

CHAPTER 4

WHITHER THE RIGHT?

THE FASCIST RIGHT

Essential to understanding conservatism is the distinction between it and the Right. While conservatism arose as a militant response to the French Revolution and its doctrine of universal rights and found an eloquent precursor in the 1790s in Edmund Burke, the Right emerged in the twentieth century in reaction to the progress of the Left. Unlike conservatism, the Right drew its strength primarily from the bourgeoisie but also from remnants of the aristocracy and those members of the working class who rejected socialist internationalism. The alliance that became the Right developed by joining together the concerns of the bourgeoisie and parts of the working class with various nationalist ideas and goals. Particularly as this process unfolded in the twenties and thirties, it helped nurture the Marxist critique that fascism and other real or alleged rightwing movements characterized an advanced form of capitalism trying to stave off a worker's revolution.

Even though this argument, which often takes the form of an accusation, overlooks the deep human attachments and widely held sentiments to which the Right has appealed, sentiments that, as the historian John Lukacs noted, are more real to more people than socialist internationalism or the dubious achievements of the now vanished Soviet economy—the Marxist interpretation of fascism includes some measure of truth.¹ In interwar Europe and in South America, what there was of a professional and commercial class was attracted to authoritarian regimes that promised social stability. The bourgeois typically had to share power in ruling

coalitions with other forces (e.g., landowners, the military, the Church, and cooperative labor unions) and accepted this arrangement in return for economic security and at least the appearance of a defense against the radical Left. The Left then was either Communist or anarchist but, in the demonology of the time, incorporated such other disturbers of the peace as Masons, Protestants, Jews, or clericalists. The demons varied according to both the type of authoritarianism established and the inherited political culture.

Fascism was only one variant of this phenomenon, albeit the most strident and perhaps most interesting example. Particularly in its Mussolinian *Urform*, fascism took the form of mobilizing opposition to Leftist revolution. Contrary views suggesting the fascists' revolutionary origins and goals must be understood in this context. The Italian fascist model claimed to be revolutionary, and indeed more genuinely so than the Left because of its national and popular character: Mussolini's *Carta del Lavoro*, enacted in April 1927, was supposed to have integrated workers and much of management into a syndicalist structure under state supervision. Moreover, the hard-line Italian fascists like Giovanni Bottai, Massimo Rocco, and Augusto Turati, often referred to as *arditi*, never hid their anticapitalism as they endeavored to construct a system of state socialism. Were it not for Mussolini's attempt to reassure his capitalist base, the *Carta del Lavoro*, as historian Renzo De Felice explained, might have turned out to be a far more radical document.²

But more relevant for the future was the anti-Leftist side of the fascist project, what Ernst Nolte, when discussing the interwar period, has fittingly called its "counterrevolutionary imitation of the Left." Whatever Italian, Spanish, and other predominantly Latin fascists may have initially hoped to do, and no matter how well they attracted nationalists from the working class, they came to be seen as the protectors of the bourgeoisie against revolutionary dangers.³ This was the role that the fascist *squadristi* had already necessarily assumed in Italy by the time Mussolini took power in 1922. His paramilitary bands had battled the anarchist Left in street fights after the First World War, when the Italian economy was crippled by massive strikes. Somewhat later, after the national party had come into being, Mussolini had to balance its antibourgeois and working-class elements against a large middle-class base that swelled the ranks of his triumphant movement. This

base of what Felice called, perhaps unfairly, "fiancheggiatori [hangers-on]," typified by the large industrialist lobby Confindustria, was an economic foundation stone for the new Italian regime. Mussolini accordingly had to assure Emilio Olivetti, who directed Confindustria, that "fascism believes in the sanctity of property." National syndicalism would do nothing to interfere with the right of employers to "terminate the tasks" of their employees. In addition, prior to the Carta, the fascist government had imposed stringent deflationary measures, to the detriment of the working class. These measures dealt no real blow to the owners of Italian industries, who anticipated increased prosperity once the Italian currency had been stabilized.⁴

