CONSERVATISM IN AMERICAN THOUGHT, 1930-1955

DISSERTATION

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By

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INTRODUCTION

American conservatism since the Great Crash of 1929 has received scant attention in scholarly works. Historians have concentrated on liberalism since, whether the New Deal was liberal or conservative, everyone agrees that the depression decade called forth one of the most progressive reform periods of American history. After World War II, however, Americans witnessed the spectacle of a large number of articulate scholars and writers openly declaring their allegiance to conservative values. A unique feature of this short-lived phenomenon was that for the most part the "new conservatism" looked to Europe, especially to England for its traditions, heroes, and body of thought. To discover why this was so is to begin to understand the nature of the American political mind.

An endemic trait of historians appears to be the inclination to see the period of which they write as a "crucial" one, as a "watershed" in the national history. This case has been made for virtually every decade since the founding of the Republic. Perhaps then it
is natural to see the era which witnessed the nation's worst depression, its most significant reform period, and its worst war as another crucial period. Historical change - planned and unplanned - has proceeded as rapidly in the past thirty-five years as at any time. But the era's most significant feature, namely the conscious commitment to social change to the extent that it could be rationally and effectively planned, existed prior to the period. In fact, the United States is probably the first large nation to have change and innovation programmed into its culture. As this fact became evident, the nature of the good society assumed profound importance. How could the good society be defined? How deliberately should a society undertake its own reform? These are the most important political problems today.

The intention of this work is to study the response of certain intellectual conservatives to these problems. There is no indivisible Platonic essence to which any embodiment of conservatism conforms. There are many varieties; it is well to state clearly that our concern is with one kind, the philosophical conservatives. What questions do they ask of society? How do the values which emerge from their writings correspond
to dominant American values? Do they render the American experience intelligible? The answers to these questions have been sought in the published writings, books and articles of intellectual conservatives.

The study focuses on cultural conservatives — the new humanists, the southern agrarians and the new conservatives — who generally abstained from comment on specific issues of national policy. Since the New Deal was the major domestic development of the inter-war years, attention is also devoted to two individuals, Herbert Hoover and Walter Lippmann, who wrote much about specific features of the Roosevelt Administration.

Moreover, Hoover's brand of avowedly "American" conservatism furnishes a clear-cut contrast to that of the cultural conservatives. For all of his enslavement to abstractions grounded in the past, he was entirely nationalistic, that is, his views were rooted in the unique biography that was his, one which he understood to be entirely American. Lippmann, philosophical and theoretical, represented the Lockean liberal, moving among universal abstractions and measuring the day-to-day events by them.

The central theme of the study is the reaction of reflective conservatism to the theory of mass society,
the theory that dwells on the standardization and undifferentiated aspects of life in modern society. The writer's thesis is that the philosophical beliefs of genuine historical conservatism are in serious conflict with the general value system and purposes of American society.
CHAPTER I

CONSERVATISM: A DEFINITION

What is conservatism? Such a protean word, so often mishandled, defies all pat definitions. John Stuart Mill once characterized the conservatives as the stupid party. In America, conservatism has usually been linked with free enterprise, self-interest, or both. William Graham Sumner, an opponent of government intervention in the name of freedom, and the historian Clinton Rossiter, who accepts New Deal reformism in the name of freedom, have both been dubbed conservatives. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union has been described as the conservative wing of world communism since it is currently engaged in the preservation of what was once a revolutionary program of reform. This chapter attempts to reduce the term to intelligibility and to set the growth of conservatism in the context of the past two hundred years of Western history.

For the sake of convenience, we may note three possible meanings - or levels - of conservatism, all legitimate given the appropriate historical and social
context. First, psychological conservatism. This type means simply the human disposition to preserve what is loved and to oppose change as being disruptive of accustomed life-patterns. It is disinterested in that it is not a rational attitude but rather a matter of sentiment and natural disposition. All individuals possess it: it is a matter of degree.

Economic conservatism denotes what most Americans think of when they hear the word conservatism. Economic conservatives are those who have something of material value to defend against innovation. It may be wealth, or privilege, or position. Usually it is materialistic and in its most extreme form, economic conservatism becomes an insidious influence, selfish and grasping. It ought to be noted, however, that the conservative who is easily irritated over discussion of economic change, may be most open-minded on subjects not directly related to his economic interests.

There remains philosophical conservatism - the conservatism of those who articulate what they believe in intellectual rather than economic or purely political terms. The philosophical conservative finds certain values and ideas which support the existing order worthy
of expression and defense, and in so doing, often transcends considerations of self-interest. The concern here is with this kind of conservatism.

Has not conservatism always existed? Psychologically, yes; ideologically, no. Undergirding all other varieties is psychological or natural conservatism with its roots deep in all organic life. It signifies a state of being, a physical or mental disposition which enables the individual to feel at home in his environment. The tried is preferred to the untried, the known to the unknown, the present good to any possible better.¹ Risk, great adventure, and critical thought are frowned upon as constituting a grave threat to societal equilibrium. Even a self-confessed "progressive" may embody many conservative inclinations. Radical in politics, he may be wary of overthrowing anything (religious or moral values) which does not already allegedly contain within itself the seeds of its own destruction. To put the matter briefly, psychological

conservatism is that group of sentiments which is favorably disposed toward things-as-they-are and thus desires little, if any change.²

What then is the cause of this attitude? A. B. Wolfe in *Conservatism, Rationalism, and the Scientific Method* says fear: "All conservatism....is essentially a safety-first attitude. Its root desire is for security."³ Fear, not in any pejorative sense (for fear may be one of the heroic virtues), but fear as a biological impulse seeking self-preservation. It is bred in the bone, so to speak, as the organism first succeeds in its unconscious phylogenetic adaptation to the environment, and secondly as it masters the art of ontogenetic adaptation — "the fitting of the individual to his environment through individual habituation and experience."⁴ Both are necessary, but ontogenetic

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²Ibid., p. 153. "What is, is right," and if the existing economic arrangements happen to cause a depression, the conservative rationalization is that, bad as it may be, it is in any case natural. See also Lord Hugh Cecil, *Conservatism* (London: Thornton Butterfield Limited, 1933), pp. 9ff; Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, ed. Paul Kecksemeti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 95.


⁴Ibid., p. 43.
adaptation is "imperfect in the case of those individuals who lack the proper phylogenetic characteristics," e.g., feeblemindedness.  

William James notes the powerful conservative function of habits - the actions which become automatized as the nervous system responds to constant, repetitious and similar commands of the mind.

When we look at living creatures...one of the first things that strikes us is that they are a bundle of habits.... Habit is...the enormous flywheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor.

Habits simplify our routine activities, lessen our fatigue, and free our conscious attention for other matters. Fear and habit, organic imperatives and unconscious ritualizations - both coalesce in the making of natural conservatism.

But fear may take other forms. Men also fear what they have been taught to fear; one can fear for one's life (fear of the unfamiliar) or one may fear the

\[5\text{Ibid.}\]

familiar if it threatens one's interests. Often, too, the fear of social disapproval encourages a conservative and conforming respectability by tempering the radical tendencies which arise out of dissatisfactions. It would be difficult to overestimate the pressures of society to which the individual is subjected in his early, most formative years. They come from a number of key sources: from the family, which "inculcates safe attitudes" to secure social acceptability for the child; from the school, which is often interested in social adjustment or in memorization instead of rigorous thinking; from the churches and Sunday Schools which stress revealed truths rather than critical thought; and finally from the middle-class social order which places a premium on moderation and conformity through contempt, ostracism, prejudice, discrimination, and lack of status. In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud went further and grounded a moderate conformity in the imperatives of social existence itself. But the

7Wolfe, Conservatism, pp. 25-29.
8Ibid., p. 48; James, The Principles of Psychology, p. 122.
9Wolfe, Conservatism, pp. 48-56.
repression of instincts had social causes as well, e.g. when he wrote that "Every renunciation of instinct for reasons of conscience now becomes a dynamic source of conscience and every fresh renunciation increases the latter's severity and intolerance."\(^{10}\)

Since childhood is so crucial in the formation of habits, James suggested that education should be geared "to make our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy. . . . we must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can."\(^{11}\) To what extent individuals can become habituated to constant change, James does not say. Surely the type of society which characterizes modern Western nations will produce a value system and outlook different than that of the traditional societies in which one adjusted once to a given social order for the duration of one's life. This is of the utmost importance for conservatism.\(^{12}\)


\(^{11}\) James, The Principles of Psychology, p. 122.

\(^{12}\) Wolfe suggests that specialization of work processes may produce conservatism since concentration on a few small operations for a large part of the day means that much else remains in the area of the unfamiliar. (p. 41) Willard A. Kerr corroborates Wolfe's opinion in "Untangling the Liberalism-Conservatism Continuum," Journal of Social Psychology, 35 (February, 1952) 111-125. (See pp. 116-117) But might it also be true that if specialization is a brother of change, habits formed in the world of work may carry over into one's leisure-hour activities?
To the extent that the foregoing is correct, it suggests that most individuals seek, physically, to save their own skins; socially, to save their reputations. Once the individual reasons, however, habits may become values worthy of defense in their own right. The biological urge for security can become a value, something more than a safety-first attitude. When the value is articulated, philosophical conservatism emerges, and to that topic we now turn.

* * *

In order to understand the relevance of conservatism to America, it will be useful to examine several theories of the origins and nature of conservatism. Samuel P. Huntington, writing in the American Political Science Review outlines the aristocratic, autonomous, and situational theories. First, the aristocratic theory understands conservatism to be the feudal-aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution and the rise of liberal thought. Its values do not embody eternal truths. They are the product of a concrete set of historical circumstances and are defined in terms of medievalism, feudalism, nobility, status, and hierarchy.

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The autonomous theory is much less restrictive in that conservatism is believed to embody universal values independent of historical and sociological factors. Conservatism in this sense, is supported not only by the aristocracy, but by members of all classes who view the world through the framework of similar values.\(^{14}\)

A third view, the situational theory, views conservatism as the ideology arising out of a distinct but recurring type of historical situation in which a fundamental challenge is directed at established institutions and in which the supporters of those institutions employ the conservative ideology in their defense.\(^{15}\)

Conservatism thus exists only when called forth by a challenge to any part of the existing social, political and economic arrangements of society.

Huntington opts for the situational definition as best explaining all manifestations of conservatism in modern history. Conservatism is "the intellectual rationale of the permanent institutional pre-requisites of human existence....It is the rational defense of being against mind, of order against chaos" - and in the

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 454-455.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 455.
latter case conservatism performs a most useful function. Contrary to other ideologies conservatism is not ideational in character, but institutional. It lacks a substantive ideal. Huntington rejects the aristocratic theory as being too narrow and restrictive, relating as it does only to a small class in society and contingent on but one historical circumstance. The autonomous theory, says Huntington, wrongly frees conservatism from historical processes, it "lacks the broad sway and catholic appeal of an ideology of universal and permanent relevance" and is rejected partly because the truth of a thing is assumed to lie in its acceptability.

But can one theory of conservatism be so clearly distinguished from the others?

Another look at certain developments in recent modern history suggests a modified view of the situational definition. Philosophical conservatism is clearly a phenomenon of the age of ideology. But need this mean that the ideas which come under the umbrella of conservatism must have arisen only when conservatism

16__Ibid., 460.
17__Ibid., 457.
18__Ibid.
became an articulated system? Until two hundred years ago, man did not have to concern himself much with either the reality or the idea of change. But since that time "the invention of invention made change, instead of stability, the supreme characteristic of the social scene." A unique conjunction of forces - technological, industrial, ideological - acted as cause and effect to give a new character to modern societies. It has often been noted of various periods in history that man became more anthropocentric in outlook but of what age other than that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can it also be said that he had the technical capacities to translate his ideas into programs of action? Prior to 1789 - to use that date symbolically - politics had been largely the management of men and "problems" devoid of an effective relation to historical and social developments. After 1789, however, certain ideas became more systematic. Thought became increasingly "ideological" (concerned with "the conversion of ideas into social levers,") and politics became the "realization of ideas." Whereas conflict had once


meant a clash of moral or theological principles, it came to mean disagreement over the nature and character of historical change.

The ideologies of the Western world — liberalism, socialism, communism, nationalism — despite their obvious differences, contained striking similarities. All were secular in that they were interested in the here and now and substituted an earthly kingdom for the other-worldly reward of traditional Christianity. And so man's energies were channeled into political action instead of into religious practices. Daniel Bell has noted that "the modern effort to transform the world chiefly or solely through politics...meant that all other institutional ways of mobilizing emotional energy would necessarily atrophy."21 As if to provide an answer to the fear of death, the orthodox Western religious concept of individual immortality was partially displaced in favor of the immortality of "the movement." One might then hypothesize that conservatism, in its deepest meaning, arose in the conscious or unconscious reaction to the absence of the experience of God in Western culture.

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21 Bell, The End of Ideology, p. 372.
Second, the ideologies were democratic. If, prior to the age of ideology, equality meant only the equality of souls before God, the revolutionaries defended "the right of everyone...to make a judgment on society." All of the social movements paid homage to the primacy of the people's will, and developments in communications permitted appeals to the people. If the aristocrats found the pace of technological and social change terrifying, such was hardly the case with the long over-burdened masses of people and thus they readily responded to revolutionary appeals.

Third, the ideologies were utopian in order to convince men of the feasibility of betterment in face of all the staggering problems of human existence. The apocalyptic visions however, demanded that the people act, because "truth for ideologies, lay in action, not in blind obedience to a metaphysical abstraction." 

\[\text{22} \text{Ibid., p. 29.}\]

\[\text{23} \text{It is true that in communism, a small, tightly-disciplined elite made the important political decisions and did not "test" their views in a popular election. But they presumed to act in the name of the people who would so have acted had they understood what was best for them.}\]

\[\text{24} \text{Ibid., p. 370.}\]
Finally, the democratic bias, the secular nature, the utopian aspirations, and the increasing powers of manipulation and control added a new elan to the human spirit, proof of which could be seen in the optimism and the idea of progress which characterized nineteenth-century liberalism.

Philosophical conservatism, to the contrary, provided the massive counter-movement against much of what is implied in the phrase, "the age of ideology;" it stood opposed either to the ideas contained within the various ideologies, or to the concrete historical event, the French Revolution.

Lord Hugh Cecil in his important work, *Conservatism* (1912), simply described conservatism as "a force called into activity by the French Revolution, and operating against the tendencies that Revolution set up."25 Karl Mannheim has analyzed conservatism as a style of thought (intuitive, qualitative, concrete) which arose in opposition to the rationalism of the Enlightenment.26 In defining conservatism as "an entity with a clear historical and social continuity, which has arisen and developed in a particular historical and social situation," he

25 Cecil, *Conservatism*, p. 244.

stands in essential agreement with Lord Cecil. In brief it is psychological conservatism (traditionalism) "become conscious." 27

As time was to show, the conservatism which defended monarchy, aristocracy, and the established church, held small appeal for those who wished to participate in the destruction of the old order of servitude and poverty, and so the aristocratic theory has tended to atrophy. At the present time both the aristocratic and situational definitions have partial validity. The specific factors which philosophical conservatism once opposed have been dissolving since purposeful change in human life is today largely taken for granted. But the "style of thought" analyzed by Mannheim remains and is renewed everytime a fundamental threat is raised against existing institutions.

Self-conscious conservatism dates from Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). 28 With few exceptions, twentieth-century conservatives have paid tribute to Edmund Burke (1729-1797) as being the first modern conservative to react to the impieties

27 Ibid., pp. 98, 102.

of the modern rationalist temper and to the revolu-
tionary events which allegedly resulted from the
mistaken ideas of God, nature, and man. Burke and his
followers represent the moderate, evolutionary wing of
conservatism which supports constitutional government.
A rival wing, founded by Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821),
was more authoritarian and reactionary as it wished to
bring back the substance of the ancien régime. The
reactionary stands at the far right on the political con-
tinuum while revolutionary communism might be said to
constitute the extreme left. Both Burkean conservatism
and liberalism occupy a middle position, the former
somewhat to the right of center, and the liberals some-
where just to the left.29 The static, reactionary wing
of de Maistre never acquired the wide following that the
evolutionary Burkeans did and today is largely dead.

Edmund Burke was Irish by birth but through
ability and connections became one of the leading figures
in the British Parliament during the latter half of the
eighteenth century. He accepted English institutions
with all of the fervor of the newly-arrived and in his
defense of traditional liberties and institutions

29Peter Viereck, Conservatism: From John Adams
to Churchill (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc.,
1956), p. 15.
produced the most important work on the philosophy of conservatism. The *Reflections on the Revolution in France* attacked one of the most basic weaknesses of the liberal rationalistic ideology - the addiction to planned, rational innovation without sufficient, reverent attention to history. Theoretically, Burke did not oppose change or progress, but he completely rejected any pretensions to its inevitability and noted that all generations owed respect to the past and concern for the future. This was perhaps his most important accomplishment.

Certain recurrent themes dot the pages of conservative works and tend to give an autonomous character to this "anti-ideology." Characteristic as these themes are, they are only that. Exceptions can always be found; nevertheless, such an approach has the virtue of being precise.\(^{30}\) If Burke is stressed more than other

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\(^{30}\) Willard A. Kerr, in the article, "Untangling the Liberalism-Conservatism Continuum," summarized the results of his study on 246 male students of Tulane University, in which he tested for liberalism-conservatism in five areas (political, economic, religious, social and aesthetic). He concluded that "the number of genuine liberals or conservatives is about zero," and that the "prediction of one type of liberalism or conservatism from another type is as inefficient as predicting achievement in one academic subject from achievement in a relatively unrelated academic subject." (p. 112) A single, unitary liberalism-conservatism continuum does not exist.
conservatives in the following pages, it is because he is commonly cited as the father of conservatism, because he often said most memorably what conservatives have believed; further, it provides the best means of weighing the repeated conservative argument that Burke has a special relevance for contemporary America. The major conservative motifs are: (1) faith in a providential plan which governs society; (2) recognition of the organic nature of human society; (3) conviction of human weakness; (4) distrust of reason and attack on the idea of progress; (5) belief in human inequality; (6) conviction of the need for an aristocratic class; (7) defense of property rights but opposition to laissez-faire economics; (8) conviction that desires must be minimized. Let us note each in turn.

1) **Faith in a providential plan which governs society.** This is a virtual absolute in conservative thought. Burke's political theory rests in his submission to the Author of Creation. "I allow," he said, "that if no supreme ruler exists, wise to form, and potent to enforce the moral law, there is no sanction to any contract...against the civil or prevalent power."\(^{32}\) Over a century and a half later, Lord Hailsham, chairman of the British Conservative Party, declared that he could "see no hope for secular society unless it is based upon a fundamental recognition of the spiritual nature of man and the providence of God."\(^{33}\) Man's insufficiency necessitates dependence on God and therefore the conservative feels that the ideological presumption that politics is the end of man is an abberation in Western history. The conservative affirms that all political questions lead to the ethical which in turn leads to the religious realm. Man must submit not to political action or to the "consent of the governed," but to God who gives legitimacy to the social order and

\(^{32}\)As quoted in Russell Kirk, "Burke and the Philosophy of Prescription," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 14 (June, 1953), 369.

provides the sole justification for the morality which exists among men. The conservative says with Lord Hailsham that

the denial of the Fatherhood of God is the root from which springs quite naturally the various heresies [dialectical materialism, worship of the State, doctrine of race and class] which have afflicted the species in our time.34

With the manifest decline in the need of "the God-hypothesis" in Western culture, what becomes of the conservative affirmations that God binds men into an eternal continuity of generations, provides a balm for their cares, teaches that poverty is not an evil, and justifies the division of societies between the exalted and the less fortunate? This is a question which conservatives must face boldly if they desire to remain relevant and avoid fossilization.

2) The organic nature of human society. The Burkean conservative society was an organic society. It was not "built" as was a machine, but "grew" in biological fashion, slowly and with purpose, attaining a sacred existence while giving continuity to past, present and future generations. The individual cells formed a corporate body in which each cell achieved dignity and won

34 Ibid., p. 27.
respect in the fulfillment of its appointed destiny. Burke, expressing the immortal and gradated essence of the organic society, also added its correlate, the theme of continuity, when he wrote that society

is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such as partnership cannot be obtained in many generations it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all mortal natures, each in their appointed place.35

The organic conception was not meant to negate all change. By definition an organism cannot remain static and live. The organic conception of society has an important corollary in the ideal of harmony. In the end, this was the Burkean ideal - not freedom, but harmony. Freedom is always subordinated to some higher need, be it tranquility, virtue, or justice. Since man, without choice, is born into a society whose life-blood is continuity, his duty is to preserve it, to reconcile innovations with customs and prescriptive institutions.

35Burke, Reflections, p. 110.
society is allegedly made atomistic (society defined as an aggregate of rootless individuals) by materialism, selfishness, class warfare, insistence of rights instead of duties, and by the liberal emphasis on the role of reason. The conservative links these "atomizing" factors with revolutionary change, disruption of harmony, and therefore opposes them. It is this which has often made the conservative cynical about premeditated change. One is reminded of the anecdote about the person who entered the British museum and requested a copy of the French Constitution, to which the reply was "I'm sorry, sir, but we don't keep periodicals."

3) Conviction of human weakness. One cannot be both a conservative and a believer in the essential goodness of man. To maintain such a proposition would be to undercut most other conservative convictions. The conservative believes in some form of Original Sin. For Christians it is defined as man's estrangement from God; in the anthropological sense, it is understood that man's battle to subdue the ancestral, animal-like traits within himself is simply a dominant fact of existence.

36 Viereck, Conservatism, p. 18.
If man is not corrupt and depraved, then "to state that he is, is to come closer to the truth than to state that he is essentially good."\(^7\) Human weakness - the tendency to be led away from correct paths, to be corrupted by the temptations of ambition and power, to display irrationality and cruelty - necessitates the continued emphasis on placing restraints on man.

Since the root of all problems lies in the nature of man, the conservative emphasis on inner restrictions and the formation of character follows. They see the liberal concern with institutions as external and superficial. "Nothing," said Lord Hugh Cecil, "is more certain than that the mechanism of human society will only express human character; it will not regenerate it."\(^8\) Why change anything which promises a good deal of disruption but little change in fundamentals? This is one reason for the liberal charge that conservatives are callous toward social reform.


\(^8\)Cecil, *Conservatism*, p. 91; T. W. Adorno and his associates write that "Liberals tend to view social problems as symptoms of underlying social structure, while conservatives view them as results of individual incompetence or immorality." p. 155.
4) Distrust of reason and an attack on the idea of progress. Once again, it was Edmund Burke who most eloquently stated the case against rationalistic politics. In a frequently quoted passage, he reflected the conservative longing for the pleasing refinements and status-oriented attributes which he thought forever destroyed by the pride, the passion, and the unmitigated use of reason by the French revolutionaries:

...the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophists, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, and cheap defense of nations, the nurse of manly sentiments and heroic enterprise is gone.39

Quite clearly, the most dangerous weapon that could be released upon the world was the "metaphysic sophistry" of those who sat down, pen in hand, to record for posterity their personal desires surreptitiously clothed in the garb of natural rights.40

Instead of reason, prescription and prejudice should rule in human affairs; i.e. a supra-rational

39Burke, Reflections, p. 89.

40Ibid., pp. 45, 33; see also pp. 26, 27, 33, 34.
wisdom of the species, an intuitive knowledge of what should be done without resorting to the critical faculty of reason. Prescriptive rights (rights sanctioned by time and history), the "rights of Englishmen" — not the "rights of man" — were the basis of true freedom. Conservatism after the French Revolution countered the natural law formulations of liberalism (the inalienable rights of man, the concept of popular sovereignty) in order to undercut its claims of universal validity.

The idea of progress was an important corollary to the use of reason. The conservative has always questioned its inevitability and often the very idea itself. This "idea" began as a mental construct in the minds of the French revolutionaries. It was not long, however, before progress became a mere function of time itself, i.e. independent of purposive human activity. The conservative feels that the puncturing of this "liberal illusion" by the horrible events of the twentieth century stands as history's reproach to the rationalist temper which had sought a degree of power which was not its to enjoy.

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41 Ibid., p. 105.
42 See Mannheim, Essays, pp. 116-118.
5) Belief in human inequality. The conservative has always been uneasy over the meaning of equality. In only one sense — the moral worth and human dignity which belongs to all — is there a lack of debate on the meaning and extent of equality. While the conservative professes belief in equality of opportunity and equality of all persons before the law, he nevertheless defends privilege and "natural" distinctions among men. Many conservatives opposed the extension of the franchise, including Burke, who defended an unreformed House of Commons, as well as Coleridge, who always maintained that men "ought to be weighed, not counted." In more recent times, the point is often a subtle one, but the fact that many conservatives are little interested in the extension of civil rights speaks eloquently enough. You can level, says the conservative, but never equalize. Liberal efforts to promote equality, he continues, limits the freedom of the individual because his essential personality is compromised and lost in the mass. Classes and orders are necessary and inevitable; hence the conservative interest in the reconciliation of classes rather than in their abolition. It would be unfair to

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say that the conservative is opposed to universal suffrage; but a faint unhappiness about it exists nevertheless and his difference with the liberal on this matter is an important one.

6) **Conviction of the need for an aristocratic class.** Clinton Rossiter, who stands on the left wing of the new conservatism, remarks that while

Conservatism has retreated some distance from Burke and Adams under the pressures of modern democracy, it has refused to yield one salient point: the belief in a ruling, serving, taste-making aristocracy.44

It has not always been clear whether a natural or inherited aristocracy is desired, or some combination. Burke himself was ambiguous. In his *Reflections*, he defended an aristocracy not of blood or titles but of virtue and wisdom. "Woe to the country which would madly and impiously reject the services of the talents and virtues, civil, military, or religious that are given to grace and to serve it."45 Yet he accepted and defended an aristocracy which ruled through influence and family connections. To those who would challenge this system

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by calling for a broadened franchise, Burke had a ready answer: "It is said, that twenty-four millions ought to prevail over two-hundred thousand. True, if the constitution of a kingdom be a problem of arithmetic." In *An Appeal From the New Whigs To the Old*, Burke defined an aristocrat as being "bred in place of estimation; to see nothing low and sordid from one's infancy....to have leisure to read, to reflect, to converse." This reflects the conservative belief that a "best" class exists which no opponents of inequality can efface. If blood had little to do with an aristocracy, still a would-be aristocrat had to enjoy the good fortune of being born into a family which could provide the leisure to read and to study history. Whatever Burke believed theoretically about aristocracy, it was clear that even a natural aristocracy of talent included the fortunes of wealth and privilege, something in practice not much different from an hereditary aristocracy.

John Adams opposed the Burkean view with a truer conception of a natural aristocracy which arose out of

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inevitable distinctions between men and which could find the approbation of the voters within the framework of a liberal democracy — a political arrangement which placed less stress on the conservative role of land as a political base.

7) **Defense of property rights but opposition to laissez-faire economics.** The first part of the heading reflects the conventional wisdom about American conservatism; the second part does not. It is true that the Websters, McKinleys, Carnegies, and Sumners defended rugged individualism and laissez-faire in the economic arena, but this would not be true of conservatives in the Burkean tradition nor of most of those to be covered in this dissertation. Cultured conservatives such as Coleridge, Carlyle, Irving Babbitt and the southern agrarians were highly critical of material progress. Lord Hailsham wrote that the conservative "has never believed in *laissez-faire,*" and he is correct.\(^\text{48}\) Property, nevertheless, is invested with something bordering on divinity. It is usually viewed as a right which long antedated the rise of modern capitalism; it is the natural safeguard of the family; it helps guarantee

\(^\text{48}\) Quintin Hogg, *The Conservative Case,* p. 22.
liberty since the existence of private property means that the State does not command total economic power; and it provides incentives to individuals which also benefits the State since man sublimes some of his baser proclivities in his devotion to property. Lord Cecil elaborates on the latter theme by admitting that the competitive system is certainly not a Christian system. The governing motive of those who are engaged in industry or commerce is self-interest, not love. . . . Self-interested human nature must ever inflict suffering on those who are weak, and therefore Christianity is not concerned with any political change which leaves the moral nature of man as it is.

Even if capitalism is immoral according to the ethical insights of Christianity, politics should do little about it.

This does not mean that the conservative approves of an open-ended exploitive capitalism. Rugged individualism of the type practiced in America ate away at the conservative themes of community, status, place, and the minimization of desires. Atomism replaced organicism in society. This is why Russell Kirk could read


50Cecil, Conservatism, pp. 89-95.
Alexander Hamilton out of the conservative tradition: Hamilton had "ignored the probability that the industrialized nation he projected might conjure up not only conservative industrialists but also radical factory-hands." Burke, too, had wrestled with the problem since he defended the liberal economics of Adam Smith; but liberal capitalist economics was to be "kept subordinate to the Conservative social ethic."\(^{51}\)

Conservatives oppose laissez-faire in the spirit of privilege. The nouveau riche who are thrown to the top in the exploitive quest for material satisfactions serve only, says the conservative, to bring boors to power; they are rootless, selfish, and crass. The conservatives counter with the concept noblesse oblige, i.e. a noble class, aware of its own privileged position, feels obliged to assume a greater proportion of duties - public service and moral leadership. Although this idea is seldom openly avowed by the privileged today, the spirit exists just the same.

