternately, given the influence of Leo Strauss on neoconservatives, the fundamentally anti-modern, preenlightenment assumption that people are not equally capable of comprehending the truth and the attendant stress by Strauss and his compatriots on the importance of viewing modern society in the context of ancient philosophy, one could argue that the neoconservatives are simply acting like good, albeit Machiavellian, Straussians, and turning the machinery of statecraft on itself by systematically demonstrating the failures of big government and proposing reforms just incremental enough that they will go unnoticed as steps away from modernity.

There is no clear indication of which of these two alternatives is correct, because both probably are true, depending on which neoconservative thinker one is talking about. Nevertheless, it is obvious which one is the fusionist alternative, and so one potential route to circumventing the paleoconservative suspicion of elites who have been infected by the "cosmopolitan ethic" is to employ the second question as a sort of screening test with respect to potential apostates – that is, are these figures themselves committed to modernity, or do they simply use the tools of modernity to

dismantle it? This question seems an appropriate one to ask, as there have not, to this point, been any well-recognized figures within paleoconservatism who have argued that using modern means to achieve anti-modern ends is unacceptable. Indeed, Pat Buchanan himself ran for President with the benefit of all the trappings of a modern campaign, with no less an eminence than Sam Francis as a speechwriter and policy adviser. At the point where even the most paleoconservative of the paleoconservatives are willing to engage the modern political world, it thus seems fair to conclude that punishing the neoconservatives for their more incremental (and, incidentally, more politically successful) strategy is illogical.

However, it would be a mistake to focus solely on the paleoconservative dispute with neoconservatives – there are other, equally noxious disagreements employed by paleoconservatives against other schools of conservative thought. Though paleoconservatives have historically enjoyed a fairly peaceful relationship with the religious Right, viewing them as a continuation of the populist backlash which the paleoconservatives themselves spearheaded, or at worst, a collection of well-meaning people who have been duped into following what paleoconservatives see as the neoconservative slavish devotion to Israel, their relations with libertarians have been substantially cooler. Sam Francis, especially, attacked libertarians almost as frequently as he denounced neoconservatives. Writing in the December 1994 issue of *Chronicles*, Francis wrote "The 'religious Right' is merely the current incarnation of the on-going Middle American Revolution, a cultural and political movement that has underlain the political efforts of the American right since the end of World War II. Despite what many right-wing sages would like to believe, that movement never had much to do with **their perennial holy cow, the free market**, but rather with the

perception that the white middle-class core of American society and culture was being evicted from its historic position of cultural and political dominance and was in fact in process of becoming an exploited and repressed proletariat."<sup>215</sup>

This, as it turns out, was the most kind thing Francis could say on the subject of the free enterprise system. Writing in the August 2000 issue of Chronicles, Francis wrote of the successful effort to remove the Confederate Flag from the South Carolina statehouse that "It is impossible to account for its victory without considering the immense assistance it received from the Republican Party and the 'capitalism' before which the party loves to prostrate itself. If it's dangerous enemies you're looking for, those two will give you a fight to the death any day."<sup>216</sup> The context was a wider essay entitled, alarmingly enough, "Capitalism the Enemy," in which Francis argued that "Capitalism is at least as much an enemy of tradition as the NAACP or communism itself, for that matter, and those on the 'right' who make a fetish of capitalism generally understand this and applaud it."<sup>217</sup> But Francis went further – his critique of capitalism ventured into to-that-point ideologically alien territory when he wrote that, "like communism, capitalism is based on an egalitarianism that refuses to distinguish between one consumer's dollar and another."<sup>218</sup> One has to credit Francis

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Sam Francis. "Religious Wrong." <u>Chronicles.</u> December 1994. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://web.archive.org/web/20080528185114/http://www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all1994.pdf">http://www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all1994.pdf</a>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Sam Francis. "Capitalism: The Enemy." <u>Chronicles</u>. August 2000. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://web.archive.org/web/20071007014203/www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all2000.pdf">http://web.archive.org/web/20071007014203/www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all2000.pdf</a>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Ibid.

for his originality – to accuse libertarians of support for *any* kind of egalitarianism was probably the last thing most conservatives would have thought of.

And why did he think of it? In usual paleoconservative style, Francis zeroed in on the immigration issue as evidence of this broad claim, writing "On the issue of immigration, capitalism is notorious for its demand for cheap labor that imports a new working class that undercuts the cost of native workers."<sup>219</sup> His evidence? Ancient Rome. Francis wrote, "The capitalist agriculture of ancient Roman plantations imported slave labor for much the same reasons, with the result that by the end of the first century A.D. there were virtually no Romans, and not even many Italians, left in Italy, and so it has been throughout history."<sup>220</sup> The problem, then, according to Francis, was that capitalism demanded labor at a cheaper rate than members of the dominant class could afford to offer it, thus requiring the importation of cultural impurities to make up for the difference in the balance sheet. Utilizing the example of South Africa, Francis argued, sounding almost Marxist, that the real reason for apartheid hadn't been racism, but actually the rapacious needs of capitalism. "In South Africa, the main reason for the rejection of Prime Minister Verwoerd's project of grand apartheid, under which the black majority would acquire their own independent states, was that South African and global capitalists needed black labor to exploit and to drive down the wages of white workers. It was for that reason that the South African Communist Party in its early days actually supported apartheid or

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Ibid.

something like it, since the party was then largely composed of white working class members to whose interests the party leadership was attentive."<sup>221</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting about this example is how thoroughly it undercuts the general paleoconservative stance on immigration, and more amusingly, how odd it is that Francis is actually arguing that the interests of white, working class communists should have been relevant to anyone, let alone conservatives. However, for the sake of substantive refutation, let us focus more on the first issue – that this contradicts the paleoconservative position on immigration. Presuming Francis is correct that the motivations of South African apartheid were capitalist in nature, it follows that they would want to keep their cheap labor as unencumbered by rights claims as possible, thus suggesting that, if those laborers were given the rights of citizens, they would cease to be competitive with whites, and would be useless as a practical matter, thus eliminating the incentive capitalist malefactors would have to use them over equally qualified white workers. Now apply this logic to the illegal immigration problem, and it becomes clear that the paleoconservative solution to this problem, on Francis's terms, is simply to grant automatic citizenship to anyone who sneaks across the Border, thus subjecting them to the minimum wage and every other union-produced restriction on the labor force and rendering them noncompetitive with the white working class, while also removing the economic incentive to cross the border by virtue of the fact that noncompetitive wages do not guarantee a job.

