

MODERN AGE

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Philosophical Foundations of the American Political Right

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I

THE AMERICAN political Right—and I refer to its intellectual foundations—is now suffering a hideous fate: popular respectability. No longer anathema to the public tastes, the ideas of what can be loosely designated as the “Right” now enjoy a considerable popularity and, wonder of wonders, the advocates of these ideas now bask in a substantial favor. I have called this a “hideous fate” for several reasons, prime among them being that anti-liberal political sentiments become the vehicle of *parvenu* academic and journalistic opportunists who seek their fortunes on the angry tide of silent and semisilent majorities. An almost picaresque assortment of ex-Marxists, intellectual vegetarians, literary monarchists, devotees of Samuel Smiles, heretofore depressed *laissez-faire* freebooters, moral zealots and simply cunning journalists are all scrambling to become tribunes of what might be construed to be a new wave of mass political enthusiasm.

This is a curious enterprise if for no other reason than few of the old categories seem to apply. The “silent majority,” long the faithful host of liberalism, is now seen as a lush region for recruitment by “conservatism” (that now fatally injured designation). Implacable foes of trade unionism march shoulder-to-shoulder with the “hard hats,” vying with each other to exhibit superior patriotic intensities. Ex-Goldwater supernumeraries become hippies, SDS publicists join YAF and extreme Left and Right stage reconciliatory “love feasts” (in praise of philosophical anarchy). Traditionalistic conservatives are thought to be suspicious libertarians (especially about expunging naughty books), *vide*, Senator Ervin and the “enter without knocking” imbroglio. Old “liberals” rally to defend the “Establishment” with Oxonian pique; new “conservatives” erect idols to strange gods (*e.g.*, Mill and Spencer). De Maistre gets a new lease on life (paraphrase: “the only thing that can save *America* is the Pope and the executioner”).

How to make sense out of it all? The first step is to jettison the tired nomenclature of the nineteenth century: "Left" and "Right" [Treasury (Right) and Opposition (Left) Benches, to be precise]. If they ever did denote anything significant in terms of political philosophy, they don't now. The contemporary Spencerian *enfants terribles*, felicitously dubbed as "radical libertarians," are radicals—as, of course, Spencer was. J. S. Mill (and before him Bentham) was a sort of intellectual consultant to the Radical Party (whose numerical strength in the nineteenth century House of Commons was poignantly similar to the current strength of the British Liberals). Some contemporary social reformers are *bona fide* conservatives: what more appropriate target for Tory wrath than the conscienceless corporate pillage of the natural environment? How about Burke or Ruskin?

If the terms "Right" or "Right-wing" convey any useful meaning, they seek to classify opponents of *twentieth century* liberalism, who, for one reason or another, seem awkward to link expressly with the Left, old and new. This classification creates an odd grab-bag, especially if one takes into account the general schismatic tendencies in contemporary ideology at both ends of the spectrum.

Also obsolete is any division as to radical alternatives as between Left and Right. Both contain radical factions, both include those dedicated to conservation, however different may be those values thought necessary to preserve. Attitudes toward change are no longer a basis for distinguishing between the nineteenth century classifications; given the prevailing state of affairs, for example, anti-democratic critics are often vigorous advocates of the alteration of existing political practices.

These conditions exacerbate any effort to talk sensibly about Left and Right, ex-

cept, perhaps, in two ways (assuming that popular journalists will not let us abandon this nomenclature):

1. political and social theory identified with the Right invariably displays a concept of the person at variance with views of the Left in that it assumes some variety of an innate, irreducible dignity of the person, coupled, at the same time, with a commitment to the legitimacy of some criterion for ascertaining relative standards of human worth;

2. a general acceptance by the Right of life and human nature as it appears to be, rather than the entertainment of utopian visions of human and social perfectability. On the whole, the Right tends toward anti-meliorism.

These frankly vague generalizations should not be over-rigorized. The almost chaotic diversity of both the Right and Left defies any strict categorizations, beyond the loosest alliances of orientation. If a viable taxonomy of ideological positions is possible, it arises not so much from the acceptance or rejection of explicit propositions as it does from the identification of historical currents and ancestries. Another caution is worth noting. There is a strong difference (although, too, an appreciable connection) between the philosophical (or, at least, intellectual) positions assumed by conflicting political theories and political movements themselves. If one talks about the American Right, for a case in point, one can be referring to the comparatively inarticulate political forces broadly identified with viewpoints on specific issues of national policy or one can make reference to a body of theoretical literature espousing certain philosophical or ideological precepts.

The analysis of the former—the convolutions of political movements and sentiments

—falls within the purview of the political analyst and, retrospectively, the historian. The latter, however, becomes the raw data of the political theorist whose interest in political ideas is not only historical and descriptive but also normative. Thus, any attempt in this essay to investigate the American political Right is not an exercise in political sociology, but an attempt to unscramble philosophical identifications. It is important to make this point, because in so doing one can cut away much that is, within this context, irrelevant. Consequently, our survey of the contemporary state of the American Right can dispense with explicit political phenomena such as lunatic copies of European fascisms, intellectually disreputable fringe groups of varying complexions, special interest factions (“alarmed citizens” against sex education, societies for the abolition of the income tax, *et al*), “know-nothing” movements more concerned with angry denunciation than substantive thought and, finally, large bodies of people justifiably aroused into a sort of disorganized anti- or counterrevolutionary excitement. Many of these political groups are distinctly exotic (as is even more true of numerous phalanxes on the Left) and are, I submit, of more interest to the political sociologist (or pathologist) than to a serious student of political ideas. I do not glean in the manifestos of the Black Panthers or the SDS or the Liberation Front (to include the feminist wing) anything that is worth more than a hurried perusal (if judged on their philosophical credibility or pertinence), but the same thing can be said of most of the offerings of the John Birch Society or the political declarations of George Wallace. Fascinating, I grant, and significant if one is to test the “winds of doctrine,” but more than a little meagre if your purpose is to deal in mature and sophisticated political alternatives.