8) Minimization of desires. Morton Auerbach in his book *The Conservative Illusion* declares this tenet

\(^{51}\) Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, p. 86.

and that of harmony to be the essence of conservatism. It began as a means of providing solace for those on the lower levels of the old, pre-modern and aristocratic societies. Under Christianity the repression of desires became a virtue in itself. "The emphatic teaching of the blessedness of poverty," wrote Lord Cecil, "ought to save Christians from the extravagance into which many now fall, of representing that moral and spiritual well-being depend on circumstances of decent comfort." What was once a sour grapes doctrine (I cannot have it anyway, so how could I possibly want it?) is now used primarily to oppose the thoughtless acquisition of material abundance which can stifle the spiritual and aesthetic life. This theme is especially strong in the writings of the new humanists.

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As the foregoing should make clear, conservatism as a system of thought was conceived in reaction against the changing character of Western civilization. Does, then, conservatism possess the means of interpreting historical change, and of deciding what should change as well as what should not? Francis G. Wilson, a political

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53 Cecil, Conservatism, p. 87.
scientist and conservative theorist, has written that "social theory in the West has recognized that society is in a continual state of dynamic tension and change, and therefore conservatism...must be in part a theory of change."^54^ But while conservatives admit the necessity of historical change (Burke: "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation;" Hearnshaw: "Conservatism is not a brake on progress...it is a brake on indiscriminate change."^55^) most are hopelessly vague on the means of deciding what, how, and why things should change. Russell Kirk did not appreciably clarify the matter when he noted that "change should result from felt needs, not abstractions spun out in drawing rooms."^56^

Any conservative theory of change would need to be developed around the creed of continuity. That which the radical sees as the dead hand of the past, the conservative often sees as a necessary continuity worthy of preservation. The radical sees a period of significant

^54^Wilson, The Case for Conservatism, p. 2.

^55^Burke, Reflections, p. 33; Hearnshaw, Conservatism in England, p. 27.

social reform as a beneficent break with the past; the conservative may see it only as a transition between stabilities. Francis Wilson, in attempting to construct a theory of conservatism, suggests that conservatives seek out the fundamentals that are common to all periods. One such fundamental is inequality: having existed since time out of memory, the conservative accepts it as a fact of existence. What does change, he says, is the structure of inequality. Some elite group will always hold power (economic, political, or both), but the composition of such a group may change. Knowing that inequality will continue to exist, the duty of the conservative is to see that the ruling class be constituted in such a manner as to prevent the exploitation of the governed.

The moral values of a society make up another continuity. Though they are often attacked as rationalizations of the prevailing structure of privilege, the


58 Ibid., 31.

59 Ibid., 38.
conservative understands that "morality as social cement is steadier than technology." Unchanging or subject only to very slow transformations, conservatism permits wide differences on matters of secondary importance, such as politics. Thus Peter Viereck can defend the "Tory Socialism" of Disraeli and Randolph Churchill as "an application of Christian ethics to economics." The emphasis on continuities and similarities in history leads to a modified cyclical view of history in which the human will is limited - limited because the disparity of human "purpose and consequences of action" suggests a considerable objective character of the historical process. The conservative bets on the probability that human behavior will continue to follow a pattern formulated by the past. In so doing, he is of course tying the hands of the future and emphasizing the virtues of stability.

Wilson's theory raises several questions. First, to return to a question raised earlier - what is to change? This problem leads Wilson to suggest that a

60 Ibid., 43.
62 Wilson, American Political Science Review, 35 p. 42.
primary and a secondary conservatism exist. Private property, belief in the wisdom of the past, and stability are selected as examples of primary conservatism, but, except for the last-named trait, it is not clear why these particular ones are chosen. They appear to be matters of opinion. Stability is selected to be "the keystone in the arch of social reality" because the purposes of idealists are dangerous:

Because the best-conceived purpose is erratic in result, because purpose tends to be utopian in character, and because when purpose is utopian it becomes destructive in its collision with process, stability becomes a primary value in conservatism's analysis of how things ought to change.63

And yet what does this tell us about deciding what is to change? Can anything of a primary nature be said to have changed in Russia should property, family, and patriotism all survive the Bolshevik Revolution?64 No answer is given, but if the answer is "no" then we can only be surprised.

In the second place, if no clear criteria are given to distinguish primary from secondary conservatism (other than that primary conservatism is "broad in nature") what is to check one from arbitrarily defining

63Ibid., 58.
64Ibid., 39.
any institution of privilege as primary and therefore not subject to reform? Is it not all too obvious that the reluctance to admit a distinction between the two has been a major cause of revolutions?

Finally, a fully-developed theory of change would be able to pin-point important causal forces in the historical process. Is the basis of historical change economic, social, and moral, or something else? Morton Auerbach has tried to show that conservatism in all ages has stressed social factors as the basis for historical change.65 Changes in economic relations are traced to earlier transformations in the moral code. Plato declared, for example, that the institution of private property resulted from moral degeneration.66 Wilson appears to imply the opposite: "If technology is marching ahead in seven-league boots...the conservative will not admit that basic institutions, or that the primary social values, are changing at the same rate."67 The issue is too complex to be dealt with here. It is


66Ibid., p. 292.

67Wilson, American Political Science Review, 35, p. 43.
enough to point out that there is no agreement on what forces induce historical change and that so long as this is the case, philosophical conservatism will continue to appear as a defensive creed unable to articulate a positive affirmation of human creativity.
CHAPTER II

THE HUMANISM OF IRVING BABBITT AND PAUL ELMER MORE

The new humanists in America were a small group of literati who shared many of the same ideas on morality and taste in society and in literature. The term "new humanism" was confusing. In spirit and outlook it differed greatly from the humanism of the Renaissance. Renaissance humanism attempted to modify the spiritual other-worldliness of medieval culture; the humanists of the twentieth century revolted against what they believed to be an opposite fallacy, the materialistic conception of man. The former was hopeful and modern; the latter anxious and archaic.

The humanist movement can be traced roughly from Paul Elmer More's editorship of the Nation, 1909-1914, but interest in humanism reached its peak in the late nineteen-twenties and early nineteen-thirties when a large number of books were published on humanism. Examples of new humanist writings can also be found in
such periodicals as *The Forum*, *The Hound and Horn*, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, *Criterion* (edited by T. S. Eliot), and in two periodicals edited by Seward Collins, *The Bookman* and its successor, *The American Review*. The dominant figures of the new humanism were Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt. Those much influenced by these two or who contributed in one way or another to humanism included T. S. Eliot, Louis Mercier, Norman Foerster, Gordon Chalmers, W. C. Brownell, and Robert Shafer. As a group, their ideas were confined to a relatively small number of academicians and the humanist influence on public affairs was negligible.¹

The new humanism nevertheless constituted an important phase of twentieth-century American thought for it contained a powerful critique of American culture and reflected, from a conservative viewpoint, the sense of disquietude felt by so many intellectuals during the twenties.

Paul Elmer More, the more prolific writer of the two humanist leaders, was born in St. Louis in 1864 to

a family of old American stock. Graduating from Washington University in 1887, he did graduate work at Harvard, taught at Smith Academy in St. Louis and at Bryn Mawr College before retiring to Shelburne, New Hampshire, where he immersed himself in world literature. At the turn of the century, he became literary editor of *The Independent* (1901-1903), followed by a similar position with *The Evening Post* (1903-1909) before assuming the position of editor-in-chief of the *Nation* (1909-1914) in the pre-liberal days of the magazine. It was during this period (1901-1914) that More produced most of his *Shelburne Essays* (eleven volumes) which Robert M. Davies, in his biography of More, calls "the most comprehensive collection of judicial criticism from the hand of one man that we possess in our country." From 1914-1934 More was Professor of Greek and philosophy at Princeton, usually lecturing one term per year. During the years between his editorship of the *Nation* and his death in 1937, he published mainly in philosophy and religion, including the six volumes of *The Greek Tradition*.2


Babbitt, too, was a Midwesterner, born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1865, but both of these bookish, sceptical, opinionated men were spiritual "children of the last Brahmins in New England."\(^4\) After graduating from Harvard in 1889, Babbitt taught at the University of Montana and at Williams College before returning to Harvard in 1894 where he remained until his death in 1933. After 1912 he held the position of professor of French Literature. He lectured widely throughout the United States and in 1923 was an exchange professor at the Sorbonne. He wrote seven books, including *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (1912), *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), and *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), the last of which is most important in delineating his social and political conservatism. Since these two men included between them all of what was essential to humanism, the remainder of this chapter will center on their work.\(^5\)

Any account of the rise of the new humanism must take into consideration the character of American society as understood by the humanists. The fundamental tenet


in their critique of America, indeed of Western civilization, was that it lacked standards; that is, commonly accepted criteria of excellence and taste rooted in a sense of order and authority. The modern world distinguished itself by its disenchantment with absolutes. The ancient outer restraints of monarchy, aristocracy, traditions, class division, and loyalty to persons disintegrated before the popularity of various philosophies of change and the steady growth of democratic habits. Even Christianity was of doubtful service in the maintenance of standards since it appeared too much interested in adopting humanitarian programs of sentimental naturalists and too little concerned with inner moral reforms. Americans were losing their Puritanism, which the humanist defined as the "inner check upon the expansion of natural impulse."  

Primarily literary critics, the humanists were hostile to experimentation and unconventional themes.

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Babbitt took issue with Mencken's contention that

The critic is first and last...simply trying to express himself; he is trying to achieve thereby for his own inner ego the grateful feeling of a function performed, a tension relieved, a katharsis attained.'

To Babbitt such creativity was egotistical and dangerous. If the critic had only to express himself, what was to guarantee adherence to standards and how would one find the permanent amidst the flux of sensation? Babbitt concluded that the novelists who fancied themselves as emancipated were only unbuttoned and that Mencken's "superior intellectual vaudeville" had nothing positive to offer. 8 Whereas Mencken had encouraged young writers to use new techniques, More described John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) as "an explosion in a cesspool." 9 More believed that modern literature was chaotic and joyless: "The noise and whirl increase, the disillusion and depression deepen, the nightmare of Futility stalks before us." 10

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8Ibid., 169.
he argued, should fix his imagination on what was best in man in an attempt to build models of character. The naturalistic philosophy and behavioristic psychology which animated the literary avant garde lacked the element of nobility and concern for standards and hence was incapable of producing either tragedy or true art. Babbitt had made the same point many years earlier in Masters of Modern French Criticism, in which he concluded that the failure of nineteenth-century criticism "to attain to any centre of judgment set above the shifting impressions of the individual and the flux of the phenomenal world is a defeat for civilization itself."\textsuperscript{11}

To correct this literary fallacy, the new humanists defended Puritanism in literature. They opposed liberal criticism which identified Puritanism with Freud on repression and with intellectual tyranny or hypocrisy. The liberal critics had forgotten that the Old Adam resided within man and threatened always to break out in chaotic fury if not restrained.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{11}] Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 9.
\item[\textsuperscript{12}] Babbitt, Forum, 79, p. 167.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
However defined, the essence of Puritanism for the humanists was precisely that which its critics attacked: the emphasis on control and restraint.

With life as with literature standards had to be maintained. But the humanists hardly knew where to begin since for them the modern age was a nightmare. Quantitatively the American democracy set records; qualitatively it hardly merited the badge of civilization. One had to ask in all seriousness, wrote Babbitt, "whether in this country...we are not in danger of producing in the name of democracy one of the most trifling brands of the human species that the world has yet seen."\(^\text{13}\) America, the "paradise of the half-educated," was "not a country but a picnic," and could best be defined as "standardized and commercialized melodrama."\(^\text{14}\) Had Mencken written these words no one would have been surprised. Not so with the new humanists. They were convinced the Western world had gone wrong on first principles. Their strictures on the vulgarity of material values found wide agreement among intellectuals.

\(^{13}\) Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership*, p. 243.

in the twenties but the humanists were too antiquarian in thought and strait-laced in taste to enjoy general acceptance.

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The origins of the humanist's disenchantment with the present lay in their understanding of romanticism; and here, in negative fashion, our definition of the new humanism begins. The hazards of tracing the influence of ideas in history by the mind steeped in first principles becomes apparent when we consider Babbitt's visceral, almost pathological, outburst against Rousseau and romanticism. Babbitt's works are emphasized here because he most comprehensively summed up the humanist case against romanticism and its failure to provide standards of ethical judgments. In his writings he sees the romantic temper as predominant in modern literature (the subject of Masters of Modern French Criticism), in the emotions (Rousseau and Romanticism), and in politics and society at large (Democracy and Leadership). The villain was Rousseau - Babbitt's Goliath. On a few occasions, as in Aristocracy and Justice (1915), More pushed the origins beyond Rousseau when he maintained
that "the history of England since the Revolution of 1688...has been the record of a gradual yielding of the steady thrust of opportunism."¹⁵ In the sixth series of the Shelburne Essays, More admitted that Rousseau was influenced by English writers, notably Dryden, Pope, Bolingbroke, and Locke.¹⁶ But after paying respects to the multiple sources of modern discontents, Rousseau always remained "first among the theorists of radical democracy...and the most eminent of those who have attacked civilization."¹⁷

Babbitt portrayed a great encounter in the political thought of modern times "between the spirit of Burke and that of Rousseau."¹⁸ According to Babbitt, the salient feature of the past two centuries was the convergence of the democratic pretensions of Rousseau with the utilitarian idea of progress into a single naturalistic movement, the totality of which he called "humanitarianism."¹⁹

¹⁷Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 2.
¹⁸Ibid., p. 69.
¹⁹Ibid., p. 4.
Romanticism, as understood by Babbitt, was not synonymous with individualism or a return to the Middle Ages, but meant something extreme, enormous, exotic, and natural. These themes were present in all manifestations of the romantic temper. By definition, the romantic mind sought something which could not be accounted for rationally, something which transcended cause-effect relationships. Tradition and form could not contain it, and therein lay its danger. Romanticism, as Babbitt saw it, was made to testify only to the truth inherent in the flux of the phenomenal world, thereby standing in radical opposition to the claims of universal standards. The genius of romanticism was to live in submission to the claims of the present, flaunting the wisdom of tradition. It had no ordering principle. In the untrammelled urge to self-expression, emotions were to be enjoyed for their own sake. 20

The model romanticist was Rousseau who symbolized the impulsive and uncontrolled man, the sentimental humanitarian, the scion of all prescriptive institutions. Indignant at the static hierarchy in society, Rousseau

rejected the Christian ideal of humble submission, flattered the masses, and in order to give emotive power to his ideals sought "to make the poor man proud," and at the same time to make him feel that he is the victim of a conspiracy.21 Because Rousseau lacked the "inner check," Babbitt held him responsible for both modern democracy and totalitarianism. Babbitt moved from the writings of Rousseau to the French Revolution, analyzed the relationship to the discredit of Rousseau, and ultimately declared that what Rousseau did for France, France did for Europe.22 He accepted without question the simplism that without Rousseau there would have been no revolution, without the revolution no Napoleon, and without Napoleon no large-scale European war.

Babbitt was uneasy with the Rousseauian emphasis on rights; natural rights anterior to duties were not consonant with the maintenance of deference and subordination.23 Instead of undergirding the mythology of democracy, Rousseau's emphasis on the natural goodness

21Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 77.


23Ibid., p. 61.
of man, as Babbitt understood it, led to a feeling of "fraternal self-pity" and decline in concern for the improvement of the "self." By turning the minds of men outward to the matter of reforming society, Rousseau and the natural rights school of thought forced Christianity to make way for humanitarianism, that is, concern, not for the individual and his inner life, but for the welfare and progress of "man in the lump." Through the influence of the French philosophes, theology was subordinated to sociology; sin was transferred from man to society, thereby relieving man of moral responsibility.

Modern humanitarianism, then, was romanticism writ large in the fields of religion and sociology. Babbitt traces this development through the works of Madame De Staël, Sainte-Beuve, and Renan who supported Rousseauism in the nineteenth century, that is, the idea that there was virtue in emotional effusion and that in

Babbitt's deep conviction that Western civilization was in a state of serious moral decline and that Rousseau was the chief theorist responsible for the decay, led him to completely misconstrue Rousseau's ideas on the natural man as well as the concept of the General Will, which Babbitt understood to mean a simple majority at any given moment. A useful corrective on Rousseau and romanticism is Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1961), especially chs.1,2.

Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 8. John Locke's "final superficiality" was that "he granted man abstract natural rights anterior to his duties, and then hoped that it would be possible to apply the doctrine moderately." p. 103.
philosophy the category of becoming ought to replace the category of being.\textsuperscript{26} The humanists found the romantic fascination with flux manifested in naturalism which stressed the "unconscious at the expense of moral choice and conscious deliberation" and which advocated social discontent as the means of achieving material progress.\textsuperscript{27} Pragmatism, too, lacked an ethical center and was dangerous because it took

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the stream of impressions coursing through us as the totality of consciousness, without distinguishing between the \textit{elan vital} of the flux and \textit{frein vital} distinct from it and as a counter current superior in its nature.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Such was the philosophical background of the twentieth-century ideals of service and beneficence (humanitarianism). The humanitarian ideal was psychologically harmful in that it was based on the doctrine of uplift. The sentimental humanitarians, Babbitt said, falsely assumed that the underdogs had been the victims of the social order instead of guilty of misconduct, or indolence, or lack of virtue. The "uplifter" mentality

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 9; Louis J.A. Mercier, \textit{The Challenge of Humanism} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 35-45.


\textsuperscript{28}Mercier, \textit{The Challenge of Humanism}, p. 207.
had become popular because it was grounded in spiritual complacency:

it enables a man to look upon himself as 'up' and on someone else as 'down'
.....A man needs to look, not down, but up to standards set so much above his ordinary self as to make him feel that he is spiritually the underdog. 29

Several observations may be made at this point. In contravention of conservative ideals, Babbitt and More rejected the organic view of history. They could not or would not see as organic the gradual weakening of the historic condition of "master and servant," the growing awareness on the part of man that he could further the same process, the continuing relativization of values, the diffusion of the goal of human fulfillment, and the slow rise of democratic liberalism. When, one may ask, do the shared experiences of democracy, industrialism, and commitment to change itself, become, in a sense, organic?

Second, Babbitt, and More too, attacked a disembodied romanticism, devoid of any unity and dominated by a haphazard urge to creativity and originality. Romanticism seemed only an irresponsible product of whim and fancy. What the humanists were doing, it appears, 29

29 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 257.
was to take over the defense of a classicism which the romantics were endeavoring to throw off. Classicism stressed order, form, stability, and good sense; its ideals were repose, harmony, restraint. Concerned with "oughtness" instead of "is-ness," the classical ideals stood in grand imitation of the Platonic Forms above the ephemeral flux and thus gave the classicists models to judge by. But the classicist dealt in abstractions and generalities which might be seen as an escape into a unifying simplicity which suppressed the annoying exceptions to their ideals. Jacques Barzun, in Classic, Romantic and Modern, defined the classic flaw as being the mistaken impression that the man-made and temporary was given and permanent: the classicist forgets that what he has taken as truth "has not been found but made." The romanticist, close to life and nature, did not make the same mistake.

It may seem that the humanist apotheosis of individualism conflicted with the classical ideal of conformity to ideal standards. Perhaps it did. And yet the humanist idea of individualism was always tempered by

31 Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern, pp. 52, 57.
the conviction that a responsible individualism would be
guided - inevitably - to the ends of dignity, restraint,
and tradition. In matters of morals and ethics, the
humanists were not individualists at all, but authori-
tarians who feared the implications of their own ideal.
It was the humanist infatuation with inflexible standards
which determined their approach to history. They were
not really interested in history. They used it for
their own purposes of defending values which they saw
as being absolute. Naturally, the humanists misunder-
stood the historical role of romanticism. The post-
Napoleonic period required reconstruction, and the
enthusiasm, ingenuity, and genius which is associated
with romanticism was thus a necessity of the times rather
than an irresponsible escape into unreality. Romantic
art and writing which stressed the themes of love, war, death and terror, reflected the world as it had
been experienced. By studying the emotions and irregu-
larities of human conduct, the romanticists strove for
a fuller understanding of the human complexities which
the classicists had refused to consider. They did not
need Freud to tell them that men acted on motives of
which reason knew nothing. It comes as no surprise

\[32\] Ibid., p. 33.
then that the conservative humanists with their fear of disorder greatly feared the romantic genius for its improvisation and creativity.

Finally, there is a crudity in their arguments that cannot escape attention. On humanitarianism and the sympathetic man, Babbitt had this verdict: "It would never have occurred to Buddha...to measure a man's humanity, much less his religion by his 'droppings of warm tears.'"\textsuperscript{33} Or to take More: "If you hear a man talking overmuch of brotherly love and that sort of thing...you are pretty sure that here is a man who will be slippery or dishonourable in his personal transactions.\textsuperscript{34}

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If the foregoing suggests what the humanists opposed, what did they offer instead? By looking closely at a number of the specific interests of Babbitt and More, one sees the conservative spirit articulating itself - a spirit sceptical of democracy, fearful of the mechanization of life, and desirous of an aristocratic restoration. The two humanists were not concerned with specific issues as such, but with "first principles."

\textsuperscript{33}Babbitt, The Dhammapada, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{34}Paul Elmer More, Aristocracy and Justice, pp. 143-144.
Humanism maintained that there were two orders of existence, a law for man and a law for thing. Man is dualistic; his higher self is distinct from his lower self. Naturalistic monism was opposed as stripping man of his distinctive nobility, for the essence of man was that faculty which had some intuition of the permanence above the flux of the phenomenal world. Louis Mercier, a humanist philosopher at Harvard, defined humanism as "the philosophy of that which abides in and above the changing, the philosophy of being and becoming, with man having proximate ends in the changing and an ultimate end in the abiding." For the most part, humanism did not openly repudiate the supernatural but mediated between supernaturalism and naturalism. Man was embued with free will and was to create for himself a life of beauty and happiness. He found the dignity that was his through the quest of moderation in all things. Moderation meant discipline, but the locus of this power caused the humanists considerable trouble as we shall see when discussing the relationship between humanism and religion. Yet the law of moderation was not always

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applicable. When first principles were at stake, remarked Babbitt, differences were "not subject to moderation." One could not be moderate in face of error.

A mature doctrine of the golden mean had to incorporate the attitude of humility. It was in this latter aspect that Babbitt and More found Christianity and Confucian humanism superior to the Western Aristotelian tradition. Western philosophy had placed reason in first place among the categories of the mind and so was subject to pride. Confucious avoided this by stressing tradition and imitation of superior models of conduct. Human dignity, man's dual nature, free will, moral responsibility, and humility were the truths of the inner life, to which we turn now for a more complete understanding.

The question of the nature of man and the implications attendant to an answer, constituted a major interest of the humanists. The question underlying their discussion was whether it was possible to take a purely human attitude towards existence and declare that, in

37 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, pp. 33-36.
view of the lack of scientific techniques to confirm belief in a transcendent being, man could be the measure of all things. "This," More said, "was perhaps the biggest question of the day." More, a religious moralist, answered "no." Babbitt, a non-religious puritan, said "yes." Whatever the answer, and Babbitt's and More's differences were crucial on this point, they agreed that man had to be viewed as more than a mere arrangement of chemicals involved in an unintelligible cosmic process. Their radical pessimism about man's ability to choose the good necessitated a search for some universal principle of control on human behavior and their respective answers occupied a major part of their writings. Both feared that the West had succumbed to a naturalistic philosophy which denied spiritual values and which insisted on a monistic conception of human nature. They took vigorous exception to the ideas in "The Religious Humanist Manifesto" (1933), a document signed by thirty-four persons, including John Dewey and John H. Randall, Jr., which stated among other things that:

Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process.... the traditional dualism of mind and

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body must be rejected....the
nature of the universe depicted by
modern science makes unacceptable
any supernatural or cosmic guarantee
of human values....Humanism considers
the complete realization of human
personality to be the end of man's
life and seeks its development and
fulfillment in the here and now.39

This was a radically different humanism from that of
the new humanists who believed that any form of monism
was incompatible with sound character and would ultimately
produce social catastrophe, because when man understood
himself to be an accidental product of a universe which
was unaware of itself the over-all lack of purpose was
bound to destroy such ethical inclinations as he had.
Thus the humanists also opposed the pantheistic natur­
alism of Spinoza and Hegel who viewed history as the
unfolding of the Absolute. The merger of God and the
world was still a monistic negation of the supernatural.
As the Absolute was always in the process of becoming,
there could be no realm of antecedent truths to guide

39These excerpts included in Paul Kurtz, (ed.),
American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century (New York:
The Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 368-371, were ori­
ginally taken from The New Humanist (May-June, 1933),
pp. 58-61. See Mercier, American Humanism, pp. 5-8
for a critical commentary by a new humanist on the
"Manifesto."
frail humanity. Christianity secularized to the extent that the Kingdom of God was no longer distinct from the kingdom of the world was no Christianity at all.

Against naturalistic man, More postulated a dualistic man with a lower self controlled by animal instincts, and a higher self quite distinct from anything else in nature in that it possessed a faculty of "consciously directive purpose." In this faculty, said More, "begins the field of conduct, of ethics, of statecraft and religion, wherein a man makes of himself by free choice, under certain limitations, that which he will."  

Embodied in this higher nature, More saw an "inner check" which operated against the expansive impulses of the romantic temper. The inner check, taken from Plato's _Phaedo_, could not be explained in rational terms but one knew of its existence through observation and experience.

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41 Paul Elmer More, _Platonism_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), p. 146. Critics rebuked More for defining what was highest in man in purely negative terms. Cf. More on the inner check: we do know that the clarity of our spiritual perception and the assurance of our freedom depend on keeping this will to refrain distinct from any conception of the will as a positive force....the spirit, if we would define it, can be expressed only in terms of negation. pp. 146-147.
In the man who would remain true to himself there existed a "consciousness of something within...that stands apart from material law and guides itself to ends of happiness and misery which do not belong to nature."\[^{42}\]

Dualism - the division of man into two selves, the distinct categorical separation of God, man, and nature - is the essence of humanism.

Babbitt's solution to the problem of ordering conduct paralleled that of More, on the surface at least, as he too accepted the duality of human nature. In his books Democracy and Leadership, On Being Creative and in his translation of the Dhammapada, Babbitt tried to show that the idea of a "higher will" was central to all Asiatic religious faiths. The higher will represented eternal wisdom, a faculty above intellect, something supernatural within man. It operated as a "vital control" which presided over man's appetites. Ruling over and bringing order to the evanescent multiplicity of things, it was part of the permanent of the cosmos which could be known experientially as "the higher immediacy that is known in its relation to the lower immediacy."\[^{43}\]

T. S. Eliot chided Babbitt for his

\[^{42}\text{More, Aristocracy and Justice, p. 85.}\]

vagueness in definition and wondered what the higher will was to will if nothing anterior or superior to the individual existed. Most readers would be tempted to identify it simply as man's conscience but apparently Babbitt did not understand it as such. He took the mystic concept of the higher will to be a psychological fact, one of the first principles of life, and felt it could be denied only at one's peril.

Both Babbitt and More affirmed the existence of an inner check and of some reality in man beyond the chemical constituents. But what was such reality ultimately grounded in? The humanist fear of disorder and change necessitated some answer to this question. It was here that humanism split between those who viewed religion as an indispensable prop of humanism, those who were hostile to religion, and those who, while sympathetic to religion, saw no need for it. Babbitt and More stood on opposite sides of the fence in this matter; therefore, the usual interchangeability of their names in discussions of humanism is not fully justified.

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Without doubt, More's religious background would form a fascinating story in itself. Suffice it to note that his early home life in the Midwest was intensely religious and that his later extensive reading in the classics and Hellenistic and Oriental philosophy did not permanently shake him from his faith. Inspired by the idea of reconciling ethical and philosophical aspects of Platonism with the religious insights of Christianity, he produced *The Greek Tradition*, six volumes spread over twenty years of study and writing. In this synthesis, he found the means to give order and meaning to life. After a deepening suspicion of dogma during the middle years of his life had nearly obliterated the faith of his youth, he eventually turned full circle and accepted the Incarnation of Christ as the logical fulfillment of Platonic teleology.