Fascism strengthened, in an exaggerated manner, developments that the Italian and other European bourgeoisies had supported in the nineteenth century: the nation and the state. The first was to become a revolutionary principle, whereas the second would be totalized, at least in theory, in the framework of a national revolution. While this fusion was often messy and hastily improvised, and while some bourgeois preferences, like liberal parliamentary institutions, were denounced by the fascists for being decadent or politically counterproductive, some continuity between bourgeois and fascist societies is not hard to find. A relatively liberal economy in some fascist countries, the functioning of representative bodies even in fascist Italy into the thirties, however attenuated, and the preservation of a nation-state structure that the bourgeoisie had helped build made fascist rule something that its bourgeois critics Benedetto Croce and Vilfredo Pareto could at least tolerate.⁵ In its mild, clerical fascist form in Austria, this inter-war fascist authoritarianism gained the favor of the classical liberal Austrian school of economics for saving the country from the revolutionary Left. The clerical fascist emphasis in Austria in the thirties on neo-Thomist and corporatist socioeconomic policy mattered less to the liberal bourgeoisie than did the efforts of Christian Social Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss (1892–1934) to protect the Austrian state. Dollfuss, who ruled by emergency decrees, sought to control Nazi infiltration of the Austrian government while keeping the Social Democratic paramilitary organization from seizing political control in a civil war. Dollfuss became a firm ally of fascist Italy before it changed sides to join the Axis and before Dollfuss fell victim to Nazi assassination. He and his followers belonged emphatically to the anti-Marxist and Catholic Right, a

loyalty that led them into struggling to prevent Hitler's takeover of their country.⁶

Disagreement about whether fascism was essentially "counter-revolutionary" in the 1990s moved two prominent European historians, Nolte and François Furet, to take up the contested subject in an exchange of correspondence. In the magazine *Commentaire*, they published the fruits of their exchange, which dealt with the following themes: whether fascism should be viewed for the most part as an interwar development that gained currency in reaction to Soviet Communism and its supporters; whether it contained a revolutionary potential similar to that of Bolshevism; and whether Nazism represented a general fascist phenomenon that emerged in response to the Soviet revolution.⁷ At least two points made by the corresponding historians in *Commentaire* and elsewhere are pertinent to the present discussion. Furet argued on the basis of Nolte's first major work, *Three Faces of Fascism*, that (1) the intellectual foundations for interwar fascism were laid before the First World War, that is, prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, and (2) the Nazi variant of this movement was far more virulent than Mussolini's version or the Spanish Falange. Nazism exemplified a violent, genocidal radicalization of an older fascism, Furet argued, and it differed qualitatively from the movements to which Nolte, a German, linked it. Despite Nolte's courageous originality as a thinker who has been badly abused by the German "antifascist" Left, Furet insisted (with justification, in my opinion) that his colleague could not escape the feeling of obligation as a "patriotic German" to render less abhorrent German Nazi crimes, which were immeasurably worse than those committed by Italian fascists before the Germans took over their country. It was his desire to normalize the aberrant authoritarianism that took over Germany in the thirties that impelled Nolte to treat Nazism in a general context, as just another form of extreme anti-Communism or, in his earlier work, as a German absorption of a counterrevolutionary body of ideas that affected other European peoples as well.⁸ Furet made this observation sympathetically, while deploring the antifascist intolerance that has gripped German academic life—and perhaps, to a lesser extent, scholarship in his own country.