II

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT event in the recent history of Right-wing politics in the United States was the well-known resurgence of “conservatism” (“self-conscious” conservatism) shortly after the close of the Second World War. Prior to this time, Right-wing politics were almost exclusively devoted to the defense of the diminishing mobility of free enterprise capitalism. To pillory the New Deal was the *summum bonum* of the Right. In large measure, the Right (as then constituted) was fighting a long and frustrating retreat from the high-water mark of the late nineteenth century when classical liberal doctrines were in vogue and before liberalism underwent its twentieth century collectivistic metamorphosis. There was nothing very “conservative” about all this and, indeed, American conservatism (of the Adams-Cooper-Calhoun version) had gone “underground,” perhaps as early as the import of the Jacksonian revolution could be clearly divined.

Withdrawing from the inhospitable arena of democratic politics, conservatives (in the broad tradition of Aristotle, Burke, and Disraeli) became *litterati*, their haunts were the habitat of philosophers, poets and literary essayists. Many remarkable men can be numbered among these intellectual *émigrés*, but they were either content or could not do other than to send their flashing barbs and insights into the marketplace of ideas (from Melville to Faulkner), hoping to taunt the body politic from its cerebral lethargy. But their audience within the democratic policy was certainly limited to the sophisticated few, to say the least, and they were spurned by a professional intelligentsia whose dedication to popular democracy verged on the evangelical.

From the turn of the century—from the small phalanx of Harvard New Humanists

(Santayana, Babbitt, More and T. S. Eliot) to Kirk and Viereck in the late 'forties—American conservatism underwent very lean years indeed, although the standard was kept aloft by such as Mencken, Nock, Cram, Sait and others. But it was a time of troubles, too, for the nonconservative Right; the uneasy days of GOP economic liberalism, the era of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover, finally ended with the threat of a national calamity—and some argued that that calamity was visited upon us in the form of Franklin Roosevelt and his era of supposed reforms. In any case, the Second World War marked *finis* to any hope of a retention of a political orientation based upon the values of nineteenth century liberalism and individualism, the Protestant ethic and rule by businessmen. The foundations of the American Right were cut away.

It was not only this predicament and its attendant anxieties (the beginnings of a reaction against the unfamiliar and extravagant proposals of the Left) that, in part, transformed the Right. If the broad historical conservative view of political and social matters could only be encountered in the salon rather than on the hustings, it had not lain dormant there. Three principal intellectual upsurges were largely responsible for the renaissance of a more overt political conservatism:

1. a strong philosophic reaction against neo-positivism and extreme ethical relativism;
2. a revival of theological orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant;
3. an articulate rejection of the inhumanity and vulgarity produced by the technological revolution.

The formative works of the "conservative revival" of the late 1940's were not so much creative political theory as urbane and sensitive reminders of the conservative tradition, the providing of a politically verbalized orientation that united hereto-

fore isolated segments of conservative opinion.¹ Edmund Burke was somewhat belatedly recognized as the seminal figure in modern conservatism. But even this resurgence of conservative ideas did not elicit a proportionate political response. Conservative intellectuals remained a small and still unfashionable community. The post-Truman period featured one political party apparently moving closer to an overt social democratic posture and the other exhibiting a last ditch stand of nineteenth century liberalism (personified by Robert A. Taft) against the newer liberalism of the Eisenhower onslaught.

The Right, over all, was both looming larger on the horizon and splitting off as a result of several factors: a mounting tempo of conservative publication; a vigorous (and often excessive) anti-communist anxiety; a reaction against the rising power of trade unionism and a union-government alliance on behalf of the goals of "welfare statism"; the backlash against Negro agitation. On occasion, some of these motivations coincided. The term "conservative" began to assume a popular journalistic currency. Beyond its conventional usage, the term was applied to such diverse and often mutually incompatible stances as opposition to communism, unionism, social reform and racial integration and support for "big business," "rugged individualism" and religious fundamentalism.

By the 'sixties, when the issue of "law and order" became significant in practical political terms, "conservatism" took on an honorific connotation, invoked by politicians hopefully to garner support from those alarmed by the accelerating breakdown in order. Mr. Goldwater became a presidential candidate and authored a book under the presumably unequivocal (if putative) title, *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Mr. Goldwater was certainly not a "conservative" in a precise historical sense,

but the use of "conservatism" as a rallying sign had two effects: 1. it created an irreparable semantic confusion regarding the word and 2. it prompted a number of publicists to advocate that historical conservatism be wedded to the more apparent, if weakening, Rightist tradition growing out of nineteenth century liberalism. This was seen as a sort of prudential American compromise and it became the "fusionism" in some vogue today, as we shall see, although the late Clinton Rossiter had made such a similar recommendation as early as 1955.

