

straight face, Professor Richard Weaver's definition of conservatism as "a paradigm of essences towards which the phenomenology of the world is in continuing approximation"—as noble an effort as any I have ever read. The point is, of course, that we are at the stage dangerously close to mere verbal gambling. I have never failed, I am saying, to dissatisfy an audience that asks the meaning of conservatism.

Yet I feel I know, if not what conservatism is, at least who a conservative is. I confess that I know who is a conservative less surely than I know who is a liberal. Blindfold me, spin me about like a top, and I will walk up to the single liberal in the room without zig or zag and find him even if he is hiding behind the flowerpot. I am tempted to try to develop an equally sure nose for the conservative, but I am deterred by the knowledge that conservatives, under the stress of our times, have had to invite all kinds of people into their ranks to help with the job at hand, and the natural courtesy of the conservative causes him to treat such people not as janissaries, but as equals; and so, empirically, it becomes difficult to see behind the khaki, to know surely whether that is a conservative over there doing what needs to be done, or a radical, or merely a noisemaker, or pyrotechnician, since our ragtag army sometimes moves together in surprising uniformity, and there are exhilarating moments when everyone's eye is right. I have, after all, sometimes wondered whether I am myself a true conservative. I feel I qualify spiritually and philosophically; but temperamentally I am not of the breed, and so I need to ask myself, among so many other things, how much it matters how one is temperamentally. There are other confusions.

Whittaker Chambers, for instance, distinguished sharply between a conservative and a "man of the Right." "You," he wrote me on resigning as an editor of *National Review*, "are a conservative, and I know no one with better title to the word. But I am not one, never was. I call myself, on those occasions when I cannot avoid answering the question, a man of the Right." I reflected on that letter, needless to say, as would you if you were the editor of a journal from which Whittaker Chambers had just withdrawn, and remarked an interesting thing: In the five-year history of the journal, Chambers was the only man to resign from its senior board of editors explicitly because he felt he could no longer move within its ideological compass; and yet he

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

The best-known conservative in twentieth-century American public life, William F. Buckley, Jr. (1925–2008), forged an unmistakable persona out of his patrician upbringing, committed Catholicism, political savvy, and stylish wit to become a celebrated journalist. He founded and edited the journal *National Review*, wrote a widely read syndicated column, and for over three decades hosted the weekly program *Firing Line* on public television, dashing off best-selling novels as a sideline. In this essay, Buckley assesses the several strains of modern American conservatism.

Notes Toward an Empirical Definition of Conservatism

I AM asked most frequently by members of the lecture audience two questions, to neither of which have I ever given a satisfactory answer. The first is asked by those who share my feelings that the world is in crisis and the nation imperiled: "What can I do?" I don't know, and I haven't the stomach to contrive an aphoristic answer. The second question, asked alike by friendly and hostile listeners, is "What is conservatism?" Sometimes the questioner, guarding against the windy evasiveness one comes to expect from lecturers, will add, "preferably in one sentence." On which occasions I have replied, "I could not give you a definition of Christianity in one sentence, but that does not mean that Christianity is undefinable." Usually that disposes of the hopes of those who wish a neatly packaged definition of conservatism which they can stow away in their mind alongside (or replacing?) the definitions of astrology, necrophilia, xenophobia, and philistinism. Those who are obstinate I punish by giving, with a

never wrote a piece for us (or in the last dozen years of his life, that I know of, for anyone else) that was out of harmony with the thrust of *National Review's* position.

Oh, yes, people withdraw, and write and denounce you, and swear green grass will never grow over your grave on account of this or that offensive article or editorial or book review; but these losses are merely a part of the human attrition of outspoken journalism. They prove nothing, in our case, that has anything to do with ideological fecklessness. What I am saying is that notwithstanding the difficulty in formulating the conservative position, and the high degree of skepticism from our critics before *National Review* was launched, *National Review's* position was, I believe, instantly intelligible, from the very first issue. *He would probably say that anyway* (the skeptic will charge), *it being in his and the journal's interest to say so*. But I make that statement on empirical grounds, as I propose to make others in this essay on the meaning of conservatism, which will reason a posteriori from the facts to the theory—and which will be based exclusively on my own experiences as editor of *National Review*. Since I shall not allude to it again, let me say so now unambiguously: This essay is about the experiences of *National Review* and their bearing, by the processes of exclusion, on a workable definition of contemporary conservatism. I do not by any means suggest that *National Review* is the only functioning alembic of modern conservatism, merely that it is the only one whose experiences I can relate with any authority, and that its experiences may be interesting enough to be worth telling.