But the difference between Nazism and some kind of generic fascism cannot be ignored. The Nazi variation on fascism was not only vicious and aggressive, but it also brought to power similar movements wherever Hitler extended his empire. In interwar Germany, those who most closely resembled Mussolinian fascists,

like the Black Front of the Strasser brothers or the would-be putschists grouped around General Kurt von Schleicher, fell in a Nazi purge in 1934. And throughout Nazi-occupied Europe—including Hungary, which the Germans only directly occupied as late as 1944 after overthrowing the Rightist but non-Nazi regime of Admiral Miklos Horthy—violent anti-Semitic groups had to be mobilized to carry out Hitler's final solution against the Jews. The re-creation of a German-controlled Italian fascist government, the Salo Republic in 1943, resulted in similar mass murder. One may be excused for speculating about Italian fascism and how it might have evolved under different circumstances, that is, if Mussolini had not been seduced in 1936 into a self-destructive alliance with Hitler. That alliance, however, came about only after Mussolini had reversed his earlier course as the European leader of the anti-Nazi front. He had assumed this role in the wake of Dollfuss's murder in 1934. And the anti-Jewish legislation, barring Jews from the Italian Fascist Party, government, and the professions, which Mussolini pushed through in 1938, revealed an equally dramatic about-face. Until the late thirties, Mussolini enjoyed the friendship of European Jewish leaders, not least because, as a staunch opponent of Nazi anti-Semitism, he provided Italian bases for Zionist military training. For Jewish and black nationalists like Zev Jabotinsky and Marcus Garvey, he was the paradigm of a successful nationalist revolutionary, one who showered attention on imitators outside of his own Latin nation.⁹

Although Mussolini was obviously to blame for his own disastrous decisions, it is possible to imagine a fascist international without the bloody German contribution and those collaborators in German-occupied lands. This milder fascism would have been authoritarian and corporatist, and it would have ranged from neo-pagan modernizing variants in Italy and elsewhere to clericalist regimes in Austria and Portugal. It would have tried to win working-class support with guarded welfare measures but without upsetting its bourgeois base, and it would have eventually yielded to more conventional national democratic governments after the effects of interwar economic crises, particularly the Depression, were over. Fascism in the twenty-first century may no longer be possible. To the extent that fear of Communist upheaval fueled fascist loyalties, the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the vanishing of its subversive apparatus might have removed one argument for anti-Communist authoritarian government. Most importantly, looking at the social base of Mussolini's movement, a

traditional and threatened bourgeoisie alongside a by now antiquated working class, it is hard to see how the social foundation for an authoritarian national movement could have remained intact in any Western country. The social foundations of Mussolini's regime were the classes of yesterday, classes that do not have counterparts in either a modern service economy or the current universal welfare state. Both the inherited bourgeois family, with its gender and generational distinctions, and a cohesive working class do not belong to the social and political picture of our own late modernity. Two aspects of the present—a postbourgeois welfare state that accommodates a variety of unconventional lifestyle choices and, above all, women liberated from traditional homemaking roles—might have dumbfounded interwar fascists or even Marxists. It is hard to imagine what, if anything, fascism would look like in today's society. Equating fascists with European or American critics of Third World immigration is a propagandistic ploy, when it is not simply an anachronistic exercise. It tells nothing about the nature and preconditions of interwar fascism, but it denigrates those who do not seem sufficiently enthusiastic about government-imposed diversity as a guiding principle.

Some aspects of Nolte's depiction of fascism are, in fact, correct. Unlike Furet, who contrasted it to "the counterrevolutionary ideas of the nineteenth century" and saw it instead as "an idea of the future," a form of antimodernism that "regained its charm with Mussolini," Nolte presented his object of study as a "mere secondary phenomenon."¹⁰ Fascism was exactly as the Marxists presented it: a reaction against the Left that imitated what it opposed. And it did so by adopting democratic as well as liberal features. Fascists employed plebiscitary techniques to confirm actions taken at the top, a method of winning majoritarian approval pioneered by Louis Napoleon, who reached below the French political class to the "people" when he wished to have himself as installed as president for life in 1852 and as emperor in 1853. Throughout the late nineteenth century, as both Furet and Nolte have observed, sworn enemies of bourgeois republican government from the monarchist Right toyed with idea of building alliances with the working class. It was a desperate version of Benjamin Disraeli's Tory democracy or of Otto von Bismarck's efforts in the 1880s to identify the German Second Empire with workers' pensions and universal manhood suffrage. In the radicalized counterrevolutionary version, which fascism developed, the national leader was to cultivate a special relation with the masses.

who were seen as the repository of national virtue. He would operate independently of parliamentary parties and all interest-wielding cliques that might interfere with the unmediated relation between him and his people.