But this is not at all the position that Francis, or any other conservative, takes on immigration. Rather, they tend to argue for strict enforcement of the laws and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Ibid.

ruthless deportation, thus giving illegal immigrants every reason to stay under the radar, and every incentive to rapacious capitalists to discreetly hire them at wages well below the minimum. The libertarians who Francis so despises, on the other hand, argue for an open borders policy, thus permitting as many Mexicans as possible to compete in American markets at American rates. Francis thus exposes a fundamental contradiction both in his anti-capitalist paleoconservative thought and in open-borders libertarian thought. It seems that libertarians, rather than supporting open borders, should endorse keeping illegal immigration illegal so that illegal immigrants can continue to undercut the efficacy of the minimum wage they so despise. Anticapitalist Middle American Radicals, meanwhile, should support open borders and citizenship for all because it makes the only thing illegal immigrants have to offer competitively (low wages) vanish. Or, alternately, one could reject both positions as incomplete fetishism and argue that not only should the border laws be enforced as strictly as possible, but the minimum wage should be abolished so that true competition can happen. However, this is a step that Francis and his blue collar-oriented paleoconservative anticapitalist school seem unlikely to follow. As to why they find the notion of Americans competing with foreign workers so noxious, as well as anything that smacks of multiculturalism, is the subject of our next section.

Firstly, however, a final note on bias. Without a doubt, our philosophical scrutiny of this particular branch was the harshest, which may raise the question of bias once again. However, we reply that our sharpness in dealing with the paleoconservative tendency was motivated not by animus toward paleoconservatism, but by the intellectual necessity of holding a school of thought to the burdens it sets for itself. Seeing as paleoconservatives stake their entire claim to importance on not

being concerned with practical questions, but solely with the permanent things, it seems only necessary that they withstand the most withering criticism for any failure to defend those permanent things adequately. As it turns out, we think the paleoconservative claim to being philosophically motivated is a mistaken description of their role in conservative discourse; if anything, libertarianism fits the more traditional, analytical role of the philosopher. Rather, given their mistrust of the almost completely prosaic neoconservatives, and also in line with their belief in the supremacy of culture, permanence and aesthetics, we argue that paleoconservatives represent the imaginative and creative urges of the conservative movement.

Though this may sound like a consolation prize, such a reading is highly mistaken. As Russell Kirk observed, and as we noted in Chapter 3, the power of creative ventures such as the arts can serve as a marker for a return to cultural purity. Moreover, the power of the creative and contemplative sectors of society to influence the political world, especially in America, cannot be underestimated, for liberalism arguably could not make many of its advances without aid from Hollywood and academe. Paleoconservatives, with their explicitly romantic, aesthetically focused vision, are in a prime position to form an opposition bloc to the liberal dominance of the arts - a vital role, given that conservative criticism of the liberal bias of the arts is, as any libertarian will tell you, blunted by the fact that liberals enjoy a monopoly on culture and art, and thus have a captive market. The influence of liberal academe is even more toxic, for as far back as Joseph Schumpeter, it has been recognized that the influence of education on the rising governing classes can lead to the spontaneous destruction of civilization. Paleoconservatives are sufficiently esoteric and capable of cloaking their thinking in academic style that they once more serve as a credible

counterpoint to this type of influence. Thus, we move to the final charges regarding their fitness to serve as such a counterpoint.

# III. Powdered Wigs or White Hoods: The Shadow of Racism in Paleoconservative Thought

"White leaders no doubt assume that the multiracial future of the country will not threaten whites or the country because all races accept or are coming to reject race in the same ways they do. This assumption is demonstrably wrong."

-Sam Francis

When asked about paleoconservative nationalist bona fides, David Frum noted that "I'm not sure it's right to call them nationalists. What happened by 2003 is that they'd become so angry and so alienated from their country that they had in many ways ceased to be nationalists. Some of them have become white nationalists, some of them have become southern nationalists, but they had really given up on the United States." Meanwhile, discussing the paleoconservative wariness of modernity, R. Emmett Tyrell wryly observed, "Most of the paleos were thoroughly dominated by the conservative temperament, so much so that they were prisoners of their private musings. A government fit for their participation would be one suspended somewhere in the vapors of yesteryear, far away in old Europe in a time when government ministers wore powdered wigs, tucked dainty handkerchiefs up silken sleeves, and walked with elegant walking sticks...In the early days of the Reagan Administration, when a paleo of some academic distinction failed to get a presidential appointment, he called a distinguished conservative at the Heritage Foundation who had opposed him

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Interview with David Frum, July 21, 2009

and challenged the amazed man to a duel."<sup>223</sup> The two quotes are more than simply alarming and amusing, they represent the two reactions which paleoconservatism tends to receive, both of which frequently combine. That is, critics of paleoconservative allege, it is at best a bunch of irrelevant, incompetent old antiquaries and at worst a collection of dangerously ignorant bigots whose quaint affection for the past is really a sinister hatred for anyone different from themselves.

True though any part of this could be of individual paleoconservatives, it is a blatantly unfair claim to make about paleoconservatism as an ideology that it requires either irrelevance or bigotry. Perhaps most persuasively in this respect, even explicitly pro-Southern paleoconservatives have disowned white nationalism as childish and unproductive. Thomas Fleming, for instance, has written of white nationalists that "so many of them prefer their little Sci-Fi fantasies about a once and future kingdom of the Great White Race. Just make this a white man's country again, and everything will be all right. Well, it won't be. White people ruined this country, out of greed, cynicism, and impotence." Sam Francis, despite his affection for the South, maintained that the "peculiar institution" of slavery was unjustifiable, albeit on interesting grounds, writing that "the same imperative of capitalism to import foreign labor as a means of undercutting the costs of domestic workers is apparent in the American South itself, where a main economic argument for black slavery was that it made white workers as well as production in general a lot cheaper." 225

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> R. Emmett Tyrell. <u>The Conservative Crackup</u>. New York: Simon and Schuster. 1992. p. 236

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>224</sup> Fleming, "The Thirty Year War for Immigration Reform,"

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://www.vdare.com/letters/tl\_120201.htm">http://www.vdare.com/letters/tl\_120201.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Francis, "Capitalism The Enemy,"

<sup>&</sup>lt;a href="http://web.archive.org/web/20071007014203/www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all2000.pdf">http://web.archive.org/web/20071007014203/www.samfrancis.net/pdf/all2000.pdf</a>.

This is not to say that racial thinking is wholly absent from paleoconservative writing. One extended essay of Francis' includes the controversial passage "The commonly held beliefs about race mentioned above—that it does not exist or is not important and that serious concern about race and racial identity leads to negative and undesirable consequences—are wrong. Yet it is precisely those beliefs that make it impossible for whites who accept them to preserve themselves as a race and the civilization and political institutions their race has created." Yet this quote, as Francis himself points out, is not so far out of step with the thought of even black neoconservatives like Shelby Steele, who has argued that it is unfair that "Racial identity is simply forbidden to whites in America and across the entire Western world. Black children today are hammered with the idea of racial identity and pride, yet racial pride in whites constitutes a grave evil. Say 'I'm white and I'm proud' and you are a Nazi," even as he savages Sam Francis' favorite symbol of "white pride" — the Confederate flag.