More was sympathetic to Buddhism, but unlike Babbitt, he missed in it the experience of God and the other-world of traditional Christianity.\(^{45}\) He instinctively agreed with T. S. Eliot that though religion without humanism may be incomplete, humanism was futile

without religion. But how to justify faith? His lifelong interest in Plato and the Forms is traceable to the search for a rational basis for faith. He found the dualism between mind and matter and the explanation of evil in Platonism most appealing. Here was something concrete, a philosophy which went beyond the golden mean, the moderate "nothing-in-excess" doctrine of Aristotle and Confucious. Man must look to standards fixed by God or embedded in the cosmos itself. God, not man, was the measure of all things - a view which suggests that More might be better understood as a theist rather than as a humanist.46

More traced Plato's discussion of the Ideas through the Meno, Phaedrus, Symposium and Phaedo and concluded that

the doctrine of Ideas...is no more than an assertion that with the inner sense of responsibility we are bound, if we reflect honestly, to believe in the existence of something to which we are responsible, something eternal to ourselves in so far as we neither make nor unmake it, neither alter nor escape, that there are fixed standards of right and wrong under which we are held to account in our choice of conduct.47


Once the human soul was at one with the 'ideas' but through some misfortune became imprisoned in the human body. Nevertheless the soul had a reminiscent vision of what the other world of justice and beauty was like, and could be deepened by continued concentration on the spiritual recollections. One could not take lightly the fact that "all mankind...have been making the same inference of powers behind the visible world corresponding to the intuition of conscience." To ask man to believe himself the victim of a cosmic jest, planned and executed by some happy Demiurge, was to say that all psychical longings were nonsense.

More's belief in God and another world was not entirely orthodox however. He could not really account for the origin of evil and finally relied on Plato as he understood him. More played down the sixth and seventh books of the Republic (in which the Impersonal Idea of the Good stood in place of a personal God) and stressed its sequel, the Timaeus, where Plato offers the myth of creation. Necessity, a principle of chaos or unordered motion, is postulated in the universe. God or the benevolent Demiurge becomes the active agent

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48 Ibid., p. 153.
seeking to reclaim the world and pattern it after the model of the Forms. Since disorder existed in the world, the Demiurge was evidently not all-powerful. The action of the supreme artisan of Timaeus is somewhat paralleled by the death of Christ in which God sought "to persuade necessity" and bring goodness to life. But it is clear that the natural state of anything inclines to disorder. It is a difficult thing both for God and man to create order, the former in the universe, the latter in his soul.

This then is More's conclusion. The Divine was a limited God, slowly reclaiming the world as his own, as evidenced by man's deepening understanding of him throughout history. He was necessary to give a teleological element to life, for without such a design, man would be inclined to fall into a condition of Stoic pride or Epicurean relaxation. For More, the concept of a limited God permitted belief in free will, in moral choices; it was in this way that humanism could give value and purpose to life.

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Babbitt's attempt to find a basis for standards of conduct and order in society was more complex. Early in life Babbitt, like More, had drunk deeply from the springs of Indian philosophy - a fact which adds a distinctive flavor to his criticism of the modern world. Whereas More had favored the older, more mystical Hindu Upanishads and Vedic texts, Babbitt preferred the more concrete Pali canon (the basis of the Hinayana expression of religion) because it most accurately recorded the thought of Buddha whom he considered to be the "ultimate Oriental."\(^5^1\) As a result, he substituted a psychological for a theological answer to the problems of man.

Early Buddhism impressed Babbitt because of its profound naturalism: it contained no God or immortal soul. Since no purpose was built into the universe, the drama of existence and the working out of one's salvation had to be accomplished by individual effort in this world. Evil in life was man-made; through right actions and a right view of things it could be removed. After leading a life of detachment, renouncing all passion, desires and hate, Nirvana might be reached. Babbitt was attracted by this Buddhist ideal of the

\[^{5^1}\text{Babbitt, On Being Creative, p. 241.}\]
extinction of desire and hoped that the modern West
could somehow be convinced of the virtue of renunciation.\(^\text{52}\)

But this skirted the question of God: Babbitt was
impressed with Buddhist insight but never became a
Buddhist, avoiding as he always had, affiliation with
any religious group. Could humanism have an independent
validity as Babbitt's understanding of Buddhism seemed
to suggest? Norman Foerster, Fulton Sheen, and Allen
Tate reproved Babbitt for his revulsion toward revealed
religion; Sheen, in particular, accused Babbitt of
Pelagianism which foreswore the need for divine help in
the pursuit of salvation.\(^\text{53}\) More, in 1930, nearly broke
with Babbitt over the matter of the supernatural and
how it might differ from the superhuman.\(^\text{54}\) More charged
Babbitt with obscurantism, saying that a "supernatural
within man" could not mean the same thing as "super-
human." Babbitt's humanism, so perfect as far as it
went, was suspended in mid-air. In the end, rather at

\(^{52}\)\text{Ibid., p. xxxiv.}

\(^{53}\)\text{Mercier, The Challenge of Humanism, pp.}
172-178.

\(^{54}\)\text{See More, On Being Human, Chapter 1, "A Revival}
of Humanism," which was first published in The Bookman,}
71 (March, 1930), 1-11.
the top, it was attached to nothing. Moreover, could a man be expected to live a life in which his only function was to restrain his natural self, all for no ultimate purpose? "Will not the non-religious humanist...find himself at last, despite his protests, dragged back into the camp of the naturalist? If we perish like beasts, shall we not live like beasts?"  

Two years later, T. S. Eliot took up the theme, declaring that Babbitt was posing humanism as an alternative to religion. Was it likely, Eliot wondered, as had More, that restraints could be placed on man's natural appetites without the use of religion? Babbitt's reply was prompt. In his book of essays, On Being Creative, Babbitt noted that there were many "men of good will for whom dogmatic and revealed religion had become impossible. Were they therefore to be banished into outer darkness where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth?" Babbitt never relaxed his Buddhist-like affirmation that man had to work out his own salvation; therefore, the Christian doctrine of divine grace was a

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55 Ibid., p. 20.  
56 Eliot, Essays Ancient and Modern, p. 77.  
57 Babbitt, On Being Creative, p. xvii.
negation of true individualism. He differed from the Christian in that his interest lay in a veto power which existed within man and which was in need of no theological interpretation. He imagined himself always as the supreme experimentalist dealing with the strict facts of the matter. One must always, he said, begin with "the immediate data of consciousness." So doing, it was impossible to affirm the existence of God. Did not the Dhammapada say that "Self is the lord of self, who else could be the lord?" Despite such statements, Louis Mercier never ceased trying to bridge the gap between Babbitt's concept of a higher will and the Christian doctrine of grace. Mercier did admit in one place that Babbitt "stopped short of affirming the existence of God," but explained it saying that Babbitt wanted to meet the naturalists on their own terms by examining only "the immediate data of consciousness." In reality,

58 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 188.
59 Ibid., p. 6.
60 Babbitt, The Dhammapada, pp. 8, 26.
62 Mercier, American Humanism, p. 27; Mercier, The Challenge of Humanism, p. 181. More, too, wished that this interpretation would explain Babbitt's refusal
Babbitt was agnostic: perhaps a transcendent power existed but Babbitt could not perceive it or commune with it - nor did he ever feel any particular need to do so. He did not share More's need for a teleological understanding of man. Much more interested in producing cultured gentlemen than saints, Babbitt's ethical will was not predicated on the reaping of an eternal reward. For Babbitt, humanism was an end in itself; for More it was a way-station to religion.

Consequently, Babbitt is important for finding a basis for supporting order in society in a manner quite different from historic conservatism which has usually seen God as the moving or controlling agent in history. Babbitt emerges as the most individualistic of all conservatives to be covered in this study. The outer institutional restraints were gone. In the post-metaphysical age, man could look only to himself. Nothing to affirm the superhuman: "He held it a law of sound tactics not to arouse the hostility of those whom he desired to convince, but to make concessions where this could be done with honour." (On Being Human, p. 36.) Babbitt seemed to offer support for such an interpretation when he wrote in his translation of the Dhammapada that it would seem desirable...that those who object on either humanistic or religious grounds to the over-reaching attitude of the scientific naturalists should not burden themselves with any unnecessary metaphysical or theological baggage, and their appeal should be to experience rather than to some counter-dogma. (p. 118)

63 Babbitt, On Being Creative, p. xxxii.
was to stand in opposition to man's inalienable free will. Babbitt's secularization constituted an honest and courageous attempt to deal with a major problem of modern man - the fear of being alone in the silence of the universe.

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If romanticism, naturalism, and the human capacity for delusion sabotaged the humanist goal of a cohesive and ordered society, what could be done? In the first place, the American educational creed had to be revamped. Both More and Babbitt periodically issued urgent pleas to Americans on behalf of a classical education which would, in Babbitt's words, inculcate "awe and reverence and the inner obeisance to the spirit of standards." The educational dispensation of John Dewey, he added, dealt only with service and power, not character and wisdom. In a world in which many doubted the necessity of the God-hypothesis, it would be up to the educational system to provide men with the capacity to recognize an ethical center in himself. Hopefully the classical education would evoke the inspiration that comes from the study of great lives, would teach

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64 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, pp. 310-311.
65 Ibid., p. 305.
the virtues of sound character and instill in children the ideal of moderation in all things. Their hostility to science was based on the belief that knowledge had to be compartmentalized and that the proper place for science was clearly below the highest level of humanistic and religious studies. Above all, the practicality of the vocation subjects ought to be avoided. Yet, in their approach to education, they too succumbed to an obvious utilitarianism - the very approach which conservatives scorn in theory. More declared that

It shall be the duty of the teacher and moralist to instill into students the feeling that their own true happiness as individuals depends neither on the un pitying exercise of strength nor on the envious striving after equality, but is bound up with the social happiness which can exist only when each division of society...has a distinct place and responsibility and is recognized and rewarded accordingly.67

66 Since the humanist bias against science will be considered in the following chapters, the statement below by Babbitt will perhaps suffice to give the import of their position:

Man, in spite of what I have termed his stupidity, his persistent evasion of the main issue, the issue of his own happiness, will awaken sooner or later to the fearful evil he has already suffered from a science that has abrogated to itself what does not properly belong to it;...in the long run it is in the interest of science itself to keep in its proper place, which is below both humanism and religion. (Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 383.)

67 More, Aristocracy and Justice, p. 122.
The educational goals of the new humanists would drive ever more deeply the wedges between social classes.

Their political ideas reflected some of the ends of the ethically-utilitarian education which they advocated. They were hostile to democracy which they thought was becoming increasingly decadent. Their view rested on several assumptions. Both men assumed that mankind could be divided between the "average man" and the "saving remnant" - if one could even find the latter. Babbitt expressed himself clearly on this difficulty when he lamented that if one looked at human nature realistically "one might find here and there a person who is worthy of respect and occasionally one who is worthy of reverence." Anyone who trusts in the "divinity of the average, is fated to pass through disillusion to a final despair."68 The congenital differences among men were so great that one would be flouting nature if one attempted to produce social egalitarianism.69 This tone and language is not one which is usually understood to be "humanistic."

68 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 261.
Secondly, democracy rested on the Rousseauist fallacy which held that man was the sole judge of his estate. This attitude, when joined with the education of man to the naturalistic level, produced a will to power free of the traditional restraints which the Rousseauist undermined. It is then but an extension of this principle that brings us to the third weakness of democracy. It is imperialistic: "Behind all imperialism," said Babbitt, "is ultimately the imperialistic individual." Democracies tended to be idealistic in thought and imperialist in practice; in fact, "the idealism and the imperialism, indeed, are in pretty direct ration to one another." Translated in terms of American history, democratic people were increasingly choosing the imperialistic and expansive attitudes of Jeffersonianism instead of the controlling and moderate outlook of Washington and Hamilton. In the absence of restraints, democracy encouraged a collective will to power. If present tendencies were permitted to work themselves out, said Babbitt, then "we may esteem ourselves fortunate if we get the American equivalent of a Mussolini; he may be needed to save us from the American equivalent of a Lenin."

71 Ibid., pp. 248ff; p. 312.
To protect our culture and to avoid both Lenin and Mussolini, Babbitt proposed a theory of the "right" man: contemporary men of character, he said, had come to recognize the cultural necessity of revitalizing the "saving remnant" and substituting "the doctrine of the right man for the doctrine of the rights of man."\(^{72}\) The right man was "ethically energetic" in that he could discipline himself with the inner check and so was "just and exemplary."\(^{73}\) What indeed is meant by the saving remnant or how does one find the right man? Babbitt gives no objective criteria by which a man can be considered as right. David Spitz, in *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought*, has clearly laid bare the tautological nature of Babbitt's theory of the right man: "the 'right' man or class is that man or class which follows the 'right' policies; and the 'right' policies can only be followed by the 'right' man or class."\(^{74}\)

\(^{72}\)Ibid., p. 246.

\(^{73}\)Ibid., p. 309.

Babbitt's ideal leader could not be checked; in fact Babbitt never admitted that the man of character would make important mistakes. But assuming this to be an oversight, who was to check the right man? No institution since Babbitt's extreme individualism saw all power inherent with the higher will of man. Nor would another man be able to correct the right man because how could anyone "be more right than the right man?"\(^{75}\) Democracy provided an answer to this problem but Babbitt did not like it. More, too, failed to "solve" the problem of democracy. He stated that he had "no futile intention of abrogating democracy" but nevertheless agreed that the key political issue was whether a natural aristocracy could be developed within democratic forms. Such an aristocracy would mediate between equalitarian democracy and a hereditary oligarchy. And yet he implied that somehow the "best" persons should get together and have power bestowed upon themselves and thus leaves the reader with the impression that he agreed with Burke on the virtues of a prescriptive oligarchy.\(^{76}\) And there the problem is left.

\(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 240.

\(^{76}\)More, Aristocracy and Justice, pp. 3, 14, 30.
Once the doctrine of aristocracy is accepted, the problem of maintaining the superior talents in power remains. Very likely this problem, along with the oriental influence of concern with the "self," led More and Babbitt to their extremism in matters of economics and social justice. In all fairness, one ought to note that both men apparently understood the theoretical inadequacies of laissez-faire economics. More could attack Manchester liberalism as "one of the most heartless creations of the human brain," and Babbitt admitted that with "a few more Harrimans...we are undone." But beyond moral exhortations against a way of life that glorified material acquisition and accomplishments, they had no solutions. Equalitarianism was an unethical ideal since men were unequal in talents and hence deserved proper rewards. Social justice, More could write

is such a distribution of power and privilege and of property as the symbol and instrument of these, as at once will satisfy the distinctions of reason among the superior, and will not outrage the feelings of the inferior.78

77Ibid., p. 172; Kazin, On Native Grounds, p. 299.

78More, Aristocracy and Justice, p. 120.
There were greater evils than hunger or other forms of social injustice – notably the corrupted state of the soul which sought a redistribution of other people's property in brutal contravention of the fact that "to the civilized man the rights of property are more important than the right to life." 79

For Babbitt property was "a genuinely spiritual thing," indispensable to personal liberty. 80 It could not be attacked in any way to remedy the evils of competition because as Hesiod had pointed out nearly three thousand years earlier, competition "was built into the very roots of the world; there is something in the nature of things that calls for a real victory and a real defeat." 81 Babbitt, no better than Hesiod, could tell us how to plan for the competition which brought creative and harmonious achievement instead of war and strife. Since social justice everywhere led to confiscation and a decline in moral standards, the remedy for the evils of competition was to be found in the

79 Ibid., p. 136.
80 Babbitt, Democracy and Leadership, p. 272.
81 Ibid., p. 205.
"moderation and magnanimity of the strong and the successful, and not in any sickly sentimentalizing over the lot of the underdog."\(^{82}\)

And if the strong and the successful were not moderate and magnanimous? To this question, the new humanism gave no adequate answer. Nor did they have answers for most other problems which assailed America in the twentieth century. What strikes one most is the dated character of the humanism of Babbitt and More. They prided themselves on being the heirs of Renaissance humanism, and in that the new humanism was elitist in character, individualistic in outlook, at home with classical regularity and moderation, and contemptuous of triviality and vulgarity, a certain parallel existed. But it lacked the vibrant curiosity about man and nature which animated Renaissance humanism, and which alone could have brought the new humanists into deeper involvement with their society. For all of their vaunted learning, they nevertheless overlooked the second commandment which may have enabled them to think better of their fellowmen. Disintegration of the new humanism came with the depression and the subsequent rise of a social consciousness which could be translated into cooperative action by groups, public and private, at all levels of society.

\(^{82}\)Ibid., pp. 205-206.
CHAPTER III

TRADITIONALISM AND THE AGRARIAN NOSTALGIA

The humanist attack on the values of American civilization found spirited support, often of a more popularized nature, from a literary group which came to be known as the "Nashville" or "southern" agrarians. As southern apologists for older, pre-capitalist virtues, they scorned the materialism of the twenties and all quantitative criteria for success. Nor was the literature of that rushing decade viewed any more positively; its rebellious even nihilist qualities were unacceptable to those who, while critical of modern society, were traditionalists not radicals by nature. They saw humanitarianism in social reform as shallow and superficial. Thus in the broadest sense, the agrarians made common company with the "New Critic" school which emerged in the late twenties, with men such as T. S. Eliot, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More,
and as the thirties progressed - the Distributist Herbert Agar, and Seward Collins, editor of the rightest, even fascist-inclined American Review.¹

The agrarian movement grew out of the "Nashville Fugitive" group of young men all connected in some manner with Vanderbilt University. This group, consisting mainly of students, published and contributed regularly to The Fugitive, a magazine of poetry which was published from 1922-1925. This magazine was one of the earliest signs of the Southern Renaissance in letters.

All of the fugitives had a rural southern background, but being interested chiefly in writing poetry and in literary criticism, showed little interest in the social and economic problems of the South or in its historical legends. On the contrary, they considered themselves quite cosmopolitan and the first issue of

¹Henry F. May, "Shifting Perspectives on the 1920's," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 43 (December, 1956), 405-427.

The New Critics were hostile to the culture of the twenties, but they were critics from the Right, equally hostile to Marxism and liberalism. They valued a more communal society, classical literature, and opposed progressive education, the new social science methodology, and the atomization and shallowness of a business civilization, (but so also did the rebellious writers of the twenties who agreed with their critique of a business-dominated culture.)
their new magazine declared that "The Fugitive flees from nothing faster than from the high caste Brahmin of the Old South."²

It was primarily the Dayton Trial concerning the teaching of evolution in Tennessee public schools and the subsequent spate of condescending and malicious pulp of the northern press that focused their attentions on the southern past and its values. It appeared that Mencken's blast depicting the South as the "Sahara of the Bozart" was all too commonly believed.³ Donald Davidson considered the Dayton Trial evidence that Americans became excited mainly when standardization in

²The Fugitive, 1 (April, 1922), Foreward. For biographical information on the fugitives, see Rob Roy Purdy (ed.), Fugitive's Reunion: Conversations at Vanderbilt (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959), pp. 11-13. This volume records the conversations of the former fugitives who were reunited at Vanderbilt University, May 3, 1956. Although Vanderbilt extended the invitation, the reunion was financed by the Rockefeller Foundation which offered a grant to the American Studies Association. The four sessions of delightful conversation were recorded on tape and then prepared for publication by Rob Roy Purdy.

thought did not "go rapidly enough in Dayton, Tennessee, or in Texas or Illinois."4 By 1928, several members of the Fugitives decided to answer the attack on the South; two years later their Southern manifesto appeared.

The roots of agrarianism found much nourishment other than that provided by the fundamentalist spectacle at Dayton. It would have been difficult to remain unaware of the southern economic transformation and the optimism it produced. Boosterism was not merely a northern phenomenon; a sort of George Babbitttry existed south of the Ohio River also. W. J. Cash has alluded to the pre-war decline in southern dignity as evidenced by the infiltration of Rotarian backslapping; "to the strange notes - Yankee notes - in all this talk about the biggest factory, about bank clearings and car loadings and millions."5

The local Chambers of Commerce primarily, but the states as well, rushed headlong into the effort to attract northern industry to the South. Every state


had an "Industrial Plan." The "Mississippi Plan," for example, promised a five-year tax exemption to any industry which would move to that state.  

The material on the industrial development of the South, as well as southern efforts to attract industry is overwhelming. Several useful articles surveying some of the economic transformations are: Thomas J. Pressly, "Agrarianism: an Autopsy," Sewanee Review, 49 (April, 1941), 145-163; Marian D. Irish, "Proposed Roads to the New South," The Sewanee Review, 49 (January, 1941), 1-27; Clarence E. Cason, "Alabama Goes Industrial," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 6 (April, 1930), 161-170; and Broadus Mitchell, "Growth of Manufacturers in the South," The Annals of the American Academy of Social and Political Science, 153 (January, 1931), 21-29. Mitchell, an academic apologist of southern industrial progress, compared the stagnation caused by slavery with the vast social gains brought by industry:
employment for the poor whites, urban growth with all the activity this implies, sound banking, establishment of a wage system, greater productivity of wealth and its more even distribution, larger tax yields, better schools and roads, improvement of farming methods, and the growth of many government services. pp. 23-24.

For a more detailed story of industrial advances in the South, see Mitchell (with George Sinclair Mitchell), The Industrial Revolution in the South (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930). Some of the best examples of the southern desire to industrialize can be found in the annual Blue Book of Southern Progress published by Manufacturers Record of Baltimore. In the 1926 issue, Richard D. Edmonds, editor of Manufacturers Record (one of the leading advertising vehicles of southern industrialists) wrote of the spectacular industrial advances in "A Bird's-Eye View of the Mighty Panorama which is Being Unrolled Before the Astonished Gaze of the World." pp. 11-22. In the issue of the following year he portrayed the story of the South as "The Greatest Epic of Material Advancement the World Has Ever Seen." pp. 17-20. The South was shown to be the nation's most valuable asset in terms of natural resources and a solid Anglo-Saxon population. In land, labor, resources, people, climate and future prospects, it was the El Dorado of the American experience.
Most southerners, following in the tradition of Henry Grady and Walter Hines Page, were favorable to industrial growth. Professor Edwin Mims of Vanderbilt University, himself a progressive advocate, expressed the majority view in *The Advancing South*: "While the New industrialism brought evils in its wake, it also brought wealth, good schools, beautiful public buildings and symphony orchestras."\(^7\)

But others committed to the higher realms of aesthetic taste and humane values read the story of economic development quite differently. They saw that industrialism was a tough process in the South, that in company towns "freedom" took on new and inverted meanings, that the capitalist benefactors paid one-half the wages comparable workers received elsewhere in the country. Add to this the evils of the "stretch-out" system and the failure of unionism to make any inroads. There still remained the derivative effects: a one-crop, cash farming system which was stimulated by the virus-like spreading of the urge to acquire money, and the cultural limitations of a poverty-striken section which surely contradicted the optimistic claims of what

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\(^7\) Edwin Mims, *The Advancing South* (Garden City: Doubleday Page & Company, 1926), p. 11.
industry could do for the South. The coming of depression in 1929 only added to the deepening psychological reactions of bewilderment, bitterness, and hatred of the Yankee and his Wall Street capital. 8

In yet another sense, Agrarianism may be seen as the political phase of the Southern Literary Renaissance which produced such figures as William Faulkner, Ellen Glasgow, Erskine Caldwell, Katherine Anne Porter and Tennessee Williams, as well as those who contributed to the first volume of agrarianism, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Donald Davidson, and John Gould Fletcher. This creative out-pouring, Tate maintained, was spurred by a "peculiar historical consciousness of the Southern writer;" 9 it was rooted in a tragic view of history and in an urge to win for the South the dignity and respect so long denied it. This backward glance into history in the search for values produced an agrarian nostalgia unparalleled since in this country.

Southern agrarianism is best understood as a type of conservatism more technically called traditionalism in the sense that traditionalism constitutes


a conscious articulation of past values threatened by revolution — political, economic, or social. Traditions are something more than customs; customs are habitual, and they need not have a firm historical base. Since a tradition is essentially a value judgment about the merits of certain folkways, traditionalism takes on a dimension which transcends history. If a proper historical context for the maintenance of traditional ideas does not exist, then it has to be created. Such was the case with southern traditionalism which arose in reaction to the social and economic revolution which took place in that part of the country during the twentieth century.

To complicate matters further, the agrarians were poets and men of letters, a breed of men most imaginative. Their writings were half-poetical, half-literal, and often one is at a loss to know which idiom predominates at any given time. The general setting for their fusions of myth and reality was the Old South; at least their nostalgia found a more congenial resting place there than anywhere else.

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"Throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the Wall," wrote Andrew Lytle and that vigorous
statement marked the tone of the 1930 manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition.*

It was a book about man and his spiritual needs - about the nature of the good society; and it was a reaffirmation of the conservative faith in inner solutions to external problems. The "Statement of Principles" which prefaced the book unified the twelve contributing conservative intellectuals around several major points. All supported "a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way," a conflict represented by the phrase "Agrarian versus Industrial."

They longed for a simpler economy and proposed the principle of regional determinism to secure it. They all subscribed to the statement that a genuine humanism "was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South," and that "If a community, or a section, or a race, or an age, is groaning under industrialism, and well aware that it is an evil dispensation, it must find a way to throw it off." 11

Each contributor submitted an original essay which accounts for the wide diversities of the volume.

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The poet and author John Crowe Ransom, responsible for drafting the statement of principles, trained his guns against science and its metaphysic progress. In a thesis which he had defended in previous articles, he pointed to the North as being the deviant section and declared that the South best represented European principles of culture, stressing its alleged humble attitude toward nature and the greater value put on the leisurely quality of farm life.12

Donald Davidson in "A Mirror for Artists" warned that industrialism would stifle artistic impulses because the "furious pace of our working hours is carried over into our leisure hours, which are feverish and energetic."13 In a plea for regionalism, he offered the thesis that the South as a conservative and agrarian section offered the environment most conducive to the arts. William B. Hesseltine, a southern historian, in his review of the Southern manifesto, roundly rebuked Davidson for his suggestion that art galleries were products of a diseased, effete civilization and that

12 Ibid., p. 3. For Ransom's earlier expressions of the same thesis see "The South - Old or New?" The Sewanee Review, 36 (April, 1928), 139-147, and "The South Defends the Heritage," Harper's Monthly Magazine, 159 (June, 1929), 108-118.

13 Ibid., p. 34.
the folk-arts of country songs and spirituals, folk tales, weaving and furniture making were the only true indices of an artistic culture.\(^1^4\)

In an impassioned essay, the historian Frank Owsley followed with a conspiracy theory of the Civil War, maintaining that the North defeated the South militarily to subject it to its economic will, and having done that, was presently engaged in the attempt to sterilize the South intellectually and spiritually. John Gould Fletcher, expatriate in England for twenty-five years, attacked the democratic theory of education and proposed the establishment of an intellectual elite since "the inferior, whether in life or in education, should exist only for the sake of the superior."\(^1^5\)

Lyle Lanier, psychologist, and for many years Provost of the University of Illinois, contributed a philosophical essay on the doctrine of progress. He traced the progressivist temper to Roger Bacon and divested Christian teleological views of any causal relationship to modern ideas of progress. The social and philosophical significance of the pragmatic theory


\(^{1^5}\)I'll Take My Stand, p. 120.
of truth and William James' hypothesis of an open world found its most impressive, albeit deluded representative in John Dewey, who believed "that modern industrial technology provides us with a method for securing progress and for preserving our culture against decline."¹⁶

In an essay on southern religion, similar in its main argument to Ransom's God Without Thunder, Allen Tate maintained that the South never created a fitting and articulate religion capable of uniting all of society and thus its social system began to crumble after the Civil War. He proposed political action to save what was good in the tradition of the Old South. Herman C. Nixon advocated an economy balanced between an inevitable industrialism and a strengthened yeomany.

The most flamboyant essay in the volume was "The Hind Tit" by Andrew Nelson Lytle in which he predicted "a war to the death between technology and the ordinary human functions of living" unless there was "a return to a society where agriculture is practiced by most of the people." After raving against all inventions, he suggested that the corrupt values generated by the money economy were blinding modern farmers to the

¹⁶Ibid., p. 122.
knowledge that "A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn." Robert Penn Warren, Rhodes Scholar and a Pulitzer Prize winner for *All The King's Men* (1947), suggested that the negro problem could be solved by encouraging them to take up farming. It would have the double-effect of ending industrial exploitation of the negro and would thereby force the industrialists to increase the wages of the poor white groups.

John D. Wade wrote of a fictional character who was destroyed by the industrial system and Henry B. Kline created another inner-directed character who hated all extremes, disliked machines, and found a spiritual haven in a decentralized and cultured society. Stark Young concluded the volume by reminding the South to hold onto its tradition of manners and knowledge of living as an antidote to the age of the mass-man and the crude, odious traits of industrialism.

In such manner was sounded the agrarian alarm. Certainly there was little danger that it would be acted upon, for it could hardly have been less practical: it was not a program, nor was it meant to be. It would have been difficult for any southerner to have guessed

17Ibid., pp. 202, 203, 205.
just what the southern tradition was, so diverse were the views. In any case, I'll Take My Stand created much discussion and was widely reviewed — generally unfavorably. Most were not so generous as Edmund Wilson who thought it obvious that the agrarians were "locking the stable after the colt has bolted," but who praised agrarianism for its concern for human dignity in the context of an industrial and technological revolution.¹⁸ Those whose articles were most irresponsible and snobbish — Wade, Fletcher, Kline and Young — ceased to play any important role in agrarianism. The main work yet to be done came from Tate, Davidson, and Ransom.