Another related feature of this selective democracy was *homonoia* as a principle of popular consensus. From Plato and Xenophon to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Carl Schmitt, democracy, properly understood, has been about long-term agreement on basic matters among self-governing citizens. Not pluralism, but shared sentiments and opinions, have until very recently been seen as the hallmark of successful self-government.¹¹ The progressive disintegration of a society into competing individual wills and interests weakens democratic commonality in proportion to how far this development proceeds. The danger is exacerbated by "pluralistic democracy," which its critics have considered a contradiction in terms. In the historic democratic tradition, equality has far less to do with combating discrimination or even redistributing incomes than it does with knowing and carrying out the general will. Democratic practice, to whatever extent it is democratic, is about like-mindedness among those who accept one another as members of the same polity.

Having written in defense of such a conception of self-government, particularly as practiced at the local level, I would distinguish between democracy as the practice of a historical community—one guided by custom—and democracy as the imposition of consensus by fascists, global democrats, and the enforcers of political correctness. The first sort of democracy tries to preserve past elements that remain integral to the shared lives of its people; the second is constructivist and manufactures a consensus by which others are made to live. In any case, the identification of democracy with continuing consensus is the long-established view of democratic life that interwar fascists took over to produce their own form of popular government. This version was a strictly guided democracy in which, despite radical rhetoric, there was little evidence of radical changes in the socioeconomic structure. There thus took root during the interwar period a regime that, according to Nolte, incorporated a reaction to Communism and to other movements of the radical Left. As the frightened bourgeoisie rallied to and even joined the fascists, they found a haven that became the major competitor of the internationalist Left and the beholden defender of property-holders. Although fascism rarely fell into the hands of big business, contrary to the conventional

Marxist view, and while in Germany the Nazis were far from the first choice of industrialists and bankers, the nationalist or corporatist Right scared those interests far less than did the radicals on the other side. And Nolte has a point that the Soviet experiment, widely celebrated in Marxist rhetoric, was a ghastly nightmare to the European middle class.

Equally relevant, Nolte stresses the interwar context as necessary for understanding fascism. That movement took shape as one of the two contending sides in the "European civil war" that raged in the twenties and even more in the thirties in central and eastern Europe.¹² Although there were arguably less violent alternatives available than those chosen, to partisans on both sides, Nolte recognized that two conditioning factors determined the European civil war. One factor was that those who took meaningful political positions often landed in one of the two polarized camps, regardless of where they had started. A second factor was that partisans picked political-existential positions only from among the significant choices that they discerned. The second point reminds me of a question that a relative once asked about why Jews in eastern Europe became Zionists or Marxists or lived under Orthodox Rabbinic control. Couldn't these people be like German Jews, my relative wondered, who came to America in the nineteenth century and then became steadfast Republicans, who imitated Episcopalians? The answer to this query is this: not everyone perceives the same historical choices or has the opportunity to make the same choice.

THE CHANGING RIGHT

The particular polarity that Nolte explored was time-bound. Fascists exerted influence and ran governments but did so in "their epoch," as readers learn from the original German title of Nolte's magnum opus. True fascists have not survived as Flemish opponents of Muslim immigration or as those types referred to journalistically as "Islamofascists." More useful than sticking our contemporaries into archaic categories, perhaps as a way to express displeasure, is to acknowledge this obvious fact: fascists belonged to the Right as it existed in a particular time and place, and while the fascist Right is no longer around, another Right may be. Making the Right what it is comes down to its mobilization against the Left, although what that Left is will differ from one generation to the next.