The so-called "polarization" of U.S. politics with its accompanying threat of revolutionary turmoil and the counteractive uprising of the middle classes gave some promise of a Rightist swing among the electorate and candidates began to campaign as "conservatives" or were so labeled by the press. Moreover, the increasing respectability and popularity of "conservatism" led inevitably to a fragmenting of the expanding Right. There was a notable pulling away from the traditional philosophic-literary conservatism (which had little in common, anyway, with the Right-wing enthusiasm of the more politically conscious *bourgeoisie*) in favor of a widening scope of Right-wing but rather anti-conservative doctrines.

The split between traditional (Burkean-Adamsonian) conservatism and the New Right (if the description will temporarily suffice) centered on four main distinctions:

1. The crux of traditional conservatism was *aristocracy*, not some archaic system of European class designation, but a neo-Greek concept of the *Aristoi*, social differentiation and hierarchy based upon a commitment to rigorous standards of individual excellence. This deep-running aristocratic predilection in traditional con-

servatism was at irreconcilable odds with the middle class, social darwinistic preferences of the "heartland" American Right. Standards of worth, as defined by traditional conservatives, were largely ethical and artistic; the Rightist concepts were primarily acquisitive and utilitarian.

2. The fulcrum of Rightist concern still remained principally economic, sensitive to the rights of property, free enterprise, the work ethic and, above all, the limitation of governmental interference. The traditional conservative, as well, sought to defend private property, economic independence (in the broad sense), but he did not give to economic questions the highest priority, the overarching concern, and rejected an uncritical hostility to governmental activity and prerogatives and remained, at heart, suspicious of the power represented by concentrated and socially irresponsible wealth.

3. The conservative did not equivocate regarding the imperative of social order and perhaps took a firmer and more realistic view than did other Rightists, but he was equally contemptuous of efforts to enforce an omnibus and unenlightened conformity. He opposed the crude censoring of literature and art, the appalling zeal exhibited by philistines to reduce the diversities and colors of social life to an opaque regimentation. But such a project of uniformity, in fact, a variety of leveling represented by post-Babbit suburbia (George, not Irving!), was and is dear to the hearts of many Rightists.

4. The traditional conservative remained a cosmopolitan; patriot, yes, uncritical nationalist, no. Anxious to defend America from her foes, internal and external, he was yet keenly aware of the notable shortcomings of American culture, an ethos constructed in large measure of the relativism, materialism and egalitarianism he found

so distasteful and debilitating. He was in an uncomfortable position: he would defend the Establishment because he shared some of its more basic precepts (*e.g.*, freedom, legalism and the rights of person and property) and because the prevailing arrangements were infinitely preferable to the horrors posed by the Left, but he did not lose his perspective regarding the severe maladies besetting the national life. His concept of "love of country" was to continue his role as benevolent and sympathetic critic. Hyper-nationalism, even a type of resurgent jingoism, characterized some elements of the Right who were prepared, so it would seem, to argue that God is a permanent resident of the United States.

The Right consequently divided, even splintered, with most elements claiming the venerable title of "conservatism," although, in fact, the contemporary Right ranged from philosophical anarchy to a Carlist-type fascism. Student "conservative" groups (not an insignificant force on university campuses) differed in complexion from apostles of William Graham Sumner to admirers of Torquemada. The term "conservatism" is simply no longer useful—it has gone the way of that once pertinent appellation: "gentleman."

III

TO ATTEMPT to bring some classificational order to the Right-wing Tower of Babel, I should like to designate the two primary wings of the Right as *Traditionalists* and *Libertarians*. Certain major subdivisions are possible (and I have included only those with some claim to intellectual respectability):

TRADITIONALISTS (or "TORIES")

1. Catholic Rightists
2. Continentalists
3. Conservatives

4. Hamiltonians
5. Neo-Jeffersonian Agrarians

LIBERTARIANS

1. Democratic Theists
2. Legalists-Constitutionalists
3. Fusionists
4. *Laissez-faire* Individualists
5. Radical Libertarians
6. Objectivists

A certain spectrum is possible to outline if one moves from *Traditionalist*(1) to *Libertarian*(6). In terms of fundamental commitment, the spectrum moves on a number of levels, from objectivity to subjectivity; from absolutism to relativism; from organicism to atomism; from aristocracy to social darwinism; from religious orthodoxy to secularism and materialism—from Aristotle to Hume, from De Maistre to Herbert Spencer.

Catholic Rightists

I have put the Catholic Right on the far end of the Traditionalist continuum, because in addition to espousing a traditional political absolutism it links this viewpoint to a doctrinal persuasion of an explicit metaphysical-theological type. It endorses not only a revival of a pervasive recognition of political authority resting on a base of natural law legitimacy (usually expressed in neo-Aristotelian or neo-Thomistic terms), but, also, advocates a political theory which, in an institutional sense, seeks to adapt many of the features of the organization of the *Ekklesia* to political and social structures. Its theomorphic philosophy of human nature is joined with a hierarchical conception of social relationship, with strong emphasis upon upward authority and the importance of subsocietal institutions (*i.e.*, the family and the parish). Its natural law base induces a

sometimes severe legalism, with considerable stress on social control, a supervision in which secular and ecclesiastical authority is often merged.

The Catholic Right's mood is aristocratic, but frequently in a distinctly continental sense, displaying the influence of De Maistre and the Spanish Rightists. The reaction against Catholic "modernism" in the *fin de siècle* period helped shape it and the Catholic Right is predictably hostile to many recent modifications within the Catholic Church. There exists a certain "ultramontane" flavor in some of the writings of the Catholic Rightists in the sense that their express political and social theory is directly derived, unabashedly, from metaphysical precept. It is not surprising, therefore, that a medievalist orientation pervades it, but more in aesthetic and liturgical terms than overtly an admiration for feudalism, although the doctrines of *Universitas hominum* and the universal church remain a lively hope.