This racial thinking, it is well established, is implicit in the complaints of Francis and his followers (who arguably include Pat Buchanan) about the decline of "American jobs." The problem, in other words, that Francis and Buchanan have with immigration, is not one purely of economics or of class, but one of race – there is no guarantee that immigrants will be European (read: white), and thus no guarantee that immigration will add anything to the paleoconservative vision of a homogenous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Sam Francis. "Race and the American Prospect: An Introduction." VDare. September 5, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://vdare.com/francis/060905\_race.htm">http://vdare.com/francis/060905\_race.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Shelby Steele. "Yo, Howard!" Wall Street Journal. November 13, 2003. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110004295">http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/feature.html?id=110004295</a>.

society, which would ideally be homogenous in race, *as well as everything else*. So, too, with paleoconservative opposition to United States support for Israel – it is not that the paleoconservatives bear Israel any ill will, but rather that they see no reason why a white State should expend any effort in defending a racially alien Jewish one. Moreover, as any paleoconservative will mention, Israel is well-equipped to defend itself, and there is no undisputed reason why American interests are served by support for Israel – in fact, they are arguably hindered by it, as many non-racially focused paleoconservatives such as Justin Raimondo have argued.<sup>228</sup>

Contrary to the attacks by liberals and/or neoconservatives, this does not mean that all conservative, or indeed, all paleoconservative opposition to Israel, immigration, or multiculturalism generally, *must* be racially based. Much as we differ with the paleoconservative assessment of Israel as an albatross around the United States' neck rather than a valuable regional balance in what is otherwise a hotbed of anti-Americanism, to claim that all principled opposition to American involvement with Israel is necessarily premised upon anti-Semitism does not logically follow at all. <sup>229</sup> Moreover, to claim that opposition to amnesty for illegal immigrants is premised upon racism is an egregiously illogical step. For instance, one could take the minimalist position advocated by the Minnutemen that, even if the United States decides to implement a less restrictive borders policy, it must first be shown that *any* border policy can be enforced before those changes are considered. Such an argument,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Justin Raimondo. "Israel Crosses the Line." Antiwar.com. July 15, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2006/07/14/israel-crosses-the-line/">http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2006/07/14/israel-crosses-the-line/</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> A stronger case could be made in the case of outright anti-Zionism, which necessarily involves the notion that no Jewish State has the right to exist, but even this is not certain, given that this could take

while it could be *motivated* by racism, does not *require* racism to be sustained, and thus should be considered on its merits. Moreover, at the point where Francis himself indirectly acknowledges that a political system as seemingly obviously racist as apartheid could be justified using nothing but the raw economic self-interest of one class <sup>230</sup>, the recourse to claims of racism with respect to milder questions like Israel and United States immigration reform seems to duck the argument.

The more dangerous of the accusations listed above, then, is that paleoconservatives are so mired in the past that they can no longer respond to the problems of modern society. On this count, we think the critique misses the value of paleoconservatism to the wider conservative movement, which is its profound historical consciousness. Rather like their brethren in the Religious right, the strength of paleoconservatism lies in its ability to provide a foundation, upon which the policy and economics-oriented branches of neoconservatism and libertarianism can erect a more detailed ideological edifice. In the case of the religious Right, that foundation is moral, but in the case of the paleoconservatives, it is cultural. As such, much as it makes sense for religious writing to continually use the teachings of particular religious texts as reference points, and for the writers themselves to remain cloistered in Church, it is only appropriate that paleoconservatives continually remind their more forward-thinking peers of where they have come from and how they can use this as a guide to where they are going. This is the function which genuine paleoconservatives such as Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk filled, and in Kirk's

the form of an argument that no racially based State has the right to exist – an argument which is, if highly unrealistic, not remotely racist.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> See our discussion of "Capitalism, the Enemy."

case especially, it was shown to be vital, given that Kirk arguably foresaw the rise of postmodernism. <sup>231</sup>

If these literary and historical elements seem politically weaker than the hardheaded power politics of neoconservatism, or the moral crusading spirit of religious conservatism, or the sharp and clinically logical dissections of liberal economic fallacies offered by libertarians, it is because their originators meant them that way. If libertarianism is an economic philosophy, religious conservatism is a moral philosophy, and neoconservatism, if it is a philosophy at all, is monomaniacally political, then paleoconservatism is essentially an aesthetic philosophy. However, much like its three compatriots, paleoconservatism's specialized focus cripples its ability to speak to other areas - a discrepancy which its founders understood, even if its current advocates do not. With respect to economics, for instance, paleoconservatives have often been enchanted by seemingly beautiful, but utterly impractical ideas such as the Catholic philosophy of distributivism, a philosophy which Acton Institute scholar Todd Flanders calls "impractical and impracticable", while ascribing to it the power to "exert literary, cultural, and social influence because of the beauty and power of its social and ethical ideals." <sup>232</sup> The idea itself - that "social justice demands widespread distribution of [landed] property...[which] would obviate the need for division of labor "233 - is almost entirely grounded in aesthetic preferences for small community life and the family farm, with barely a shred of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> See Gerald Russello. <u>The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk</u>. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press. 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> Todd Flanders. "What's Wrong With Distributivism?" Acton Institute. March 2000. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/adjunct/ppolicy\_adjunct\_papers\_distribute.php">http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/adjunct/ppolicy\_adjunct\_papers\_distribute.php</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Ibid.

economic analysis, or of ideas for how policy would look in a distributivist world. Flanders notes this when he writes that "neo-distributivists today behave as though the theory is not only coherent, but also unremittingly opposed to free economic activity as actually practiced in free societies. Belloc's chief worry about state encroachment on freedoms is virtually absent in the new manifestation. What remains is antipathy toward capitalism, and toward a parody of capitalism at that." Perhaps most tellingly of all, the leading apostle of this economic self-parody, Wendell Berry, is a farmer and poet with absolutely no background in economics.

This sort of romantic pontification on a field in which one has no understanding, while quaint, only reinforces the notion that paleoconservatives are powdered wig-wearing, shallow eccentrics rather than serious thinkers. As such, just as strident disrespect for prevailing norms is the shame of libertarianism, and religiously authoritarian utopianism is the shame of religious conservatism, and excessive idealism is the shame of neoconservatism, so too is mindless, unserious romanticism the shame of paleoconservatism. Moreover, absent the sort of rigorous moral reasoning propounded by theologians such as Rushdoony, their aesthetic worldview runs the risk of looking and sounding like nostalgia for anachronistic authoritarianism, rather than a serious critique of the moral premises of liberalism. Paleoconservatism has much to offer in this latter respect, as morality is inextricably bound up with aesthetics, and in the formulation of aesthetically pleasing visions of Godly morality, they are unmatched, even if their seeming inability to think systemically prevents them from reaching beyond the aesthetic. What is more, even if

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

one assumes that the Wendell Berry-style of family farming is aesthetically pleasing (which, to hear a paleoconservative tell it, undoubtedly is), it is still true that someone has to be willing to not only take a shotgun to the wolves who eat one's sheep, but also to track down their nest and destroy it - a role which neoconservatives are eminently qualified for. As we noted above, paleoconservatives have at times raised quite cogent critiques about the over-affinity with modernity exemplified by some of their peers, but these concerns are not, and should not, be taken as evidence that their vision is without its problems.