Roughly the same group of men, representing the same vested interests in certain ideas and attitudes, continue to be the major participants in *National Review*. The magazine found instantly and expanded an audience which seemed intuitively to grant and to understand the happy eclecticism of the magazine's guiding ideas; whereas the critics, whose delighted line at the beginning was one or another variant on the theme: "This country needs a conservative magazine, and having read *National Review*, we still say what this country needs is a conservative magazine," finally, except for the bitter-enders, gave up, and began to refer to *National Review* as, plain and simple, a "conservative journal." Others, who, as I say, refuse to give up, will continue to refer to it only after a ritualistic pejorative: "the McCarthyite *National Review*," "the ultrarightist *National Review*," etc. But it being so that

in language the governing law is usage, it is by now predictable that those who feel Peter Viereck or Clinton Rossiter or Walter Lippmann are the true architects of American conservatism are bound to enter the ranks of eccentricity, like the right-wing gentlemen who, because they continue to insist on referring to themselves as "liberals," have difficulty communicating with the rest of the world, which for two generations now has understood liberalism to mean something else, beginning, roughly, from the time Santayana observed that the only thing the modern liberal is concerned to liberate is man from his marriage contract.

Since this is to be an empirical probe, based, apologetically, on my personal experience as editor of *National Review*, I shall speak about people and ideas with which *National Review* has had trouble making common cause. In 1957, Whitaker Chambers reviewed *Atlas Shrugged*, the novel by Miss Ayn Rand wherein she explicates the philosophy of "Objectivism," which is what she has chosen to call her creed. Man of the right, or conservative, or whatever you wish to call him, Chambers did in fact read Miss Rand right out of the conservative movement. He did so by pointing out that her philosophy is in fact another kind of materialism—not the dialectical materialism of Marx, but the materialism of technocracy, of the relentless self-server, who lives for himself and for absolutely no one else, whose concern for others is explainable merely as an intellectualized recognition of the relationship between helping others and helping oneself. Religion is the first enemy of the Objectivist, and after religion, the state—respectively, the "mysticism of the mind," and "the mysticism of the muscle." "Randian Man," wrote Chambers, "like Marxian Man, is made the center of a godless world."

Her exclusion from the conservative community was, I am sure, in part the result of her desiccated philosophy's conclusive incompatibility with the conservative's emphasis on transcendence, intellectual and moral; but also there is the incongruity of tone, that hard, schematic, implacable, unyielding dogmatism that is in itself intrinsically objectionable, whether it comes from the mouth of Ehrenburg, or Savonarola, or Ayn Rand. Chambers knew that specific ideologies come and go, but that rhetorical totalitarianism is always in the air, searching for the ideologue-on-the-make; and so he said things about Miss

Rand's tone of voice which, I would hazard the guess, if they were true of anyone else's voice, would tend to make it *eo ipso* unacceptable for the conservative. "... the book's [*Atlas Shrugged's*] dictatorial tone ...," Chambers wrote, "is its most striking feature. Out of a lifetime of reading, I can recall no other book in which a tone of over-riding arrogance was so implacably sustained. Its shrillness is without reprieve. Its dogmatism is without appeal. . . . resistance to the Message cannot be tolerated because disagreement can never be merely honest, prudent, or just humanly fallible. Dissent from revelation so final can only be willfully wicked. There are ways of dealing with such wickedness, and, in fact, right reason itself enjoins them. From almost any page of *Atlas Shrugged*, a voice can be heard, from painful necessity, commanding: 'To a gas chamber—go!' The same inflexibly self-righteous stance results, too, in odd extravagances of inflection and gesture. . . . At first we try to tell ourselves that these are just lapses, that this mind has, somehow, mislaid the discriminating knack that most of us pray will warn us in time of the difference between what is effective and firm, and what is wildly grotesque and excessive. Soon we suspect something worse. We suspect that this mind finds, precisely in extravagance, some exalting merit; feels a surging release of power and passion precisely in smashing up the house."*