A look at the French Communists since the end of the Second World War illustrates the sea change undergone by the European Left in general. The Communist Party of France in 1946 polled 28.6 percent of the vote in national elections, and as late as 1956, could garner about 26 percent; by 2002, however, its electoral share had fallen to about 3 percent. As late as 1979, 46.5 percent of the French Communist vote came from industrial workers, who made up 36 percent of the French work force. But such workers' votes by 1997 accounted for only 31 percent of Communist support, extracted from a once formidable class that had shrunk to 29 percent of French wage earners.¹³ The majority of French Communists were by then white-collar employees, including large numbers of government functionaries. Moreover, the old issues that had distinguished the French far Left—that is, nationalization of productive forces and support for existing Communist regimes—had given way to other, more fashionable concerns, which the Communists now share with their coalition partners in the Socialist Party. Feminism, gay rights, multiculturalism, and mobilization against “fascism,” henceforth defined as insensitivity to Third World cultures and opposition to Muslim immigration, have become salient issues on the transformed French and European Left. For such as there remains of a working class vote, the French, Italian, Flemish, and Dutch Lefts are now forced to divide with anti-immigration parties on the Right. In the cases of Front National in France and the Vlaams Belang in Flanders, the Right has sometimes done far better than the Left in picking up disgruntled workers.

Although the Left's projects have changed over time, there are also overlaps between its past and current interests. An antipathy to bourgeois society, formerly associated with capitalist exploitation and more recently with sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia, has been a constant Leftist feature in the twentieth century, as also has been an obsession with secularizing public institutions seen as languishing under reactionary Christian influence. Such proclivities complement a Leftist vision of progress, understood as a gradual or revolutionary advance toward a universal society based on secularism, equality, and scientific planning. The Left, particularly in Europe, usually has indulged Soviet tyranny far more than oppression inflicted by governments perceived as being on the Right. This double standard in contemporary Europe has taken the form of a noisy crusade against “fascism”; it typically treats Stalinist and Maoist mass murder as a mere faux

pas, something that progressive antifascists are not supposed to notice. This posturing has resulted in a steady stream of invectives in the French and German press, as Furet documents, against those who have focused attention on Communist crimes. Such publicists have been accused of trying to turn our minds away from fascist atrocities by exaggerating less reprehensible Communist misdeeds. At the same time, parties of the Left in Germany have honored dead Marxist revolutionaries by naming or renaming public places and streets for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Marx and by re-erecting statues of Lenin in Berlin.¹⁴

What makes the Right a "secondary phenomenon" is its opposition to the Left, regardless of how that side expresses itself at any particular time. The current Right, allowing for isolated exceptions, does not treat interwar fascism as a useful model for reform; today's racial nationalists in the United States typically are libertarians who do not speak about a corporate economy or reintroducing legal segregation. Such Rightists, exemplified by the contributors to *American Renaissance* and *The Occidental Quarterly*, have no hope of reclaiming public administration from the Left and would be delighted if government were to abandon social policy and disentangle itself from an already value-laden public form of education. It is hard to find groups on the present American Right calling for a Mussolinian state or who, in contrast to the neoconservatives, associate "national greatness" with an expanded central government. Characterizing all manifestations of the Right in the United States is a distaste for the administrative state as a promoter of a multicultural, egalitarian vision. Against this global vision, the far Right offers an identitarian or explicitly racialist defense of the majority white Christian population, whose culture and self-respect the Right sees as under attack. The Right loathes "managerial multiculturalism" and complains that the welfare state has become a prime instrument of cultural-social transformation through its socialization of the young, immigration policies, and preferential treatment of minorities.¹⁵

A widely used textbook with an unmistakably Leftist tilt, *Political Ideologies* by Leon P. Baradat (now in its ninth edition) vilifies Americans of "the extreme Right." In a chapter featuring a painting of emaciated inmates at Auschwitz (it is noteworthy that no Gulag art accompanies the book's generally empathetic descriptions of Communism), Baradat portrays the Right as being irrationally opposed to government: "Rightwing extremism is

gaining popularity in the United States. The collapse of the Soviet Union has eliminated a traditional negative focal point of the extreme Right. With that external danger removed, those Americans who tend to look for sources of great evil in their midst have come to see the federal government as an oppressive and threatening force that must be resisted—violently, if necessary.”¹⁶ Looking beyond Baradat’s unproved premises—that the Posse Comitatus, neo-Confederates, and libertarian Rights are all growing by leaps and bounds; that anxiety about government overreach is exclusively rightwing or indicative of paranoia; and that those who feel such anxiety are violence-prone—one may acknowledge that this passage makes at least one true statement. The far Right, and even the less extreme Right, holds no brief for the administrative state and, unlike the interwar fascist Right, resembles anarchists or critics of the New Deal more than followers of Mussolini or, a fortiori, Hitler.