Even so, the purely aesthetic nature of paleoconservatism does give it some leeway in seeming anachronistic and/or overly intuitive, given that these are characteristics which are uniquely well-suited for defenders of culture. To be fanatically politically aware or up-to-date would not be much help for paleoconservatives, since the surest route to death for a great culture is for it to be perceived as simply the convenient crutch for a particular regime, and thus, while paleoconservatism's concern with restoring the purity of American culture has political components, it is bigger than politics and should be treated as such. The occasional challenge for a duel or longing for a powdered wig aside, the warnings paleoconservatives proffer on a world adrift from its cultural foundations and estranged from its traditional commitments to assimilation for all those seeking to join a community are pungent ones and will not die simply because the people espousing them happen to be eccentric. In short, as long as there is a Western culture to preserve, there will be those who, like Stephen Tonsor, "dipped [their] hand[s] in the holy-water fount of Russell Kirk and said, 'Home at last!'" All that is required now is that they recognize their ideological neighbors as being in the same

community as we move toward the conclusion of this analysis.

#### **Conclusion: Whither Fusionism?**

"We want every American to be the best he or she chooses to be. We recognize that we are all individuals. We love and revere our founding documents, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence."

-Rush Limbaugh, Conservative Political Action Conference Keynote Address, 2009

"All the Republicans are talking about is: 'We need a bigger tent. We need a big tent. Can we get a bigger tent? How can we get a big tent?' What is this, a circus?"

-Glenn Beck, Conservative Political Action Conference Keynote Address, 2010

Writing in the original fusionist work, <u>In Defense of Freedom</u>, Frank Meyer observed, "The contemporary American conservative effort is far from irrelevant. Rather it is directed with precision towards overcoming the actual spiritual, moral, and political crisis we do face today." This recognition of the need for a relevant conservatism, as we explained in Chapter 1, inspired Meyer to actually take on the seemingly insurmountable task of uniting two movements which stood at philosophical antipodes and showing that, far from being mutually exclusive, those philosophical antipodes complemented each other. Naturally, in proving that they needed to be complemented, Meyer had to show the insufficiency of both ideologies on their own terms before he could formulate the two pithy concepts that summed up the style of thinking that was to become the first fusionist conservatism – the idea that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> Frank Meyer. <u>In Defense of Freedom</u>. Chicago: Liberty Fund. 1996. p. 178

reason should operate within tradition, and the idea that liberty and order were inseparable, for with order came the predictability and safety necessary to make liberty worth fighting for, as every libertarian tacitly recognized when they argued that absolute liberty was the mother of order, and as every traditionalist explicitly recognized.

To this point, we have only pointed out flaws and hinted at reconciliations, as was wont to happen, given the original thesis that all sectors of the conservative movement have defensively accepted certain problematic tenets of modern liberalism. For libertarians, we showed that the temptation toward moral relativism produced an unjustifiable "fatal conceit," which falsely claimed that there was an absence of moral argumentation in libertarianism, and which thus permitted egalitarian social liberalism to enter through the back door. For religious conservatives, we showed that an excessive and heretical faith in the imperfect power of top-down human authority to create a perfect State by fiat was difficult to distinguish from the theologico-economic schools of thought that created the modern progressive movement, and that their desire to "immanentize the eschaton" carried an ominous lack of faith in God. For neoconservatives, we showed that the very idealism and romanticism which originally caused the neoconservative sect to be "mugged by reality" was capable of entering their thought through uncritical acceptance of Straussian legitimating myths, without understanding the mythical content. Finally, in dealing with the paleoconservatives, we suggested that their otherwise solid defense of American/western culture had been mongrelized by a provincial particularism which rendered their reasoning indistinguishable from that of the multiculturalism/cosmopolitanism that they so

despised. Still, despite these elements, we maintained that each of these four tendencies had an equally valid role to play in the conservative consensus.

it is only appropriate, then, having demonstrated the insufficiency which the various different schools of conservative thought as independent forms of ideology, that we propose a model by which the four can be once more combined into a coherent, complementary whole like Meyer's original fusionism. Fortunately, this task is not as daunting as it first appears – indeed, implicit in our analysis of how various schools of conservative thought have affected the positions on contemporary policy issues which politically-oriented conservatives take was the rather libertarian assumption that this spontaneous ideological division of labor reflected some sort of internal coherence. As we noted in the introduction, the average conservative of these times tends to apply the reasoning of libertarians on questions of the welfare state, taxation and spending, while applying the reasoning of religious conservatives on questions of abortion, gay marriage and drugs, while simultaneously applying the reasoning of neoconservatives on questions of foreign policy, and applying paleoconservative thinking on the questions of immigration, racial discrimination and multicultural education. This is no accident, given the emphases of each school of thought, but it should be noted that much as this division of labor exists, no systematic formulation has been given for why it exists, or why it makes sense. It is to that which we turn our attention now.

### I. From "Root Canals" to "Cream and Sugar": Libertarianism and the Perfectibility of Man

During the early 1990's, the famous "bleeding heart conservative" Jack Kemp called libertarian arguments against deficits "root canal economics" with no hope of

ever persuading a majority of Americans to support them. Twenty years after Kemp's derisive comment, however, a movement based on precisely the libertarian view of economics and balanced budgets – the Tea Party movement – sprang up and began to grow. Simultaneously, the explicitly libertarian, anti-Bush talk show host Glenn Beck began to move into the spotlight, with a message that both the Republican and Democratic parties were irrevocably corrupted by "progressivism." It seems, therefore, only appropriate to conclude that, contra Kemp, libertarianism is, and will remain a vital portion of the conservative coalition on the strength of influence alone.

As we noted above, given that libertarianism understands the extent to which humans can rationally choose ignorance over enlightenment, the extent to which self-interest naturally takes precedence in human decision-making over social thinking, and the extent to which humans resent being controlled, the crucial libertarian insight without which conservatism cannot survive is quite simple and yet vitally important. In deciding which policies to implement, or where the all-too-human authority of the state should be allowed to tread, it is safer to assume that people are selfish, incapable of perfect knowledge and inclined to go their own way than it is to assume that people are purely altruistic, omniscient, and easily led. In short, the libertarian contribution to the conservative movement is to reinforce the classic Madisonian formulation that "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> Glenn Beck. "Keynote Address at 2010 Conservative Political Action Conference." <u>Youtube</u>. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHDuHZVhIgM">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHDuHZVhIgM</a>>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> James Madison. "The Federalist No. 51." <u>Independent Journal.</u> February 6, 1788. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm">http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm</a>>.

Libertarianism argues most persuasively when it argues that men are not angels, and that government controlled by men are not angelic, so one must therefore be very wary of allowing the angelic power to perfect mankind into the hands of human beings.

Rather, libertarianism argues, it is best as a general principle to allow advances in civilization to flow spontaneously and to allow human beings to have their animal urges by the natural tradeoffs of the invisible hand of the market, which enforces an ascetic bourgeois ethic at the same time it encourages innovation within the framework of the society in question, and which is capable of synthesizing all the different specific forms of knowledge which individuals possess into a logical distributive result. Government, the libertarian argument runs, ought to reflect human nature, rather than having human nature forced to artificially reflect the desires of government, especially when you consider that humans are perennially shrouded by a veil of imperfect knowledge.