American expression of Right-wing Catholic thought continues to be influenced from European sources (although Orestes Brownson is remembered as a native voice of Catholicism), but it rests, too, upon the essentially conservative mood of the American Roman church and the comparative absence of volatile anti-clericalism in the U.S. There exists, possibly in reaction to the utilitarian character of contemporary American life, a certain almost Carlist-like romanticism in the Catholic Right, a sense of eschatological drama, a Dantesque imaginative fervor. Under other circumstances, it might be pro-monarchist. It does retain a *hauteur*, a melancholy grandeur, that suggests the dignity and self-abnegation of the best in the monarchist tradition.

Its influence *vis-à-vis* the contemporary impact of political thought, tends to be limited by its reasonably circumscribed theological metaphysics, attractive largely

to fellow Catholic theists, yet a certain disaffection in Catholic ranks over "renewal," the obvious intensity and sincerity of its views and its candid concern with the spiritual roots of the present cultural dilemma are enhancing its reception. Among notable writers in this cause are Frederick Wilhelmsen and Brent Bozell. (I shall in this and subsequent sections list only one or two representative publicists, not attempting, for obvious reasons, a definitive listing; I shall also point out that a great deal of overlapping occurs in my admittedly tenuous categories and that judgments differ as to how important contemporary theorists ought to be described and classified.)

Continentalists

The Continentalists share a close proximity with the Catholic Rightists and draw upon similar influences, yet they also tend to be less doctrinaire in their metaphysics and the European conservatism of which they are the products is far wider in range, to include, for example, neo-Hegelianism. Their intellectual forebears are Bonald, Maurras, Mosca, Croce, Ortega, de Madariaga, von Savigny, Scheler and, in some instances, the British neo-Hegelians, Bosanquet and Bradley. While being realists in ontology and epistemology and ethical absolutists, the Continentalists are neither sacerdotalists or, in all cases, natural lawyers. Most (like Eric Voegelin, for example) are historicists with a marked teleological bent. Most have developed a strong interest in an anthropology arising from continental neo-realism and also in philosophical analysis along the lines of European phenomenology, especially that of Husserl and Heidegger.

Order, power and legitimacy are the primary interests in which a transcendental rationalism is commonly a prominent fea-

ture. If one took a European example of this school, it might be Bertrand de Jouvenel, but Voegelin (whose American connections suggest his inclusion) and Thomas Molnar are illustrations of Continentalism or what Peter Viereck once called "Otantottism."²

The difficulty encountered by the Continentalist theorists, in terms of influence, arises from both the measure of philosophical abstraction inherent in their political theory and its relative aloofness from the currents of Anglo-American thought (*e.g.* the conservatism of Burke and the Federalists). Anglo-American "high" Toryism had Whig roots, it emerges from classical republicanism (of Aristotle, Cicero, More and Hooker), while the Continentalists presume, in the main, a tighter concept of both the foundations of authority and the basis of social leadership, stressing a more professionalized and ideologically sophisticated elite than the Anglo-Saxon "squirearchy" and with generally a more statist predilection.

Again, the Continentalists, often embracing a more articulated ontology, tend toward an idealistic rather than a naturalistic conception of the transmission of knowledge, the mandate of tradition and custom. The approach is more akin to Herder or Hegel than Montesquieu or Toqueville.

The Continentalists are of importance, not only as a continuation of continental conservatism, but also because they represent a highly humanistic revival of the best in essentialism and organicism, a bridge to the English-American thought of Green, Royce, Arnold and Hocking.

Conservatives

It is easy to describe these Conservatives as "Burkeans" and, indeed, Burke remains their modern intellectual progenitor. Frequently, the term "Tory" is applicable. Yet

Burke did not himself spring full-blown from the brow of Zeus; his originality cannot be discounted, but he is also a product of a recognizable historical and even national skein. One understands Burke not only through Aristotle, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, but also by way of Shaftsbury and Halifax. It is doubtful that any other national culture of its day could have produced a figure identical to Burke. After all, Burke was an Irishman, an Anglican and a man of the eighteenth century, whose baroque prose clearly recalls the tradition of Milton, Dryden and Pope. To understand Burke, it is required to appreciate the English landed gentry of his time, an altogether unique social configuration, mirrored only, perhaps, on the North American continent by the gentleman described by James Fenimore Cooper and personified by John Adams, Gouverneur Morris, Fisher Ames, Chancellor Kent and, perhaps in a more flamboyant guise, by Randolph of Roanoke.

Thus, the Conservatives' admiration of Burke arises from distinct differences in orientation from the continental Right. The Conservatives are, in part, agrarians, with a particular fondness for the life and habits of the countryside (as Quinton Hogg once observed that "foxhunting is the "wisest of religions"). They are parliamentarians (although not necessarily equilibriumists) and devotees of a paternalistic rural magistracy or its contemporary urbanized equivalent, aware of the majesty of the State (emphasis on the capital S), but dubious about concentrations of personal power, less agitated about philosophical precision than the results of practical policy. An eclecticism, alien to the Catholic Rightists and the Continentalists, is characteristic. They tend to be compromisers and negotiators—even "trimmers" in Halifax's complimentary context. Their piety—and most are orthodox religionists—is broader-

based and more naturalistic than the more absolutist Tories, even tinged with an urbane skepticism. There persists in their attitude a vivid liking for eccentricity and political adventure. But, above all, the Conservatives claim to be "public men," in the Roman sense, descendants of Cato, Scipius and Cincinnatus.