It may occasion little surprise that such a book appeared and yet the reception it received perhaps tells us as much about the modern temper of Americans as it does about the book itself. The southern agrarians constituted the last concerted effort in American life to preserve a tradition in which the soul of man was bound up in a mystic communion with the life-giving properties of the soil. The farmer became a religious symbol summing up all of the history and values of the pre-industrial age.

Toil on the land conferred dignity and a sense of modesty based on man's awareness of the limitations placed upon him. The farmer placed seeds in the soil but knew always that help was needed to make them grow. By necessity, then, the farmer enjoyed a humble (correct) relationship with nature.

The agrarian ideals of independence, industriousness, and moral virtue have inspired generations in their search for identity; but the "agrarian myth," which embodied all of these values and saw them personified in the yeoman farmer, became less and less effective during the nineteenth century as a rationalization of the American experience. Henry Nash Smith has pointed out its repressive influence on social reform.¹⁹

If the agrarian myth became increasingly inadequate in the North, the southern version was even more untenable. Whereas the old Northwest in idealizing the yeoman elevated work to a moral absolute, Smith asserted that the South "became violently hostile to the yeoman ideal," challenged the ethic of virtuous labor and stressed instead the leisure ideal of the landowner.

class. Thus the historicity of the tradition that the agrarians, like the new humanists, sought to invoke is questionable.

The traditionalism of the southern agrarians was never more simple and reactionary than when dealing with industrialism, technology, and science. Usually the three were used synonymously and were always identified with the North. It is a matter of record that the North, including the agricultural regions, had long since given itself over to the calculus of machines, trade, and progress. It was accepted as a matter of course that when the human will successfully asserted itself in the continual effort to modify natural forces or to harness the power of nature, human society experienced a dramatic upturn in security and in human betterment. Industrialism and the application of machine technology provided the vehicles with which man worked his will over his environment.

As Ransom saw it, (and he may be taken to speak for all the agrarians in 1930), the sense of power and progress was illusory and ultimately self-defeating, for

Progress never defines its ultimate objective, but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series. Our

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Ibid., pp. 165, 163.
vast industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experimentation and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace.\textsuperscript{21}

The successes of industrialism were "at points of no strategic importance" and were pyrrhic victories because in the fatal process man was forced to sacrifice his human qualities.\textsuperscript{22} Man became a victim of his own creation.

Thus was launched an attack on American industrial capitalism. The system was too abstract; it caused people to leave the real world of family loyalties and age-old customs, of attachment to nature and to life values, to forget the time-honored traditions of religious life and sacrifice their self-mastery to the increasing tempo and regular, clock-like rhythm of the machine. In Lewis Mumford's words, "as regular as clockwork" became the bourgeois ideal.\textsuperscript{23} Abstractions continued to mount, one upon the other, until time itself lost the human quality of being a continuum of experiences and became an arrangement of similar intervals to be controlled at whim.

\textsuperscript{21}I'll Take My Stand, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{22}Ransom, The Sewanee Review, 36, p. 145.

Money and power became two of the most despised abstractions. Thus in Allen Tate's brilliant novel, *The Fathers* (1938), Lacy Buchan remembers that people never spoke of money or asked how much money people had. Somehow it did not seem important. Another victim, Bogan Murdock, the central figure in Robert Penn Warren's *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), lost his humanity when he forsook the world of tangible realities for the world of symbols. His "abstract passion for power" brought him control over other people, but he lost his soul in the process. 24

The most damning agrarian indictment against industrialism and machine technology was that it forced conformity in the social habits of people. This was not new. Coleridge much earlier had said the same thing. Few cared to dispute the agrarian contention that technology could be dangerous, but as much could be said about the careless use of ideas. Why blame technology? The attack on it was a surface criticism; it did not go to the root of the problem which was man himself.

It is characteristic of traditionalism to prefer the restoration instead of the creation of values even

though the hope of restoration involves a good deal of poetic creation. This explains the archaic character of traditionalism during periods of transition. In *Technics and Civilization*, published during the agrarian crusade, Lewis Mumford showed how the machine could create new cultural values in harmony with human betterment. Interest in "the factual and practical...were only two in a whole series of new values that had been called into existence by the development of the new technics." And as if to cut to the heart of the traditionalist bias, the new values were symbols of a more intelligible world "in which the taboos of class and caste could no longer be considered as definitive in dealing with events and experiences." 25 Mumford did not fail to note the development of shared experiences, the existence of cooperative thought and action, the objective personality - all buttressed by the use of machines.

Naturally the machine process subjected men to a certain discipline, but the order and quality of objectivity which it introduced in the life of society gave man confidence, bolstered his morale, and immeasurably multiplied his powers. To the agrarians this exemplified the modern addiction to abstractions; to Mumford it

suggested nobility and grandeur. While machines created uniformities and standardization in society - the bane of all intellectual conservatives - they nevertheless created a situation in which any man could be regarded as the equal of another. As was made clear by the reactions to the agrarians (and by the results at the polls) Mumford's main case prevailed. It was clear that the enrichment of life depended upon the human faculties which called into being new forms of control.

The metaphysical basis of agrarianism was articulated by John Crowe Ransom. His book, *God Without Thunder* (1932) is important because it summed up in sophisticated fashion the arguments of the agrarians and gave them a philosophical basis which they otherwise lacked. Since the agrarians shared the same views on science as did the new humanists, some consideration should be given to their anti-science bias.

Agrarianism had a strong religious element. It could be argued that religious questions were their main concern. In the agrarian symposium held in 1952, Frank Owsley remarked that all of the contributors to
I'll Take My Stand believed that "no society could long endure that eliminated God from its life and habits." As an analysis of their ideas will make clear, the agrarians had a limited conception of God and a crude understanding of the role of scientists.

At the center of Ransom's indictment of American and Western culture was the charge that the "old God" of mysterious contingency and power was superseded by a "New God" under the name of science. It was an amiable and understanding God, the master-scientist and the master-servant intent on meeting human needs. Humble men could not serve the new God; all were little scientists of pragmatic temper, defining and seeking to realize a destiny exclusively their own.

The new Satan (Ransom's synonym for the "New God") was purely rational and was anti-faith. With powerful logic, Ransom argued that man could not live without myths for only through an acceptable myth could faith and reason be joined. A myth may be defined as a fiction which expresses a truth or affirms a value and if momentous enough can rationalize the mysterious universe for man. It gives man identity. It may be

super-scientific and supernatural but need not necessarily be anti-scientific or un-natural. Why then, asked Ransom, did Western man persist in calling them lies?27

In explanation, he delineates the basic defect in Western civilization: the alleged conflict between its religious heritage and the scientific spirit. Christianity, said Ransom, was an eastern religion: Christian orthodoxy is "such a religion as that of the Eastern or Orthodox Church...its doctrine is that of the stern and inscrutable God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament."28 Since the Old Testament God, quite unlike His modern counterpart, was capable of performing the activities of a warlord and could not be fully understood, He never permitted the familiarity which bred contempt. He was as capable of causing evil as good and had to be placated through offerings and sacrifices. Anticipating his criticism of science, Ransom rejoiced that the orthodox God worked by "fiat," not by "law" and thus was not predictable.29


28Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

29Ibid., pp. 29-33.
Ransom presumably considered the rise of science an historical aberration; for some inexplicable reason it had appeared in Western history, creating a vast hypocrisy: Western principles of conduct were not grounded in its religious faith. Science dealt only with those properties of reality which could be measured and counted, thereby eliminating all qualitative matters through avoidance. Its method of perceiving reality consisted of studying the outer world of the physical universe; anything else was dismissed as being subjective and again by implication, unreal. This, Ransom concluded, was the background of the monistic conception of nature which the new humanists had attacked with such vigor.

The conservative complaint at this point is always the same — that bias toward reason dulls all other faculties of the mind. Ransom maintained that the faculty of reason had a co-partner in perceiving reality which he liked to call "sensibility." It meant the "harmonious adjustment, or rather unified function of thought and feeling."  

the mind sought to categorize and verify all data, to isolate universals for predictive purposes, the sensibility maintained a wonderful sense of particularity and an intuitive feeling for the contingent and unforeseen.

The modern rationalists, Ransom maintained, would not admit of this duality. They were satisfied to find uniform qualities in the mass of events and objects which constitute the phenomenal world in order to assign causal attributes to the universals and certainties. For what reason? — because he was deluded by the satanic vision of power and progress as he trespassed on the domain of nature. And this was man's sin — his refusal to honor the inviolability of nature.

This interpretation bespoke either an intellectual snobbishness or a naive innocence and it could not stand. Most scientists readily admit that scientific "laws" are descriptive only and hardly imply an inexorable course of events. Nor is the scientist as barren and aesthetically sterile as Ransom would have him. Humanistic scholars forget that the scientist, through use of the imagination, creates pictures which seem to

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conform to the real world as it is understood to operate. And it has been this capacity along with the ability to dream, which explains the success of the physical scientists.

The anti-science motif could be seen in any of the other agrarians. Perhaps Andrew Lytle was most irresponsible in his comparison of folk-signs and science:

Charms, signs, and omens are folk attempts to understand and predict natural phenomena. They are just as useful and necessary to an agrarian economy as the same attempts which come from the chemists' laboratory in an industrial society, and far wiser, because they understand their inadequacy, while the hypotheses of science do not.32

As to the relative wisdom of the farmer and scientist, the scientist is quite aware that at any time he has only a small part of nature under control. Adverse to change themselves, perhaps the agrarians could not understand that the scientific mind was prepared to accept change precisely because it did admit the provisional character of scientific theories. Should it be otherwise, science would have no meaning; indeed the evolution of science is the evolution of theory.

32I'll Take My Stand, p. 224.
Tate's fear of science and defense of religion rested on the same premises as Ransom's: Religion is contemptuous of all knowledge of nature; to quantify nature is ultimately to quantify ourselves. The indispensable office of religion is that it checks the abstracting tendency of the intellect in the presence of nature; nature abstract becomes man abstract.\(^33\)

With such logic, the southern traditionalists defended an agrarian order. All of history showed that there were just two economies: "the one is religious," conservative, contented with existence; "the other is secular," progressive, warfaring, and discontented with all limitations. The one could be found on the farm; the other anywhere else. Industrialism was the manifestation or economic consequence of the secular, scientific-materialist mind which worshipped the god of efficiency and divested labor of all beauty and pleasure.

Thus, "the best labor," said Ransom, "is the one which provides the best field for the exercise of the sensibility - it is clearly some form of pastoral or agrarian labor."\(^{34}\) Donald Davidson, writing on the

\(^{33}\)Allen Tate, "The Fallacy of Humanism," The Hound and Horn, 3 (Winter, 1930), 255.

\(^{34}\)Ransom, God Without Thunder, p. 193.
growth of agrarianism, gave this "best labor" a historical base:

As we thought and talked further, we realized that the good life of the old South...and the life of our own South so far as it was still characteristic was not to be separated from the agrarian tradition which was and is its foundation. 35

Here was the traditionalist fallacy: the grounding of values in a particular type of culture. Having declared the values and the culture indissoluble, they ran the risk of having their center of identity shattered when the passage of time and changing objective conditions inaugurated a new historical era. Somehow civilized man has gotten himself into the state of taking science, machines, and industry - everything that can work for him - quite for granted. To think that man could suddenly be happy with the simple things, when all through history he has sought to widen the reaches of his experience, was faulty psychology and bad history.

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It is true that My Stand was not a program but a set of principles. Later some of the agrarians would hold that they were protesting general trends in American

life and were really not interested in specifics.  

But during the thirties they took criticism of their manifesto quite seriously. To eliminate some of the vagueness and generalities which studded I'll Take My Stand, they studied politics and some economics and tried to become relevant. With the pages of the American Review opened to them, they produced a spate of articles outlining specific proposals for their vision of a better society.

36 A symposium on agrarianism can be found in Shenandoah, 3 (Summer, 1952), 14-33. Published were the replies to five questions sent to each of the agrarians by the editors. For the main part the agrarians (Ransom, Davidson, Owsley, Tate, Nixon, Lytle, Wade) were chastened but unregenerate. While conditions had changed, the values they had upheld were timeless ones and had no less validity in 1952 than in 1930.

The same issue of Shenandoah included a brief appraisal of the agrarians (pp. 3-10) by the new conservative Richard M. Weaver.

37 The American Review was published by Seward Collins, a wealthy disciple of Irving Babbitt who wished to provide a forum for critics with a "traditionalist" viewpoint. The major groups who met this test, said Collins, were the new humanists, the English "Distributists" (particularly Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton), the neo-scholastics in philosophy, and the southern agrarians. See The American Review, 1 (April, 1933), 122-127.
Robert Penn Warren wrote several articles defending literary regionalism and distinguishing it from local color. Regionalism was not concerned with sentimental local color and folklore but raised questions of major import which transcended time and place. Yet time and place could not be ignored for that would mean the dishonesty of denying one's native impulses and cultural heritage.

In an article entitled "Happy Farmers," Ransom attacked Louis Hacker's pamphlet *The Farmer is Doomed* which defended the thesis explicit in the title. Not farming, but commercial farming was doomed, countered Ransom. He then outlined his idea of an ideal farmer, a talented amphibian who could move back and forth between a commercial and a subsistence economy with the latter receiving top priority. The thesis was similar to a general theme implicit in *I'll Take My Stand*: "The apostasy of American farmers from primary subsistence farming is the greatest disaster our country has yet suffered."  

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To stop the trend toward commercial farming, Ransom proposed legislative action which would place a tax on borrowing, on the sale of tractors and other farm machinery, and on the use of commercial fertilizers. To avoid paying taxes, the farmer would be forced to remain an agrarian farmer. Why the farmer, most happy of creatures, did not choose to withdraw voluntarily from the commercial economy, Ransom did not say. Nor were any of the inevitable psychological problems of a half-subsistence, half-commercial economy explored.

It was left to Frank Owsley to express succinctly the agrarian view as it had evolved by 1935. In "The Pillars of Agrarianism," he outlined five great pillars which would support the agrarian society. He supported the English distributist demand that the giant corporations be broken down into smaller units and envisioned a society in which the social and economic life was dominated by small agricultural market towns. Two of the proposals designed to secure these ends were most novel. It should be the government's responsibility to buy all land held by insurance companies, absentee landlords, and some of the larger

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planters and distribute the land to the landless, each receiving eighty acres, a log house, two mules, two milk cows and $300.00. In what amounted to a semi-feudal arrangement, no farmer could mortgage or sell land. The first duty of all farmers would be to practice sound conservation practices, to drain and terrace the land; otherwise it would escheat to the state.  

The other proposal envisioned a new constitutional deal to put the sections on an equal political basis. Since the United States was not really a country of united states (all agrarians thought American unity was a myth) "less, a nation than an empire, a plebiscite could determine the region to which a particular state would belong." The regional governments were to have a great deal more autonomy than the states historically had and all would be equally represented in the Federal Legislature (a unicameral body elected by regional congresses) and in the selection of a President. The new political scheme also included regional determination of tariff regulations, a proposal which found wide agrarian support. Others added, however, that tariff rates should be decided by a treaty among the regions if

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42 Ibid., 535-538.

43 Ibid., 543.
possible. Everything that the Common Market was meant to achieve in Europe in the post-war era was negated by the agrarian economics of the thirties. It found no support outside the agrarian group.

The last stand of the agrarians came when they contributed to *Who Owns America* (1936) edited by Allen Tate and Herbert Agar, London correspondent for the Louisville Courier. Agar had long admired the small distributist group led by G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc which advocated the dissolution of giant corporations and wide distribution of property.

In some ways, *Who Owns America* was a better book than *I'll Take My Stand*. It was better-planned and organized and more specific. The common ground occupied by the agrarian-distributionist contributors was "a belief that monopoly capitalism is evil and self-destructive" and that a stable society demanded the widespread ownership of small property, the majority of that being land. Most writers had been impressed by Berle and Means' book, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, which had made its appearance a few years earlier and highlighted the separation between ownership and control in the modern corporation.

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Although big corporations were to be decentralized, Herbert Agar made it plain that they were not proposing a back-to-farming movement or an end to the utilization of technology. The idea would be to humanize what already existed, thus modifying Owsley's hope for a partial return to the farm. The major change from *I'll Take My Stand* was that industrialism was accepted, however uneasily, as long as it was not dominant or if it were placed under regional control.

The best work was done by the non-agrarian contributors. John Donald Wade, Donald Davidson, Frank Owsley, and Andrew Lytle had not overcome the tendency to raise up old issues such as sectional imperialism, rural-urban conflicts, and the idyllic view of farm life. Donaldson's writings, especially, degenerated into provincial regionalism.

The agrarians dissolved as a group after the publication of *Who Owns America*. Ransom, in particular, already had second thoughts about the superiority of agricultural life. Writing in the *American Review* as early as 1933, he stated that

> Agrarians may not like cities temperamentally, and talk against

46 Ibid., p. 103.

47 The article "The Fallacy of Mass Production" by David Cushman Coyle, and "Corporate and Private Persons," by Richard B. Ransom are especially noteworthy.
the prospect of any big cities in the future, yet they too go to cities and are influenced by cities, and it is a matter of fact that the city focuses all the features of a culture as nothing else does.48

1936 was a bad year for agrarians. They were nearly expelled from the Southern Policy Association during its spring meeting and later in the year were charged with fascism.49 For one reason or another, the esprit de corps was broken and nothing more of consequence was said about an agrarian program.


49 Seward Collins, editor of The American Review, was pro-fascist and saw much good in Hitler and Mussolini. It was this fact more than anything else that brought charges of fascism against the agrarians. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The agrarians had no sympathy with either fascism or nazism and John L. Stewart, a close student of the agrarians, disposes of the ridiculous charges by noting that the Agrarians were simply "found guilty of proto-fascism by association." See Steward, The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 177.

For some of the debate concerning the alleged fascism of the agrarians see "Fascism and the Southern Agrarians," The New Republic, 87 (May 27, 1936), 75; Allen Tate, "Fascism and the Southern Agrarians, From Mr. Tate," Ibid.; "The Sunny Side of Fascism," Ibid., 87 (June 10, 1936), 132.
What then does one say of the agrarian venture? The traditionalism and the regionalist bias of the agrarians can be explained largely by their hatred of the present. The North-South conflict defined as industrialism versus agrarianism was too simple; nevertheless, the geographical dichotomy permitted them to blur the march of time, thus obscuring the fact that the old agrarian order was no longer desired even by southerners. This ought not, however, suggest that the agrarians had no real basis for their fears of the future. C. Vann Woodward has challenged the universal applicability of the abundance theme in America by describing the South as a "people of poverty" among a nation of plenty.\textsuperscript{50} The southern heritage of frustration and defeat over slavery, then agrarianism, (and quite possibly segregation as well) produced a distinct defensiveness in the lovers of tradition. He quotes Thornton Wilder to good effect with the latter's remark that the southerners were "cut off, or resolutely cut themselves off, from the advancing tide of the country's modes of consciousness. Place, environment, relations, repetitions are the breath of their being." Their social ideals put

\textsuperscript{50}C. Vann Woodward, \textit{The Burden of Southern History}, p. 18.
them into irreconcilable conflict with the mobile, adventurous but disconnected Americans whose relations were "to everywhere to everybody, and to always."\(^51\)

The myths of any people are not easily modified; when challenged the traditionalism of the defenders creates distortions and a morass of contradictions. The agrarian myth became the agrarian nostalgia. As men of letters, the agrarians well understood the use of images but they failed to create a satisfactory religious and agrarian image for a secular and urban age. While a sentimental nostalgia can serve as a counter-influence to the "deracination of human communities" as Ransom maintained, nostalgia cannot replace the conservative need for roots in the past. Statements claiming that "Religionists are almost inevitably agrarians" or that Lot chose the city, the wicked city, while "Abraham went to the hills and prospered," testified to the sentimental proclivities of the agrarians.\(^52\)

This tendency toward sentimentality found expression in their regionalism which all too often was a blind, blustering, and blistering reaction against

\(^{51}\) Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

alleged alien tendencies. The idyllic small farm existence which Lytle, Wade, and Davidson described so lovingly was a fantasy, a concoction of idealists who themselves went to the city and returned to the farm only now and again. Farming in the South was never healthy. Unfortunately precise statistics about the poverty of farming in the South are overwhelming in number and sufficiently negate most claims to the contrary.⁵³

⁵³See W. T. Couch (ed.), Culture In The South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1934), especially "Southern Agriculture: by A. E. Perkins, pp. 52-79, and "The Farmer and His Future," by Clarence Poe, pp. 319-343. Charts on pages 327 and 329 compare the total farm cash income, income per capita rural population, and cash income for livestock and crops between ten northern states and ten southern states. The editor sums up the general impression given by the data when he includes in the introduction an answer to the southern agrarians who expected a better way of life from southern agriculture:

If one looks at agrarian life in the South without colored spectacles, what does one find? Essential differences from industrialism, yes. But superiority?... One find 1,790,000 tenant farmers, white and black. One finds the last stronghold of child labor. One finds women who have to cook, sew, wash and iron, who have to work regularly in the fields planting, hoeing, and harvesting, and who are not protected by any laws or customs regulating their hours of labor. The system is so thoroughly bad that no laws can be devised which, so long as the system lasts, can protect the women and children who are a part of it. Again, in what way, may one ask, is tenant
The agrarian ideal, moreover, embodied a static view of history quite at variance with Christian teleological conceptions and with Ransom's own biblical exegesis. In *God Without Thunder*, Ransom held that the death of Abel at the hand of Cain symbolized the victory of the agricultural order over the pastoral, hunting stage of human existence. At a later time God farming superior to work in a factory? Look at the South's 775,000 croppers whose legal position is that of wage hands without any definite assurance of wages. Or compare the opportunities for leisure and for the use of leisure in isolated homes in the country and in towns and cities. The comparison made by the agrarian is strangely confused. Now we hear that country life in the South (superior to country life in the North, of course) is good because it is slow, leisurely, affording plenty of time to invite the soul or to contemplate the infinite variety and moods of nature. At the same time we hear that country life is good because men cannot learn how to use leisure and because farming does not leave them long, idle hours. If the women have to spend all their energy cooking, scrubbing, hoeing, why not? we are asked. How else could they spend their time better? I am constrained to believe that the gentlemen who ask this question have never known or imagined the misery, the long drawn-out misery, of over-work and undernourishment, of poverty and isolation, of ignorance and hopelessness.

*God Without Thunder*, pp. 121-123.
destroyed Noah's antagonists because they were acquisitive and imperialistic, a "race of property owners and capitalists." Yet even after the great flood,

God recognized that the insubordinate spirit of his creatures was bent on agriculture and the private ownership of real property....So the agrarian civilization became a fact. For God sanctioned it.\(^5^5\)

Changing stages in the growth of civilization were a reality after all. An inscrutable and unchanging God had in fact sanctioned what man wanted; in the agrarian view, apparently, it was not to happen again.

How ironic it is that an act of nature had in fact called technology into being in the form of Noah's ark. Thus in the two dramatic examples of God's manner of dealing with men, Ransom had unknowingly found both change and technology justified by the Deity. And where was it all to stop? What the guidelines were for resisting change, the agrarians nowhere said.

John Crowe Ransom was the first to recant when in 1945, writing in the Kenyon Review, he repudiated all hope of and even the desirability of an innocent agrarian restoration.\(^5^6\) Had the agrarian ideals been

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 124.

merely a poetical reaffirmation of values as most members maintained, no recantation would have been called for. But the agrarian traditionalists did not go back to the farm: "Presently it seemed to them that they could not invite other moderns, their business friends for example, to do what they were not doing themselves." The Morganthau Plan for the pastoralization of Germany made Ransom speak out. Whereas he once believed that an agrarian nation offered the best environment for happiness, he now had no difficulty in seeing what the Morganthau Plan "was meant to be: a heavy punishment." As agrarianism appeared to Ransom in 1945, so it appeared to most Americans a decade earlier. Agrarianism was never a rational approach to real problems but rather a nostalgia for ancestral ways.

The inter-war years were not easy times for writers who were concerned about the course of social change. During the period of economic breakdown, other intellectuals no more prescient than the southerners had found communism or even fascism alluring. The agrarians protested the loss of identity and the dehumanizing

57 Ibid., 686-687.
58 Ibid., 687.
influence fostered by technological change. They protested the inadequacy of laissez-faire capitalism and they served notice that Americans should be critical of all schemes of progress. The traditionalist creation of an earlier and simple world was illusory, but as Robert Penn Warren was to say in 1956, the

simpler world is something I think is always necessary - not a golden age, but the past imaginatively conceived and historically conceived in the strictest readings of the researchers. The past is always a rebuke to the present; its bound to be, one way or another...Its a better rebuke than any dream of the future. Its a better rebuke because you can see what some of the costs were, what frail virtues were achieved in the past by frail men...59

CHAPTER IV

HERBERT HOOVER: CONSERVATISM AND THE WELFARE STATE

In domestic politics the Great Depression of the 1930's stands as one of the majorwatersheds in American history. Before the thirties, a certain correspondence existed between events and ideas; in the thirties, events outstripped ideas. The economic crisis necessitated a reformulation of the meaning of freedom in terms of a mature industrial society. The key issues of the period were three. Could traditional, atomistic capitalism become social minded? Could economic planning be reconciled with freedom? Could both of these questions be resolved through American democratic processes of government?

The significance of the depression in world terms was that freedom and equality could not be guaranteed within the prevailing capitalist system. The American answer was the New Deal which inaugurated the basic program of the modified-capitalist or welfare state. The New Dealers, with wide popular backing,
decided that it was the government's responsibility to provide jobs for the unemployed and to promote through positive action the well-being of the economy.

The depression crisis was not resolved without debate, but the debate was not really a free one for events abroad largely shaped its character. Voices from the right and the left declared as often as not that fascism or communism were the necessary results of any strengthening of federal power, that the choice lay between economic planning and social chaos, between the American way of liberty and European totalitarianism. Both left and right rejected the New Deal, the former for its ad hoc and compromising character, the latter because it challenged the assumptions of classical liberalism.

William Allen White, writing in the Saturday Evening Post in March, 1933, wondered whether "Herbert Hoover was the last routed figure of the old order or a leader born before his time." As titular head of the Republican Party Hoover articulated conservative opposition to increased participation of the Federal government in the life of the community. His conservatism,

\[1\]William Allen White, "Herbert Hoover - The Last of the Old Presidents or the First of the New? Saturday Evening Post (March 4, 1933), pp. 6, et. passim."
however, was of a different kind than that covered in the preceding chapters. Entirely American, it rejected the importation of alien ideas. Hoover's conservatism denied the belief of the philosophical conservatives that a society was more than the sum of its parts. His conservatism was atomistic, optimistic, materialistic, and driven by the hopeful conviction that the good society was to be realized for the first time in history in the United States. In view of the political turmoil in Europe, Hoover was even more convinced that the Jeffersonian version of the state had been correct; accordingly, his views were congenial to the perpetuation of business power.

As White perceived, the question surrounding Hoover's presidency involved the inadequacy of a creed rather than that of a man. George Soule, writing in the New Republic in October, 1932, admitted that for all of his own disagreement with Hoover's politics, the President's actions were intelligible: he acted in "conformity with his past philosophy and that of the men who supported him."2 It has been the fortune of few politicians to attain the unerring consistency in

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thought and action which was Herbert Hoover's. There is no need to attack Hoover as an inept politician mesmerized by simple laissez-faire theories. Those stale charges were never true; but to exonerate him would be equally false for it would be equivalent to saying that his value system was congruent with the demands of the times. It has become increasingly fashionable to credit Hoover with inaugurating several of the programs which became part of the New Deal, e.g. public works programs, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and (in 1932) federal expenditures for unemployment relief. But Hoover had never been happy about his experiments in using Federal power and viewed his actions as temporary. Philosophically, he agreed with almost nothing of what came to be called the New Deal. For confirmation of this one need only note the chapter headings in his Memoirs: "Building the Trojan Horse of Emergency," "Usurpation of Power...," "Collectivism Comes to Currency," "Fascism Comes to Agriculture," "Fascism Comes to Business," "Fascism Comes to Labor...," "Collectivism by Thought Control and Smear."³ Hoover

repudiated out of hand any suggestions that he had originated some of the concepts of the welfare state. "And the saddest blow of all," he told an audience in 1936, "is that certain New Dealers now arise and say that I was the father of the New Deal."  

Hoover's press secretary, Theodore Joslin, studying Hoover's speeches and writings during the twenties and through much of his presidency observed:

In all of those million-odd words, dealing with every important subject... the number of times he reversed himself or modified an important position could be counted on the fingers of one hand.  

