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Fighting Over the Conservative Banner

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FIGHTING OVER THE CONSERVATIVE BANNER

Carl T. Bogus

ABSTRACT

Whither Conservatism? That was the question posed to a group of scholars, including Carl T. Bogus, author of Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism (Bloomsbury Press), at a conference co-sponsored by the University of Texas School of Law and the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy. In this paper, Professor Bogus argues that conservatism has long been an uneasy alliance among three distinct groups: libertarians, neoconservatives, and religious (or social) conservatives. The glue that held the alliance together is weakening. As the groups drift apart and compete, they are becoming more strident and extreme. Each seeks to become the dominant philosophy of the right. Each seeks to claim the conservative banner, that is, the right to present itself as the one, true, and genuine conservatism. Conservatism is indeed in flux, and its future definition depends on the outcome of this struggle.

Fighting Over the Conservative Banner

Carl T. Bogus*

This symposium asks a group of scholars to ponder the question *Whither Conservatism?* The assumption behind that question is that conservatism is about to go somewhere, to change or transform. Only someone who believed that likely would be asking the question. Moreover, the assumption goes one step further: the change may not come through a more or less natural process of evolution but rapidly and dramatically, perhaps as the result of a crisis, jolt, or intense struggle of some kind. Is the assumption warranted? What's driving it? And why, by the way, isn't anyone asking: Whither liberalism?¹

I am going to take a discursive approach and circle the questions before directly answering them; but the reader may want some idea upfront where I'm headed so here's the gist of my argument: Conservatism – and liberalism too for that matter – is under stress. To some extent, both ideologies are victims of their own successes. One of modern American conservatism's central concerns was anticommunism, and some of its *raison d'être* collapsed with the Soviet Union. It has tried substituting the so-called war on terror – or the war with Islamofascism, as some conservatives have tried framing it – for the Cold War, but that has not

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* Professor of Law, Roger Williams University; Visiting Professor, George Washington University Law School (Fall 2012). This paper was presented at a symposium on the topic "Whither Conservatism?," co-sponsored by the University of Texas Law School and The American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy, in Austin, Texas, on September 14, 2012. It is scheduled for publication in a forthcoming volume of NOMOS.

¹ Professor Sanford Levinson, the organizer of the "Whither Conservative?" conference, tells me that no parallel conference on liberalism is planned.

been entirely satisfactory.² Somewhat similarly, many of modern liberalism's greatest causes – the civil rights, feminist, environmental, and consumer movements – have largely succeeded. Meanwhile at least one of its other causes, the war on poverty, has proved intractable.³ Thus liberalism is also entering a period of searching and potential definition.

Unlike liberalism, however, modern conservatism is more a coalition of three schools of thought – libertarianism, neoconservatism, and religious or social conservatism – than a unified ideology. Those schools of thought have important commonalities but also significant differences. They have been political allies; but they are also potential rivals. They were brought together in the 1950s and 1960s by William F. Buckley Jr. and his colleagues and *National Review*.⁴ This coalition came easily to Buckley because – despite their inconsistencies – he personally embraced all three ideologies. When the modern conservative movement began, Buckley and *National Review* both redefined conservatism and created a new conservative community consisting of the magazine's editors, writers, and readers. Buckley permitted debate and disagreement among the three schools of thought, but only within certain parameters. He brilliantly co-opted, outmaneuvered, and excommunicated thinkers who advocated positions that, he believed, threatened the coalition and its central tenets. Buckley and *National Review* became so successful that, for at least the first two decades of the modern conservative movement, the magazine was all but synonymous with conservatism. This too created a unifying force. But as

² Regarding "Islamofascism," see, e.g., William Safire, "On Language: Islamofascism," *New York Times*, October 1, 2006 (available at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/magazine/01wwln_safire.html). Conservatives are now also trying to use the rise of China as a world power as a substitute for the threat of what they used to call international Communism, but that too is likely to prove an inadequate substitute.

³ For a good description of the history of the war on poverty, at least with respect to poverty in black communities, see James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Some of liberalism's other failures are related to this struggle. See, e.g., Joe Klein, "Head Start Doesn't Work," *Time*, July 18, 2011, p. 27.

⁴ I have dealt with this at length in Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011).

the movement grew other leaders and journals sprang up, and over time Buckley and *National Review*'s singular influence declined.

For all of these reasons, the coalition is weakening. All three groups are now fighting over the conservative banner, each seeking to appropriate the term *conservatism*. What will arise depends on this struggle. This is where I'm going; but bear with me, because it will take me awhile to get there.