The primary motif of Conservatism is aristocracy (rather than specialized elitism), but one rather flexible and informal, with notable sympathies for what was once called the "yeomanry" and the "working classes," devoid of the studied snobbery of the more self-conscious liberals. Aristocracy is connected with a high regard for the importance of tradition and custom, which include regional and local habits and preferences. Conservatism is an avowed foe of mass conformity, repression and aesthetic monotony. Its roots are candidly Anglo-Saxon, from Burke, Coleridge, Adams and Calhoun. Its contemporary representatives number among them Russell Kirk and Eliseo Vivas.

Hamiltonians

I have severed from the Conservatives a group which I have designated as "Hamiltonians," partially for the reasons that separated off Hamilton himself from the more traditional Tory Federalists. The Hamiltonians differ from Traditionalists in four ways:

1. a stronger alliance with urban-industrial interests and an increased sense of economic determinants in social theory;
2. a greater eagerness to participate in partisan politics;
3. an amplified appreciation of power as a political objective and a certain Machiavelian orientation;
4. a distrust of accustomed concepts of aristocracy and a regard for a more mobile, resourceful elite.

The two representatives I have selected for this category are James Burnham and William Buckley. The latter choice may surprise some (who would be prone to think of Mr. Buckley as a Conservative), but I consider Mr. Buckley a "broad" rather than a "high" Tory (to borrow the nineteenth century Church of England designations). There is a strain of practical partisanship in Mr. Buckley that is typical of the Hamiltonian persuasion, a strong awareness of the Florentine's dicta (and, indeed, Mr. Burnham is well-known for his book, *The Machiavellians*). Not that Mr. Buckley accepts Machiavelli's somewhat labored amorality, but his political peregrinations suggest something other than the aloofness of Conservatism—and, perhaps, that is to his credit. Certainly, Mr. Buckley's interests (like Hamilton's) are far less philosophically oriented than most of the Tories to his right on the continuum; his pessimism regarding human perfectability (a general Tory conviction) takes as a counterpoise a sense of manipulatory imperative far more intense than the more overt absolutism of the Catholic Right and the Continentalists and the didacticism of the Conservatives.

The major separation between Hamiltonians and Conservatives turns about (a) what constitutes "sophistication" and (b) the desirability of congeniality with upper-middle class managerial and entrepreneurial interests. The Conservative, for good or ill, remains a creature of the geographical "outback," the antithesis of the courtier—whether he "takes his stand" in Mecosta, Michigan, the Arizona desert or a fishing village on Majorca. The Hamiltonian is a city boy, known to frequent publishers' offices and the "seats of influence." In America, he is a species understood to inhabit the East Coast; he adapts well to the electronic age and the roar of jet aircraft. He possesses a Hamiltonian adapta-

bility, almost an opportunism, that is foreign to the Conservative; his enthusiasm for political warfare arises from a genuine zeal rather than from a sort of obligatory resignation, characteristic, in large measure, of Conservatism. The Conservative, once in politics, yearns to return to his farm, to be invited to pass out ribbons at the county fair; the Hamiltonian's concept of retirement is withdrawal to a New York apartment and a long-distance telephone.

The Hamiltonians have made an indelible mark on national affairs. They are articulate, tough-minded and yet sensitive to the arts of persuasion. They are also "provincial" in an odd sense (as was Hamilton), because they fail to adequately frame a national reality that includes those whose orientations are not urban and not "fashionable"; they do not have a complete grasp of the significance and underlying dignity of those who are disinterested in or incapable of an acquisitional posture. They lack, perhaps, the gentler paternalism of the Conservatives or the majestic vision of those further on their right. They suffer, at times, from Hamilton's confusion between influence and authority.

Neo-Jeffersonian Agrarians

To some, perhaps with justification, this group should not appear under the label "Conservative". This would have been correct in the last century, but I would now contend that within the existing ideological spectrum they are compatible with the over-all matrix of Toryism. They are not, quite evidently, a direct offspring of Jeffersonianism, but they preserve a connection in terms of a sturdy agrarianism, a faith in the ultimate preeminence of an agriculturally-based "yeomanry" and a defiance of the juggernautine bureaucratic state, remote, impersonal and oligarchic.

To a large degree, these Neo-Jeffersonians are identified with the American South, which puts them far from the rural populism of the Midwest. They are "traditionalists" of a sort, although more egalitarian and with a somewhat less sophisticated concept of authority than that found among the Conservatives, but possessing an almost mystic—certainly poetic—attachment to locality, to custom, to rudimentary dignity, to a deep regard for untutored courtesy. Their great spokesman was William Faulkner, with support from Richard Weaver and the Nashville Poets (Ransom, Tate, Davidson, *et al*). Faulkner represented a vital current in American life, moderate, charitable, emotionally unencumbered, gifted with a profound sense of nature (to be compared here with Melville and Robinson Jeffers), an appreciation of simplicity and honor and an almost instinctual sense of suitability—the latter virtue which not only characterizes the Southern Agrarians, but also the often unlettered people whose cause they espouse. Theirs is not the advocacy of an insular antebellum Southern ruling class nor the *nouveau-riche* so beautifully castigated by Mencken in "The Tragedy at Appomattox," but their loyalty is to the residual frontiersman, not only the buckskinned runner of the forests, but the whole *dramatis personae* of continental expansion, the indispensable gentry and yeomanry so crucial to that project that is only preserved nostalgically in Faulkner's South or, too, perhaps, in the Southwest of J. Frank Dobie.