It is thus appropriate that the portion of politics which is most intimately tied to gauging human reactions to different incentives – ie, the economic portion – would be dominated in the conservative mind by a libertarian mistrust of power concentrated in the hands of actors whose capacity to exercise it and individual merits do not justify that concentration. Further, it follows from this position that anyone claiming to be able to predict the reactions of a society so saturated with information, and with different sets of individual preferences, that the fastest supercomputers could not process it all would be greeted with incredulity and opposition. Therefore, the libertarian position that survives ideological scrutiny and can be fused most usefully into a broader conservative ideology is that while government ought to be predictable,

people are not themselves predictable, and so it may be just as much in the interests of maintaining a stable state as it is in the interests of preserving freedom not to try to force the hands of individuals in ways where the consequences lie in the realm of dangerous possibility.

However, the power of the libertarian position can only be maintained if certain elements are recognized – for instance, that libertarians require religious/moral arguments to justify their strictures against tyranny and, indeed, to help define what tyranny, and other evils of excessive state control, actually are, and why they are evils. This function is filled within the conservative movement by the religious right, which, as already demonstrated, leans libertarian even in its most extreme form. Moreover, freedom cannot exist without agency, and agency cannot exist without some form of power, even if it is only over one's own affairs. As such, libertarians must not only be prepared to defend themselves at the domestic level, but also to defend the agency of their chosen country at the international level, using whatever methods necessary so long as the country itself does not actively transgress morality.

It may be objected in response to this claim that, if individuals are so much better at deciding their own interests than a central decision-maker, then surely they would be better equipped to defend themselves than a militaristic state, as well. We reject this false antithesis, responding that, while it is true that self-defense is an essential element of conservative ideology, the organization and planning of large-scale warfare is fundamentally different at the practical level from the organization and planning of an entire economy simply on the grounds of scale. Unlike in an economy, whereby every individual constitutes an actor, warfare waged by states usually only involves the interests of one or two different actors at most, with armies

acting simply as geopolitical tools of agency for those interests. To be sure, individual soldiers, generals and diplomats have their own interests (which is a compelling argument for maintaining a solely volunteer-supplied armed force), but unlike in the economy, where all notions of a "common good" are necessarily incoherent and unproveable, the interest of a State in preserving its own power through an act of war is much more easily apprehensible, and much more easily to centrally plan. Moreover, even within a perfectly free market, certain small-scale instances of central planning still exist. For instance, many modern corporations still operate on a centrally planned model, albeit with voluntarily employed actors submitting to the edicts of the planner (usually the CEO). This problem of scale thus answers both the socialist argument that, if war can be planned, so should everything else, and the anarcho-capitalist argument that, if the economy cannot be planned, then neither should war. Moreover, in answer to the libertarian objection that war is the health of the state, as we noted in Chapter 4, a strong state need not be a large state, and so while war may increase the power of the state, it need not increase the scope in which that power is applied, as not all functions are appropriate for state management.

Returning to our discussion of the contributions which rival schools of thought can make to libertarianism, we note that just as libertarians require a religious base for their critiques of the State, and a sense of power politics in order to defend themselves, it seems to be a noncontroversial claim that they also require an understanding of the cultural foundations for their love of liberty, which will permit them to appeal to the little platoons of their countrymen in the most effective and resonant terms whenever threats to freedom and justice arise. This is an element which the paleoconservatives are in a prime position to provide.

### II. The 50 Lost Tribes of Federalism: Religious Conservatism, Righteous Authority and Rejections of Dissent

As already noted, religious conservatives tend to trust authority too frequently. However, as R.J. Rushdoony pointed out, this does not prove that authority is itself an evil – God, for instance, is all-powerful, but no one would suggest that God is corrupt. This is a useful counterpoint to the libertarian position we have outlined above, which, if taken to an extreme, would suggest that not just any and all governments, but any and all authority, risks too much chance of abuse to be permitted to exist. While libertarianism can remind religious conservatism that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," the piece of this which is of the greatest interest is the fact that power only *tends* to corrupt. Religious conservatism is thus not, properly speaking, only a doctrine whose primary usefulness is to the governed classes, but also to the governing classes, for inherent in the subjection to an almighty God is the notion that nobody, rich, poor or otherwise, is above that God's laws. Governments in the neoconservative policy-focused mode are thus allowed to function, albeit on a limited scale, given the libertarian arguments against perfecting humanity, and the multiple religious strictures against allowing anything to supplant God.

Of course, in a modern secular society, this vision is increasingly difficult to fulfill, but it is at this point that the usefulness of religious conservatism to the governed classes becomes important – even if politicians do not believe religiously themselves, if their power rests on a foundation which is believed by the populace to be partially religious, they have no choice but to follow the strictures against abuses of power offered by that religion, or risk being rejected at the next election. The great

religious conservative argument, then, is that society must have a root theory of morality which can be justified not just with reason, but also intuitively – a mission which has been served historically by religion, and which has permitted religious moral ideas to permeate society so thoroughly that even arguably antisocial tendencies are forced to draw on them, to some extent. 238 Moreover, the religious conservative argument goes, just as Locke understood that people who are loyal to foreign agencies or explicitly reject the prevailing tenets of morality cannot be tolerated if society is to function, so too both society and, to a lesser extent, the State must remain vigilant against such threats to the moral courage of the nation. This need not foreclose a diversity of moral visions in a society like the United States, where there are 50 States in which different theories of morality can, and ought to be, tried as a matter of politico-philosophical discourse, albeit only so long as those standards of morality fit within the Lockean consensus. There is no special reason why Mormonism should dominate in Utah, and Baptism should not dominate in Georgia, given that neither moral view challenges the root premises of Western society, or of America's constitutional order; however, if California were to permit Communism to dominate, this would undoubtedly be cause for concern, given the necessarily aggressive, anti-Christian, anti-Constitutional predilections of this system. The religious Right thus faces the problem of resolving a troublesome internal dialectic over how much variation in religious/moral reasoning can be tolerated in a free society. The religious conservative rejection of judicial standardization of various extraconstitutional rights is thus an argument for, rather than against, diversity, and one which ought to be

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> For instance, the original socialists based their ideas on certain passages of the Bible.

embraced so as to permit different arrangements of political rights to test themselves out at the state level in a political marketplace of moral ideas. Naturally, presuming the religious conservative arguments about the superiority of any particular religion are correct, that religion can prevail on its own in a peaceful and partially closed society, especially if it is backed by Western cultural values, thus preserving the paleoconservative fixation on roots.