This statement could be extended to cover Hoover's subsequent speeches and works - The Challenge to Liberty (1934), Addresses Upon the American Road (1933-1938), and the three volumes of his Memoirs. His life-long, rigid adherence to his early-formulated beliefs ranks as one of the phenomenal features of his career. Hoover's views did not grow and his career gives considerable support to those who have stressed the virtues of pragmatism in politics. The purpose of this chapter is not to analyze his presidency as is usually the case when studying Hoover, but rather to bring together his

4Herbert Hoover, Addresses Upon the American Road (1933-1938) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 148-149.

5Carl N. Degler, "The Ordeal of Herbert Hoover," The Yale Review, 52 (Summer, 1963), 563-564.
political and social philosophy and to look particularly at his opposition to the New Deal. Thus his early career is of considerable importance.

His personal success story in which he rose from an obscure rural background to become a world-famous millionaire ranks as one of the most impressive in American history. Unfortunately, the experience did not always serve him well in later years. People expected too much of him. His career seemed to validate the creed he represented and it had come true often enough to have become embedded in popular mythology. Born in 1874 in West Branch, Iowa, he lost both parents before the age of ten. After spending some time with various relatives, he went to Oregon to live with his uncle, Dr. Henry John Minthorn, a country doctor who became wealthy in the Quaker land-settlement business. There he took on odd jobs, worked as a bookkeeper in his uncle's office, took evening courses in business administration, and saved enough money to enter Stanford University in 1891. Unable to find a job upon graduation, he worked as a common laborer in the Nevada mines at the rate of two dollars a day. In rapid succession

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he spent brief periods of time mining in Colorado and New Mexico, then joined Louis Janin, a western mining engineer, who, recognizing the young man's abilities, recommended him to the British mining firm of Bewick, Moreing and Company in London which was searching for an engineer to operate gold mines in Australia. After accepting this position, he was never poor. Before the age of twenty-four Hoover was earning $7,500 per year which with increased responsibilities soon grew to $20,000. By his late thirties he was a millionaire and widely-traveled in foreign lands.

The irony in Hoover's experience was that he made his fortune abroad by taking advantage of mining concessions offered by foreign governments. Moreover, the mining firm in which he was a partner was British, not American. Nevertheless, travel confirmed his conviction that America was the land of unique opportunity; he described every return to America from abroad as "an inspiration."7 In view of his repeated references to his foreign travels, his tendency to see America as the

7Ibid., 125; see also Herbert Hoover, The Challenge to Liberty (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 38.
most civilized and perfect of all societies - "History became an ugly reality and America a contrast" - should not be overlooked when noting his reluctance to undertake institutional reforms in the economy.8

Because of Hoover's success as director of Belgian relief during the early years of World War I, President Wilson in 1917 tapped him for the position of food administrator where he performed with his usually efficiency. Meanwhile his name became familiar to Americans. In 1921, he rejected an offer (reputedly carrying the highest income ever offered an engineer) from the metallurgical firm of the Guggenheim Brothers and accepted instead a position in Harding's Cabinet.9 In his cabinet position he again showed his technical mastery and capacity for dealing with facts and figures. In matters relating to government-business cooperation and the rights of labor, he was thought to be the most liberal man in the cabinet. By 1928, he was an American

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hero, the subject of many articles and the natural candidate of the Republican Party. All of Hoover's achievements, as he saw them, had been won without help from anyone else. This was crucial for his philosophy, because as Carl Degler has pointed out in summing up the outlook of the successful, "What to other men appear as obstacles or handicaps, to the self-made man appear, at least in retrospect, as goals and incentives."

Hoover's economic philosophy was a settled conviction by the time he joined the cabinet. Hoping to renew Americans in their traditional principles, he wrote a brief essay published in 1922 as American Individualism. It was a defense of democracy, the rule of law, hard work, voluntary cooperation, and the free individual. Individualism - the creed which opposed legal restraints on the individual - was the heart of his philosophy. The uniqueness of its American version, Hoover wrote, was equality of opportunity which permitted any man to rise to a position to which his talents

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entitled him. Later, during his presidency, he reiterated his belief:

It is by the maintenance of equality of opportunity and therefore of a society absolutely fluid in freedom of the movement of its human particles that our individualism departs from the individualism of Europe.12

America, he said, had no class leadership, and as proof he pointed out that "of the twelve men comprising the President, Vice-President and Cabinet, nine have earned their own way in life without economic inheritance, and eight of them started with manual labor."13 Having experienced in unique manner what opportunity meant in his own life, he never suspected that his vision of equal opportunity for Americans might be riddled with myths; he never admitted that business perpetuated itself in power or that the young farm boy seldom had the same chance as a banker's son.

He believed that government should seek to maintain, as its highest priority, "high and increasing standards of living and comfort." American opportunity, if protected, would bring such a profusion of products that Americans would never need to resort to European

12Herbert Hoover, Addresses Upon the American Road, 1933-1938 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 3.

13Hoover, American Individualism, p. 21.
socialistic schemes of organization. America, he said, was the richest nation in the world, but it was too early to worry about the distribution of its wealth:

To all practical souls there is little use in quarreling over the share of each of us until we have something to divide. So long as we maintain our individualism we will have increasing quantities to share and we shall have time and leisure and taxes with which to fight out a proper sharing of the 'surplus.'

Hoover warned that equality of opportunity ought never to be equated with human equality in character and ability — "that was part of the clap-trap of the French Revolution." He counseled Americans to heed the temperate ideas of the individuals of intellect and to scorn the dictates of the mob: "The crowd only feels: it has no mind of its own which can plan. The crowd is credulous, it destroys, it consumes, it hates, and it dreams — but it never builds." What Hoover meant was that the present relationship between government and the people was essentially correct. Here too are traces of the superiority and self-righteousness which later were revealed in his amazement that so many could challenge his diagnosis of the depression.

14 Ibid., pp. 32, 34.
15 Ibid., pp. 19, 24.
Hoover's economic views - so often distorted to stand in greater contrast to Roosevelt's - were individualistic, tempered by service and cooperation. He believed that the most significant social force which arose out of the war years was service - "service to those with whom we come in contact, service to the nation, and service to the world itself."\(^{16}\) And he had good reasons for thinking of himself as the exemplar of this idea. He saw cooperation on every hand and characteristically found it practiced most impressively in business organization which blended the "initiative of self-interest" with the "sense of service."\(^{17}\) Not that competition in itself was bad. On the contrary, competition was a positive good. Any rapaciousness was checked by America's love for equal opportunity; nevertheless, "out of fear we sometimes even go too far and stifle the reproductive use of capital by crushing the initiative that makes for its creation."\(^{18}\)

Hoover believed that America, qualitatively, had largely fulfilled her promise. The changes which he saw coming were quantitative ones. Because his

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 29.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 44.

ideal already existed, there was no need to discover it or to hope for it in some remote future. The business of leadership was to keep it functioning without dangerous or expedient tampering. With government exhortation and further progress in voluntary cooperation the capitalist system would be largely self-regulating. Satisfaction with the present and optimism about the future summed up Hoover's attitude and it provided the foundation on which to oppose radicalism on the left and ultra-conservatism on the right.

Hoover's response to the depression is well-known. In his unsuccessful effort to stem the deflationary tide and induce economic recovery, he pushed nineteenth-century liberalism as far as it could go. Convinced that he had done all that the ideals of freedom and equal opportunity permitted, he was deeply hurt by the insults to his person and to his presidency. Certainly he represented the noblest expression of the older middle-class liberalism in American public life. It is true, as Carl Degler has written, that Hoover "was unquestionably one of the truly activist presidents of our history."19 Again and again he declared that the period of unregulated

business was gone forever and that laissez-faire had been dead in America for generations. He disagreed with his conventional-minded Secretary of the Treasury who wanted to liquidate everybody and everything in the belief that people would "work harder [and] live a more moral life." He understood that wages had to be maintained to provide purchasing power. But any change in philosophy which Hoover brought to economic problems was not a change in direction. "The economic fatalist," he said in an address to the American Bankers Association, "believes that these crises are inevitable and bound to be recurrent. I would remind these pessimists that exactly the same thing was once said of typhoid, cholera, and smallpox." No president before had said this, but Hoover went on to say, "I am confident in the faith that their control of economic depressions, so far as the causes are within our own boundaries, is within the genius of modern business." His reliance

20 Hoover, Memoirs, III, 30.
21 Ibid., 43, 44.
23 Ibid.
on business was not new and within two years even businessmen recognized that confidence in business leadership lay in ruins. Hoover never suspected that the anti-statist bias of liberalism might have been only a temporary historical phenomenon. Accordingly, he could never bring government power to bear even when he knew that positive action was needed. The old liberalism in its death agony responded with a hurricane of verbal activity - but largely divorced of Federal power. Although an activist, Hoover was often powerless.

A press statement in early 1931 again revealed Hoover's dilemma when he quoted, approvingly, Grover Cleveland's explanation in 1887 for vetoing a $25,000 appropriation for the relief of drought victims:

> though the people support the Government [said Cleveland] the Government should not support the people....the expectation of paternal care on the part of the Government [weakens] national character.24

In a similar situation, Hoover pledged Federal aid should state and local authorities ever find it impossible to prevent hunger and cold, but diluted his promise by

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concluding that he had "the faith in the American people that such a day will not come." It would destroy individual initiative and create a dangerous precedent for the Federal government to deal directly with the problem of unemployment. Hoover, as demonstrated by his leadership in Belgian relief, sympathized with people who had suffered because of wars, but he could not see that suffering from unemployment was often just as bad. Together with the freedom to work, the workers demanded the right not to go hungry; and on that issue, Hoover's variety of conservatism died.

For two years after his election defeat in 1932, Hoover refrained from attacking the New Deal. When he emerged from his self-imposed period of silence, he often took up the theme of the causes of the depression. His explanation was based on his early (and life-long) belief in the soundness of American institutions and it provided him with a success story which contrasted with the failure of the New Deal. He declared that the depression was a natural step in the liquidation of the World War. It was not the American stock-market crash

\[25^\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 499}\].
that pulled down the world. "Without the war," he wrote in his Memoirs, "there would have been no depression of such dimensions." Through vigorous administrative action, recovery was well under way in 1931 when "we were plunged into the deepest world-wide depression until then known to our history by the financial panic which swarmed out of Central Europe." The trough of the depression came in the spring of 1932. Once again (and it was "now well-established by disinterested economists the world over"), "America was shaking itself clear of the depression, under its Republican Administration, in June-July 1932," when the election of Franklin Roosevelt and widespread fear of the New Deal caused America to falter on the road to recovery. In speech after speech in all parts of America, he reiterated this theme. The depression had three major causes—war, the financial collapse of Europe, and fear of the coming New Deal. It was a vindication of his policies as President. But also, it meant that the New Deal was

26 Hoover, Memoirs, III, 2.

27 Hoover, Addresses, p. 309.

28 Ibid., pp. 143, 89; see also his speeches of December 16, 1935; January 16, 1936; February 12, 1936; April 4, 1936; October 16, 1936; and Challenge To Liberty, pp. 169-170.
not necessary for America. All other nations of the world continued the recovery begun in the summer of 1932, and "They adopted no New Deal." That Germany's war economy might have had some effect on her economic recovery was not mentioned.

The distinguished economist Wesley Clair Mitchell, in a balanced, even favorable review of Hoover's *Challenge to Liberty*, pointed out that there was "one significant fact...established by the impartial record of statistics," namely, that recovery in England and France during the summer of 1932 continued without serious relapse in the spring of 1933, when this country touched a lower point of depression than that which marked the spring of 1932.

One can sympathize with Hoover's hope that recovery had begun from its lowest point during the course of his administration but it was precisely this inability to change his views which earlier had caused George Soule to write that contrary to popular impression, and in spite of his excellence as an engineer and executive, he is an indifferent

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29. Hoover, Addresses, p. 90.

economist. Many of his economic views are conceived in advance of the evidence, and are held stubbornly after the evidence goes against him.31

It is hardly surprising that in his Memoirs, Hoover had no regrets, could find no errors in judgment, no wrong choices made. His friend, William Allen White, wrote that Hoover's incapacity to admit mistakes and to compromise accounted for much of his failure and added, characteristically, that

politics...is one of the minor branches of harlotry, and Hoover's frigid desire to live a virtuous life and not follow the Pauline maxim and be all things to all men, is one of the things that has reduced the oil in his machinery and shot a bearing...32

Hoover's book of 1934, The Challenge to Liberty (a Book-of-the-Month selection issued with Henry A. Wallace's New Frontier) together with American Individualism formed the philosophical basis for his attacks on the planned economy. The later volume contained nothing new but outlined in comprehensive form his major ideas. His subsequent public speeches filled in the details. Justice Harlan F. Stone of the Supreme Court, who read the manuscript of The Challenge to Liberty,

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advised Hoover not to publish it. The Jeffersonian state may be theoretically desirable, he said, but the question of liberty and economic security could not be settled "by an appeal to the eighteenth-century philosophy of individualism in the abstract, for that philosophy cannot be completely adapted to the twentieth-century state." It was precisely the abstract nature of Hoover's individualism that seemed to blind him to social reality. Even though he was out of office and wished to show the failure of the New Deal (it was the "challenge to liberty"), he could not see anything basically wrong with the American system except the New Deal reforms. On the matter of the distribution of wealth he wrote

that with the diffusion of income in normal times under our system among 25,000,000 American families, it cannot be justly claimed that more than a fringe of a few hundred thousand receive more than they deserve for the service they give the community and that there are not more than a few million on the other fringe who conscientiously work and strive and do not receive that to which they are justly entitled.  

He never saw the one-third of the nation that Roosevelt was to mention.


Hoover's major thesis was that liberty and not economic security was the foremost issue confronting the depression-ridden Americans. Liberty was "a thing of the spirit - to be free to worship, to think, to hold opinions, and to speak without fear," but it had to be grounded in the economic freedom "to earn, to spend, to save, to accumulate property that may give protection in old age and to loved ones." Take away economic freedom and all others ceased to exist. "Economic stability is the first need for any system and indeed for the preservation of liberty and the survival of civilization itself." Two things threatened liberty - economic greed on the right and collectivist government on the left, but it was the second which worried him most. The Jeffersonian view of government supported the ideals of the American System - Hoover's term for the traditional economic, social and political ideals of the nation. Its liberalism, he wrote with some exaggeration, "challenges all other philosophies of society and government, for all others, both before and since, insist that the individual has no...inalienable rights, that he is a servant of the state." All other

philosophies insist that "the state is the master of man." Power corrupted, big government was immoral; both destroyed individual initiative.

There was a particular type of bureaucratic government which he feared most - the one which attempted economic planning - and between 1932 and 1938, it assumed the central position in his critique of the New Deal. He had detected during the 1932 campaign, he later wrote, something more sinister than the depression, viz. "that Roosevelt and some members of his Brain Trust were proposing to introduce parts of the collectivism of Europe into the United States under the oft-repeated phrase 'planned economy.'" Perkins, Acheson, Morgenthau, Ickes, Johnson, Wallace, and Frankfurter "interpreted liberalism as a sort of collectivism" and they were followed to Washington by "a host of dangerous men and women." It is interesting that a government policy of economic planning should have frightened an engineer. In the first volume of his *Memoirs*, Hoover


38 *Hoover, Memoirs*, III, 329.

wrote with pride about the profession of mining and the consequences of planning:

There is the fascination of watching a figment of the imagination emerge through the aid of science to a plan on paper. Then it moves to realization in stone or metal or energy. Then it brings jobs and homes to men. Then it elevates the standards of living and adds to the comforts of life....From the point of view of accuracy and intellectual honesty the more men of engineering background who become public officials, the better for representative government.40

There is some evidence that Hoover reflected the prevailing views of his occupational group. Arthur Kornhauser, writing in the April, 1938 issue of Public Opinion Quarterly found that engineers as a group closely paralleled the views of business executives and lawyers on government ownership of big business, distribution of wealth, and the conflict between the objectives of the labor movement and national well-being.41 Whether the "class attitude" reflected status anxieties, an


41 Arthur Kornhauser, "Attitudes of Economic Groups," Public Opinion Quarterly, 2 (April, 1938), 260-268. For example, only 15% of the engineers questioned in the survey thought that government should own and operate the big industries of the country, 28% were in favor of the New Deal, and 11% believed that what labor unions wanted coincided with the best interests of the country as a whole. The percentages in each case were much higher among college professors.
uncritical acceptance of early-acquired beliefs, or the lack of congruity between highly-technical professions and progressive social and political views, Kornhauser did not say.

In several speeches in late 1935, Hoover got down to specifics in a comprehensive indictment of collectivism in government. Speaking before the Ohio Society of New York, he defined the New Deal as a mixture of a deliberate plan based on central dictation of what a few men thought was good for the country and an "un-coordinated reckless adventure in government," devoid of philosophy. For the most part the New Deal planning involved no comprehensive blueprint but a type of planning which included "political management of money, credit, farming, industry, morals, and the more abundant life." It was at best self-defeating and at worst dangerous to American ideals. The New Deal experiment in planning meant limiting competition and restricting production. Hoover found the source of these objectives in Franklin Roosevelt's Commonwealth Club speech in which the Democratic nominee had declared

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42 Hoover, Addresses, p. 76.

43 Ibid.
that the United States had a mature industrial plant and should therefore place greater emphasis on the distribution of goods. In practice this philosophy of "monopolism" appeared in both the Agricultural Adjustment Act and in the codes of the National Recovery Administration. This, he charged, was not planned abundance but "planned scarcity." Moreover, it centralized power in the executive, prevented competition, sought to impose minimum wages and maximum hours, and ultimately retarded recovery. All in all it was "the most stupendous invasion of the whole spirit of liberty that the nation has witnessed." What were the FERA, PWA, CWA, and TVA except invasions of individual freedom? That government should not enter into competition with private enterprise had been a major theme of Challenge to Liberty; hence the Tennessee Valley Authority and other Public Works projects could not be justified.

Hoover pulled down the straw man of laissez-faire but hauled up the red flag of National Regimentation. Warming up for the coming political struggles with an address in Lincoln, Nebraska in January, 1936 (and some of Hoover's friends felt he was committing political suicide) he charged that the New Deal was "goosestepping the people under the pinkish banner of Planned Economy."

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44 Ibid., pp. 78, 46-47; Challenge to Liberty, p. 85.
He closed his speech with words of personal emotion. He told of his experiences in Europe where he had witnessed the effects of war on other societies, how the farmers of Russia supported the Bolsheviks only to be later thrown into the collective farms.

I have seen freedom, the most priceless heritage, torn from children that this generation might escape its responsibilities. I wish to say to you unhesitatingly that our country has been following step by step the road through which these millions of people in foreign countries lost their liberties.\(^45\)

Hoover's fear of socialism (which he identified with communism) was connected with his belief that a world ideal had been achieved in the United States, with the belief that not many people suffered in the United States, and that with few exceptions people got what they deserved out of life. To take but a few examples from his Memoirs. He traced collectivist tendencies in the United States to the recognition of Russia in 1933. This act started forces which were to have considerable influence in the attempt to collectivize the United States, particularly through the labor unions. We saw government conducted by 'emergencies,' purges, propaganda, bureaucracy, hate, the turmoil of class conflict - all of a collectivist pattern.\(^46\)

\(^{45}\textit{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 112-113.}\)

\(^{46}\textit{Hoover, Memoirs}, \text{III, 484.}\)
He connected the "leftist" nature of the National Labor Relations Board with the recognition of Russia and followed with his final comment on New Deal labor legislation:

Few people contested the right of labor to bargain collectively for representatives of its own choosing, but the entire absence of fair play and of any resemblance of judicial spirit along with the communist infiltration made the career of this legislation one of the most regrettable in all the history of American freedoms.47

In explaining his refusal to meet with representatives of the Bonus Expeditionary Force which had converged on Washington in the spring of 1932, he argued that "it was in considerable part organized and promoted by the Communists and included a large number of hoodlums and ex-convicts determined to raise a public disturbance."48 He leaves in obscurity the event of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan of $90 million to the Central Republic Bank and Trust Company of Chicago in which Charles Dawes, former president of the RFC, was a director, and hints that the run on Dawes' bank may have been a communist operation.49

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47Ibid., 438.
48Ibid., 225.
49Ibid., 170.
Even when hitting hardest at the New Deal, however, the more relaxed "new" Hoover of 1935 (friends had urged him to improve his dour image) found some areas of humor. He could not count all the agencies of planning but could say that

there are only four letters in the alphabet not now in use by the administration in Washington. When we establish the Quick Loan Corporation for Xylophones, Yachts, and Zithers, the alphabet of our fathers will be exhausted.

And then he added, "But of course the New Russian alphabet has thirty-four letters." He reserved his greatest scorn for the rise in the cost of relief, but here too, could express his sympathy "for the humble decimal point," for its "pathetic and hectic life, wandering around among regimented ciphers trying to find some of the old places he used to know."

A second "consistency" in all planned economies was the tendency to spend carelessly. The concept of the unbalanced budget was a "subtle" and "dangerous" one because it was based on the expectation that governments could spend nations into prosperity. Tampering with the currency was the natural correlate raising grave problems

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50 Hoover, Addresses, pp. 95, 77; Challenge to Liberty, pp. 88-89.
51 Ibid., p. 92.
of morals, honor, and public confidence. It destroyed the self-respect and responsibility of self-government. 52

Hoover's third criticism of government planning was directly related to the second. Currency manipulation and deliberate credit expansion produced inflated values. "And let me say," speaking this time before the California Republican Assembly,

that if the history of the last hundred years teaches anything it is that inflation is more dangerous to a people than war. It has been the abyss into which democracy has fallen in these recent years. It has been the cradle of tyranny in a dozen countries. And they all started by inflating bank credit. 53

Thus national planning collided with itself. What use were old age pensions, unemployment insurance, savings and veterans allowances when there was no certainty that they would be free of devaluation and inflation? His point was a real one if it was assumed that such practices were to be continuous.

Waste was the fourth fallacy of planned economies: waste in resources, in relief, in the spoils system, in an increased civil service, and in the ballooning government agencies. Bureaucracy fed on

52Ibid., pp. 64, 69, 77-79.
53Ibid., pp. 79, 72.
its own spirit of "self-perpetuation, expansion, and demand for more power." Its ultimate corruption came when it was used as a tool for winning elections.\textsuperscript{54}

Hoover, in a hundred speeches, added a fifth criticism. If the objective was recovery, planning didn't work. And when citing the unemployment figures, Hoover found a vulnerable spot in the New Deal.

In such manner, Hoover rejected the whole of the New Deal. His constructive alternatives were implicit in his criticism of the Roosevelt Administration. He repeated them often and summed them up most effectively and uncompromisingly in an address delivered a few weeks before the Republican nominating convention in 1936. The major planks consisted of economy in government, banking reforms, and an end to credit inflation. He hoped that the party would endorse the balanced budget, repeal laws permitting the president to manipulate the currency, protect farmers from the flood of imports, take the handcuffs off business, obey the constitution, end the spoils system, and restore morals to government.\textsuperscript{55} Most conservatives in McKinley's time could have supported this program.

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 67, 78.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 159-172.
Hoover never had to study the details of the New Deal. According to his presuppositions it could not work. Thus he clothed himself in the either-or strait jacket which affected so many intellectuals in the thirties who knew by prior logic that capitalism could not work. Hoover, with the same rigid absolutes, held that only capitalism would work. "Our American system," he had written in Challenge to Liberty, "cannot be made to work part free and part regimented." On June 10, 1936, he reaffirmed the same thesis in an impassioned and deeply bitter speech before a wildly enthusiastic audience at the National Republican Convention. He saw in the New Deal a step-by-step imitation of the tactics of European despotism. "If there are any items...in the march of European collectivism that the New Deal has not initiated it must have been an oversight." The Roosevelt Administration was intellectually and fiscally dishonest. "Do I need to recall the repudiation of obligations, the clipping of the coin, the violation of trust to guard the constitution and the coercion of the voter?" And what

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56 Hoover, Challenge to Liberty, p. 113.

57 New York Times, June 11, 1936; his Memoirs reflected no change in his belief that there was no middle way in economics: The great blow to depression recovery had been "New Deal collectivism. There was no middle road between any breed of collectivist economy and our American system." Memoirs, III, 475.
of the moral laws of the Great Book? What of the gospel of brotherhood? "For the first time in the history of America we have heard the gospel of class hatred preached from the White House." He affirmed his belief in social betterment and hoped he spoke for the Republican Party on this. But beware of thoughtless change: "...change which destroys the safeguards of free men and women is only apples of Sodom." Disregarding the hard analysis of facts, the tone of his language became increasingly moralistic as he saw the danger of collectivism grow.

Hoover's tragedy was the failure of a philosophy of government and society in which he deeply believed. With some exceptions it was the older liberalism which idealized small government, rational man, capitalism, and the middle class. It was both optimistic and atomistic. For all of his emphasis on cooperation and conviction that laissez-faire was dead, he still resembled in many ways the classical liberals who having so completely won freedom for the middle class were reluctant to extend it to the industrial classes. They understood legal compulsions but not economic compulsions. Hoover's confidence in competition and his belief that all planning was regimentation, wrote one

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historian, marked him as "the last presidential spokes-
man of the hallowed doctrines of laissez-faire liberal-
ism, and his departure from Washington marked the decline
of a great tradition." 59

His liberalism failed as a method partly because
it misunderstood the uses of power. A reformulated
liberalism (Dewey, Niebuhr, the New Dealers) denied
that power in itself corrupted. The check developed by
Niebuhr and Dewey was the theory of countervailing
power and it was this that the New Dealers had in mind
when they spoke so incessantly about the need for
"balance" in social, economic and political relations. 60

The New Deal objective in labor relations, for example,
was to set a strengthened labor movement against the
power of the business community. We have already noted
Hoover's recoil at this technique. But other factors
were at work also. The objectives of the workers -
money, employment, security - were now sought through
direct political action. They had been well-schooled
by their employers in seeking government aid and the

59Richard Hofstadter, The American Political

60Cf. Harry G. Girvetz, From Wealth to Welfare
employers had not been too squeamish about the methods used. When the workers began to exercise their latent power based on the value system and set of beliefs handed down to them, the conservatives showed their captivity to fixed ideas and turned against them. 61

In developing his creed to the utmost while president, Hoover prepared people to accept the reformulation of the relation of the individual to the state which had been underway for fifty years. Despite the rigidities of his own position, Hoover's warning against the enroachments of big government remains relevant today. Wesley C. Mitchell, in reviewing The Challenge to Liberty was struck by the similarity in objectives between that book and Henry Wallace's New Frontiers. Both stressed full employment, higher wages, and a shorter working day, conservation of natural resources, and the freedoms of speech, criticism, and conscience. 62

Hoover's conservatism was humane in method. His philosophy contained none of the authoritarianism which disfigured certain species of more recent conservatism - or pseudo-conservatism.

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Two concluding points may be made which help contrast Hoover's liberalism with that of the twentieth century. Hoover's understanding of human nature was grounded in the psychological assumptions of classical liberalism, e.g. Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo. It was assumed that man was naturally indolent. Rewards - and for Hoover this meant economic rewards - goaded men into action while a leveling socialism demoralized them and led to the quiescent society. Late nineteenth-century liberals had used this to buttress the capitalist order. Apparently initiative was man's most fragile virtue; government ought to take care not to stifle it. Yet a contradiction always existed in the conservative defense of competition, and was perhaps best summed up in the "Hymn to Free Private Enterprise" which appeared in the Nation magazine of March 18, 1944.

We face today a dreadful threat from fools who could destroy us, Of "Socialized Security" they prate in accents joyous; Security? Its costs alone would drive us to perdition, Besides, it kills initiative and dries up all ambition; Security breaks down the will, the urge that keeps men free, It stifles effort, starves the soul - except in men like me.63

Hoover never explained - as classical liberalism had not - why the initiative of the rich and the well-placed was not dulled, why riches and government aid did not corrupt their moral fiber.

Assuming that man's nature had been forever illuminated by Bentham, Malthus, and James Mill, Hooverian individualism degenerated into an erroneous understanding of subject and object. If the individual as subject was the source of all values then it must follow that the institutional arrangements of society were secondary, existing only to fulfill the ends of the subject. Conservatism, distrustful of man, sought to make permanent the impersonal regulators of the free market and profit motive. It is this which caused Hoover to glorify the profit motive - "It does not require qualifications as to ancestry, religion, good looks, or ability to get votes."\(^6^4\) The profit motive became important not for what it did but for what it was.

Hoover's conservatism had taken on none of the newer views of human nature as understood by

\(^{64}\)Hoover, Memoirs, I, 24.
William James and John Dewey who had criticized the theory of natural human passivity. Dewey had shown that while it might be natural for individuals to need pecuniary remuneration in order to perform work, it was a product not of original human nature but of the cultural environment. Nor had Hoover's conservatism reckoned with the new anthropology which found that people worked even when economic conditions did not demand that they do so.\(^65\)

The outlook in life, the relationship between man and society which was expressed in Hoover's speeches and writings, resembled rather closely that abstraction "economic man." Liberty was usually defined in economic terms, e.g. the freedom to earn, to spend, to accumulate property. He assumed that the profit motive in the context of governmental non-intervention would provide the means whereby man could most completely fulfill himself.\(^66\) Rational man evidently was imbued with a pecuniary sagacity which in the end would solve his major problems. Not that Hoover was so enamored of economic values that all other values were excluded,


but the former were so bound up with man's moral fulfillment that they could not be subjected to other considerations. Because of the inextricable relationship between the two, it was impossible, for example, to give unemployment relief. Hoover was no more materialistic than other Americans and much less so than many; but in his policies he insisted that social ends be subordinated to economic means. That largely explained his failure as president and his opposition to the welfare state.