The mainstream version of the Right that now exists here and in Europe opposes the initiatives undertaken by the media, courts, and public administration to promote the kinds of significant social change that have altered Western societies since the 1960s. Representative of this position is the activist Phyllis Schlafly, who has devoted her journalistic and legal career to fighting the social Left. A recent biography of Schlafly by Donald T. Critchlow depicts her as a relentless combatant against Leftist reforms that affect the family and the workplace. Offensive to Schlafly are such developments as the diminution of the traditional domestic role of women, the removal of Christian symbols from public places, the implementation of minority-targeted preferential hiring and admissions, gay rights, and the expansion of Third World immigration. Although her stands do not necessarily remind one of interwar fascism, and though Schlafly, moreover, has no discernible interest in racial nationalism, she is on the Right by virtue of her reaction against the social Left. Her Rightist orientation notwithstanding, her biographer might have erred by using “rightwing” too freely and associating Schlafly with Ronald Reagan in a collective “counterrevolution” carried out by “conservative rightwingers.” Such a description makes this reader wonder whether Critchlow’s terminology fits his subject. Should one apply to Reagan epithets that belong to Count Metternich, who worked to subdue the forces of the French Revolution, and other nineteenth-century counterrevolutionaries?

More meaningful is Critchlow's explanation about how Schlafly understands the "people" and her place among them: "Any characterization of Schlafly must be qualified with the recognition that she, and other grassroots conservatives who joined her, opposed the political status quo. They waged a protracted struggle against the liberal welfare state, with its reliance on centralized government, bureaucratic expertise, judicial activism, and distrust of popular democracy, traditional values, and patriotism."¹⁷ Critchlow convincingly shows that his subject, a Catholic Republican from St. Louis who, like her husband, is a well-trained and articulate lawyer, brought out of her childhood the image of a virtuous American nation that needed to be re-empowered. Her "grassroots conservatism," as Critchlow calls it, is a tendency that Schlafly eloquently exemplifies. It is a defining rightwing phenomenon, which distinguishes the Right, particularly since the middle of the twentieth century, from any classical conservative tradition. Others beside Schlafly on the postwar Right, from Pierre Poujade and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France to George Wallace and Pat Buchanan in the United States, have appealed to the "people" over the heads of political elites in the name of betrayed popular virtues.

Although Critchlow draws parallels between Schlafly and another self-assertive midwestern woman, the protofeminist Betty Friedan, his comparison cannot be successfully extended beyond a few personal traits to any specific populist belief.¹⁸ Feminists and the social Left do not call for the overthrow of political elites but wish to work through them to reconstruct human behavior. They certainly do not idolize the "common" man, whom they view as a sexist and a bigot, but they are amenable to entrusting him to progressive administrators. The populist Right, by contrast, expresses a passionate and almost mystical belief in the demos, whose instincts and natural goodness must be released in order to restore the nation and its freedom. Willmoore Kendall, the unvarnished populist in the early *National Review* circle, lavished praise on those "who think in their hips" and who rallied to anti-Communism as an expression of their outraged sense of virtue.¹⁹

Although the Right and the social Left exhibit a comparable enthusiasm for electoral displays—for example, the Left calls for extending the electorate to the hidden disadvantaged and the Right hopes to submit every decision to plebiscites—their aims are entirely different. One side wishes to create a broader consensus for managerial governance, while the other seeks to mobilize the masses for a counterrevolution. These observations lend support to

Baradat's point without imputing the stigma of the Third Reich to the entire Right. Presumably the demos, which the Right seeks to let have its way, is not any random collection of individuals; it is, or so Rightists hope, sufficiently cohesive to rule itself. And the more internally unified it is, as a nation or as a people, the more effectively it will be able to assert itself against the Left, which enjoys the support of public administration and the media.