On the other hand, religious conservatism alone is not sufficient as a governing philosophy, for while it offers assertions about politics, it cannot substantiate them as a matter of empirical fact without deeper analysis. Moreover, its "heresy" of excessive trust in top-down power, without realizing the amoral nature of power, is a clear blind spot in which other elements of the conservative movement can, and should, correct it. Religious conservatism thus remains a powerful foundation for an ideology, but only that, which requires us to explain the contributions which other portions of the movement can make to its analysis. In the first place, religious conservatism lacks an understanding of the power both of human potential and of human limitations, given its focus on God, and thus must turn to libertarianism to universalize its mistrust of sinners into a coherent theory about the human potential both for vice and virtue, and to provide a series of mechanisms by which that vice and virtue can be controlled spontaneously. Secondly, religious conservatism takes as its starting point the security of righteousness in the power of an almighty God, but because that God so rarely intervenes in human affairs, its understanding of the niceties of policy and power politics is necessarily stunted, and thus it lacks the conceptual understandings to argue for how to effectively defend a virtuous nation, and how to implement that vision domestically. Moreover, because

pure religious conservatism only speaks from the religious side of Western culture, it is blind to the portions of Western culture which were defined by the Ancient philosophers, and thus needs the philosophical and Straussian elements of neoconservative thought to buttress its intuitive conclusions with the durable fortifications of systematic reason. Finally, just as a defense of morality itself is important, a defense of the culture which has sustained that morality is vital, and so the paleoconservative defenses for a culturally homogenous society become part and parcel of the religious conservative vision, even as it fights to imbue that culture with the moral foundations which it needs in order to survive.

## III. Wilson's Not Your Middle Name: Neoconservatism and the Theory of Power

Much as neoconservative authors love to use Reagan as a case study for neoconservative foreign policy, it is arguable that another President occasionally works his way into the neoconservative argument, and that President is Woodrow Wilson, with his argument that one should "make the world safe for democracy." This is, as documented in our chapter on neoconservatism, and in our note on bias above, an entirely misguided element, for Wilsonian idealism has little place in a movement which has been "mugged by reality." Indeed, in that chapter, we argued that the neoconservative movement has been at its strongest when it has moved explicitly in the opposite direction of Wilson by embracing a hardheaded realist approach a la Kirkpatrick's defense of United States support for authoritarian regimes and Bill Kristol's advocacy for a benevolent global hegemony tenaciously maintained by unilateral American force. This is because, unlike its three sister branches, neoconservatism is the portion of conservative ideology with the closest historical and

ideological relation to power – indeed, as we argued in our chapter on neoconservatism, it argues just as persuasively from the "authority principle" as libertarians do from the "exchange principle." It is thus fair to say that, among its other, substantive functions, neoconservatism provides an ideological check on libertarianism. This is because, while libertarianism warns against what the State must not do in order to preserve a predictable and rational society, neoconservatism explicitly informs conservatives of what the State *can* do to *restore* a predictable and rational society.

Continuing along the same vein, neoconservative doctrine on foreign policy represents an important element of conservative discourse – how a predictable and rational society can defend itself against unpredictable and irrational ones. Given the fact that neither Communism nor international terrorism could ever be accused of being predictable in their methods, and are dubiously rational in their beliefs, such a doctrine of defense is much needed as a matter of conservative thinking. The doctrine itself is seemingly straightforward – regimes which appear overwhelmingly likely to manifest threats to the United States must be confronted, defeated, and supplanted by regimes friendly to American interests. These regimes are to be put in place on the basis of two criteria: firstly, how secure they are likely to be, and secondly, how much freedom they are likely to guarantee. It is this type of argument which motivated Kirkpatrick's writing, and which dominates, we argue, in the persistent neoconservative unwillingness to allow apolitical chaos to reign in countries where American forces have intervened. The neoconservative doctrine of defense is thus a doctrine by which a benevolent global hegemony can incrementally remake the global power structure such that it becomes more stable, more predictable and, as a result,

more free. The neoconservative root premise on questions of politics, then, is one which demands international and domestic dominance, and which provides concrete mechanisms by which the movement itself can achieve that dominance.

These smaller policy questions are subsumed under a root premise which represents the crucial neoconservative contribution to the conservative cause – the concept of the legitimacy of a legitimating myth. Having been attacked on all sides by the quasi-nihilistic New Left, neoconservatism has formulated a series of cast-iron defenses against the New Left's adulation of social chaos, most of them grounded in the very conservative notion that human consciousness is insufficient to remake society. As such, the necessity of maintaining certain traditional, organically grown "noble lies" or legitimating myths becomes apparent, under the assumption that the human mind, left to its own devices, will naturally gravitate towards nihilism. This provides a series of interesting political and philosophical rationalizations for the other schools of conservative thought, as well as a means by which the populist and elitist elements of conservative ideology can be reconciled – the elites will not actively challenge the populace's most cherished ideas, and the populace, as such, need not fear behavior contrary to their values by the elites.

Still, as already mentioned, these legitimating myths can just as often be cover for covert idealism and unquestioned conventional wisdom as they can be profound obstacles to barbarity. As such, the neoconservatives also require the aid of their fellow wings in several ways. Firstly, as already alluded, neoconservatives need the persistent nagging reminder of libertarians that human nature is imperfect as a clarion stricture against trying to save the world, or overextend the power of the State in pursuit of social dominance for particular ideas/groups. Secondly, while many non-

religious neoconservatives most likely look at religious conservatives as particularly devout patrons of legitimating myths, that devoutness is essential as a corollary to the intellectual posture of Straussianism, whiel also serving as a check on its cynicism. This is because, while Straussianism posits a native intellectual superiority on the part of its adherents – superiority which allows them to see the little cracks in the logic of society – it never attempts to defend this assumption, nor does it posit moral superiority on the part of its adherents. In fact, Strauss's attacks on Nietzsche and Heidegger only prove that not all great minds are good people. As such, a religious moral vision is required as a check on the philosophical hubris of intellectual elites by providing a reminder that revelation can be rationally preferred to reason as a source of epistemology, and also as a check on the ambitions of political elites via its vision of stringent moral accountability. Religious conservatism can also provide a series of assumptions upon which policy can be judged in order to measure its moral content, thus providing neoconservatism with a generalized moral compass.

But once more, an objection presents itself: is it really fusionism if neoconservatives are simply allying with the religious right because they think they are a convenient assortment of dupes who believe Platonic noble lies? Moreover, could the religious right stand to be associated with this sort of condescension? We think the answer to both questions is yes. In the first place, a Straussian skepticism need not, and should not, imply a prima facie judgment that the legitimating myths one is defending are necessarily false. The key point of Straussian thought is that, *solely on the basis of rational inquiry*, one cannot know if such myths are true. However, on the basis of revelation, such thought is quite clear that one could indeed discover evidence to the effect that such myths are true. As such, two opportunities

present themselves via an alliance between Straussian neoconservatives and the religious Right. From the Straussian perspective, the advantage is that the Straussians have the potential to plumb the philosophical school of revelation in search of higher truth, while still being able to hold to the agnosticism of reason. From the religious perspective, meanwhile, the advantage is that one has the opportunity to win intellectually gifted converts and apologists for one's moral vision by demonstrating the superiority of revelation. Such a mutual set of advantages is entirely convenient and eminently justifiable as grounds for an alliance, especially when one considers that the goals of both movements are the same, whatever their differences in reasoning.