* * *

How one approaches any topic dealing with modern ideology obviously depends upon one's perspective. I believe that, when discussing ideology, it may be helpful to reveal one's own ideological bias. When it comes to ideology, no one is a truly neutral and objective observer. On this, I agree with Alan Greenspan, who famously told a congressional committee that ideology "is a conceptual framework with the way people deal with reality. Everyone has one. You have to – to exist, you need an ideology."⁵ Because we are so strongly influenced by our ideological perspective, a reader may reasonably want to know a writer's perspective. So let me state upfront that I am a liberal.

What kind of liberal am I? That question leads to a striking difference between liberals and conservatives. I can't tell you what kind of liberal I am in any kind of instantly recognizable way because – unlike conservatives – liberals don't have a recognized taxonomy.⁶ Ask someone what kind of liberal he is and you are likely to draw a blank stare. That is far from the case with conservatives. Conservatives categorize themselves as libertarians, neoconservatives, religious conservatives, or traditional conservatives. Some subdivide the categories still further. If she's a

⁵ Quoted in Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (Bloomsbury Press, 2011), p. 348.

⁶ I classify myself as a Burkean liberal, but few people recognize that term – indeed, most people probably consider it oxymoronic – which supports my point: liberals don't categorize themselves in any generally understood way.

devoted disciple of Ayn Rand, a libertarian might classify herself as an objectivist, and an agrarian (or according to some, very angry) traditional conservative might identity himself as a paleoconservative.⁷

This difference – that conservatives divide themselves into subcategories and liberals don't – is surely part and parcel of another fundamental difference between them. Conservatives are endlessly fascinated with ideology; liberals are not. Compare, for example, the iconic works of modern liberalism and conservatism.⁸ With few exceptions, the liberal books have dealt not with ideology but with particular social or political problems – works that include Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962), Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965), which respectively helped ignite the war on poverty and the environmental, feminist, and consumer movements.⁹ With only a few exceptions, none of the seminal books of modern liberal ideology dealt directly with ideology.¹⁰ By contrast, all of the six canonical works of the modern conservative movement – F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944); William F. Buckley Jr., *God*

⁷ Conservative historian George H. Nash describes paleoconservatives as “an angry group of traditionalists.” George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute 1996), p. 337. Paleoconservatives are sworn enemies of neoconservatives. Paul Gottfried, a professor at Elizabethtown College, was one of the first people to adopt the term. Many consider the most prominent paleoconservative to be Patrick Buchanan, although Buchanan may be sui generis and only accurately described as a Buchananite. Ibid., pp. 337-39, 433 n.8.

⁸ The selection of the six canonical works of modern American conservatism is subjective and mine. See *ibid.*, p. 118. The academic reader may ask: Where are the great works by John Stuart Mill, John Locke, John Maynard Keynes, and John Rawls, or by Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Michael Oakeshott? I'm putting aside works that – excepting academics – few conservatives and liberals have read, except as assigned readings in college. The books I list were all modern bestsellers with staying power; decades after publication, they remain in print and widely read.

⁹ No cause is more important in the history of modern liberalism than civil rights, but there is no single preeminent work of that movement. Three that were influential, however, are Martin Luther King's *Why We Can't Wait* (1963), James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965).

¹⁰ Two exceptions are Arthur M. Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* (1949) and John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958). Because we are now entering a new era of searching and redefinition, liberals are starting to address ideology more directly. Three prime examples are Paul Starr, *Freedom's Power: The True Force of Liberalism* (2007); Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (2007); and Alan Wolfe's *The Future of Liberalism* (2009).

and Man at Yale (1951); Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (1952); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (1953); Barry Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative* (1960); and Milton Friedman, *Freedom and Capitalism* (1962) – deal directly with ideology.¹¹

Why this difference? I have spent a great deal of time pondering this. I am convinced that the difference is important yet the reason for it remains something of a mystery. Perhaps the difference stems from liberals highly valuing pragmatism. Liberals eschew ideology and believe that policy decisions should be determined by applying knowledge to facts. If there are liberal cathedrals, they are the schools of public administration that purport to train policy makers.¹² An enlightened liberal administration would fill the administrative departments with graduates of these schools. That administration would also be headed by a leader who sought advice from the best and brightest minds in the social and natural sciences.¹³ Conservatives, by contrast, are deeply skeptical of policy being determined by this kind of expert advice. They fear that expert self-confidence outruns expert wisdom. Moreover, conservatives recoil at the prospect of the government's direction being determined on ad hoc, issue-by-issue bases. Policymakers and voters alike are too easily blown hither and yon by the constantly-shifting zeitgeist. Conservatives put their faith more in a philosophical compass guided, they believe, by enduring principles of human nature. But this is not an entirely satisfactory explanation because it is close to being a tautology – that is, it is not very far from saying that liberals focus nearly exclusively

¹¹ The only partial exception on this list is *Witness*, which is also autobiographical.