VALUE CONSERVATISM VS. THE RIGHT

The Right is not, and perhaps never can be, coextensive with conservatism. Therefore, the term "grassroots conservative," when applied to those who believe in nonmanagerial democracy, is a problematic usage. Neither Schlafly nor Buchanan seeks to bring back a society of degrees and orders; in fact, much of what they say, as illustrated by Buchanan's taunting reference to George H. W. Bush in the presidential primary in 1992 as "King George," is ferociously anti-elitist and intended to arouse egalitarian passions. Like the Left, the populist Right makes its own appeal to equality. The confrontation between Left and Right in 2005 does not, however, replicate the nineteenth-century battle between conservatives and liberals. Different social classes, armed with different political goals, are waging a quite dissimilar struggle.

Even less than the Right equals conservatism does it mean trying to sell packages of "conservative values." A Rightist takes an adversarial position in relation to the Left; a "value conservative," by contrast, seeks to cobble together views for a TV presentation or an electoral debate. But in either case, it is a mere performance by someone who is trying to appear to have convictions but who hopes to avoid spooking his listeners. The bearers of conservative values are often experts in dealing with the establishment Left from which they are not far removed, and they are also inclined to clothe their stands in the language of self-evident truths and permanent things. One illustration of this practice is David Brooks's series of expositions of "conservative" views for the *New York Times*. In 2003, Brooks defended gay marriage as a conservative concern about "family values"; in August 2005, he sang the praises of a "virtue of virtues" that had become manifest over the last ten years and reached a new peak in "family virtue."²⁰ The reason for this praise was that the incidence of spousal violence had dropped over the last ten years to its lowest point in thirty years. The

columnist tips his hat to feminist groups for involving the government more fully in family life and for working for stiffer laws to punish male violence. In his zeal to celebrate a feminist-influenced America, Brooks fails to notice other explanations for what he attributed to unparalleled virtue, explanations such as the building of more prisons to incarcerate more young men, who might otherwise be beating their hapless significant others, and demographic shifts that keep raising the median average age throughout the Western world. Brooks talks up the social Left by attaching a conservative-sounding value to its presumed accomplishment.

This kind of gesture has become predictable in American conservatism. The unfurling of conservative values or the renaming of Leftist values as conservative ones has accompanied a general retreat from "extremism" undertaken by those seeking social and professional acceptability. The practitioners of this retreat move closer to the Left while at the same time reassuring their followers on the Right that they are not abandoning substantive stands. Such activists claim to be upholding values, which they call "conservative" and which, for as long as they speak about them in the context of public policy, can be made to seem different by virtue of wearing a different label from what "liberals" advocate.

In December 1970, in a review of William Buckley's anthology *The Governor Listeth* in the *New York Times*, Margot Hentoff calls attention to the value and issue realignment undergone by an erstwhile rightwing enfant terrible: "Mr. Buckley, looking for new ground in shifting sand, now writes of the 'new conservatism' which concerns itself with such things as: the *democratic process* ('the rights of authorities of Harvard over against the mobocratic demands of students and faculty'); *due process* ("how valuable due process becomes up against the Marcusean furies"); *upward mobility* ('for which purpose the new conservatives are giving the free market something of a hand—for instance, by preferential hiring of Negroes')."21