As if according to a script, Miss Rand's followers jumped *National Review* and Chambers in language that crossed the *i's* and dotted the *t's* of Mr. Chambers' point. (It is not fair to hold the leader responsible for the excesses of the disciples, but this reaction from Miss Rand's followers, never repudiated by Miss Rand, suggested that her own intolerance is easily communicable to other Objectivists.) One correspondent, denouncing him, referred to "Mr. Chambers's 'break' with Communism"; a lady confessed that on reading his review she thought she had "mistakenly picked up the *Daily Worker*"; another accused him of "lies, smears, and cowardly misrepresentations"; still another saw in him the "mind-blanking, life-hating, unreasoning, less-than-human being which Miss Rand proves undeniably is the cause of the tragic situation the world now faces. . . ."; and summing up, one Objectivist

* Several years later, a graduate student in philosophy, a disciple of Hayek, von Mises, and Friedman, analyzed the thought and rhetoric of Miss Rand and came to similar conclusions. Miss Rand, he wrote (2, References), is "hate blinded," "suffocating in her invective."

wrote that "Chambers the Christian communist is far more dangerous than Chambers the Russian spy."

What the experience proved, it seems to me, beyond the unacceptability of Miss Rand's ideas and rhetoric, is that no conservative cosmology whose every star and planet are given in a master book of coordinates is very likely to sweep American conservatives off their feet. They are enough conservative and anti-ideological to resist totally closed systems, those systems that do not provide for deep and continuing mysteries. They may be pro-ideology and unconservative enough to resist such asseverations as that conservatism is merely "an attitude of mind." But I predict on the basis of a long association with American conservatives that there isn't anybody around scribbling into his sacred book a series of all-fulfilling formulas which will serve the conservatives as an Apostles' Creed. Miss Rand tried it, and because she tried it, she compounded the failure of her ideas. She will have to go down as an Objectivist; my guess is she will go down as an entertaining novelist.

The conservative's distrust of the state, so richly earned by it, raises inevitably the question: How far can one go? This side, the answer is, of anarchism—that should be obvious enough. But one man's anarchism is another man's statism. *National Review*, while fully intending to save the nation, probably will never define to the majority's satisfaction what are the tolerable limits of the state's activity; and we never expected to do so. But we got into the problem, as so often is the case, not by going forward to meet it, but by backing up against it.

There exists a small breed of men whose passionate distrust for the state has developed into a theology of sorts, or at least into a demonology, to which they adhere as devotedly as any religious fanatic ever attempted to adhere to the will of the Lord. I do not feel contempt for the endeavor of either type. It is intellectually stimulating to discuss alternatives to municipalized streets, as it is to speculate on whether God's wishes would best be served if we ordered fried or scrambled eggs for breakfast on this particular morning. But conservatives must concern themselves not only with ideals, but with matters of public policy, and I mean by that something more than the commonplace that one must maneuver within the limits of conceivable action. We can read and take pleasure in the recluse's tortured deliberations on

what will benefit his soul. Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest* was not only a masterpiece; it was also a best seller. And we can read with more than mere amusement Dr. Murray Rothbard's suggestion that light-houses be sold to private tenants who will chase down the beam in speedboats and collect a dollar from the storm-tossed ship whose path it illuminates. Chesterton reminds us that many dogmas are liberating because, however much damage they do when abused, it cannot compare with the damage that might have been done had whole peoples not felt their inhibiting influence. If our society seriously wondered whether or not to denationalize the lighthouses, it would not wonder at all whether to nationalize the medical profession.