¹² The first of these schools – the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University – was founded in 1924 and remains the top-rated school of public affairs by U.S. News and World Report. Other prominent schools of public affairs include the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas-Austin.

¹³ When liberals disagree, therefore, it is generally because they disagree about what's achievable and how to achieve it – about tactics, so to speak – rather than about philosophical principles.

on policy because they don't put much stock in ideology, while conservatives are interested in ideology because they consider it both important and essential.

It may be natural that the group interested in ideology would be prone to creating philosophic subdivisions and classifications, but I'm not sure that's the only reason there are different schools of conservatism with no real parallel on the left. Maybe the explanation has to do with the different histories of the two modern liberal and conservative movements. Perhaps modern liberalism became a homogenized unity during the New Deal while, in contrast, modern conservatism became a coalition of rival philosophies, each developing its own answer to the liberal ascendancy that emerged from the New Deal.¹⁴ Maybe it has to do with differences between how conservatives and liberals conceive of liberty.¹⁵ But whatever the reason, conservatives are consciously far more interested in ideology than are liberals, divide themselves

¹⁴ Woodrow Wilson and other figures during the Progressive Era were surely important influences on modern liberalism, and there were strong differences among progressives. As just one example, Wilson – closely advised by one great liberal thinker, Louis A. Brandeis – wanted to prevent corporations from becoming too large and industries from becoming too concentrated, while Theodore Roosevelt – closely advised by another great liberal thinker, Herbert Croly – believed that modern society required large corporations, and that government should regulate corporations rather than restrict their size. This was but one important difference between Wilson's New Freedom and Teddy Roosevelt's New Nationalism. Within the political left, these two sides continued to debate and contend with one another into the early years of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration. FDR was at first uncertain about which view he favoured. By 1937, he appears to have made up his mind, and appointed Thurman Arnold, an adherent of the regulate-but-don't-constrain-size camp to head the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice. From that time forward, that camp remained dominant. For a reasonably concise description, see Chapter 7, "Community, Self-Government, and Progressive Reform," in Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1996). See also James Chase, *1912: Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft & Debs – The Election that Changed the Country* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), and Wyatt Wells, *Antitrust and the Formation of the Postwar World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). I am not well-versed enough in the history of liberalism and the New Deal to raise this as more than a question, but is it possible that this antitrust debate is typical and that during the sixteen years of the New Deal, many of the intramural disputes were resolved (or at least muted) and liberalism emerged as a generally cohesive and unified ideology? By contrast, modern conservatism developed post-New Deal into a collection of rival factions seeking to define and reinvigorate what had become a largely defeated political philosophy.

¹⁵ Conservatives emphasize what Isaiah Berlin and other thinkers have termed negative liberty – being free from interference, including coercion, by others, especially the government. See "The Two Concepts of Liberty" in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty* (Henry Hardy ed., Oxford University Press 2002), pp. 166-217. While liberals are concerned about freedom from coercion, they also believe that true liberty requires having the resources – in terms of adequate education, nutrition, health care, housing, and the like – to pursue one's aspirations. Berlin described these as the conditions necessary to exercise liberty. *Ibid.*, p. 45. Could it be that focusing on negative liberty lends itself to philosophic musings – are rights come from God, nature, and the like – while focusing on the conditions of liberty leads more naturally away from abstract philosophy and toward policy analysis?

into different schools of thought, and expend enormous amounts of energy and great quantities of ink both defining their philosophies and engaging in intramural debates and struggles.

The conservative firmament is filled with journals,¹⁶ advocacy groups, think tanks,¹⁷ even colleges and universities¹⁸ dedicated to promoting distinct schools of conservative thought, or in

¹⁶ Libertarian journals include *The Cato Journal*, *City Journal*, *Reason*, and the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*.

Neoconservative journals include *Commentary*, *The National Interest*, *New Criterion*, *The Weekly Standard*, and famously, until it stopped publishing in 2005, *The Public Interest*.

Religious conservative journals include *Faith & Reason*, *First Things*, and *Human Life Review*.

¹⁷ Besides Cato, libertarian advocacy groups and think tanks include the Goldwater Institute, Independent Institute, Manhattan Institute, National Center for Policy Analysis, Pacific Research Institute, Reason Foundation, Young Americans for Liberty, and many others. In addition, both the Atlas Society and the Ayn Rand Institute promote Ayn Rand's philosophy of objectivism, which is a libertarian philosophy even if Rand herself claimed it was not and her acolytes prefer to call themselves objectivists. And, of course, the Libertarian Party USA is a political party dedicated to promoting libertarianism.