Hentoff notes approvingly that Buckley has "taken on the weight of middle-aged responsibility" by moving toward the political center and by swerving leftward in the preceding several years on questions of race. This putative maturation reflected the force of nonintellectual as well as intellectual factors, including Buckley's known close relations with several New York Jewish liberals and neoconservatives: Abe Rosenthal at the *New York Times*, Irving Kristol, and Norman Podhoretz.²² But more striking than Buckley's application of the maxim *d'autres temps, d'autres moeurs* was his

discovery or invention of corresponding values for a “new conservatism,” a centrist position he had been moving toward even before his publicized appreciation of Harry Jaffa’s defense of democratic equality. Those who thereafter would not fall into line by making the required value and issue adjustment would become rightwing extremists in the eyes of Buckley and his followers. Presumably those who tacked sufficiently leftward remained conservative, because they espoused what were, at least for the moment, “conservative values.” Such examples are not meant to question the journalistic privileges to change one’s mind and to snub those who refuse to follow one’s course. My point is to underscore the gulf between tailored “conservative values” and those features common to the historical Right that have been identifiable as such until the present day.

A final illustration of this difference is a speech given on August 27, 2005, by Angela Merkel, the chief of Germany’s Christian Democratic-Christian Social Union, in the northwestern German city of Dortmund. At her party’s rally, scheduled three weeks before the federal elections that her Center-Right coalition hoped to win, Merkel faced the challenge of articulating the “Christian values” said to be embedded in her party. In recent years, union leaders have gingerly sidestepped any social issue that might evoke the anger of the Left-Center media, and this has irritated Catholic bishops and some Evangelical clergy, who claim that the union has cynically exploited the “Christian” label. Although Merkel, a technician from East Germany with feminist leanings, was initially disposed to find something vaguely Christian to say, her advisors, drawn from former chancellor Helmut Kohl, rewrote her remarks to remove anything that might rattle those whom they hoped to win over to their side. Merkel thus spoke in praise of “the freedom which is due to everyone, whether man or woman, no matter what one’s religion or from whither one comes.” Such freedom entails “the right of women to leave the house, to choose a career, and to pick one’s own partner.” Merkel also stressed her concern about removing any barrier that might stand in the way of someone pursuing this vision.²³

When she and her advisors (*Referenten*) were asked where in her speech any “Christian values” could be found, they responded that they were implicit in Merkel’s words. The party chief’s priority was to win the electoral campaign in which she was engaged, and then she could focus on the presentation and implementation of values. A former party chief, Edmund Stoiber, had taken care of

values for the time being when he addressed the rally and mocked the opposition Social Democratic Party for wanting to "abolish German unification day while introducing Mohammed's birthday."²⁴ This is how the party of "value-conservatism" in Germany deals with its foundational truths while keeping the German Right at a distance. The union has tried to exclude acceptable political debate from such parties of the Right as the National Democrats and even the more moderately Rightist Republicans, and it has done so to capture votes that might otherwise go to its competitors. In Bavaria, Stoiber's home base, he and his Christian Social provincial government have been prodding federal courts to ban parties on their Right as a "danger to the German democratic order."

Such tactics, according to their critics, are detrimental to political pluralism. Even Right-Center parties use the courts to go after opposition parties on their Right. Under Article 21-2 of the German Basic Law banning parties that threaten the survival of the German Republic, this procedure is simple and effective.²⁵ It achieves the desired effect of marginalizing the union's rivals on the Right, who raise serious criticisms about Third World immigration and multiculturalism and who call for slashing the costly German welfare state. Whether or not these rivals are correct in their stands, they represent a modern Right, which the value conservatives in the centrist union have tried to discredit. Not surprisingly, those who campaign under the banner of "Christian values" have not only diluted their value commitment to make it indistinguishable from that of the Left; they have also contributed to a situation in which the Right, as the real counterpoint to the regnant Left, cannot hope to become a respectable political player. Although not the sole function that value conservatism has performed in either Europe or the United States, its role in stripping respectability from an explicit Right deserves attention. Some spokesmen for the American Right, like the lately deceased Samuel Francis, have ridiculed "conservative" as a term whereby their side accepts the fate of having been driven out of the mainstream political debate.²⁶ For those who find such an outcome devoutly to be desired, it is advantageous to go on preaching "conservative values." But there is absolutely no good reason to pretend that this concept has driven political discussion toward the Right. Its effects and sometimes even its explicit purpose have been exactly the opposite.