But Dr. Rothbard and his merry anarchists wish to *live* their fanatical antistatism, and the result is a collision between the basic policies they urge and those urged by conservatives who recognize that the state sometimes is, and is today as never before, the necessary instrument of our proximate deliverance. The defensive war in which we are engaged cannot be prosecuted by voluntary associations of soldiers and scientists and diplomats and strategists, and when this obtrusive fact enters into the reckonings of our state haters, the majority, sighing, yield to reality, whereas the small minority, obsessed by their antagonism to the state, would refuse to give it even the powers necessary to safeguard the community. Dr. Rothbard and a few others have spoken harshly of *National Review's* complacency before the twentieth-century state in all matters that have to do with anti-Communism, reading their litanies about the necessity for refusing at any cost to countenance the growth of the state. Thus, for instance, Ronald Hamowy of the University of Chicago complained about *National Review* in 1961: ". . . the Conservative movement has been straying far under *National Review* guidance . . . leading true believers in freedom and individual liberty down a disastrous path . . . and that in so doing they are causing the Right increasingly to betray its own traditions and principles."*

* On behalf of the magazine I answered in part (1, References), "The American conservative needs to proceed within the knowledge of history and anthropology and psychology; we must live in our time. We must indeed continue to cherish our resentments against such institutionalized impositions upon our prerogatives as social security. But we must not, if we are to pass for sane in this tormented world, equate as problems of equal urgency, the repeal of the social security law, and the containment of the Soviet threat. The problems of assigning priorities to

And Henry Hazlitt (3, References), reviewing Dr. Rothbard's magnum opus, *Man, Economy, and State*, enthusiastically for *National Review*, paused to comment, sadly, on the author's "extreme apriorism," citing for instance, Dr. Rothbard's opinion that libel and slander ought not to be illegalized and that even blackmail, "'would not be illegal in the free society. For blackmail is the receipt of money in exchange for the service of not publicizing certain information about the other person. No violence or threat of violence to person or property is involved.' . . . when Rothbard wanders out of the strictly economic realm, in which his scholarship is so rich and his reasoning so rigorous, he is misled by his epistemological doctrine of 'extreme apriorism' into trying to substitute his own instant jurisprudence for the common law principles built up through generations of human experience."

"Extreme apriorism"—a generic bull's-eye. If *National Review's* experience is central to the growth of contemporary conservatism, extreme apriorists will find it difficult to work with conservatives except as occasional volunteers helping to storm specific objectives. They will not be a part of the standing army, rejecting as they do the burden of reality in the name of a virginal antistatism. I repeat I do not deplore their influence intellectually, and tactically, I worry not at all. The succubi of Communism are quite numerous enough and eloquent enough to be counted upon to put their ghastly presences forward in effective protest against the marriage of any but the most incurable solipsist to a set of abstractionist doctrines the acceptance of which would mean the end of any human liberty. The virgins have wriggled themselves outside the mainstream of American conservatism. Mr. Hamowy, offering himself up grandly as a symbol of the undefiled conservative, has joined the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

We ran into the John Birch Society—or, more precisely, into Robert Welch. Mr. Welch's position is very well known. Scrubbed down, it is that one may reliably infer subjective motivation from objective result—e.g., if the West loses as much ground as demonstrably it has lost during the past twenty years to the enemy, it can only be because

the two objectives is not merely a problem of intellectual discrimination, but of moral balance."

those who made policy for the West were the enemy's agents. The ultima ratio of this position was the public disclosure—any 300-page document sent to hundreds of people can only be called an act of public disclosure—that Dwight Eisenhower is a Communist. (To which the most perfect retort—was it Russell Kirk's?—was not so much analytical as artistic: "Eisenhower isn't a Communist—he is a golfer.")

In criticizing Mr. Welch, we did not move into a hard philosophical front, as for instance we did in our criticisms of Miss Rand or of the neoanarchists. Rather, we moved into an organizational axiom, the conservative equivalent of the leftists' *pas d'ennemis à gauche*. The position has not, however, been rigorously explicated or applied. Mr. Welch makes his own exclusions; for instance, Gerald L. K. Smith, who, although it is a fact that he favors a number of reforms in domestic and foreign policy which coincide with those favored by Mr. Welch (and by *National Review*), is dismissed as a man with an *idée fixe*, namely, the role of Perfidious Jew in modern society. Many right-wingers (and many liberals, and all Communists) believe in a *deus ex machina*. Only introduce the single tax, and our problems will wither away, say the followers of Henry George. . . . Only expose the Jew, and the international conspiracy will be broken, say others. . . . Only abolish the income tax, and all will be well. . . . Forget everything else, but restore the gold standard. . . . Abolish compulsory taxation, and we all shall be free. . . . They are called nostrum peddlers by some; certainly they are obsessed. Because whatever virtue there is in what they call for—and some of their proposals strike me as highly desirable, others as mischievous—no one of them can begin to do the whole job, which continues to wait on the successful completion of the objectives of the Committee to Abolish Original Sin. Many such persons, because inadequate emphasis is given to their pandemic insight, the linchpin of social reconstruction, are dissatisfied with *National Review*. Others react more vehemently; our failure to highlight *their* solution has the effect of distracting from its unique relevance and so works positively against the day when the great illumination will show us the only road forward. Accordingly, *National Review* is, in their eyes, worse than merely useless.