Neoconservative advocacy and think tanks include the Center for Security Policy, Hudson Institute, Project for the New American Century, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

Religious conservative organizations include the Christian Coalition, the Faith and Freedom Coalition, and Focus on the Family.

¹⁸ Many colleges and universities are religiously affiliated, of course, but some schools consider conservative religious and political views to be inextricably intertwined and believe their mission includes providing conservative leadership for the nation. Pat Robertson reflected this sentiment when he said that "there is no way that government can operate successfully unless led by godly men and women" and that Regent's mission is to train "God's representatives on the face of the earth." See Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy* (New York: Viking, 2006) p. 215 (quoting Robertson). These schools include Ave Maria University, supported by Domino Pizza CEO Thomas Monahan; Bob Jones University, which, according to its website, defends and teaches "the inerrancy of Scripture"; Liberty University, founded by Rev. Jerry Farwell Sr.; Pepperdine University; and Regent University, founded by Rev. M.G. "Pat" Robertson.

There are different perspectives among religious conservative colleges. Ave Maria, for example, is a Catholic college while the others listed above are all affiliated with Protestant sects. Pepperdine spans all three schools of conservative thought and may also be the most establishment-oriented university on the list. Its faculty has included prominent neoconservatives, including Daniel Pipes and James Q. Wilson, libertarian Arthur Laffer, religious conservative Douglas Kmeic. A flap occurred when Pepperdine University offered Kenneth W. Starr (who may span all three schools of conservatism) dual deanships of both its law and public policy schools while he was independent counsel for the so-called Whitewater investigation. Arch-conservative donor Richard Mellon Scaife, who contributed \$1.35 million to Pepperdine's new school of public policy, also gave \$2.3 million to right-wing magazine *American Spectator* to conduct its own Whitewater investigation. Many thought this raised the appearance of impropriety. See Susan Schmidt, "Starr Declines Pepperdine Because of Investigation," *Washington Post*, April 17, 1998, p. A1; and Kenneth Reich, "Pepperdine's Million-Dollar Club: University Releases List of Donors After Controversy Erupts on Contributions by Supporter of Whitewater Probe," *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1997 (available at http://articles.latimes.com/1997-03-09/local/me-36476_1_pepperdine-university). By contrast, the least establishment-oriented college on the list may be Bob Jones University, which has had an infamous notorious segregationist past. It was considered an act of important political symbolism when, in during his campaign for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination, George W. Bush held his first event in South Carolina at Bob Jones University. *Ibid.*, p. 357.

Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, is nondenominational and may be most firmly planted in libertarian soil. It is so opposed to what it regards as governmental interference that it accepts no subsidies from federal or state governments.

some cases to particular combinations of philosophies. For example, some of the most influential think tanks – the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, for example – are libertarian on matters of economics and governmental structure, and neoconservative on social and foreign policy. (We might even refer to this blend as establishment conservatism.) Some organizations, however, are devoted to a single philosophy. A prime example is the Cato Institute, which is exclusively devoted to promoting a pure version of libertarianism. Shock waves recently reverberated throughout the intellectual right when a fight broke out for control of the Cato Institute. The Koch brothers sought to wrest organizational control from Cato’s long-time president, Edward Crane, and the organization’s existing board of directors, led by Robert A. Levy.¹⁹ Crane and Levy feared that the Koch brothers wanted to make Cato more “politically relevant” – that is, less devoted to promoting a pure version of libertarianism and more a part of the Republican political infrastructure – and they vigorously resisted the Koch brothers’ efforts to seize control. Litigation was commenced, and later settled. Although Cato’s leadership and governing structure changed, both sides claimed the agreed-upon arrangement would preserve Cato as an independent advocate of libertarianism. Whether that turns out to be correct remains to be seen.

¹⁹ Somewhat unusually for a nonprofit corporation, Cato was organized as a stockholder company. Over time there came to be four shareholders with equal shares of stock, one of whom was Cato’s CEO, Edward H. Crane III, and two of whom were Charles and David Koch. After the fourth shareholder died in October 2011, the Koch brothers filed suit in Kansas state court, demanding that the deceased shareholder’s stock either be repurchased by the corporation or distributed pro rata to the remaining shareholders, either of which would give them two-thirds of the stock and control of the organization. This lawsuit was vigorously resisted by Crane and the Cato board of directors. See Luke Mullins, “The Battle for Cato,” *Washingtonian*, June 2012, p. 64. Settlement of the litigation included Ed Crane resigning both as CEO and as a director, Charles Koch resigning as a director, and John Allison – a self-described objectivist – becoming CEO. The stockholder structure was also replaced with a self-perpetuating board of directors. The settlement was portrayed as preserving Cato as an independent advocate of libertarianism. See, e.g., Kenneth P. Vogel, *Politico*, June 25, 2012 (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0612/77809.html>); Allen McDuffee, “Koch Brothers, Cato Institute Announce Terms of Settlement,” *Washington Post Blogs*, June 25, 2012 (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/think-tank/post/koch-brothers-cato-institute-announce-terms-of-settlement/2012/06/25/gJQAQJ2V_blog.html). Whether that, in fact, turns out to be the case depends upon the loyalties and alliances of the board of directors, which is difficult for outsiders to gauge.