His stress on increased production, his constant comparison of the American economy with other nations in terms of automobiles, telephones, radios, and industrial stockholders, was very much in tune with the temper of the times; and certainly the quantitative approach to human well-being was natural after the coming of the Great Depression. Nevertheless, it was based mainly on a static interpretation of economic relations. He assumed that liberalism and capitalism were the goals of history, and now that they had been reached, institutional change could stop. It was exactly this which Walter Lippmann criticized and which defined a major difference between the two men.
In the course of the past fifty-five years, Walter Lippmann has established himself as a searching critic of political and social events and as one of America's most distinguished columnists. Few, if any, of the daily commentators have equalled his range and depth of perception.

In retrospect, Lippmann's career appears to consist of three parts: the precocious, liberal young writer for the New Republic and New York World, the chastened liberal (many said conservative) of the thirties, and the last Lippmann - the neo-conservative increasingly aware of a natural law to which all men ought to conform. Our interest lies with the Lippmann of the second period, a period which many of his friends thought was the least impressive of his life. During the thirties it was fashionable for liberals to applaud positive action. It was considered fair for liberals to oppose the New Deal from an anti-capitalist
viewpoint, but hardly from a capitalist one. The latter often appeared to be Lippmann's position and he suffered much criticism because of it.

Born in 1889, the son of German-Jewish immigrants, his youth was one of comfort and frequent travel. Entering Harvard in 1906, he joined many clubs, completed his course requirements in three years, served one year as assistant to the philosopher George Santayana, was president of the Harvard Socialist Club, and graduated with honors in 1910 with a class which boasted the likes of T. S. Eliot, John Reed, and Heywood Broun. Meanwhile he impressed everyone with his intellectual abilities. It is said that John Reed was accustomed to introducing him as "Gentlemen, the future President of the United States."¹

After a brief stint (four months) as secretary to the socialist mayor of Schenectady, New York, Lippmann, sickened by the monotonous day-to-day work of politics, published his first books, A Preface to Politics (1913) and Drift and Mastery (1914). In the latter he asserted that the socialist movement had

become sterile but nevertheless called for conscious planning in society where aimless drift had ruled before.

In 1913 he was invited by Herbert Croly to join the staff of the New Republic, and there became an advocate of New Nationalist progressive politics. He became an intimate friend of Theodore Roosevelt until the start of the war when Roosevelt surrendered his progressive principles and attacked President Wilson with increasing violence. Wilson, aware of Lippmann's abilities, appointed him to join a research committee which gathered data useful for a future peace settlement. Soon, as a member of Col. House's staff at the Paris Peace Conference, Lippmann was asked to write the draft explaining the fourteen points to Lloyd George and Orlando who wanted Wilson's ideals spelled out in greater detail.

Disillusioned, as many intellectuals were with the results of the peace conference, Lippmann turned to journalism, becoming editor of the editorial page of the important liberal, Democratic newspaper, the New York World. Allan Nevins states that Lippmann

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3Ibid., p. 17.
continued the World's emphasis on internationalism, democracy, and opposition to uncontrolled wealth and privilege, and lifted the editorial page to a high intellectual level. During the twenties he wrote much in addition to his editorial duties publishing Liberty and the News, Public Opinion, The Phantom Republic and A Preface to Morals. For a long time he had been recognized as a liberal and was on record as believing that life was something to be shaped, to be dealt with deliberately. His universe was open-ended in the Jamesian sense and awaited mastery. In his earlier books he had scorned the profit motive and hoped that it would be replaced by nobler objectives.

It was against this background that the wrath of his liberal friends descended on him when he left the financially-faltering World and became in 1931 a columnist for the New York Herald Tribune, the conservative, Republican voice of Wall Street. It was charged that he had become a tool of the well-placed and the powerful. Something of a Lippmann fever developed in

4 Ibid., p. 20.
the early thirties.\textsuperscript{5} He was the subject of many articles, was dubbed "the man with the Flashlight mind" and the "Great Elucidator." The historian James Truslow Adams called Lippmann "one of the most potent political forces in the nation."\textsuperscript{6} In any case, Lippmann entered the most curious phase of his career in which he seemed to shift restlessly between theoretical acceptance of the liberalism which he had always proclaimed and a somewhat irritable, political conservatism which led him ultimately to reject the "collectivism" of the New Deal.

Lippmann's critical views toward collectivism found their fullest expression in \textit{The Good Society} (1937) in which he analyzed the relation between freedom and the planned economy. He seemed to be at war with himself. There were confusions in the book which off-hand gave the impression of having been written with two minds. In \textit{The Free Man's Library} Henry Hazlitt (an anti-statist conservative who rejected his youthful liberalism) recommended the first half of \textit{The Good Society} but recoiled from the Keynesian espousal of


of government spending in the latter portion of the book, which Lippmann once noted contemptuously that his critics had not read.\(^7\)

*The Good Society* reflected the influence of the two Austrian economists, Frederick Hayek and Ludwig von Mises and appears to contradict the major assumptions of Lippmann's *The Method of Freedom* (1932) and *The New Imperative* (1935).\(^8\) Lippmann's thesis was that liberalism and collectivism were irreconcilable; that the totalitarian-collectivist state was a perversion of the liberal order which had overthrown kings, priests, and feudal-minded aristocrats. Collectivism was arbitrary in that it presumed to play God in human affairs and reactionary in that it refused to accept the logical consequences of the division of labor. Only the liberal state which accepted the free market as the necessary technique of the distribution of labor and goods could preserve freedom. Liberalism, therefore, should concentrate on purifying and humanizing the competitive capitalist system.

\(^7\)Weingast, *Walter Lippmann*, p. 20.

Lippmann's defense of the market economy brought an immediate reaction from liberal circles where it was considered bad manners to defend the free market. Lewis Mumford, writing of "Mr. Lippmann's Heresy Hunt," commended him for his anti-fascist arguments but felt that *The Good Society* was riddled with contradictions and that Lippmann would have spent his time better had he tried to develop a positive relationship between technological progress, economic planning and democratic institutions.\(^9\) Max Lerner upbraided Lippmann for clothing "incredibly naive statements with a magisterial solemnity." In the final analysis, the book was "reactionary"—Lippmann's views were now the "intellectual garment of capitalist power."\(^10\) Lerner took particular exception to Lippmann's premise that no man or committee could know enough to plan effectively for modern societies. Granted that men had limitations, there was no need to see political dictatorship as a necessary consequence of planning. Ralph Barton Perry also referred to the inner inconsistencies of the book and wondered gently why men who displayed such effective governing powers when directing huge corporations

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\(^9\) Lewis Mumford, "Mr. Lippmann's Heresy Hunt," *New Republic*, 92 (September 29, 1937), 220.

should suddenly lose those capacities upon becoming public officials. If the market was to remain free the government would have to plan it that way. Criticism from the Nation and the New Republic was less generous. John T. Flynn challenged Lippmann's claim to liberalism, charging that he changed his views as business did so and agreed in essentials with Ogden Mills and the Liberty League. Margaret Marshall suggested that Lippmann sought prestige and prosperity.

In his exposition of the growth of collectivism, Lippmann's thesis was that the most revolutionary experience in history was the replacement of local and individual self-sufficiency by world-wide economic interdependence. All other phenomena - the machine, corporations, mass production - were subordinate to this. The revolution arose out of the division of labor whose technique was the free market. The market was the scene of human liberation; it regulated the division of labor, and for the most part did so automatically.

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14 Ibid., pp. 172-173.
Collectivism represented a rebellion against the market economy and against the consequences of the division of labor. According to Lippmann, these were legitimate reasons for the rebellion. Somehow the automatic process had gone wrong. Huge corporate structures had arisen threatening the autonomy of the individual. In this respect Lippmann was in full agreement with some of the critics of capitalism. But his understanding of the degeneration of capitalism led him to different conclusions. He disagreed with Lewis Mumford's assertion that mechanized industry demanded the concentration of political power in a huge centralized state. Lippmann countered that the sources of modern collectivism were much less impersonal than Mumford believed. Nineteenth-century liberalism, in its heyday (1776-1870) had been a good creed. It had succeeded in liberating the middle class and had facilitated the growth of laissez-faire economics. But once feudal privileges were successfully abolished, both liberals and socialists fell victim to a delusion. Karl Marx, Lippmann maintained, erred when he saw the division of labor and the nineteenth-century laws of property as part of an indivisible, organic

\[15\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 172, 168.}\]
whole. The division of labor was indeed fundamental in that it provided the basis for mass production, but the laws of property were ephemeral. They could have been changed. Marx failed to understand the future because "he fixed his attention on the title deeds to property rather than upon the inherent necessities of the economy itself." The liberals duplicated Marx's error. Liberal precepts became natural, final, and ends in themselves. Liberals assumed that the institutional arrangements of laissez-faire capitalism were identical with an objective order of freedom and thus its program of liberation fossilized into an apology for the status quo. In linking the economic and social relations of life and seeing both as developing automatically, liberals such as Herbert Spencer became apologists for miseries and injustices which were intolerable to the conscience, and the rationalizers of institutions and practices that were absurdly antiquated to the critical intelligence. Their position became utterly untenable and their teaching entirely sterile.

In the end, liberalism acquiesced to a degenerate form of capitalism.

16 Ibid., p. 177.
17 Ibid., pp. 203, 191.
18 Ibid., p. 182.
If the foregoing was correct, then the sources of the concentration of wealth and power came not from advances in mechanization as Mumford had said, but from the state which had granted the privileges of limited liability and perpetual succession to anyone who paid the requisite fee. By transforming privileges into natural rights, nineteenth-century jurists created a legal environment conducive to the growth of big business; therefore, "Concentration has its origins in privilege and not technology." ¹⁹ Who could question, Lippmann asked, that "A charter of incorporation to use property for profit is a state-created privilege." ²⁰

Lippmann knew, too, as his critics would not admit, that the views of the Founding Fathers had been considerably altered. For all of the checks and balances provided in the Constitution, power ultimately resided in the primacy of the people's will. Where as the constitution had been designed to refine that will, the jurists sought to obstruct the popular will. By the twentieth century, it very nearly had been decided that there were problems of social and economic relations about which legislatures had no competence to

¹⁹Ibid., p. 15.
²⁰Ibid., p. 278.
Consequently, Lippmann concluded that a dangerous contradiction was created "between popular sovereignty and the dogmatic absolutism of the counterfeit natural law - which the judges made and then found."\(^{21}\)

The liberal jurists, abbetted by the social Darwinians, succeeded in deluding themselves and others into the belief that laissez-faire existed outside the realm of law; but Lippmann argued that all private property, trade and rights, exist in a legal context and are sustained by law.\(^{22}\)

Lippmann provided an interpretation of recent history that the advocate of positive government could use. He contended there was no reason to believe that social reform could not take place within the context of the free market. This interpretation, however, was part of the latter half of the book, the part which Henry Hazlitt disliked and which Lippmann suggested nobody had read. The first half of _The Good Society_ is a black-white, hit-and-miss assault against all planning and collectivism. It is as though the author had begun writing the book from the middle and then, as current

\(^{21}\)Ibid., pp. 258-259.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 186.
events presaged an ominous future, outlined in the preface his premonitions that his own country was going down the ruinous European road to totalitarianism. Lippmann's technique was clearly polemical; his objective was to destroy the assumptions of fascism and communism, but the implication that the New Deal was of one piece with all collectivism was always there.

In *The Method of Freedom* (1934) he had spoken with favor of a free collectivism. A year later in *The New Imperative* (1955) he discarded the presumption that all change in the present economic crisis must follow a pattern established in Eastern Europe. "I have convinced myself," he said "...that we are evolving a method of social control which is not that of laissez-faire and is not that of a planned and directed economy." The assumption that there was but one highway of social development and that the United States could either stand still, "move forward to Moscow or backward to Berlin was false." He spent considerable time explaining that Roosevelt's programs simply extended those of Hoover and were predicated on Hoover's assumption that the government was responsible for ending the

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23 Lippmann, *New Imperative*, pp. 6, 7.

24 Ibid., p. 5.
depression. Pushing the origins of the New Deal back further, there was little if anything in the New Deal reforms "which was not implicit in the New Nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt or the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson." Noting the responsibilities of educators near the end of his small book, he echoed *Drift and Mastery* of twenty years earlier, saying that "we must tell them [the young men in the universities] that they will have to manage the social order."26

In less than two years after 1935 however, he moved to a position opposing any type of collectivism: A close analysis of world developments "will disclose that all collectivism, whether it be communist or fascist, is military in method, in purpose, in spirit, and can be nothing else."27 The critic must learn to see not the New Deal in terms of its aspirations, but the New Dealers in their actual careers; not fascism or communism as ideas, but fascists and communists as they govern great nations; to remember that while ideals are illimitable, men are only men.28

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26 *Lippmann, New Imperative*, p. 51.

27 *Lippmann, Good Society*, p. 67.

In the last sixty years, the United States and Great Britain "have tended increasingly to seek relief from poverty and disorder by the use of collectivist measures." Economic planning undertaken by men drunk with power was the cause of modern totalitarianism. "Men deceive themselves when they imagine that they can take charge of the social order. They can never do more than break in at some point and cause a diversion."

This represented a considerable change from the young author of *Drift and Mastery* who had written: "Civilization, it seems to me, is just this constant effort to introduce plan where there has been clash, and purpose into the jungles of disordered growth." Or from the Lippmann of *The New Imperative* who professed ignorance as to whether men knew enough to operate a government that was responsible for maintaining the society's high standard of living, but whose thesis nevertheless was that "they have to attempt it whether or not they succeed."

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In 1937, Lippmann rejected the analogue of war hypothesis crediting Ludwig von Mises for the insight that planning for peace was not the same as planning for war. Lippmann found American liberals, George Soule, Stuart Chase, and Lewis Mumford too utopian in their conception of what men of superior intelligence could or should try to do for society. "It is nonsense," Soule had written "to say that there is any physical impossibility of doing for peace purposes the sort of thing we actually did for war purposes." Lippmann countered that even if it were physically possible (and he did not admit that it was), a free society could not long exist. During wartime a nation, out of hatred of an object or idea, could be geared to a single objective - defeat of the enemy. Patriotism justified restrictions placed on desires, and consumer taste and demand needed little attention. If dissent appeared it could be

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33 Lippmann, *Good Society*, p. 94.

34 Ibid., p. 91. See also George Soule, *A Planned Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), especially chapter seven, "We Planned the War."

35 Lippmann, *Good Society*, p. 94.
dealt with in summary fashion. But in times of peace, when civil liberties are paramount, when individuals should be free to pursue their diverse interests, no one could define an objective which could control the activity and also demand the allegiance of a free populace. "...I do not see how the purification of the public taste is to be worked out by a government commission." Moreover, planning production also meant planning consumption and the placement of workers in the economy, neither of which seemed compatible with individual freedom.

In recognizing that a marriage of omnipotence and omniscience was unlikely, Lippmann was simply admitting the obvious. His argument was no more sound than was his conception of what it meant to plan. Often inclined to push ideas to their logical but unnecessary conclusion, he assumed that any plan for the general welfare had to be defined as "specific quantities of specific goods." Nothing could be left to chance. Consequently he linked planning with dictatorship. Moreover, he added, if the sovereign people of a democracy decide that they must have a plan, they could also decide

36 Ibid., pp. 94, 97.
37 Ibid., p. 102.
periodically that the plan should be altered. "Now a plan subject to change from month to month or even from year to year is not a plan." It was ironic that Lippmann, who since his first book had called for the application of intelligence to social problems should so suddenly have developed a totalitarian conception of planning. No one had asserted that the entire end of planning need be spelled out in the beginning.

Lippmann's daily writings reflected the same ambivalence on planning and freedom as did *The Good Societ*y. By studying every reference to Roosevelt and the New Deal, in Lippmann's "Today and Tomorrow" column for the years 1932-1938, David Weingast has demonstrated that Lippmann opposed nearly every major New Deal measure. For example, 70% of Lippmann's references to the New Deal in general were unfavorable, 63% of those to the first AAA were hostile, 84% to the NRA, 100% to the Wagner National Labor Relations Act, and 94% to wages and hours legislation. One should avoid reading too much into this. It may have reflected Lippmann's understanding of his function as critic more than anything else. Marquis Childs in his introduction to

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38 Ibid., p. 103.

39 See Appendix A for more detail.
Walter Lippmann and His Times wrote that "when, as in the years after 1929, the doers are hard-pressed to keep the wheels of mere existence turning, the role of the critic is a particularly unhappy one." Lippmann has always acted on the belief that the responsibility of the intellectual is to articulate the alternatives confronting society and to suggest guidelines for rational choices. So while he opposed virtually every New Deal measure, he was often in harmony with the underlying principles of the legislation. His opposition to the New Deal was reminiscent of his earlier criticism of the practical reforms of progressivism. Even then he had commented favorably on big business. Perhaps, as Weingast reflected, his penetrating insight discovered too many loopholes, too many dangers inherent in any piece of legislation should worse come to worse.

In his columns during the last months of the Hoover administration, Lippmann urged President-elect Roosevelt to concentrate "unprecedented" powers in the executive office; the President must operate with tact.

\[40\] Childs and Reston, Walter Lippmann, p. 16.

\[41\] Weingast, Walter Lippmann, p. 123.
and an open heart, but "there must be a birch rod in the closet. There must be steel under the velvet." In February of 1933, he continued this theme. Congress must be "organized and disciplined and subjected to executive leadership." The president ought to be given "the widest and fullest powers possible under the most liberal interpretation of the constitution." There should be measures "to suspend temporarily the rules of both houses...to put the majority in both houses under the decisions of a caucus." "Dictatorial power' if that is the name for it" was to force through the measures needed to cope with the depression. It was not long, however, before he modified his stand and eventually opposed nearly everything he had demanded.

In the "Today and Tomorrow" columns, several major reasons emerge which help explain his opposition to the New Deal. There was the technical one of loosely-drawn legislation which irritated Lippmann's taste for clarity. The Wagner Act on labor furnishes an example of Lippmann's technique. Since Drift and Mastery he had defended labor's right to collective bargaining but

42 Lippmann, Interpretations, p. 5.
43 Ibid., p. 6.
44 Ibid., p. 7.
during the New Deal he was uncertain as to how far the Federal government should go in guaranteeing it. The Wagner Bill, wrote Lippmann on March 28, 1935, "was not precise." Who, for example, was to be covered by the bill? If the Federal government was to enter all labor disputes pursuant to the right to organize, which affected commerce, then this was "material for an endless series of lawsuits."\(^{45}\) Secondly, the bill stated among other things that the employer could not "interfere," "encourage," or "discourage" worker organization in any way - something impossible for mortal men to determine. Third, it was proposed that the bargaining representatives of labor be chosen by a majority vote of the employees. How was this to be applied in the non-unionized industries such as the automobile industry where over half of the employees were unaffiliated? Finally, the bill required more of the government than it could possibly hope to do effectively. To expedite matters the Wagner Bill should be scrapped and replaced with a bill that limited the government's role to conducting free elections. "Beyond that the government should make no effort to use compulsion to promote unionism or collective bargaining."\(^{46}\) This was what one might call a "position"


statement: it stated precisely his conception of the role of government in labor relations and apparently it was to be a minimal one. This all-out attack on the bill understandably left Lippmann's friends wondering if he really wanted the government to guarantee labor's right to collective bargaining. There need be no contradiction between Lippmann's life-long sympathy for labor's goals and his opposition to the bill, yet his continual criticism of the greatest pro-labor act in American history, his refusal to stand with labor when the time was right, gave cause for wonder.\(^{47}\) Too often his criticism sounded petty - a judgment later supported by the surprising strength and longevity of most New Deal legislation.

During 1934 and 1935, Lippmann criticized the haphazard, \textit{ad hoc} approach of the New Deal. The first months of Roosevelt's administration were a "brilliant success" because the president's decisiveness in asking Congress for broad executive powers broke the panic and restored morale.\(^{48}\) But it was time, he said, in July, 1934 to substitute "settled policies for administrative discretion."\(^{48}\) In November, 1934 and May, 1935


\(^{48}\) Lippmann, \textit{Interpretations}, pp. 263-265.
(two days after the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional) Lippmann wondered "what midsummer madness possessed the New Dealers in July, 1933" to pass the NRA - "their Supreme folly." The New Deal was not a coherent, organic program and because of the neutralizing and conflicting nature of much legislation, actually impeded recovery. The NRA ran counter to agricultural policy, monetary policy, and public works programs. Delegates had been sent to London to stabilize world currency while at home Roosevelt was heeding the advice of those opposed to stabilization; the NRA was incompatible with tariff reduction; the AAA was to increase farm prices to "parity" with the very industrial prices which the NRA was raising. The public works program was to prime the pump but its scale of wages and prices was so much higher than that of other occupations "that it discouraged rather than encouraged the revival of private construction." Many of his criticisms of the NRA were in fact correct. In the larger view, one sees evidences of Lippmann's doubts about the absolute freedom for experimentation and a longing for universal standards by which to set policy.

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49 Ibid., pp. 113, 266; see also Lippmann, "On Planned Planning," (April 26, 1934), pp. 253-256.
More basic than these reasons however, was Lippmann's conviction beginning in early 1934 that the crisis had passed, and that therefore the emergency powers which had accumulated in the executive should be returned to the American people. The New Deal, he declared in July, must "not be administered by fiat." He asked repeatedly that Roosevelt make clear which powers (never clearly spelled out) he intended to return and which he intended to keep. In August, 1935, he wondered, with greater urgency, how long Roosevelt was intending to act "as if the crisis of 1933 were still with us," and bluntly declared that Congress may have to take power away from him. "The people gave Mr. Roosevelt a sword to lead them in a particular battle. That battle is over, and that sword should now be returned to its scabbard." Legislation in 1937 and 1938 dealing with minimum wages and maximum hours suggested a power-grab; the Connery Bill was part of Roosevelt's plan "to gather together an irresistible power over the economic life of this country and to consolidate that power in the hands of his own following."

50 Ibid., pp. 249, 265, 260-261.
51 Ibid., pp. 294-295.
52 Weingast, Walter Lippmann, p. 76.
Lippmann's change in attitude toward the New Deal came in mid-1935. He became alarmed over its ultimate direction even though the New Deal, as he acknowledged in January 1935, was becoming more capitalistic and market-oriented. It was the "affirmative" response of a "regenerated liberalism" to the threat posed by communism and fascism. The government, instead of dictating, resembled now the balance wheel which supplemented and corrected the efforts of the private sector. On February 14, 1935, "Today and Tomorrow" spoke of "a fundamental change in policy...It is a change from acquiescence in monopoly to resistance against monopoly." Soon after, the Supreme Court invalidated the NRA and AAA - two programs vigorously opposed by Lippmann - and it seemed that Lippmann and the New Deal were coming closer together.

Just the opposite was true however. The spirit of the NRA - "a very serious menace to free institutions" - lingered on in Lippmann's mind. Its centralization "and yet undefined power" was a threat to constitutional government. In August he hinted that Roosevelt might

53 Ibid., p. 62.
54 Lippmann, Interpretations, p. 269.
55 Ibid., p. 271.
56 Ibid., pp. 113-114.
be considering "substituting some kind of a planned collectivism for a free economy."\textsuperscript{57} By early 1936 Lippmann was certain of it. Roosevelt was setting himself above the law of the land and was heading for collectivism, warned Lippmann, citing as evidence the NIRA, AAA and Roosevelt's apparent willingness to grant labor and agriculture monopoly powers as a countervailing force against industrial monopolism.\textsuperscript{58} In September, 1936, Lippmann declared for Alfred M. Landon.

Lippmann's commentary in "Today and Tomorrow" when studied along with The Good Society suggests that he was foregoing the liberalism of his earlier years - the liberalism of hopeful planning, of belief in human capacity for mastery - in favor of a Burkean scepticism about man and history. He opposed the New Deal not so much for what it was but out of fear for what it might become - or as The Good Society suggested - for what it must become. Lippmann came to see gradual centralization as no different, in essentials, than communism, fascism, and nazism. Once collectivist measures were resorted to, there was no stopping the coming of the totalitarian state; hence, his grouping of the New Deal with foreign

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., p. 294.

\textsuperscript{58}Weingast, Walter Lippmann, pp. 53, 54.
totalitarianism in *The Good Society*. In one of the
classic misjudgments of his career Lippmann misread the
intentions of Roosevelt. Interviewed by *Newsweek* in
1959, Lippmann explained his vote for Landon in 1936:
"I had no illusions about Landon. I felt the New Deal
was running wild...and Landon was the only thing I could
oppose Roosevelt with." 59

The thesis that Lippmann opposed the New Deal out
of fear and not because of substantive disagreement is
further corroborated in his chapter "The Agenda of
Liberalism," (*Good Society*) in which he outlined a pro­
gram similar in most respects to the New Deal. Unemploy­
ment relief, social security, labor's right to collective
bargaining, securities regulation, public works projects,
a graduated income tax to produce a greater equalization
of income, reform of the Supreme Court, anti-trust
legislation - it was all there. The contracyclical spend­
ing of the compensatory state would aid the imperfect
market and even out the business cycle. 60 The market
would be retained as the chief means of regulating the
production of goods and the distribution of labor. This,

59 "This Is Their Lippmann," *Newsweek*, 54 (Sep­

he said, was "The Radical Conservatism of Liberal Reform:" a liberalism radical in social relations but conservative in keeping the market mechanism. The liberal state would administer justice, not men. Anyway one read it, here was a third way which went beyond the either-or absolutes of the early pages. Interestingly enough, the dominant interpretation of the New Deal sees it as the middle way between traditional capitalism of the right and socialism of the left.

One might choose to see the two Lippmann's of The Good Society as contradictory parts of a perplexing puzzle. It is just as logical to see in Lippmann the effort to find some inner correspondence in the clashing impulses which reside in every human breast but which seem to reach a level of intensity in a few individuals which distinguishes them from the more light-hearted. When considering Lippmann's difficulties in deciphering the essence of the good society, it is instructive to remember the careers of one-time liberals such as John Dos Passos, John Chamberlain, Max Eastman and Henry Hazlitt. In such a grouping, Lippmann's new-found conservatism seems to be comparatively mild. The fact was that Lippmann had always been a moderator between

\[61\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 232-240.}\]
extremes, seldom a crusader. Mabel Dodge noted this shortly after Lippmann left Harvard when she said, "Walter is never, never going to lose an eye in a fight. He might lose his glow, but he will never lose an eye."62 There had been many conflicting strains in Drift and Mastery at a time when no one questioned Lippmann's liberalism. With progressives he stressed the role of the people against both capital and labor but believed that the fight against the financially powerful was an illusion. He asked that the people create a strong government to control business but praised the business elite. During the twenties, he denounced the injustice done to Sacco and Vanzetti but when the case was over, praised the work of the Lowell Commission, an act which the New York World's famous columnist Heywood Broun criticized until he was discharged. Lippmann was always independent, never a hero-worshipper; his vote against Roosevelt in 1936 was not out of character. He had voted for Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, Wilson in 1916, Smith in 1928, Roosevelt in 1932, and Wilkie in 1940,

Roosevelt in 1944, Dewey in 1948, Eisenhower in 1952 and Kennedy in 1960. While Lippmann's tendency to temporize between extremes is a consistent one in his career, it is evident that the "center" of his dialectical world has shifted to the right.

Today The Good Society reads as a defense of the New Deal and has much in common with the more advanced of the new conservatives of the fifties. Lippmann's problem was pre-eminently a philosophical one involving the search for a transcendent law or ethic. The moderate Lippmann which emerged out of the confusion of the thirties was a Burkean in many respects. After having been under the sway of William James, Lippmann, in the hope of finding some abiding rationality in the universe, switched to the essences of Santayana. "The dim apprehension," wrote the more cautious Lippmann,

that there must be a law higher than the arbitrary will of any man has driven civilized men forward seeking to tame the barbarian that is in us all, and by usages, laws, and institutions to achieve what Plato called the victory of persuasion over force.64


64 Lippmann, Good Society, p. 333.
Twentieth century man "must find again the polestar which men have followed in their ascent from barbarism towards the Good Society." After the manner of Burke, he now perceived that the good society had no architectural design, no blueprint designed by finite politicians. Liberalism would not administer civilization - "that is the essence of the matter" - but would "commit the destiny of civilization to the whole genius of mankind." The theme of human limitations was common in The Good Society and has appeared in Lippmann's writings ever since. With increasing conviction, he has written of the inviolability of the human person - in each man is a "final essence" - which the totalitarian movements denied. He sought something which could order human affairs independent of human whim and fallibility, and it was this which led him to write that "the first principle of liberalism...is that the free market must be preserved and protected as the prime regulator of the division of labor." In the summer of 1938,

65 Ibid., pp. 371-372.
66 Ibid., pp. 364, 367, 368.
67 Ibid., pp. 378-383.
Lippmann tells us, he began writing the book which was published seventeen years later as *The Public Philosophy*. Therein he stressed human ineptitude, the irrational power of the masses, and hoped that the elected leaders could be convinced of the existence of natural laws which would enable them to withstand the claims of the people. This book marked the consolidation of the philosophically conservative Lippmann which emerged from the latter pages of *The Good Society*.