The defenders of Mr. Welch who are also severe critics of *National Review* are not by any means all of them addicts of the conspiracy school. They do belong, however inconsistently, to the school that

says that we all must work together—as a general proposition, sound advice. Lenin distinguished between the sin of sectarianism, from which suffer all those who refuse to cooperate with anyone who does not share their entire position, right down to the dependent clauses, and the sin of opportunism, the weakness of those who are completely indiscriminate about their political associates.

The majority of those who broke with *National Review* as the result of our criticisms of Mr. Welch believe themselves to have done so in protest against *National Review's* sectarianism. In fact, I believe their resentment was primarily personal. They were distressed by an attack on a man who had ingratiated himself with them and toward whom their loyalty hardened in proportion as he was attacked. So their bitterness ran over, and now it is widely whispered that *National Review* has been "infiltrated."

The questions we faced at *National Review* were two. The first, to which the answer was always plainly no, was whether Mr. Welch's views on public affairs were sound. The editors knew from empirical experience that they were not. Enough of us had recently been to college, or were in continuing touch with academic circles, to know that the approaches to the internal security and to foreign relations that have been practiced by successive administrations after the Second World War are endorsed by the overwhelming majority of the intellectuals of this country; therefore, any assumption that only a Communist (or a fool, as Mr. Welch allowed) could oppose the House Committee on Un-American Activities or favor aid to Poland and Yugoslavia must deductively mean that the nation's academies are staffed, primarily, by Communists (or fools). It is not merely common sense that rejects this assumption, but a familiarity with the intricate argumentation of almost the entire intellectual class (who, of course, are not fools, at least not in the sense in which Mr. Welch uses the word).

The second question then arose—whether it was necessary explicitly to reject Mr. Welch's position as an unrealistic mode of thought. And that had to be answered by asking whether at the margin it contributed or not to the enlightenment of right-wing thought. The answer was not as obvious as one might suppose. Ironically, the assumptions that reason will prevail and that logic and truth are self-evident—the constituent assumptions of those who believe that that syllogism is correct which says: "(a) We were all-powerful after World War II; (b)

Russia is now as powerful as we are; therefore, (c) we willed the enemy's ascendancy" (the essence of Mr. Welch's methodology)—argued in favor of leaving Mr. Welch alone. Thus might one reason if one believed that the truth will triumph: If Mr. Welch merely succeeds in drawing people's attention, which otherwise would not be drawn, to public events; if he scourges them to read about and think about public affairs, then those same people, though introduced to public concern by Mr. Welch, will by the power of reason reject, upon examination, Mr. Welch's specific counsels and graduate as informed members of the anti-Communist community.

But reason is *not* king (and many of those who have shrunk from Mr. Welch have done so less because on reflection they repudiate his analysis than because public scandal of a kind has in fact attached to discipleship in a movement dominated by a man with a very special set of views which reality rejects). And so it seemed necessary to say what one hoped would be obvious: that the Welch view is wrong, that it is wrong irrespective of the many personal virtues of Mr. Welch, and wrong irrespective of how many people who were otherwise politically lethargic are now, thanks to Mr. Welch, politically animated.