For our purposes, however, this incident highlights that while intellectual and political conservatism does, of course, intersect, each of the three main ideological schools have adherents who believe that promoting their philosophy over the long-term is more important than winning the next election.

Libertarians, neoconservatives, and religious conservatives are the large and powerful groups in conservatism today. The weakness of other schools of thought – traditional conservatives, who may also be called Burkeans, is a prime example – is evident in the lack of a supporting infrastructure of advocacy groups, think tanks, and journals.²⁰

* * *

How did we get to where we are? The coalition of the three schools of thought that comprise modern conservatism – and the vanquishing of traditional conservatism as a rival – came about in the 1950s and 1960s as the result of efforts by William F. Buckley Jr. and the collection of writers and editors he assembled around him at *National Review*. Before Buckley, conservatism was very different. The story about how Buckley changed conservatism is a rich and complex one. I have devoted a book to it, and cannot do it justice in the space of this chapter; but I can offer a few historical observations.

At the risk of mixing political and intellectual history, it may make sense to begin with Calvin Coolidge. Coolidge, of course, served as president from 1923-1929. He was Warren G. Harding's vice president, and became president on August 2, 1923, when Harding unexpectedly died. History has not treated Coolidge kindly. According to one survey, historians rank him 25th

²⁰ The principal institutional guardian of traditional conservatism may be the Russell Kirk Center, located in Mecosta, Michigan. It is headed by Russell Kirk's widow, Annette Kirk, and in significant part devoted to preserving Russell Kirk's legacy. Its quarterly publication, *University Bookman*, is published exclusively online. Another journal with a traditional conservative viewpoint, *The Imaginative Conservative*, is also available exclusively online. These enterprises appear to be largely operated by volunteers.

among the first 44 presidents.²¹ Some argue that Coolidge's low ranking results from historians unfairly judging him in retrospect.²² Coolidge sat idle while speculative investments and market bubbles in the economy of the Roaring Twenties set up the Great Depression. Coolidge, however, was following the mainstream economic thought of his day, and he did not have the benefit of Keynesian insights. John Maynard Keynes' *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* was not published until 1936.²³ I am not going to take sides in this debate. What is important for our purposes is that Coolidge was extremely popular at the time. When he stood for election on his own in 1924, he captured 54 percent of the popular vote and 72 percent of the electoral vote in a three-way race against Democrat John W. Davis and Progressive Robert "Fighting Bob" La Follette. When Coolidge elected not to run again four years later, it was because he believed that if reelected he would wind up serving nearly ten years, which, he said, was "longer than any man has had it – too long!"²⁴ It appears that when he left office the consensus was that Coolidge had been a successful president.²⁵

Coolidge was not the hardest-right conservative of his day. Warren G. Harding selected him as his vice-presidential running mate in 1920 because Coolidge was acceptable to both the progressive followers of Teddy Roosevelt and establishment, pro-business Republicans.²⁶ As governor of Massachusetts, he had been distinctly moderate. But regardless of what they thought

²¹ See Julia Edwards, "How Historians Rank the Presidents," *National Journal*, February 21, 2011 (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/how-historians-rank-the-presidents-20110219>).

²² Those holding this view include economist John Kenneth Galbraith and historian David Greenberg, *Calvin Coolidge* (New York: Times Books, 2006), pp. 147, 156.

²³ Greenberg acknowledges that some proto-Keynesians were issuing warnings. At the same time, books with wide-readerships were claiming that the business cycle had been conquered and there was no need for concern. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁵ I know of no poll, but according to Greenberg this was the view of the press. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁶ Greenberg, p. 23.

of him when he assumed the presidency, because Coolidge governed conservatively and was deemed successful, conservatives surely became pleased with Coolidge's brand of conservatism.