America lacks a sense of sadness, an appreciation of the tragic motif. One receives this poignant *douleur* in fairly elaborate and expansive terms from the Tory Right, but only the Neo-Jeffersonian Agrarians, perhaps, give it a vibrant, earthy simplicity in which elemental human struggle is yet tastefully extolled.

Democratic Theists

Of all the Tory subdivisions previously described, none can fairly be called proponents of democracy, at least twentieth century popular democracy. If popular democracy means pervasive enforced equality, "one man, one vote," governmental regulation of heretofore private spheres of life, *et al*, then the Tories are against it. Not so the Democratic Theists. Their argument is, essentially, that the moral principles of democracy are clearly derived from Christian ethics and, at the same time, democracy can be made to function only by hard-headed realism and an unsentimental awareness of human sin.

Such a position naturally entails sharp departures from the liberally-oriented democratic *apologias* on at least two major counts:

1. Christian ethics are presumed to rest upon universal and immutable moral values (as contrasted with the predominantly relativistic mood of popular democratic thought).

2. There is no room, when all is said and done, for the concept of "sin" or human depravity in contemporary democratic thought, its thesis being, rather, that flaws in human character and behavior are correctable by environmental improvement.

This divergence may well be created by an unresolved circularity in the reasoning of the Democratic Theists who appear unwilling to follow the stark inferences from their premises, yet the case has been put with sincerity and force by Reinhold Niebuhr, René Williamson and the late John Courtney Murray, to name three otherwise diverse examples.

The fact is that the Christian Theists under discussion are "high" democrats (to use Ralph Adams Cram's terminology) and certainly are not Jacobin democrats. They fairly belong on the Right since their theis-

tic commitment is manifestly primary, particularly as it includes the least "democratic" of all assertions: the "fallen" character of Man, redeemable only by a transcendental grace. Niebuhr, for example, seems only a "procedural" but not a "substantive" democrat, a not unuseful distinction. Moreover, the inherent requirement of moral discipline distinctly suggests forms of social control, however non-coercive, that run counter to customary democratic permissiveness. Additionally, the Democratic Theists, being of quite orthodox theological backgrounds, are at odds with social gospelism, religious "liberalism" and its offshoots: "ethical humanism," "situational morality" and neo-deism.

The Democratic Theists, not without their problems of consistency and logical rigor, nonetheless express what is most desirable about the evolution of democratic theory, especially as the "primacy of the person" thesis is advanced not on the basis of some naturalistic egocentrism, but on the ground that human freedom is an emanation of a higher will which imposes responsibilities as well as opportunities. Moreover, their espousal of democratic ideas is prudently tempered by the critical awareness of the dark and unregenerate side of human nature.

Legalists-Constitutionalists

I was initially tempted to simply refer to this category as the "Common lawyers," but the animadversions of Common Law theory of recent date make such a designation suspect. I do refer here to the tradition of legal and constitutionally-based libertarianism identified with the evolution of the Common Law, natural rights theory, the mixed state concept of Locke, infused as well with the influence of the Historical Jurists of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth (*e.g.*, Maine and Pol-

lock). Not only are these Constitutionalists advocates of the primacy of constitutional limitations and the defense of individual rights (of persons and property), but they vigorously oppose the growth of judicial positivism and with it the transference of juridical authority to the bureaucracy. They contend that while the jurisprudential art must be amenable to social needs and conditions, it responds only on the basis of the historical and prudential convolutions of *stare decisis* as against the vagaries of statutory proclamation; the metamorphosis of law, they assert, proceeds from an irreducible body of individual rights beyond the legitimate interference of the judicial or the legislative arm. Individual rights, then, must take precedence over social utility; social conservation is primarily the insurance of legitimate individual prerogatives, as against transgressions by individuals or the state, a set of relationships set forth in constitutional instruments designed to supply a continuous basis for social order.

This fundamental position has been assumed in this century by jurists themselves (two contemporary illustrations are Herbert Wechsler and Alexander Bickel) and in a broader political scope by political theorists (Leo Strauss and Carl Friederich, among others). These gentlemen are "libertarians" in the best sense, since they realize that the preservation of individual liberty is dependent upon a complex fabric of social recognitions and reciprocities, that law as protector of the person not only must stand against and control human passion, but is itself generated by a more elevated wisdom than the insights of a living generation, the antithesis of Jefferson's perverse notion that constitutions should only bind those present at their creation. Law and constitutions are not paradigmatic devices, but expressions of a moral consensus, if not, in all views, an objective moral order.

These factors, on the contemporary scene, prompt many of the Legalists-Constitutionalists to favor a "balancing" approach in contrast to judicial absolutism.

Law, in the sense embraced by the Legalists, has become a main target of Jacobin democrats and New Left nihilists. Essentially political moderates, imbued with the equilibriumism of Montesquieu and Locke and the liberality of Toqueville, the Legalists and Constitutionalists now belong on the Right as they are, in a manner of speaking, the "traditionalists" among the libertarians. Their individualist assumptions, their explicit philosophical view of law, their equilibriumist ideas about society may be open to rebuttal, but their reiteration of a noteworthy Anglo-American intellectual and ethical continuity provides them with a valuable role in the maintenance of rational political alternatives.