In consequence, *National Review* was widely criticized for "throwing mud" at Mr. Welch (a curious way to refer to the act of throwing at Mr. Welch his own statements!), and some battle lines (and some necks) were broken. Whom did we actually alienate? A body of people? A body of thought? I tend to think not, for the reasons I have suggested. If we alienated those who genuinely believe in *pas d'ennemi à droite*, why do these same people (a) applaud Mr. Welch's exclusion of Gerald L. K. Smith and (b) proceed to exclude us? It is no answer to the latter inconsistency that the penalty of turning against someone on your side excuses the turning away against the offender, and Mr. Welch, while failing to be consistent on point (a) above, was consistent in respect of (b). Aside from a few aggrieved references to *National Review's* naïveté and to the Communists' need of conservative front men to implement the smear of the John Birch Society, he has not, as yet anyway, excluded us from the anti-Communist community.

For this reason I tend to put down our encounter with Mr. Welch as having no philosophical significance in an empirical probe of the contemporary locus of American conservatism—except to the extent it

can be said that *National Review* rejects as out of this world what goes by the name of the conspiracy view of history. Most of the followers of Mr. Welch who broke with *National Review* on account of our criticisms of him showed themselves, by the inconsistency of their own position, to have acted primarily out of personal pique—to which, of course, they are entitled. But perhaps this brief analysis is relevant, if only because it explains why *National Review's* noisiest collision did not serve any great purpose in the construction of an empirical definition of conservatism.

A few years ago, Max Eastman, the author and poet, wrote sadly that he must withdraw from the masthead of *National Review*:

There are too many things in the magazine—and they go too deep—that directly attack or casually side-swipe my most earnest passions and convictions. It was an error in the first place to think that, because of political agreements, I could collaborate formally with a publication whose basic view of life and the universe I regard as primitive and superstitious. That cosmic, or chasmic, difference between us has always troubled me, as I've told you, but lately its political implications have been drawn in ways that I can't be tolerant of. Your own statement in the issue of October 11 (1958) that Father Halton labored "for the recognition of God's right to His place in Heaven" invited me into a world where neither my mind nor my imagination could find rest. That much I could take, although with a shudder, but when you added that "the struggle for the world is a struggle, essentially, by those who mean to unseat Him," you voiced a political opinion that I think is totally and dangerously wrong. . . .

Can you be a conservative and believe in God? Obviously. Can you be a conservative and not believe in God? This is an empirical essay, and so the answer is, as obviously, yes. Can you be a conservative and despise God and feel contempt for those who believe in Him? I would say no. True, Max Eastman is the only man who has left the masthead of *National Review* in protest against its proreligious sympathies, but it does not follow that this deed was eccentric; he, after all, was probably the only man on *National Review* with that old-time hostility to religion associated with evangelical atheism—with, e.g., the names of Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Henry Mencken, and Clarence

Darrow, old friends of Eastman. If one dismisses religion as intellectually contemptible, it becomes difficult to identify oneself wholly with a movement in which religion plays a vital role, and so the moment came when Max Eastman felt he had to go, even while finding it difficult to answer the concluding observation I made to him: "I continue to feel that you would be at a total loss as to what to criticize in the society the editors of *National Review* would, had they the influence, establish in America."

Mr. Eastman's resignation brought up an interesting point, to which I also addressed myself in my reply to my old friend:

You require that I take your letter seriously, and having done so I must reproach myself rather than you. For if it is true that you cannot collaborate formally with me, then it must be true that I ought not to have collaborated formally with you; for I should hate for you to think that the distance between atheism and Christianity is any greater than the distance between Christianity and atheism. And so if you are correct, that our coadjutorship was incongruous, I as editor of *National Review* should have been the first to spot it and to act on it. All the more because my faith imposes upon me more rigorous standards of association than yours does.

I know now, several years after this exchange of letters, that my point here, that the reciprocal of the proposition that a God hater cannot associate fully with a Christian, is not in fact true—for reasons that are not easy to set down without running the risk of spiritual or philosophical condensation. But the risk must be taken, and I choose the Christian, rather than the secular, formulation because, although the latter can very handily be made—see, e.g., Eric Voegelin's "On Readiness to Rational Discussion" (4, References)—it remains debatable in a way that the Christian formulation does not. The reason why Christian conservatives can associate with atheists is that we hold that, above all, faith is a gift and that, therefore, there is no accounting for the bad fortune that has beset those who do not believe or the good fortune that has befallen those who do. The proreligious conservative can therefore welcome the atheist as a full-fledged member of the conservative community even while feeling that at the very bottom the roots do not interlace, so that the sustenance that gives a special

bloom to Christian conservatism fails to reach the purely secularist conservatism. Voegelin will argue on purely intellectual grounds, taking as his lesson the Socratic proposition that virtue can be taught, but only if virtue is defined as knowledge. Socrates defined knowledge, Voegelin reminds us, as transcendental cognition, as, in fact, requiring the ability to see far enough into the nature of things to recognize transcendence, a view he elaborated in *Protagoras*.