Coolidge is interesting for another reason. Ronald Reagan claimed to have closely studied Coolidge and greatly admired him. One of Reagan's first acts as president was to hang Calvin Coolidge's portrait in the Cabinet Room.²⁷ It is not difficult to understand why Reagan liked Coolidge. Coolidge pursued a program of what we today would call trickle-down economics. He installed Andrew Mellon as his treasury secretary and generally followed Mellon's advice on economic policy. Through a series of reductions, the Coolidge administration lowered the effective tax rate on those with incomes exceeding \$6,000 (the equivalent of about \$75,000 today) from 70 percent to 40 percent.²⁸ Exemptions were also increased to the point that most Americans paid no federal income taxes at all. Federal spending was trimmed, business boomed, and by 1925 the federal budget was in surplus.²⁹ The Coolidge years were prosperous for most Americans, but the wealthy did particularly well and income inequality increased.³⁰ Still, Coolidge was hardly the hard-edged, antigovernment libertarian of the present day. One of Coolidge's biographers, historian Daniel Greenberg of Rutgers University, argues that Coolidge's economic thinking was driven not by ideology, but by moral sentiments instilled by a New England upbringing that valued thrift, prudence, and fiscal responsibility. For Coolidge, this translated into an economic program of low spending, low taxes, and balanced budgets.³¹

²⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 71-80.

²⁹ Coolidge does seem to presage modern conservative sentiment in that, while he cut federal spending in almost all programs, two exceptions are increased spending for immigration control and prisons. Ibid. 78. Regarding budget surplus, see *ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

³¹ Ibid., p. 70.

With Mellon as his adviser, Coolidge was certainly pro-business. He preferred “welfare capitalism,” as it was called at the time – that is, benefits supplied by employers – to government benefit programs. He cut back on enforcement by the antitrust agencies, the FDA, and the Interstate Commerce Commission. Professor Greenberg persuasively argues, however, that Coolidge followed a moderate laissez-faire vision, not a purist one.³² He protected American business with import duties, for example, while laissez-faire absolutists believe in unfettered free trade.³³ Moreover, Coolidge supported the expenditure of federal monies for what were then large infrastructure projects, including the construction of the Boulder Dam (later renamed Hoover Dam) in Colorado and federal buildings for government departments and agencies in Washington, DC, as well as the construction of roads financed by block grants to the states.³⁴

Further, if Coolidge was not a modern-day doctrinaire libertarian, he was not what we would today call a religious conservative or a neoconservative either. The modern religious conservative finds religion to be a source not merely of inspiration and humility, but of certainty. For them, religious teachings often provide answers for questions of public policy. Some religious conservatives believe they have been called by God to seek public office. Coolidge was just the opposite. Greenberg writes that Coolidge subscribed to a social gospel Protestantism that filled him with a sense of humility and that he “never deployed Christian teachings as a political weapon.”³⁵ Coolidge supported United States membership in the World Court, recognized the revolutionary Obregon government in Mexico (after Obregon agreed to compensate American companies for property seized by his government), vigorously pursued arms control negotiations,

³² Ibid., pp. 73, 75.

³³ Ibid., p. 73.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 74-75.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

and signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which states pledged not to use war to resolve disputes.³⁶ These policies are more than enough to disqualify Coolidge as a modern-day neoconservative, even if he also pursued other policies they would find more agreeable.

We next take up Herbert Hoover. Despite having become known to history as the ultimate champion of laissez faire and the arch-enemy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Hoover wound up in that position more through egomania and narcissism than through ideological beliefs. Before becoming president, Hoover made his reputation as a brilliant administrator and a humanitarian. He happened to be in Britain when World War I broke out and took it upon himself to organize a relief effort to provide food for starving people in war-torn Belgium. Along with extraordinary administrative talent, Hoover possessed extreme self-confidence. He was never reluctant to take total command and do whatever he considered necessary, irrespective of whether he had any authority to do so. As he set himself up in this work he declared – in what seems to have become his life-long credo – “it has got to be recognized by everybody...that I am the boss, and that any attempts to minimize the importance of my leadership would do...infinite harm.”³⁷ From this experience, Hoover also developed a strong belief in the power of private rather than government-directed relief efforts.

In 1917, during the war, Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to create the position of food administrator to provide for the production and distribution of food for both domestic consumption and American troops. Hoover was serving as food czar before Congress acted. When the war ended in 1918, Hoover sailed to Europe to head relief efforts.³⁸ Not only was he extraordinarily effective in all of these efforts, he was also adept in letting the world know just

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 114-117 (World Court), 117 (Obregon), 121 (arms control), 123 (Kellogg-Briand).

³⁷ Quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, (New York: Times Books, 2009) pp. 27-28.