Fusionists

The crux of the Fusionists' position rests upon an attempt to merge the doctrines of classical nineteenth century liberalism with some elements of traditional conservatism. But it is an unhappy wedding; John Stuart Mill and James Fitzjames Stephen cannot be made to share a nuptial couch. The tenets of American entrepreneurialism, "rugged individualism" and middle class morality do not really reconcile with aristocratic and paternalistic Toryism. The primary point of tension revealed by the Fusionists arises from their endorsement of an individualism based upon a fundamentally egocentric psychology (probably derivable from British empiricism) which culminates, granted in a somewhat modest fashion, in social Darwinism. The Fusionists, such as Frank Meyer, cannot really renounce a nineteenth century affection for the "practical man," the personification of

the more homely (but equally contentious) virtues. This sentiment contributes toward a variety of anti-intellectualism, a certain philistinism, among the Fusionists, an antagonism toward the aristocratic predilection for eccentricity and diversity.

In point of fact, the Fusionists not only are not Conservatives or Tories, they might be identified quite easily as *laissez-faire* individualists, save for their invocation of "conservative" terminologies and turns of phrase. I suppose one might suggest the late Robert A. Taft as a Fusionist culture hero, a substantial American Rightist with his heart in the nineteenth century and possessed with a hardy if somewhat uncomplicated integrity, justifiably admired by the Fusionists.

To a marked degree, a modified Calvinism is apparent among some Fusionists (however they might announce admiration for older orthodoxies) or at least a nuance of Port Royal in which social preeminence ought to fall to men of "character," meaning by that men who are "successful," industrious, circumspect and, above all, have proven themselves by performance in the more mundane areas of life. For the Fusionists, Peter Viereck's "unadjusted man" is no hero, but neither is Russell Kirk's "bohemian Tory."

For the Fusionists, Beard's well-known interpretation of the Constitution makes sense (even more sense is made, perhaps, from the pre-convention maneuverings of the Annapolis meeting). The acquisition of property (and the presumed temperings of character that issue from it) produces a heightened sense of responsibilities and an admirable probity, an argument widely used in the early nineteenth century against universal manhood suffrage. The Fusionists, however, are not so naive as to assume that unalloyed classical liberalism can be revived (even in the American "heartland") and they suppose that conservative

motifs are required to modify and humanize the harshnesses of social Darwinism.

A singular departure from Conservatism occurs as a result of the Fusionists' adherence to social atomism that is a natural consequence of their individualistic preferences. Society is presumed to exist for individual enhancement, being only an aggregation of isolated beings. Hence, Fusionism's intense defense of individual freedom presumes a Bentham-Mill definition of the term.

Mr. Meyer suggests that Fusionism is the "conservative mainstream," but he confuses expedient eclecticism with compatible integration. The Fusionist can be accused, perhaps uncharitably, of parading nineteenth century social Darwinism under the occasional rhetoric of humanistic Toryism, but, in any event, the absence of a commitment to the primacy of community, the aristocratic principle and Fusionism's obverse acceptance of self-interest ethics removes it from historical conservatism. It cannot be denied, colaterally, that Fusionism may become an increasingly attractive political stance—but, one fears, more shibbolethicaly potent than philosophically so.

Laissez-Faire Individualists

These gentlemen can be applauded for their candor: they do not claim to be "conservatives." Instead, they are expressly utilitarians and economic reductionists and subscribers to the basic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, economic, political and social. A very substantial segment of their number are distinguished free-market economists (Hayek, Mises and Roepke, for illustration)³ who are, above all, dedicated to a repudiation of collectivism, economic "welfareism" and governmental restriction. Their social theory is a conventional nineteenth century individualism, strongly

reminiscent of William Graham Sumner, but their philosophical orientations are often mixed in terms of underlying metaphysics (compare Mises and Roepke, for example), but metaphysics is not a paramount preoccupation.

Not being an economist, I am loathe to comment upon the merits of their theories in this field, but it is evident enough that to the *Laissez-Faire* Individualists the activities of production, distribution and consumption are the primary social undertakings. Granting the immense importance of economic relationships and their effects on the commonweal, it is doubtful that the root causes of present social discontents and dislocations are predominantly economic. Mass deracination must be explained in other terms. Indeed, the argument might be advanced that economic preoccupations (which have been characteristic of wide-ranging ideologies) have partially obscured the base cultural issues.

Rightists of all varieties would undoubtedly seek to resist the economic despotisms of the Left, holding that these proposals are either untenable or undesirable in terms of their social impact. That this is true does not necessarily imply that a *laissez-faire* economic system or an unfettered free market is, to all, a vital and irreplaceable social objective. While I sympathize, insofar as my knowledge of economic theory takes me, with many, if not most, of the explicit economic tenets of the *Laissez-Faire* Individualists, one can be justifiably dubious about both the priority given to economic concerns and the utilitarian philosophical and social premises from which this economic theory develops.

The importance of the *Laissez-Faire* Individualists may, in the last analysis, be their energetic and searching refutation of spurious economic radicalisms rather than their concrete recommendations for social amelioration.