Lippmann's basic argument in *The Good Society*—virtually identical to Roosevelt's—was that the spiritual and natural well-being of the people was better served by adhering to the traditional capitalist methods than by resorting to vast collectivist schemes of economic, and therefore social, organization. And in defending this thesis, he became more prophetic of future American trends than most of his critics. But American liberalism maintained that in the 1930's he confused the issue by defining freedom in terms of the free market, and it challenged his assumption that the "agenda for liberalism" could be achieved without considerable planning. The consumer was less a beneficent king than

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Lippmann had assumed. In his drift to a more conservative philosophy during the thirties, he often appeared to be more interested in abstract truth — in right and wrong — than in cautious experimentation, and it was this which led him to oppose the New Deal.
CHAPTER VI

THE NEW CONSERVATISM: PROFESSORS' PRESCRIPTION

In 1955, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., writing in the Reporter, professed surprise over the conservative revival in the United States. Whereas the professors and young intellectuals were once liberals, now "with a roar and whoop the conservative prophets emerge out of nowhere and declare liberalism naive, ritualistic, sentimental, shallow...."¹ A new phase in American intellectual history - more pessimistic and anti-egalitarian in attitude - began with the close of World War II.

There were two major reasons for the revival of conservatism. First, the state of the world which emerged out of the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki called for a period of contraction in order to prepare for a new threat to world peace. At home this meant

more attention to forms and traditional habits as opposed to the free-wheeling style of the New Deal era. Secondly, the new conservatives indignantly rejected philosophical relativism on all fronts. They insisted on a crisis in values and found it rooted at various places in the past where allegedly mankind had taken a wrong turn. Somehow Western civilization had suffered a massive cultural hemorrhage which threatened its Graeco-Roman-Judeo-Christian heritage. The new conservatives believed that the ethical collapse spawned a nihilism which had led, step by painful step, to modern totalitarianism, the great world wars, and finally the threat posed by communism and the Red Army. Reflecting on the modern atomic parallel to Sodom and Gomorrah and the shocking reality of genocide, what more proof was needed that man had pushed much too deeply into the hitherto secret recesses of nature, only to learn: that his capacity for discovery overshadowed his capacity for control? This widespread apprehension - that man was not safe to enjoy the freedom and power that were his - was a major force behind the conservative revival. The new conservatives' rejection of relativism and their alarm over a decline in manners and morals was analogous to
the new humanist reaction two decades before although
the earlier movement had commanded nowhere nearly so
large a popular following - if indeed it had any
"popular" following.

Peter Viereck admitted - rather, pointed out with
relish - that "there [was] no single shining object to be
peddled as 'the' new conservatism" except in the sense
that all were concerned with the alleged devaluation of
values in modern culture.\(^2\) It was not always clear
exactly what the new conservatism was in reaction
against: in general terms it might be liberalism, or
pragmatism, utilitarianism, ethical relativism, religious
unbelief, industrialism, conformity, or Soviet Russia.
Russell Kirk and John Hallowell believed that ethics
were grounded in a divine order; Peter Viereck was not
certain. Richard Weaver viewed property as one of the
last rights to withstand the ravaging attacks of secular
socialism; Clinton Rossiter hailed the growing power of
labor unions and accepted the idea of the welfare state.
Kirk and Weaver declared themselves in opposition to
all liberals; Viereck and Rossiter concluded that

\(^2\) Peter Viereck, *Shame and Glory of the*
conservatism was sometimes served best by "aristocratic" political progressives such as Adlai Stevenson, Reinhold Niebuhr, David Lilienthal and Paul Douglas. Some defended an autonomous theory of conservatism; others adhered to a positional definition. It is false, therefore, to speak of "the" new conservatism. Nevertheless it was clear that conservatism had gained the philosophical initiative and that it was more diversified than the original modern conservative reaction engendered by the French Revolution. Burke always knew the identity of the enemy; the new conservatives saw the enemy anywhere.

What, briefly, unified the revival in conservatism? In the first place, it was primarily a cultural movement; it was not actively engaged in politics although some ventured now and then to prescribe such a program and all had opinions on what ailed modern politics. Russell Kirk's *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice* was subtitled "Essays of a Social Critic" - a statement which could be applied to much of the writing of the

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3 Among those identified as new conservatives at one time or another were Peter Viereck, Russell Kirk, Richard Weaver, Clinton Rossiter, John Hallowell, Reinhold Niebuhr, Willmoore Kendall, Francis Wilson, Anthony Harrigan, Will Herberg, Walter Lippmann, Raymond English, Thomas Cook, August Heckscher, Daniel Boorstin, John Blum, Leo Strauss, and Arthur Burns.
new conservatives. Interested in social and spiritual values, they followed more the tradition of Coleridge, Goethe, and Eliot than that of Greek rationalism which led to the development of the social sciences. In fact, they openly flouted their hostility to the social science disciplines. Basically they were interested in a way of living, a style of life, a type of society in which man could enjoy the freedom and the capacity to regulate his activities according to his own needs - not simply as a rational being, but as a traditionalist rooted in the history of accustomed forms and habits. Continuity, order, and inequality were the ear-marks of the good society. Democracy was not viewed as an unqualified good.

A new galaxy of heroes appeared in the conservative pages: gone were Jefferson, Paine, Jackson, Mill, Bentham, Marx and Dewey; in were Burke, Coleridge, Disraeli, John Adams, John Randolph, Calhoun, Churchill, Santayana, T. S. Eliot, and Irving Babbitt. The greatest of these was Burke, a man born into a stratified

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society, in many ways still pre-capitalist and anti-democratic; only a few questioned whether the wisdom of Burke was the wisdom of the ages.

The dominant motif which linked the new conservatives was agreement on the age-old controversy over man's nature. In this matter they endeavored to win an unconditional victory. They were alarmed by human excesses as manifested in the world wars, rising divorce rates, juvenile delinquency, and sexual freedom. Responsibility for utopian illusions about man, the blundering into war, the relaxation of standards, and the disenchantment with the past was laid at the feet of liberalism. The emphasis on man's propensity toward evil is the fundamental question which has divided the conservative and the liberal: the conservative view necessitates the concern with form, dogma, codes, regulations - all of which are to be administered or preserved by a select elite of undoubted virtue. It is this elite which must exercise the divine or natural "inner check" - the one key to universal order. In short, the new conservatives appropriated the neo-orthodox view of man and history, hence their numbering of the politically-liberal Reinhold Niebuhr as one of
their own. One of the remarkable effects of the new conservatism was the degree to which it succeeded in breaking down remaining vestiges of nineteenth-century liberal optimism.

When the conservatives spoke of politics, radical democracy was their main target. Many delighted in the fact that the United States was not a pure democracy and reminded their readers that they had a republican form of government, a constitutional democracy. Constitutional checks, judicial precedent, and Congressional discretion all served as checks on the popular will. Man's eternal contract with the Deity and with past and future generations was acknowledged. Thus they held with Burke that the individual acting alone was foolish; only the "species," with time and intuition to serve it, acted right.

The creed of the new conservatism could be found in a host of books published during the late forties and early fifties, including Russell Kirk's *Randolph of Roanoke*, *The Conservative Mind*, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, and *A Program for Conservatives*; Peter Viereck's *Conservatism Revisited*, *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals*, and *Conservatism: From John Adams to Churchill*; Gordon Chalmers' *The Republic and the Person*; Francis Wilson's *The Case for Conservatism*;
John Hallowell's *The Moral Foundations of Democracy*, Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* and *Ethics of Rhetoric*. Daniel Aaron, writing in the *American Quarterly* noted that the new conservatives rejected nineteenth-century Spencerianism. The extreme individualism which found expression in Herbert Spencer has never been a part of philosophical conservatism for that would occasion a fragmentation of society. Aaron also wrote that "Tory Socialism" and openness to the positive state was part of the conservative revival. But this, as we shall see, would be carrying common agreement too far. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. thought that the new conservatism represented the "ethical afterglow of feudalism." While its forms had passed away, a mirage remained which blinded the modern conservatives to present-day realities. An obvious "new" feature of this conservative movement was its "self-professed" character. On few occasions in American history has a group so belligerently called itself conservatives. Even Herbert Hoover and Robert A. Taft did not forsake the term "liberalism" as they understood it.

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The most outspoken and best-known of the self-conscious conservatives were Peter Viereck and Russell Kirk who best represented the two wings of the movement. The fact that the new conservatism had two wings cannot be stressed enough despite the attempt by its liberal critics to fit everyone indiscriminately into a false unity. The group led by Kirk was larger and it included Anthony Harrigan, Richard Weaver, Frederick Wilhelmsen and a number of the regular contributors to William Buckley's National Review. This group generally supported what has been called the autonomous theory of conservatism, holding that certain absolutes, grounded in an acceptance of a divine being, were prerequisites for an ordered society. Much closer to Viereck in temper were Reinhold Niebuhr and Clinton Rossiter. In their case the situational theory of conservatism is more fitting; they were willing to update their body of thought so rapidly that even the recently-enacted New Deal attained prescriptive status, that is, the natural right to be conserved for its own sake.

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Russell Kirk, the leading figure of the new conservatism, was born in 1918 in Plymouth, Michigan. From his father who descended from Scottish farmers,
Kirk early acquired a bias against technological civilization which became a recurrent theme in his writings. His mother, a descendent of New England puritans, introduced him to American and English literature at an early age. He received his M.A. degree from Duke University in 1941, after having completed a study of John Randolph which was published in 1951 as *Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in Conservative Thought*. He taught at several universities although his first position, at Michigan State College, 1946-1953, was most significant in shaping his ideas; it was there that his animosity toward "intellectuals" and Deweyite professors developed. He left the school because of resentment against students and administrators who he said had read nothing of importance and did not intend to. Kirk, who now shares an old house with a great-aunt in Mecosta, Michigan (one of his visible links with the past) has described himself as an eccentric Republican and a pre-Reformation Christian. His books and articles reveal a spirit more congenial to the Middle Ages - for which he has great admiration - than to modern civilization.

Among his many writings, *The Conservative Mind* (1953) stands as the major contribution to the conservative revival of the fifties. During the first two
years it sold 20,000 copies in hard cover, before the paperback edition was published. His debt to Edmund Burke and Irving Babbitt can hardly be over-emphasized. In many ways, Kirk was reiterating for the fifties what Babbitt had said three decades earlier. In The Conservative Mind, Kirk listed six canons of conservative thought:

(1) "Belief that a divine intent rules society;" (2) love of variety and tradition; (3) conviction that a "civilized society requires orders and classes"; (4) belief in the inseparable connection between property and freedom; (5) faith in prescription; (6) recognition of the necessity of slow, conserving, organic change.

When Kirk turns from principles to society, however, we encounter a strange conservatism. If one of the functions of conservatism - indeed the chief function, according to the situational definition - is to rationalize the existing institutional arrangements of society in terms of God, nature, and man, then one may entertain doubts about the "conservatism" of Kirk's position. For he is essentially an alienated man, who

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in the end displays a forced optimism which carries little persuasive force. Scattered through his writings one sees America described as "sterile," "near to suicide," "purgatorial," a world which has "clutched at Rousseau, swallowed him whole." "Whirl is King" in "this world of slime;" "things [industrialism, centralization, secularism, the leveling impulse] are in the saddle," he says with Emerson "and ride mankind." The revolt of the masses had manufactured a civilization bent upon the "uglification" of its life styles ("intent upon reducing any surviving gentlemen to the condition and manners of proletarians") and even of its physical being. Note, said Kirk, the "disheartening contempt for station, and age, and sex, and character," the "literal degradation of the democratic dogma" which could be seen at "the Capitol at Washington," on "every city bus," and everywhere. The presumptuous man, spurred by "the gutter press and the diminished influence of the religious concepts of hierarchy and veneration" may ultimately bring down American civilization.  

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in his invective but it bore little relationship to Edmund Burke who had written so lovingly about the cattle under the British oak or about the happiness of people in their "little platoons" engaged in the business of living. Burke had defended something which existed; Kirk repudiated his world.

A good deal of the difference between Kirk and his English mentor lies in the conflicting pragmatic and teleological strains in Burke's thought. In spite of his belief in a providential order, Burke's relativism permitted him to argue that the customs of any given culture attained self-validation with the passage of time: what was natural for England might not be so for France, or India, or the United States. This belief did not conflict with providential purpose, in fact it explained it. Kirk would have none of this: the pragmatic temper was simply the "cancer of our intellect."¹⁰ But Kirk never mentioned Burke's pragmatism.

If the modern world was going through a spiritual time of troubles, what was wrong? In Ideas Have Consequences (a book for which Kirk had high praise) Richard Weaver emphasized man's follies in history and

found the source of "the dissolution of the West" in "the defeat of logical realism" during its medieval conflict with nominalism. To summarize, Weaver saw the consequences as follows. The nominalism of William of Occam - the stress on particulars in the search for truth - displaced the emphasis on the transcendent universals of realism and opened up the natural universe to human study. The tendency to stress perceived phenomena - the objects of the senses - side-tracked man's intellectual and spiritual development. The universals discovered by the intellect were disavowed and individuals came to see themselves as willful creators of values, capable of liberty, but oppressed by the medieval social structures of church, family, and community. The decline in the organic sense of oneness with nature undermined authority and subverted social hierarchy; ultimately, man himself could partake of the divine essence by discovering the rational principles on which the universe was founded. This inexorable march of human pride in quest of full knowledge emerged in modern times in the French Revolution, Marxian materialism, philosophical positivism, and behavioral

psychology. In brief, every man became his own "professor of ethics" ushering in moral idiocy and spiritual suicide.\textsuperscript{12} These were the consequences of a wrong "idea."

Although Kirk applauded this interpretation he did not usually go back as far - seldom beyond the French Revolution. In an essay "The Problem of Social Boredom" he found an early cause of modern discontents in David Riesman's "inner-directed" man and felt that the rise and decline of this social type closely paralleled the high noon and decay of political liberalism, to which he assigned the period 1832 (when the British constitution was "subverted") to the outbreak of World War I.\textsuperscript{13} The inner-directed man believed that reason, not tradition, was a sufficient guide in matters of morals and politics. It was an optimistic faith but developments proved him wrong. Even the educational system which gave man the ability to evaluate and form rational decisions passed away. The inner-directed man's ideals shattered, social boredom - "a repudiation of purpose in life" - ensued and humankind was threatened by "a will to annihilation which lies below the level of consciousness." Thus Kirk in his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 1-8.
\item \textsuperscript{13}Kirk, A Program for Conservatives, p. 112.
\item \textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 113.
\end{itemize}
historical explanation displayed an obvious contradiction: he continued to attack the presumed rationality - the "metaphysic sophistry" - of contemporary liberals while at the same time noting that man no longer had the capacity for rational decision-making. But then, as Granville Hicks noted in his review of Beyond the Dreams of Avarice, Kirk had a way "of not getting things quite right."  

Whereas Riesman had seen the "other-directed" man as restricted to the new middle class, Kirk extended the concept to the proletariat; that is, to all those divorced from tradition - rootless social atoms, "without enduring convictions, without true home, without true family, without community, ignorant of the past and careless of future generations." It is this man who hailed the totalitarian leaders and viewed in callous unconcern the atrocities of total war. He acted so because his life was devoid of all meaning; consequently, his despair led him "to urge humanity to commit suicide." The proletarian mass-man had been told by the liberals that he had rights; this was a mistake,

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16 Ibid., 114.
17 Ibid., 115.
said Kirk, and it only made him want more. Actually the mass-man longed for leadership and when he found that he could not handle rights without duties, he turned in hopelessness to totalitarianism. It is important to note the historical interpretations of the conservative because it reflects the total commitment he makes to tradition and hierarchy as constituting the most important means of preventing social chaos. It also reflects his judgment that most men, left to themselves, eventually commit some sort of suicide. If William of Occam had not questioned universals, if the men of science had not searched for explanations of themselves, then modern man could rest in the tranquility of a tradition-oriented society of free men, submissive to the will of God. Whatever this was, it was not new.

Kirk's solution to degenerate mass culture was identical with that of the new humanists: he agreed with Paul Elmer More that the most urgent political problem was "to persuade victorious democracy that it must resurrect aristocracy."¹⁸ The aristocrat could be produced only by a liberal education which would

teach men the universal desirability of re-creating the discarded hierarchical systems of earlier centuries. And, as Burke said, "the ascent to power and distinction ought not to be made too easy."

Believing as most conservatives do that the only lasting changes are those which result from a reform of heart and mind, Kirk defended censorship in reading and education. He did not advocate the same degree of freedom for the life of the mind as for the economic world. A market place for ideas was a dangerous thing. If one needed the traffic lights of law in the world of everyday behavior, how much more so were guidelines needed to regulate the life of the mind. Censorship in itself, said Kirk, was neither good nor bad, but depended upon the ends for which it was used. Since most individuals were incapable of exercising self-censorship, someone concerned with moral standards must assume this function.

During the McCarthy period in which the


20 Ibid., 71.

State Department's overseas libraries were attacked and books burned, Kirk was "not much alarmed;" nor should professors be permitted to voice opinions which threatened the delicate social fabric. University trustees and administrators had a duty to intervene and protect the younger, more flexible minds from contamination. 22 In the end, those who stressed a degree of freedom which no society could tolerate, based their arguments on the relativistic assumption that, after all, no enduring moral standards exist; that every man ought to follow his own humor; and that vagaries of private opinion and taste will not be followed by any lamentable social consequences. 23

On the level of practical politics, Kirk's opinions did not much differ from the pronouncements of the National Association of Manufacturers. He cited as the philosopher's stone, John Randolph's statement at the Virginia Convention of 1829-1830, "that it was always unwise - yes - highly unwise, to disturb a thing that was at rest." 24 Such was the "essence" of

22 Ibid., 162. Cf. Viereck's fear of censorship ("academic freedom is as fragile as it is indispensable. Hands off!" p. 294) in Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals, Section Ten, pp. 281-309.

23 Ibid., 121.

Randolph's political wisdom. Accordingly, Kirk opposed most positive legislation, higher taxes, centralization in government, social security ("a deadening collectivism masked as liberal humanitarianism"), and the school-lunch program because "it may be cited as a precedent for every form of centralization."25 Universal suffrage was a dangerous experiment and was "kept within limits only by the Providential law that the number of fools in opposite factions usually is in balance."26

To point up the vast differences within the new conservatism, it is instructive to note that Peter Viereck accepted most of the New Deal as prescriptive while Kirk still held deep reservations about the English Reform Bill of 1832. To Kirk, the enfranchisement of the English middle class disclosed a utilitarian spirit devoid of true utility.27 Clinton Rossiter declared that


27Ibid., pp. 150-151.
Russell Kirk sounded very much like "a man born one hundred and fifty years too late and in the wrong country." 28

Kirk's dilemma was his inability to legitimize an aristocracy in a democratic society. 29 The majority of people, in conservative opinion, are mediocre in abilities; left to themselves, they continually court disaster. To resolve the dilemma, Kirk ultimately referred the problem not to history or to any given principle, but to God. Kirk was not really interested in the study of the development of institutions in history; he used history to fit his needs. God assigned stations in life and was the author of a design, commonly inscrutable, which nevertheless had to be sought in order to bring political structures into harmony with it. Why God refused to admit of any real change in assigned stations, Kirk did not make clear – unless it was to promote the conservative ideal of harmony. It


was God's action in history which enveloped the past, the present, and future generations into a continuity of existence. And indeed, if this be true, it would, Kirk said, be foolish and presumptuous to tinker with it.  

What might a conservative such as Kirk hope for America? Consistency would have necessitated considerable pessimism if not despair. Tradition and custom in the United States was seriously undercut, he said, by the triumph of modern technology, the ascendency of general literary and secularized schooling, the extreme mobility and fluidity of twentieth-century American society, the disappearance of many elements of authority and class, and the diffusion of positivistic ideas.  

But in a chapter entitled "The Promise of American Conservatism" he declared that what had been retained remained "immensely greater than what had been forfeited." Conservatism was "not conquered;" three times British Socialism had "grown sick of itself,"

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positivism "succumbed to its own absurdities," Marxism was never a serious threat to America. Henry Wallace "was repudiated by his former admirers," and now that the ranks of radicalism are decimated,... conservatism has such an opportunity for regaining ground as it has not seen since that day when modern radicalism issued its challenge to traditional society by decorating 'this hell-porch of a Hotel de Ville' with human heads on pikes.33

Perhaps, as Kirk once wrote, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."34

* * *

On the other wing of the new conservatism stands the poet-aristocrat, Peter Viereck. Viereck was born in 1916 in New York City and received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard, where he also taught history and literature in 1946-1947. He was highly successful in both these disciplines, having received Guggenheim Fellowships in history and literature and the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1949. He spent time abroad as a visiting professor in American poetry at the University of Florence, Italy, in 1955, and as United States State Department cultural exchange poet to the Soviet Union in 1961. He was also in Russia in

33 Ibid., pp. 521-523.
34 Ibid., p. 271.
1962 as the recipient of the Twentieth Century Fund travel and poetry research grant. Since 1948 he has been a professor of history and literature at Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts. His writings have ranged widely from modern European, Russian and American history and culture to extensive volumes of poetry.

Viereck's *Conservatism Revisited* (1949) is the first book which explicitly called for a new conservatism. Viereck was interested in definition: the new conservatism, he wrote, may best be defined as "the rediscovery of values."\(^{35}\) Conservatism had to be taken away from conservatives: it was non-commercial, non-Republican, non-conformist; it had no connection with the cash-nexus vulgarities of popular mythology.\(^{36}\)

Conservatism, said Viereck in another place, was "the political secularization of the doctrine of original sin."\(^{37}\) Politics plays a conservative role along with

\(^{35}\)Viereck, *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals*, p. 245.

\(^{36}\)Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited* (New York: The Free Press, rev. ed., 1962), p. 123. In *Shame and Glory*, Viereck defined the new conservatism as "a fresh and creative traditionalism - never admires the past passively in sterile escapism. It must daily and actively re-experience, as if for the first time, the aspirations of the past - and then fulfill them in the future." p. 249.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 47.
the churches in taming the natural man and fitting him for life in society. The conservative was never taken in (as once the liberal was) by the fiction of the Noble Savage. He knew that the gap between the cave man and the pacified man had to be bridged by men who were cognizant of the seriousness of the business of civilization. The difference between the conservative and liberal, therefore, was primarily psychological, not economic. Their ends might be similar, but the spirit in which they were sought, quite different. In practical life it meant that the true conservative could be equally at home in either of the major political parties for often the conservative discovered that those who best reconciled traditions and necessary change were found in the Democratic party.

In his writings, Viereck exhibited two radical differences with Kirk and most other conservatives. First, he repudiated the necessity of an aristocratic class. Such a class was natural and desirable for most countries, declared Viereck, but not for America. It would lack "rootedness" and any attempt to produce such a class would be doomed to failure. "Today," Viereck explained, "what is precious is not the aristocratic class, increasingly anachronistic and functionless, but the aristocratic spirit" - a spirit
characterized by "dutiful public service, insistence on equality and standards, the decorum and ethical inner check of noblesse oblige" - open to men of all stations in life.\textsuperscript{38} Elsewhere he defined the aristocratic spirit which sustains democracy as "whatever conserves not real-estate values, but real values, not gold standards but cultural standards."\textsuperscript{39}

Despite his explicit disavowal of an inherited aristocracy, Viereck was still elitist. The intellectuals were the most important of the groups which made up society for it was their function to educate and set standards. They were the sensitive "ethical Geiger counters," the "social arbiters" who called all men to nobility of spirit. Their message was that all citizens might become aristocrats and thus acquire the ability to distinguish value from price and happiness from hedonism. The road to aristocracy was not to be made difficult, as Kirk said should always be the case; an aristocrat was an aristocrat whether the ascent was easy or difficult.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 38.

\textsuperscript{39}Viereck, \textit{Shame and Glory}, p. 252.
Secondly, Viereck differed from Kirk and orthodox conservatism on the value he attached to reason. Reason, as Viereck understood it, was the central hallmark of civilized man; it was the disciplining agent which reconciled freedom and order. Not until the authority of reason was undermined - the revolt against reason - were the twentieth-century catastrophes possible. No matter how much the lamp of reason may flicker, "the fact that reason is so frail and vulnerable makes its stubborn persistence all the more heroic; a vindication of the spirit of man." To revolt against it is to court the danger of ending up "in lynch law and Dachau." Rational man is free man - free from the bondage of impulse. Viereck's faith in reason and opposition to the concept of an aristocratic class, when linked with ethical passion, gave a peculiar power to his variety of conservatism.

It is the latter - the ethical fervor, the reaffirmation of values - which stands as the major

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40 Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 46.

The contribution of Peter Viereck. *Conservatism Revisited*, *The Unadjusted Man* and especially *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals* are deeply moral books. The sources are two. First, Viereck's understanding of the modern history of Europe since 1870: it was the history of a power-worshiping, three-generation assault on the two-thousand-year-old Western value system. Three non-political revolutions - the ethical, territorial, and industrial - worked a transformation on Western civilization. Of the three, the revolution in ethics from humanity through nationalism and on to beastiality was the most significant. The challenge to the Western heritage of individual ethics with universal validity came from Bismarckian nationalism and Marxian socialism which had as a common denominator the resort to force. National power and proletarian man became the ultimate criteria of right and wrong.

Europe was engaged in the effort of taming the new revolutionary forces, of absorbing the best from each, and extending some political liberties when

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World War I broke out - "the worst single catastrophe in human history." Since the world wars prolonged the assault on Western values, the shift to blood and iron politics and an exclusively ends-centered code of ethics were the major challenges facing America at mid-century.

The second source of Viereck's concern for values lay in his irritation with the flirtation of American intellectuals with communists during the depression years. To represent the alleged moral shabbiness of liberalism, Viereck created a third-generation Babbitt, a liberal progressive who made a new conformism out of non-conformity. Essentially a "philistine," he nevertheless despised the term. He was chic, thought it "smart to be left," and read the Nation to discover

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43 Ibid., p. 84. Viereck saw this war as the greatest catastrophe because it brought to an end Europe's apparently successful absorption of new revolutionary forces, it wrecked economic and social institutions, and it paved the way for the Fascist and Bolshevik totalitarian revolutions. Although the horrors of the second world war were numerically greater, there was at that time "much less freedom and decency left to destroy than in 1914." pp. 84-85.

44 Ibid., Section Two, "The Table Talk of Gaylord Babbitt," pp. 16-35.
what was "in" — what to say, what to oppose. Thoroughly emancipated from all medieval superstitions and a devotee of "good causes," he found it impossible to summon up the moral resources to oppose Stalinist communism; he was only non-communist, not anti-communist. That was his shame — the failure to stand up against the Stalinist version of totalitarianism with the same degree of urgency as he had opposed the Hitlerite version ("the glory of the intellectuals"). Liberalism, in Viereck's eyes was bankrupt; it had succumbed to the dogmas of pragmatism, cultural relativism, and economic determinism — none of which provided a basis for value judgments. The following quotation best states his criticism of contemporary liberalism:

Now listen carefully, you logical positivists, you progressive educators: this is the Katyn-Belsen decade; it matters to us deeper than tears whether our civilization lives or dies; we need help, and its no-go telling us again and again — waiting in that line at Katyn together, it's no-go your telling us with a superior bored patience — that concepts like "ethics," "absolutes," "values," "human dignity," "tragedy," and "death" are incorrect, amateurish semantics or have been "replaced" by non-Aristotelian logic. 45

The liberal fallacy, said Viereck, was the belief that totalitarianism was the opposite of naturalistic relativism, when in fact it was its consequence. To sustain sanity and to maintain freedom it was necessary to go beyond the presumed neutrality of the social sciences in their study of man and society. It would be necessary to go to school with value-affirming individuals such as the Italian liberal and anti-Mussolini leader Gaetano Salvemini, who maintained that "our civilization will break down if the school fails to teach the incoming generation that there are some things that are not done." 46

In economics, too, Viereck believed that the world would have to understand the "economic necessity of anti-materialism." "Pure pragmatism is unpragmatic; it won't work." 47 If economists and scholars sought only to see what would work in a materialistic culture while at the same time ideals and human values atrophied - why, what was so pragmatic about that? Values had to be discovered anew, not obtained second-hand as men, their thoughts dominated by money, simply selected among economically-efficient alternatives.