Paleoconservatism provides an equally useful check on neoconservative hubris, for despite its belligerence, it tames the universalist assumptions of neoconservatism and focuses them on the national interests of their country, rather than on an abstracted, Rousseauistic global general will. It is not possible to hold and exercise power without cultural institutions to legitimate that power, and to dilute one's culture excessively is a sure way to seeing the legitimating myths (if indeed myths they are) underlying it exposed by naked reason. In a way, then, the neoconservative predilection towards skepticism actually increases their ability to act as jealous guardians of the culture, for assumptions whose moral certainty induces certity, even as one questions their philosophical certainty, are certain to be the most zealously defended when the chips are down. The neoconservative thirst for dominance is thus given a moral compass, cultural roots and a necessary wariness and respect towards those it hopes to dominate by virtue of its inclusion in the wider conservative mind.

## IV. Assimilation Forever: Paleoconservatism and Cultural Dominance

It is a well-known and infamous moment in American history when Governor George Wallace of Alabama gave his 1963 inaugural address and bellowed, "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," 239 While segregation – at least of the kind practiced in Alabama in 1963 - has obviously been discredited in wider American society, this moment is an instructive one where the paleoconservative dissent against modernity is concerned, and also with respect to its more counter-historical elements. Wallace's stand was seemingly the ideal paleoconservative declaration – one made on behalf of a homogenous society against the cosmopolitan tyranny of distant elites in favor of a system which separated the like from the unlike and kept the unlike from corrupting the cultural perceptions of the like. Yet it failed, not only because of the crusading spirit of the pro-Civil Rights forces, but because the fear of difference which Wallace's stand embodied was mutually exclusive with a proud and determined stand to nullify that difference. The proper cry of the paleoconservatives, then, as a fitting rejoinder against multiculturalism in all its forms, is "assimilation today, assimilation tomorrow, assimilation forever."

This is the correct position not only politically, but philosophically as well, for what paleoconservatism offers to conservatism broadly is a ringing, poetic defense of the aesthetic superiority of Western culture. As such, the notion that this culture can crowd out the negative influences of any foreign cultures naturally would not only be compatible with paleoconservatism's contribution, but desirable, given that it would

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> George Wallace. "1963 Inaugural Address." <u>Alabama Department of Archives and History</u>. January 14, 1963. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs\_list/InauguralSpeech.html">http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs\_list/InauguralSpeech.html</a>>.

show that Western peoples have nothing at all to fear from outside influences. At the level of ideology, this is fundamentally important, for it shows that while conservatism argues for a society whose political and economic arrangements remain as static as possible, conservatism as an ideology has built in mechanisms for the mitigation of dynamic change. Given the paleoconservative preoccupation with tradition, custom and order, this sort of mechanism is essential, for only if different generations/populations can believe in, and accept, the same tradition, will that tradition survive. It is thus politically necessary, from the paleoconservative worldview, for assimilation to be possible, and encouraged. Moreover, such a doctrine only strengthens the paleoconservative opposition to multicultural learning and amnesty for illegal immigrants, for the former disincentivizes assimilation, and the latter permits people to become citizens who have already shown bad faith toward the United States.

Moreover, the paleoconservative suspicion of elites permits conservatism itself to become more than the ideology of a reigning elite, for with this suspicion is the tacit acknowledgment that, while ideas may be dominant throughout society, this does not mean that the dominant classes accept them, or that the dominant classes can be trusted as acceptable guardians for them. Rather, it means that the need to look after widespread social values falls on every member of society, thus rendering any failure to tend to those values as equally dangerous. At this point, the populist inclinations of paleoconservatism enter the conservative ideology without requiring the existence of a fictional oppressor class to act as a crutch. Such a crutch only prohibits self-examination, as documented in our sixth chapter, and would thus weaken the ability of paleoconservatism to argue its perspective.

Naturally, paleoconservatism is insufficient on its own, seeing as it is primarily an aesthetic/literary movement, and thus requires more explicitly political elements to be drawn from outside. It is, therefore, obvious that other elements of the conservative consensus can be melded onto this ideology to correct its various deficiencies. For instance, the hyperbolic fury of Sam Francis aside, libertarianism offers paleoconservatism a persuasive argument on the value of traditions as the outgrowth of intellectual spontaneous order, whereby only the most effective social institutions are permitted to survive down through the ages. Religious conservatism, meanwhile, ascribes a moral righteousness to the paleoconservative jealousy of Western culture as an attempt to preserve cultural elements which are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also ordained of God. Finally, neoconservatism, whatever paleoconservatives may think, stands as a set of unromantic Benthamite blueprints for the slow, methodical, but ultimately successful disintegration of modernity, and the vigorous pursuit of intellectual, moral and political dominance by the last, best hope for a West unhampered by the cosmopolitan ethic. The paleoconservatives thus also have much to gain, and can meld themselves into a movement grounded on impulses which are not contradictory, but complementary.

## V. Morning in the Unchanging Republic

And now, we come to the final question: Is there a conceivable fusionist ideology? In answering this complicated question, we choose to use a time-tested approach in describing ideological movements – that is, by positing the ideal conservative world. This may seem counterintuitive, at the point where conservatism rejects utopia as an idea, but counterintuitiveness is not the same thing as being wrong, and most of the problems associated with formulating an ideal conservative

world are illusory. The conservative disdain for utopia does not imply that no perfect conservative vision exists; it implies that said vision is not a fanatical hallucination which conservatives want to see implemented in a split second. Rather, the conservative vision posits its ideal as a distant, asymptotic dream to be pursued at a pace which, when conservative forces are weak, slowly and methodically forces society in the direction it wants to go, and when they are strong, vigorously forces society backwards to its better roots, only stopping to allow stability to persist. Finally, the lack of utopianism in modern conservatism refers to the content of its vision, rather than to the scope of that vision, for ever since Ronald Reagan posited the "shining city on a hill," conservatives have been desperately trying to get to it, even if that city rejects the usual utopian tropes of perfect equality, or unbounded social liberation, or perfection of the human condition.

The ideal which conservatism strives for is much more prosaic, and embodied by the title of this work. That is, the perfect conservative government is an Unchanging Republic of perfect predictability, wherein change may happen, but never unannounced and certainly not with the clash of swords, the firing of shots or the sound of the Constitutional parchment being slowly but deliberately shredded. Within this world, the law details clearly how political change will occur, and is never disobeyed in that respect. Within this world, the forces of market competition produce prosperity, and the small bit of unpredictability inherent in a market economy is harnessed to keep citizens frugal, careful and predictable in their habits, even as a religious code of unalterable and easily interpreted moral rules permeates a vibrant, distinctively Western literary and aesthetic culture and provides the tacit, Federally unlegislated but universally recognized rules of social conduct.

Elite political figures are simultaneously jealous of their power and fearful of the anger of their subjects, and thus take an active role in promoting public morality while being careful not to accrue too much power, lest they show themselves incapable of using it effectively. Academic elites, meanwhile, recognize that their freedom of inquiry rests on a society which holds freedom as an objective moral good, and thus labor to propagate whatever legitimating ideas the society needs in order to run, even if they believe them to be agnostic myths, with only their most gifted students allowed to see past the mythical mask to glimpse the glory of truth. If the Unchanging Republic is threatened, it reacts with deadly, decisive force and crushes its opponents, supplanting them with figures who will not make the same mistake again, and makes sure that its rivals take the conquest as an example. It is a world where, while people are free to ask whatever questions they wish under the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, nothing is absolute, and those who reject the fundamental premises of social discourse and conduct in word and deed are treated as enemies, for Lockean consensus and freedom cannot survive in an atmosphere of intellectual chaos.