Radical Libertarians

If the term "radical" is applied precisely (to mean advocacy of change at the "roots"), then the Radical Libertarians are fairly identified. Theirs is frequently a flirtation with philosophical anarchy, a non-recognition of any authority save the subjective assessment of self-interest. Theirs is a world-view of an unmodified process of "natural selection"; the writings of the Radical Libertarians appear to be an updated version of Herbert Spencer (so close, in fact, that one wonders whether they have meticulously studied him or have arrived at similar "libertarian" conclusions with the belief that their ideas are original). Passages in Spencer (*vide, Social Statics*) concerned with the denunciation of charity, public education, *et al*, reappear, transmogrified in language, in the writings of the Radical Libertarians, some of whom, by the way, even deny the right of the state to compel its citizens to participate in the common defense. Personally, I cannot help but agree with Carlyle's well-known evaluation of Spencer as "that immeasurable ass." Such an attitude, I confess, prompts me to look at Radical Libertarianism as a sort of quaint lunacy, even when espoused by such respectable gentlemen as Murray Rothbard and John Hospers. It is difficult for me to see how anyone can miss the point that the most elemental present peril is the demise of a sense of community, of the reconsolidation of indispensable human institutions. To propose, in consequence, as a serious recommendation, the bellicose isolation of a state of affairs in which aggressive and solipsistic egocentricity is to be the rule appears unthinkable. I do not see how America can survive as a nation of two-hundred million self-engrossed "metaphysicians," let alone a comparable number of unbridled pursuers of self-interest and unrestrained whim. To function as a social be-

ing—to live, to work, to own property, to influence, to teach, to exercise authority—means the recognition of responsibilities and reciprocal restraints. And to deny that man is a “social being” requires an insensitivity to current empirical knowledge that approaches the incredible.

Doubtless, Radical Libertarianism goes about as far as one can from collectivism, but it is equally remote from humane, civilized social life. It is not, in truth, a return to the primitive—or to any nonhominid mammalian model that springs to mind—because primitive social existence involves the consolidation of mutual responsibilities, an obedience to a higher mandate than immediate self-gratification.

Objectivists

I have never been able to make much sense out of Objectivism (as promulgated by Miss Rand and her cohorts). This may be due, needless to add, to my own crude skills at assimilation. I am, for illustration, at a total loss as to why this “movement” should invoke the term “objectivism,” since it is a rampant, almost inchoate subjectivism. I glean that Objectivism incorporates some erroneously conceived Nietzscheanism, an admiration for the supposed primal strengths and virtues and the acceptance and endorsement of universal egocentrism—with a dash of Hobbes, de Sade and Romantic *Sturm und Drang* thrown in for color. It is largely propelled, perhaps surprisingly, by Miss Rand’s ponderous and sententious prose (infinitely inferior to her often uneven command of the fictional medium). I include Objectivism as a bizarre finale to the continuum.

IV

THIS COOKE’S TOUR of the American Right—replete with the advertised “agonies”

and “ecstasies”—may leave one as confused as he was before undertaking the journey. Perhaps one ought to make a list of typical “issues of the day” (e.g., the Indochina War, campus unrest, inflation, sex education and the preservation of the environment) and set up an ideological box score. The tabulation might well be both instructive and perplexing. Indeed, certain quite irreverent witticisms come to mind—or at least to those minds imbued with a fondness for the “black comedy” of contemporary American social controversy.

On the other hand, the sobering reflection one gets after viewing this pentacostal assemblage is that it may be quite true that the Western democracies are shifting in a Rightist direction, but which of these orientations or alliances of orientations will provide the intellectual foundations for political movements and the rationale for leadership? One gets a reaction similar to Wellington’s quip during the Peninsular Campaign that he didn’t know if his generals frightened the French, but they surely frightened him! The choice, after all, is not really between Right and Left, but rather what social values will prevail and which ideological persuasions best understand and project those values.

There seems to me to exist a certain solidarity among the shades of opinion I have called Traditionalist. The same is true among the Libertarians. There is some compatibility among the moderates of both groups (i.e., between Hamiltonians and Neo-Jeffersonians, on the one side, and Democratic Theists and Legalists-Constitutionalists, on the other). However, much as the Right aspires to prevent a revolutionary takeover or a fatal decadence of American political and social institutions, I do not think this is the time for a sort of ideological “ecumenism.” First, the Right is better off for its variety and, second, there are philosophical divisions that cannot be

glossed over in a desire to forge a "popular front." In any case, the history of politics teaches us that ideologies do not prevail as such, but merge in the fire-bath of political controversy to produce new and functional syntheses, unanticipated, precisely, by the

theorist. Such will be the case again, this time a novel synthesis incorporating, we devoutly hope, the accumulated wisdom and discipline of those who have in past times placed principle above the emoluments of power.

¹Special mention should be made in this connection of Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, (1948) and Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, Henry Regnery, Chicago, (1953).

²See Peter Viereck, *Conservatism: from John Adams to Churchill*, Anvil Books, New York, (1956), p. 11. The term evolved from the word in Italian for 88 (*ottantott*), said to have been the response of the king of Piedmont-Sardinia to his current political woes, reference being made to conditions prior to the Revolution of 1789 which he deemed infinitely preferable. Professor Viereck

coined the term to refer to what he designated "counterrevolutionary and authoritarian conservatism."

³It should be pointed out that Messrs. Hayek, Mises and Roepke are in sharp disagreement in matters relating to metaphysical and ethical convictions. They also choose to adopt differing classifications (Professor Hayek, for example, selecting for himself quite felicitously, I think, the title "Whig"). It is not because of the insignificance of these differences that I group them together, but, rather, because in the context of the continuum that I have adopted their overriding social orientations have a common core.