³⁸ It has been said that Hoover “fed more people and saved more lives than any other man in history.” Ibid., p. 161 (quoting a Hoover associate).

how extraordinary he had been. The then-assistant secretary of the navy remarked that Hoover “is certainly a wonder, and I wish we could make him President of the United States. There would not be a better one.”³⁹ That man was named Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Hoover certainly agreed. In 1920, he announced that he was a Republican, and declared that if the party “adopts a forward-looking, liberal, constructive platform on the Treaty [of Versailles, which included the creation of the League of Nations]...and is neither reactionary nor radical in its approach to our great domestic questions,” he would give the party his entire support. He added that should the party demand that he become president, “I cannot refuse to serve.”⁴⁰ Hoover entered the California presidential primary, but was trounced.

After Warren G. Harding was elected president later that year, he asked Hoover to be his secretary of commerce. Hoover agreed, but on certain conditions. Because the commerce department, as then constructed, did not offer Hoover adequate opportunities for “constructive national service,” Hoover demanded that bureaus in other departments be relocated to Commerce. It was critical, Hoover wrote later in his memoirs, that his portfolio included “business, agriculture, labor, finance, and foreign affairs.”⁴¹ Harding reluctantly agreed, over the strenuous objections of other cabinet members who were losing bureaus to Commerce, and to the consternation of right-wing Republicans. “Hoover gives most of us gooseflesh,” a Republican senator privately remarked.⁴²

During his tenure in the Harding and Coolidge administrations, Hoover cemented his reputation as a progressive. To Andrew Mellon’s horror, Hoover declared that he favored a progressive income tax and “a steeply graduated tax on legacies and gifts...for the deliberate

³⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴² Ibid., p. 51.

purpose of disintegrating large fortunes.”⁴³ He published a short book, in which he wrote: “We have long since abandoned the laissez faire of the 18th Century – the notion that it is ‘every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost’....We have also learned that fair division can only be obtained by certain restrictions on the strong and the dominant.”⁴⁴ Hoover, however, generally preferred that efforts be undertaken by private parties rather than government, and he was strongly supportive of business. He got into a tussle with the attorney general for applying the antitrust laws to trade associations, which Hoover decried as “a perversion of justice.”⁴⁵

In 1927, heavy rains caused the Mississippi River to swell, levees broke, and floods engulfed communities along more than a thousand miles of the Mississippi River Valley, causing a disaster of epic proportions. It was a crisis made for Hoover. President Coolidge dispatched him to oversee rescue and relief efforts. Hoover performed so well – and received so much credit for it that the following year – that, notwithstanding reservations by the party’s right-wing, he captured the Republican presidential nomination on the first ballot.⁴⁶ The general election was a cakewalk. The nation, under Republicans Harding and Coolidge, seemed to be enjoying unprecedented prosperity. “Given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon with the help of God be in sight of a day when poverty will be banished from the nation,” Hoover declaimed at a campaign rally.⁴⁷ Hoover beat his Democratic opponent – New York Governor Al Smith – in a landslide.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 66 (quoting Hoover’s book *American Individualism*).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 72.

Despite having made some right-wing appeals during the campaign, Hoover seemed to take office as a progressive.⁴⁸ In his first week as president, he remarked that “excessive fortunes are a menace to true liberty.”⁴⁹ One of his first initiatives was to push through legislation providing federal loans to help small farmers develop alliances so that they could compete with large agricultural companies.⁵⁰ Hoover also supported establishing a national institute of health, proposed reforming the banking system, directed the census bureau to begin counting the number of unemployed workers in the country, called a White House conference on the health and protection of children, added two million acres to the national forest reserve, terminated oil exploration on federal lands, and persuaded insurance companies to underwrite pension policies as a precursor to a national system.⁵¹

Then came October 29, 1929 – “Black Tuesday.”⁵² The stock market crashed and financial markets panicked. This was not crisis, declared Hoover, but merely a “depression.”⁵³ Though that turned out to be one of the most hapless word choices in history, for a while knowledgeable observers agreed with him. Hoover asked Congress to appropriate \$150 million for public work projects (the equivalent of less than two billion dollars today), and he asked governors to pursue “energetic but prudent” public work projects in their states.⁵⁴ To do more,

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 74-74 (regarding right-wing statements during the campaign).

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵² I am not suggesting that Hoover took office as a genuine progressive or later became a consistent conservative. His record was mixed throughout his administration. For example, in March 1930 he nominated John J. Parker to the U.S. Supreme Court. Parker was considered a racist and a staunch opponent of organized labor. That nomination pleased only the extreme right wing, and the Senate – with Republicans joining Democrats – did not confirm Parker. In 1932, Hoover (though perhaps somewhat reluctantly) nominated the great liberal jurist Benjamin N. Cardozo to the Court. Ibid., pp. 88, 99-100. Despite his mixed record throughout his four years, it is probably true in general that Hoover seemed to enter office as a progressive and moved right or seemed to move right. William E. Leuchtenburg writes that, by maybe a year or a little more into Hoover’s administration, “progressives came to believe that they had been hoodwinked – fools to ever think of Hoover as an enlightened statesman.” Ibid., p. 98.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