It is a world where people are free because the power of God and the power of political and cultural hegemony has permitted their nation to stand astride the world, fearless of enslavement by foreign powers, or by men within their own government. Unfettered capitalism reigns, even as vibrant private charity encouraged by the prevailing morals takes care of the indigent. Morality which has its origin in Judeo-Christian religion dominates, irrespective of whether citizens choose to believe in the religions which underlie them, and deviations are either kept in the privacy of the bedroom or of voluntarily constituted libertine communities. A foreign policy aimed

at preserving dominance while speaking the language of idealism is employed with respect for the nations of the world, but without deference to global authority and without the stain of romance or universalism in its actions. Finally, a culture rich with respect for the old and able to tame the excesses of the new enriches the lives of the citizens of the Unchanging Republic, even as it forces those who enter the nation to assimilate. The conservative ideal political system thus aims at predictability, even as it aspires toward freedom, righteousness, domination and homogeneity.

This is a world where all the impulses of conservatism – the desire on the part of libertarians for a minimalist rule of law, the desire on the part of religious conservatives for a strong social code of morality, the desire on the part of neoconservatives for international dominance and the desire on the part of paleoconservatives for a pure culture – are all satisfied at once, and all reinforce each other. The moral vision keeps the culture healthy, while the assimilationist culture, in turn, ensures that the moral arguments are spread across society. Both morality and culture, in turn, reinforce the notion that the country is in some way exceptional, for it has the greatest moral authority and the greatest aesthetic beauty, as both proclaim respectively. The freedom of citizens to engage in trade and to innovate, meanwhile, produces an economy in which the morality of the populace acts as a check on the rapaciousness of homo economicus, even as that rapaciousness produces wealth, enriches the culture with new forms of popular art, and produces enough economic growth that the state can afford to defend itself. This is an ideal which makes no apologies and backs down from nothing, which pursues no abstract utopian phantoms, which tolerates minimal levels of vice but never seeks to excuse or evangelize it as more "authentic" than virtue, and which does not place trust in the capricious whims

of a regime, but in the grand, secure and organic institutions of Constitution, Church, Culture and Currency.

This ideal world, seen via the differently but in the end unified lenses of the various conservative quarters, is a place which conservatives strive to create, but which they know it is foolish to expect immediately in these times. It is a place which, to this point, has endured only the hazy, ill-defined gaze of a dream, with the squabbles of the dreamers diluting its clarity still further. With any luck, our analysis here has finally made those squabbles silent, and the picture clear.

How silly, then, is the notion that conservatism is dead, and how much more absurd the thought that such an idea *could* die! Contrary to Nikita Khrushchev's hubris-laden snarl that Communism would bury the West, precisely the opposite turned out to be true, as conservatism stood athwart the bleeding corpses of a rapacious Marxist teleology and the vile and viral totalitarian urge which marked its earthly manifestation. Yet even as they stood in this triumphal pose, conservatives permitted the prying fingers of existential doubt and ideological arrogance to split their mighty band of brothers. What is more, they fatally underestimated the resolve of the exponents of sentimentalism, anti-morality, weakness and cultural shame, believing that these elements could not survive without their Soviet ideal as a model and a reassurance. In truth, the absence of the Soviet Union has permitted the Left to forget its own complicity, to argue that the specter of Communism is dead, and to assure its targets that much as the revolutionary path propounded by Marx and Lenin was a failure, the teleological claim that "progress" toward a world free of responsibility and hard definitions is inevitable remains untouched. In the words of

Glenn Beck, the Left has shifted its focus from revolution to evolution, and the latter is gaining speed.

Conservatives have made their errors. They have been guilty of excesses – of trying to fulfill all the goals of certain portions of the movement at once, rather than fulfill all the goals of all portions gradually. They have foisted predictability in the realms of morals and power upon the country at the expense of predictability in the realms of economics and culture. What is more, the fever dream of the Left has used these excesses to its advantage, claiming that it will restore an economically feasible vision and an elite culture. To that end, its mocking assertions that conservatism is dead mask a deeper yearning: a wish that conservatives would only accept their "advancements" as ironclad elements of society, and defend them as such, for the Leftist is ill-equipped to preserve anything. Preservation requires patience, historical consciousness, and the willingness to fail, whereas the Leftist is impatient to free all of society from the shackles he hallucinates, contemptuous of history because of its authorship by the jailers he imagines, and absolutely unwilling to risk failure, given that he views failure as a construct contrary to "natural" equality. Nothing exemplifies this more than the new Democratic Party motto – "Yes, we can" – which skirts the obvious question of why we should. It is a leitmotif formed by the discordant notes of adolescent rebellion, puerile emotivism and infantile narcissism, and it stands for a vision of bewildering, chaotic perpetual change.

Against such a vision, those who aspire to live in the Unchanging Republic must have a unified ideology, and as already demonstrated, such an ideology is both conceivable and defensible. The three burdens we noted in our introduction have been met: firstly, we have demonstrated that all schools of conservative thought would be

irretrievably scarred by the absence of insights from their peers – such an arrangement would turn libertarians into shrill and parsimonious polemicists for a meaningless vision, religious conservatives into populist peddlers of vagueness for whom the pitchfork is a substitute for the pen, neoconservatives into the dangerous dreamers they were prior to being mugged by reality and paleoconservatives into pessimistic and particularistic partisans of the powdered wig. Secondly, we have demonstrated that all the wings of conservatism are in fact conservative: libertarians by virtue of their pessimism regarding human knowledge, religious conservatives by virtue of their view that mankind is indefinitely scarred by original sin, neoconservatives by virtue of their understanding that force is the only universal tongue in a world dominated by imperfect human paradigms, and paleoconservatives by virtue of their jealous guardianship of traditional, homogenizing institutions. Finally, we have shown that it is possible to conceive of one unifying paradigm under which all the concerns of conservatives can be linked: predictability in all spheres of economic, moral, political and cultural life.

Unlike the fever dreams of the Left, the vision we have propounded, and the ideological division of labor it implies, has roots in American history – roots which go deeper than the emergence of a conscious conservative movement. It is thus perhaps an exercise in divine providence that conservatives have become attached to a self-consciously "Republican" party, for in summing up the power of the fusionist view, we are reminded of the words of the great prophet of Constitutional government, James Madison:

"In the extent and proper structure of the Union, therefore, we behold a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government. And

according to the degree of pleasure and pride we feel in being republicans, ought to be our zeal in cherishing the spirit and supporting the character of Federalists."<sup>240</sup>

In the extent and proper structure of fusionism, then, we too behold a Republican remedy for the factional diseases most incident to Republican government. And according to the degree of pleasure and pride we feel in being Republican, this alone forms the character of *our* zeal in *affirming* the spirit and supporting the character of Conservatism.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> James Madison. "Federalist No. 10." <u>Daily Advertiser</u>. November 22, 1787. Accessed April 10, 2010. <a href="http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm">http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm</a>.

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