46 Ibid., p. 191.
47 Ibid., p. 36.
As trenchant as his criticism was, dangers existed in such passion. The tendency toward absolutism showed itself again and again. Differing again with Kirk, Viereck stated in *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals* that human rights were absolute and thus the American foreign policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the totalitarian communist powers was immoral and risky. "Heartless are those who prefer 'containment' to liberation." Viereck, in his academic cloister, was free to say this but it differed in no way from Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' liberationist view that one could not achieve any real harmony with a morality-denying communist power.

Perhaps it was Viereck's respect for reason which guided his strongly-held convictions into moderate channels. He was at his best when attempting the reconciliation of opposites in order to render them compatible with American equalitarian and democratic ideas. Reason balanced, supplemented, and synthesized divergent ideas and modes of behavior. Whereas Kirk had seen great danger in the libertarian tendencies of John Stuart Mill, Viereck felt that he had been an

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important supplement to Burke. Where others had seen irreconciliable conflicts between aristocracy and democracy, Viereck merged democratic forms with the aristocratic spirit. A cultured aristocracy and political democracy—such was the basis of freedom. The long-acquired wisdom of the conservative, Viereck balanced with the quick and sensitive mind of the liberal. Although communism and fascism seemed on the surface to be on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, "communazism" represented different variations on the same theme: both despaired of universal moral codes. Both had stressed Coleridgian organic unity too much in favor of the State-is-all "Third Rome" of Russia and the folk-romanticism of Hitler. The United States had erred on the side of "the whole is nothing" distortions of Manchester liberalism. 49 Viereck seemed to suggest that among all things mortal, constant conflict, tension, and eventual fusion existed which gave man elan and creative power.

To meet the Soviet threat from abroad, Viereck wanted the liberal-conservative center to unite against the extremes of both left and right. Kirk, on the other

49 Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 134-135.
hand, had put an inseparable dividing line between liberals and conservatives. The liberals were part of the left political continuum which led to totalitarianism while the conservatives were on a separate continuum which stressed religion and moral values.

It was the ability to harmonize which explained Viereck's enthusiastic acceptance of social reform and thus much of the New Deal. He compared it with the Tory socialism of Randolph Churchill and the Tory democracy of Disraeli. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a crypto-conservative who, while denounced as socialistic, prevented class war and made capitalism palatable by giving competing economic groups a stake in society. That psychological achievement, more than the economic security produced, was the major contribution of the New Deal. Viereck felt that Kirk's condemnation of social security and the minimum-wage law was crying wolf where none existed. The conservative need not oppose economic security, particularly the relatively-moderate New Deal measures, although it did at times produce surface conformities. To suggest a proper perspective,

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he quoted Henri Bergson: "Allow me to furnish the interior of my head as I please, and I shall put up with a hat like everybody else's."\(^{51}\) The "increasingly conservatized New Deal liberalism" had become "too deeply rooted in American life as a whole to let itself be uprooted."\(^{52}\)

Viereck wholeheartedly accepted the thesis of Frank Tannenbaum's *A Philosophy of Labor* (1952) that trade unionism was "the conservative force of our time."\(^{53}\) Unconsciously the trade unions had created a new organic unity which de-atomized the proletariat and presented itself as the alternative to both the authoritarian and the laissez-faire state.\(^{54}\) Conservatism had to find


\(^{54}\) See Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives*, p. 151. Kirk objected to the Tannenbaum thesis. If the labor movement was to achieve what Tannenbaum suggested, Kirk said, it would be by accident, for they wanted something quite different. Kirk saw unions as "obsessed with nineteenth-century economic theories, and have sought only to obtain more pay for their members, not to bring them pride of work, variety of occupation, free association, permanence, and tranquility."
roots in the factories and trade unions of America. Once again this reflected Viereck's role as a harmonizer adept at the balancing of interests so essential to conservatism but too often not achieved. The New Deal made concrete Burke's warning that "A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation." Viereck predicted that the year 1933 - symbolizing humane, value-conserving reform - would some day attain "the same ancient and sacred aura...that 1688 has occupied for British conservatives like Burke and Churchill." The inauguration of Roosevelt would be hailed as Burke had hailed the coming of William III: not a revolution but "a revolution averted."

The nimble-minded Viereck had thus achieved a synthesis of philosophical conservatism and political liberalism. If indeed Viereck was not a liberal he was a very eloquent fellow-traveler who defended liberal causes. In academic life, he had partners in Reinhold Niebuhr and Clinton Rossiter. In public life, Viereck

55Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 156.

56Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 235.
thought the combination was best represented in Adlai Stevenson. Liberal sentiments and the conservative sense of human frailty: this would be the new shared framework for conservatives and liberals alike.

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Looking at the new conservatism in a broader context we may note a number of problems. When thinking of the cyclical pattern of liberalism and conservatism in the United States, the conservative revival might be seen as a natural and useful interlude between the New - Fair Deals of the thirties and forties and the "New Frontier" and "Great Society" of the sixties. That some sort of consolidation should have taken place after a period of rapid domestic reform and world war was natural. That American society had abuses is all too obvious. But what was new in the recent conservatism? Considering Kirk, Weaver, and the movement as a whole, the answer would have to be simply "nothing." After all, what was new about resurrecting the new humanists or in adoring hierarchy, the middle ages, and God; what was new about opposing science, modern education, the mediocre-to-bad popular communications networks, and "sentimental humanitarianism?" The new humanists and southern agrarians had agreed on
every point. It is true that few of the new conservatives were apologists for the business interests, but then few conservative intellectuals in the past thirty years have been.

It was contradictory for Kirk to declare himself a "new" conservative when he declared that conservative truths were immutable. If Burke loved prescription, an organic society, and aristocracy, and Kirk echoed these as true and desirable, despite the institutional, technological and economic changes which have occurred since, then it would be erroneous to call Kirk's ideas new. It appears that Kirk was much more interested in resurrecting a highly selective intellectual tradition than in conserving modern institutions and in so doing, he showed himself to be a master of the art of gerrymandering history. Appropriate quotations are taken from selected individuals and fashioned into "the conservative tradition." Kirk was more rootless than the "rootless proletariat" who frightened him so. Thus he did not differ much from the southern agrarians who in despair of organic roots sought refuge in nostalgia.

Neither Viereck nor Kirk gave any basis for deciding when certain arrangements and practices become prescriptive. It is pure obscurantism for Kirk to jump
from God to history without telling us his technique. Again and again he declares that "only acceptance of a divine order can give enduring freedom to a community" but one searches in vain for help in detecting that order or what he means by God. Is God a principle, an ideal, a first cause, a personality? Ultimately he equates God's will with prescription without telling us fully how he comes to recognize prescriptive institutions. There were other traditions which Kirk could have cited: the mass search for a higher standard of living, the quest for political freedom and the secularization of modern culture.

In Viereck's case the problem is just as difficult. Viereck accepted reforms as "Revolution-preventing" (New Deal, English Reform Bill of 1832); no one would venture to argue with that. But are reforms desirable only at such times? Is change justified only because it could have been worse if strongly opposed? If such is the case (and he gives us no other criterion for deciding) then the idea of harmony must sound most callous in a world in which most of the inhabitants are

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57 Kirk, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, p. 177.
struggling for the simple freedoms won so long ago by the Anglo-Americans. Viereck seemed too often to ask what might have been rather than what could be.

But Viereck is a poet, not a political theorist. He himself felt it necessary to write off the new conservatism as a failure. In the revised and enlarged edition of *Conservatism Revisited* (1962), he saw its main defect as the "rootless nostalgia for roots." It was of no use to apply Burke, Metternich, and de Maistre wholesale to America. American conservatism had to find roots in its native land. Moreover, Kirk had failed the acid test of McCarthyism by remaining silent during that threat of a thought-controlling nationalism. Following that, he had jumped on the bandwagon of Goldwater-Manchester liberalism in clear violation of his own principles. There was every indication that the new conservatism itself had become a victim of the smugness that once was thought to characterize only liberalism.

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59 Ibid., p. 140.
CHAPTER VII

CONSERVATISM AND THE AMERICAN LIBERAL TRADITION

Peter Viereck, in bemoaning the rootless nostalgia for roots and the traditionless worship of tradition, touched on the basic problem of conservatives - an inorganic, unhistorical view of history. The thesis presented here is that American conservatism has consistently negated one of its own axioms, the belief that institutions must grow naturally, organically, out of the soil of history. The reasons for this inconsistency lie in the unique nature of American history.

The salient themes of the cultural conservatives whom we have considered converge on the quest for societal harmony made possible by the deliberate inculcation of a value system emphasizing restriction of desires.¹ The humanist search for an inner check,

¹Morton Auerbach's thesis that societal harmony and minimization of desires lie at the heart of genuine conservatism appears to be valid. See his book, The Conservative Illusion (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). A perceptive and critical study, although it defines conservatism so narrowly that it could never hope to exist again.
the agrarian defense of the inviolability of nature, and Russell Kirk's strictures on lust for innovation fed by the dreams of avarice, were all of one piece. All agreed that men, deluded by visions of mastery, sought a degree of sovereignty over the historical process which God or nature did not intend to be theirs. In the prideful attempt to become willful creators, to realize a destiny determined by mind and not history, men uprooted themselves from the forms of custom and prescription, sacrificing thereby all possibility of meaningful living. This led the new humanists and the southern agrarians to divest science and its epiphenomenon, industrialism, of any positive and causative relationship with human betterment. Industrialism and rationality in thought produced democracy and destroyed social distinctions. As a result, there was not more, but less freedom for the individual. Not only were men not free; they were alienated from their true selves by the processes of industrialism and the exchange economy. Their own barbarization proceeded to the degree that they accustomed themselves to seeing others as objects of manipulation. Yet a conservative paradox appeared: despite reservations which philosophical conservatives
have had about capitalist techniques of enterprise, their fear of attacking property often lead them to defend the economic status quo.

This aristocratic critique of American culture closely parallels Ortega y Gasset's theory of the mass-man in which rude barbarians pre-empted the roles of the select and cultured minority. The mass-man felt himself to be like everyone else, he acknowledged no vetos on behavior, and he imposed his self-confessed vulgarity on everyone and everything around him with a feeling, not of shame, but of arrogant disrespect. He was interested only in the techniques of social and industrial manipulation, not in their meaning. The pressures of plenitude - population increase, economic abundance, the consciousness of having attained an advanced level of existence - lifted the average man to positions of power more rapidly than he could be civilized - not that Gasset believed the mass-man to be interested in cultural refinement even if confronted with the possibility. Civilization was simply moving into a stage in which the mass-man was to be the norm.  

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For all the assurance with which this view is stated, one is inclined to question the validity of the conservative critique of modern culture. What support does the aristocratic theory of society find in the American past? Does it describe accurately the course of American intellectual development?

If Americans can be called conservatives, it is only because they have been intent on conserving liberalism - for America is a nation in which liberal values have predominated. While the principles of conservatism were being laid down in Europe, the Americans could boast of having rejected the concept of an established church, of having leaped over most feudal encumbrances, and of having forgotten the virtues of noble birth. Nothing has so undercut the conservative position in the United States as the existence of material abundance and the repudiation of the principle of status which Burke recognized as the foundation of the ordered society. Enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the constitution (which was produced in a most un-Burkean manner) are the "self-evident truths" of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, equalitarian
values and the principle of rule by the consent of the governed.\(^3\) A rational method - the ballot rather than kings, government, history, the church or an elite - was devised for settling differences. The impersonal mechanism of the polls made the common man the American hero. These values and techniques - secured under a federal system of government - were, and are today, liberal principles. Indeed the history of federalism has created considerable confusion in liberalism-conservatism controversies. The politics of federalism has produced remarkable inconsistencies on the part of major political parties: Federalists, Jacksonians, Republicans, and Democrats have at one time or another placed national perogatives over states' rights.

Louis Hartz has argued that the fundamental attitudes of the nation towards man and society were brought over by bourgeois settlers in the seventeenth century, that the basic traditions were liberal from

\(^3\)In light of the recent trend to convert the Founding Fathers and the Constitution into examples of classic conservatism, it is instructive to recall that the Constitution was a new document rather than a Burkean repair of the Articles. The decision, furthermore, that the approval of nine states (rather than the unanimity required by the Articles) constituted consent was little short of revolutionary.
the very beginning. Lacking a reactionary party, the country needed no radical socialist party to defend the claims of the disinherited. The sole absolutism which emerged was "the sober faith that its norms were self-evident." Consequently, the Americans became the great exemplars of consensus politics in the Western world. No matter how monotonous the lack of a Left-Right dichotomy in national politics has been, "our national well-being," to quote Daniel Boorstin, lies "in inverse proportion to the sharpness and extent of the theoretical differences between our political parties." Boorstin

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The rise of American democracy, with its radical expansion of the small liberal, its popular activism, and its simplification of political culture, is traceable in the end to a bourgeois trip that was taken in the seventeenth century which everyone has forgotten. p. 50.


suggests that the genius of American politics can be found in the "givenness" of our institutions and in the "preformation ideal" which lies rooted in the national consciousness. That is to say that certain fully-developed ideas were believed to have existed in the minds of the Founding Fathers. The skeleton of American destiny was always there; time and an invisible hand would fill out the body.

Illustrations of the homogeneity of American politics can be drawn from both the early years of the Republic and more recent times. Compare George Dangerfield writing of the "Era of Good Feelings" - "Almost every man called himself a Jeffersonian Republican in those days, and political conflicts on a national scale were apt to be conflicts between personalities and not between principles or programs," - with the "me-tooism" of the Kennedy-Nixon debates of 1960. In playing down conflict in American history, Hartz and Boorstin reflected the conservative mood of the fifties. Boorstin contended

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7Ibid., pp. 10-16.

in The Genius of American Politics that "our history has fitted us, even against our will, to understand the meaning of conservatism." Boorstin described them as the conservatives of the Western world. Even Jefferson is portrayed as a conservative lawyer whose "tenacious conservatism" is visible at every turn. But conservatives are not created by fiat.

Hartz, too, in attempting to show that American liberalism had become a static, irrational Lockeanism, believed that Americans were becoming increasingly conservative. Both Hartz and Boorstin in their consensus interpretations saw democracy as inevitable in America but they tended to overlook the elitism of the Federalists, the conflict between large and small states, the nullification ordinances, and later, slavery. Was it inevitable that the first voluntary transfer of power in modern history resulting from a popular election should have been a peaceful one? The consensus interpretation ought not be overdrawn for it portrays freedom

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10Ibid., pp. 82–90.
as something given and not won. Despite America's liberal character, freedom in 1789 was not synonymous with freedom at mid-twentieth century. It took more than a conservative defense of freedom to bring Negroes within the liberal consensus.

The conservative attitude of the Eisenhower years—identifiable by the prominence of such words as suburbia, togetherness, conformity—was documented in diverse circles. Clinton Rossiter drew attention to a pervading air of nostalgia, interest in security over achievement, a less plastic social structure, reduction in inter-class mobility, an increased emphasis on status, and the stabilization of the economy.11 Popularizations and vulgarizations of David Riesman's "other-directed" man and William Whyte's "organization man" contributed to the mood of conservatism.12 Men, stodgy in thought and content with security, sought comfortable places in a bureaucratic hierarchy. They no longer reacted to the promptings of internalized codes of behavior but


instead heeded signals picked up by personal radar systems which scanned the opinions of others who were engaged in a similar intelligence operation. The outwardly energetic, self-determined, and goal-directed man of the nineteenth century was replaced by a vacillating, more malleable person. What it all meant, Riesman said, was that the American value system was changing. The new conservatives picked this up and turned it to their own uses. They took Riesman to mean that America was becoming more conservative, but they deplored conformity, the increasing quest for security, and the decline of the protestant ethic. A consistent Burkean conservatism would have seen hopeful trends in the group-mindedness of the middle class and the sense of organic cohesiveness fostered by the development of a strong labor movement.

In any case, impressive evidence exists that the fifties were only an interlude in an era of reform, much like the twenties. Moreover, "other-directedness" and the quest for security were largely manifestations of the continuing development of the nation's liberal equalitarian values. European observers of the American scene in the nineteenth century wrote of characteristic
American traits that closely paralleled those found by Riesman and Whyte. Harriet Martineau, the English liberal, wrote in *Society in America* (first published in 1837) that the Americans

> may travel over the world, and find no society but their own which will submit to the restraint of personal caution, and reference to the opinions of others. They may travel over the whole world, and find no country but their own where the very children beware of getting into scrapes, and talk of the effect of action upon people's minds; where the youth of society determine in silence what opinions they shall bring forward...and where elderly people seem to lack almost universally the faith in principles which inspires a free expression of them at any time, and under all circumstances.  

Fifty years later James Bryce saw in Americans a "self-distrust, a despondency, a disposition to fall into line, to acquiesce in the dominant opinion." Others confirmed this view. Jane Mesick's study of the reactions of the English traveler in America in the years 1785-1835 concludes that the attribute of the

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American character which was "most frequently noticed.... was the acute sensitiveness to opinion that the average American revealed." This attitude – sensitiveness to opinions of others – defied conservative conceptions of Place. For individuals with such an attitude envision themselves playing a wide variety of roles; the choice is theirs – a freedom absent in tradition-oriented societies.

The American concern for status noted by Rossiter was simply the result of equalitarian values. Tocqueville wrote that

When all the privileges of birth and fortune are abolished, when all professions are accessible to all, and a man's energies may place him at the top of any one of them, an easy and unbounded career seems to open to his ambition and he will readily persuade himself that he is born to no common destinies....the desire of equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete. Equality – politically, economically, socially – meant opportunity because "an easy and unbounded career seems open to his ambition;" thus the ambiguity of class lines

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fostered mobility and individual effort at advancement which is the scourge of conservative societies. ¹⁷

Comprehensive lists of American characteristics and values recently compiled by American writers also suggest the impossibility of finding a genuine conservative tradition in America. Two eminent scholars, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. and Ralph Barton Perry, in works published in the same year, 1949, arrived at nearly identical lists of characteristic American traits.

¹⁷ A George Gallup comparative study of attitudes among highschool students in several Western countries indicates that the achievement motive is high among students in the United States. To the question, "Would you rather be the most popular person in your class or the one who gets the highest grades?", the replies were as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>10 year olds</th>
<th>14 year olds</th>
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George Gallup and Evan Hill, "Is European Education Better Than Ours," The Saturday Evening Post, 233 (December 24, 1960), 70.
Schlesinger's list included the worship of work, individualism, optimism, wasteful living, the acquisitive spirit, vertical and horizontal mobility, equality of opportunity, emphasis on change, the pursuit of pleasure, and higher status accorded to women. Perry, with somewhat different wording selected individualism, optimism ("perpetual and limitless improvement"), worship of success, materialism, achievement, pragmatism, and respect for womanhood. On the basis of polls taken at ten-year intervals during the fifties and sixties, Robert E. Lane found that the historic optimism of Americans has been strengthened by increased affluence. Individuals felt less as victims of chance and in greater control of their lives. A study conducted during World War II by Lee Coleman on traits and values deemed characteristic of Americans in all periods since the founding of the nation as determined from contemporary


and earlier commentators, included all those mentioned by Schlesinger and Perry, plus a good many more. Significantly, Coleman saw "no important differences between the traits mentioned by modern observers and those writings in the earlier periods." In light of the foregoing, Henry Steele Commager's observation that "To the visitors of the seventeen-seventies and the nineteen-forties, to Britons, Frenchmen, Germans and Swedes, America meant much the same thing" appears justified. Significantly, in none of these lists is there any contradiction.

A useful conservative theory of the American society appears to be impossible, yet an attempt has been made by Rowland Berthoff in the April, 1960, issue of the American Historical Review. The gist of his

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For corroborating material see a later study by Arvid Brodersen, "Themes in the Interpretation of America by Prominent Visitors from Abroad," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 295 (September, 1954), 21-32.

thesis is that after the nineteenth-century upheaval of geographical expansion and vast immigration, the American social order was now settling down:

We have in the past thirty years established a society which although still highly mobile, is better integrated than that of the nineteenth century and is in this respect more comparable to that of the eighteenth.²³

We have now become conservative, he said, but the very terminology which is forced upon him refutes his thesis which focuses on the central theme of mobility - that is, the saboteur of the conservative conception of Place. Random words and phrases are "social mobility," "expanding," "leveling force of free land," "restless individualism," "disorderly process," "social and economic leveling of the frontier," "ultraliberal nineteenth century," "robust egalitarianism," "Social disorder," "Social reconstruction," "twentieth-century revolution," "rising capitalists," "disintegration," and "large restless Western population." The vocabulary - devoid of elitism, inheritance, traditionalism, place, order - is hardly that of conservatism however its meaning might be construed.

Assuming that these many views on American values are correct, they provide the explanation for the failure of both conservatism and socialism in America. Because of a fluid society, Americans, propelled by the protestant ethic, were forced to prevent failure through personal actions while in status-ridden societies (in the caste sense) where class lines dulled the sense of personal failure, individuals found it easier to express their discontent through class movements.24

Leon Samson, a socialist writer of the 1930's, distressed by the lack of American enthusiasm for a genuine socialist movement, provided an explanation for socialist failures in the United States which buttresses the thesis that America is a land of liberal, leftist values.25 The American, he said, was an "unconscious socialist." Since the socialist style of thought was


25If American historians need to debate how liberal or conservative America is, Canadian historians leave no doubt on the matter. Frank H. Underhill, past president of the Canadian Historical Association writes as follows:

When we compare ourselves with Britain and the United States there is one striking contrast. Those two countries, since the end of the eighteenth century, have abounded in prophets and philosophers who have made articulate the idea of a liberal and equalitarian society. Their
encased in capitalist forms, Americans advocated a "substitutive" socialism based on democracy, liberty, opportunity, prosperity for all, humanitarianism, equalitarianism and a future-orientation. The national mythology taught that Americans had escaped class systems by coming to the New World, thereby blinding them to any class conflict which did exist. Americans acted as if they already enjoyed the substance of socialist objectives. To suggest that Henry Ford,

political history displays also a succession of practical politicians who have not merely performed the functions of manipulating and maneuvering masses of men and groups which every politician performs, but whose careers have struck the imagination of both contemporaries and descendants as symbolizing certain great inspiring ideas. We in Canada have produced few such figures. Where are the classics in our political literature which embody our Canadian version of liberalism and democracy....For this weakness of the Left in Canada, the ultimate explanation would seem to be that we never had an eighteenth century of our own. The intellectual life of our politics has not been periodically revived by fresh drafts from the invigorating fountain of eighteenth-century Enlightenment.


26 Ibid., pp. 1-90.
Andrew Carnegie and Karl Marx may have been seeking the same ends for man appears at first hand as a dramatic, if unsuccessful, reconciliation of opposites; but if one accepts the premise of "American exceptionalism," and all that the phrase implies, Samson's thesis may have considerable validity.

To sum up, the values and character traits defining America's historical experience are anti-conservative. The quest for modernity was antithetical to conservative assumptions. Infatuated with past ideals of status and aristocratic culture, the new humanists, southern agrarians and the majority of the new conservatives remained blind to the psychological and historical imperatives of modern Western societies. From the beginning, as we have seen, American abundance in land and resources, superimposed upon the liberal climate of opinion, augered ill for the conservative motifs of status and harmony. The status system which lay at the heart of Burkean conservatism was a natural and perhaps necessary arrangement in societies which had yet to enter the take-off period in economic growth and in which power still lay in the land. For land is a conservative force, immobile and productive of a rooted quality in people, quite unlike anything that has ever existed in
Americans. As Russell Kirk has observed, conservatism historically found its loyal members "in the country, where man is slow to break with the old ways that link him with his God in the infinity above and with his father in the grave at his feet." But owning land never meant the same thing for American capitalists as it meant for European peasants. From the first, but most notably since the Civil War, the "Horatio Alger ethos" was dominant and there are few things quite so calculating, so unsettling as the optimistic bourgeois mentality which typifies this ethos. Might it not be said that the continual quest for land or a new enterprise, a higher standard of living, and the perpetual jockeying for position in a new and fluid status system has meant that Americans have never had a sense of settling down, of slowing the pace, of consolidating their gains in the psychological state of status security?

If the "minimization of desires" is accepted as a primary canon of conservative thought, one may see how the very nature of modern capitalism works strongly against it. Witness the incessant whetting of the

appetites, the creation of desires and the encouragement given to human fulfillment which distinguishes the present-day societies of abundance. Progress, not prescription is our guide.

From a purely psychological point of view, the concept of abundance has produced a very optimistic people. As Robert Heilbroner has written, "A philosophy of optimism is an historic attitude toward the future." Americans have always been inclined to see the future as a mirror-image of their past. Since the past is largely seen as one of success, progress, fulfillment, the continued existence and careful cultivation of these phenomena by politicians, the press and the entertainment industry, is akin to programming change into the psychology of the nation. The mood which it produces is not a conservative skepticism about the future, but a liberal, hopeful one which plays on alternatives to existing arrangements. Two world wars, a great depression, and the frustrating experiences of limited war have not appreciably altered American views on the freedom that man has to make history.

Although philosophical conservatism has not found an appropriate American soil in which to grow, it is undeniable that an American Right exists. But the conservatism of the Right draws its strength from the realization that its function is positional as well as substantive in nature. It is pragmatic: it reacts to concrete events; it does not bother much with ideological debate. Babbitt, More, Kirk, Richard Weaver, and the agrarians maintained that they defended values which were eternally and universally valid. In effect, they established a natural law philosophy which contradicted the historic commitment of conservatism to tradition, history, and organicism instead of to rationalism, deductive thought, and universal claims. In the end, Herbert Hoover was much truer to American traditions than were the cultural theorists. His values - democracy, equal opportunity, economic freedom - were taken from the American past. All that liberalism demanded was an extension of these to all segments of society.

Political conservatism since Hoover's presidency has greatly up-dated itself. True, vigorous conservative opposition to the New Deal modified many programs and dampened the enthusiasm of many a New Dealer.
Republican opposition threatened at times to reject all of President Truman's domestic programs. But meanwhile conservatism incorporated the basic objectives of the welfare state and showed little desire to repudiate them during the Eisenhower years. Compare this pragmatic advance with the reactionary thought of Russell Kirk and the contributors to the National Review who have progressed little, if any, beyond the ideas of the new humanists. The pragmatic conservatives, however, have avoided the anti-democratic bias of philosophical conservatism. They saw no need to establish a radical contradiction between material well-being and the good life of culture; nor did they feel encumbered by an ideology preaching the intractable objectivity of historical processes.

In speaking thus, one courts the danger of establishing a simple, non-ideational role for conservatism - a role occasionally implied in the work of Peter Viereck when he speaks of "revolution-preventing" reform. But shorn of all substantive matter, conservatism has no defense and becomes pure reaction. Although conservatism often permits liberalism to initiate reform and seems content to prevent liberalism from spilling over into radicalism, both liberals and conservatives
have coalesced on similar values. One is forced to assert that no left-right dialectic of real consequence exists in American thought. One wing of the consensus, with a greater property orientation, stresses the preservation of inherited values, while the other wing, somewhat less respectful of the sanctity of property rights, stresses the extension of freedom.

While maintaining that pragmatic conservatism has been more responsive to the forces of reform than have the theorists, one ought not overlook hopeful signs in the new conservatism. The Tory Socialism of Peter Viereck, Walter Lippmann and Clinton Rossiter is a genuine advance and reflects the promise of American conservatism. There is some evidence, too, that the liberal method of rational inquiry has made inroads among reflective conservatives. Witness especially Viereck's defense of reason as something to be nurtured and not maligned, his praise of it as the central hallmark of civilized man. Viereck's position balances the traditional tendency of conservatism to seek guidance in history and intuition. Third, the concept of aristocracy, so important to the humanists, has been redefined to signify not wealth and position
but a spirit of responsibility and moderation. As such, it embraces all classes and represents a democratizing influence on conservative thought.

Finally, whether attributable to the influence of conservatism or to the sobering experiences of depression and hot and cold wars, the conservative in the fifties could take heart in the knowledge that liberalism, too, had undergone considerable soul-searching. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s book, *The Vital Center* (1949) furnishes a good example. Schlesinger, reflecting the influence of Reinhold Niebuhr, speaks of the tragic drama of history and of the liberal rediscovery of "the dimension of anxiety, guilt and corruption." The business community, he admitted, held many values in common with liberals. In embracing the cold-war politics of the vital center, Schlesinger anticipated an even further contraction of liberal energies brought about by the controversy over McCarthyism. Conservatism's acceptance of the welfare state during the years following World War II, coupled with liberalism's increasing moderation established a new consensus during the years of Eisenhower's

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presidency. Although this consensus was frustrating for many in both political parties, it did symbolize much of what is meant by the American political tradition.
APPENDIX
### Lippmann's References to Franklin D. Roosevelt (1932-1938)

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