The God hater, as distinguished from the agnostic (who says merely that he doesn't know) or simply the habitual atheist (who knows there is no God, but doesn't much care about those who disagree), regards those who believe in or tolerate religion as afflicted with short-circuited vision. Their faith is the result of a combination of intellectual defectiveness and psychological immaturity, leading to the use of analysis and rhetoric which Max Eastman "can't be tolerant of."

The agnostic can shrug his shoulders about the whole thing, caring not whether, in his time, the conflict between the proreligious and antireligious elements within conservatism will be resolved. There are so many other things to do than think about God. "Are you anything?" a lady flightily addressed at her dinner table a scholarly gentleman and firebrand conservative who has always managed to nudge aside questions or deflect conversational trends that seemed to be moving into hard confrontations involving religion. He smiled. "Well, I guess I'm not *nothing*," and the conversation went on pleasantly. Max Eastman is nothing, and he can no more resist the opportunity to incant his nonbelief than the holy priest can resist the opportunity to proselyte—and so the tension.

Mr. Eastman, like many other programmatic conservatives, bases his defense of freedom primarily on pragmatic grounds. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn once remarked that Friedrich Hayek's *Constitution of Liberty* seemed to be saying that if freedom were not pragmatically productive, there would be no *reason* for freedom. It appears to be the consensus of religious-minded conservatives that ordered freedom is desirable quite apart from its demonstrable usefulness as the basis for economic and political association. The research of the past ten years on Edmund Burke appears to have liberated him from the social pragmatists by whom he had been co-opted. Not to stray too far from the rules of this discussion, I cite a poll a few years ago which showed that

the great majority of the readers of *National Review* think of themselves formally as religious people, suggesting that conservatism, of the kind I write about, is planted in a religious view of man.

Though as I say only a single resignation has been addressed to *National Review* in protest against the magazine's friendliness to religion, there is much latent discord, particularly in the academic world, centering on the question, not so much of whether God exists or doesn't (only a few continue to explore the question consciously, let alone conscientiously, and most of the latter are thought of as *infra dig*), but on the extent to which it is proper to show toward religion the intellectual disdain the God haters believe it deserves. Russell Kirk was not allowed inside the faculty of a major university in which, *mirabile dictu*, conservatives (specifically, libertarians) had control of the social science department—because of his "religiosity." The Mt. Pelerin Society, an organization of free-market economists and laymen, has recently trembled over inscrutable personal issues; but somewhere there, in the interstices of the strife, is a hardening of positions relating to religious differences, or differences over religion, which sometimes express themselves, loosely, in arguments between "traditionalist" and "libertarian" conservatism.

Though I say the antagonism is here and there seen to be hardening, I have grounds for optimism, based not merely on *National Review's* own amiable experiences with all but the most dedicated atheists, but on the conviction that the hideousness of a science-centered age has resulted in a stimulation of religious scholarship and of all of those other impulses, intellectual and spiritual, by which man is constantly confounding the most recent wave of neoterics who insist that man is merely a pandemoniac conjunction of ethereal gases. The atheists have not got around to answering Huxley's self-critical confession that neither he nor his followers had succeeded in showing how you can deduce Hamlet from the molecular structure of a mutton chop.

I repeat what is obvious: These are merely notes, though not I hope altogether desultory, suggesting where are some of the confines of contemporary conservatism, the walls it runs up against and bounces away from. The freeway remains large, large enough to accommodate very different players with highly different prejudices and techniques. The differences are now tonal, now substantive, but they do not appear to

be choking each other off. The symbiosis may yet be a general consensus on the proper balance between freedom, order, and tradition.

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