suggested Hoover, would run up the federal debt and shake business confidence. As time wore on and the situation became increasing dire – as businesses closed or laid off workers, breadlines formed on the streets, and people who found themselves homeless moved into “Hooverilles” – the president refused to acknowledge that things were worse than his original diagnosis or that drastic federal action was necessary to reverse the downward spiral. He was acting not as much from an ideological commitment as from cognitive dissonance. He was, quite simply, certain that an approach he adopted could not possibly be wrong. He had already decided that the way to respond was to provide reassurance to business and the financial markets, so that had to be right. When six hundred banks failed during a two-month period at the end of 1931, Hoover responded by promising that federal spending would not exceed revenues. He thought that would be reassuring to business firms and investors. The nation, he explained, was “suffering...more from frozen confidence than...from frozen income.”⁵⁵ As time wore on, Congress, economists, and even his own advisors told him that the government had to do more.⁵⁶ He refused to listen. In his State of the Union Message in December 1931, he said that it was not necessary to provide a “dole” to the unemployed because “our people have been protected from hunger and cold” by voluntary efforts and the nation’s “sense of social responsibility.”⁵⁷ That this was fatuously wrong did not stop Hoover from believing it.

As dismally as history evaluates Hoover’s economic policy, his foreign policy is considered, if anything, even worse.⁵⁸ In 1931, Japan seized Manchuria from China. This was in direct violation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which, only four years earlier, fifteen nations –

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁶ For example, Congress passed legislation to rehabilitate the United States Employment Service, but against the advice of his own advisors, the press, and economists, Hoover vetoed it. Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁸ Hoover was rated the worst president of the twentieth century on foreign affairs in a 2007 poll of scholars of international relations. Ibid., p. 125.

including Japan – agreed not to use military force to resolve disputes. If this use was allowed to stand, the pact was as good as dead. Few people blame Hoover for not intervening militarily, but Hoover also nixed proposals to punish Japan with economic sanctions. His utterly flaccid response was having Secretary of State Henry Stimson tell China and Japan that the United States would not recognize any “agreement” – a euphemism for acquisition of territory – that violated covenants of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Many believe this emboldened Japan and was a contributing cause of World War II. At roughly the same time, Hoover urged parties at the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva to agree to large cuts in their defense budgets, oblivious to the concerns about rising Nazi political power in Germany. Against the advice of Andrew Mellon, who complained that the president was exceeding his constitutional authority, Hoover said that if European countries would grant an economically-desperate Germany a one-year moratorium on war reparation payments, the United States would in turn grant them a one-year suspension on their debt payments to the United States. This initiative, albeit commendable, was inadequate. In all these initiatives, Hoover acted more like a Quaker (as Henry Stimson once noted) than a modern-day neoconservative.⁵⁹

Hoover had come into office in a landslide, and in 1932 he was swept out of office in an even greater landslide. He did not, writes his biographer William E. Leuchtenburg, “go gently into the purgatory of the ex-presidency.”⁶⁰ Surely all presidents who lose reelection are more than a little disappointed; but as an off-the-charts narcissist, Hoover was a special case. Poisonously embittered about Franklin D. Roosevelt’s accomplishments and popularity, Hoover denounced his successor in increasingly virulent terms. Because he couldn’t argue that Roosevelt’s policies weren’t working, Hoover joined extreme right-wingers in calling the New

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 122-27.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 147.

Deal socialist and a betrayal of American principles. “When the American people realize some ten years hence that it was on November 8, 1932, that they surrendered the freedom of mind and spirit for which their ancestors had fought and agonized for over 300 years, they will, I hope, recollect that I at least tried to save them,” he said, for example.⁶¹ More than that, Hoover even claimed that the New Deal was anti-Christian and anti-religious. Liberals “defame the Sermon on the Mount” and seek to “destroy our religious faiths.”⁶²

Hoover personifies something about the turning of the conservative mind. Hoover had his own reasons for disliking – indeed, hating – FDR, the New Deal, and the modern liberal era. His reasons were, at their root, personal. He came to adopt extreme right-wing views to provide salve for his wounded ego, so that he could see himself as a principled hero rather than an abject failure. Many conservatives detested FDR and the New Deal for more straightforward ideological reasons. Some opposed to governmental intervention in the financial system because they considered social security and other programs “socialistic.” Some were “America First” isolationists up until the attack at Pearl Harbor. Some considered FDR a “traitor to his class” because he was not sufficiently protective of business and the wealthy. But while these resentments were intensely felt by some conservatives, they were politically unsuccessful. Hoover could not have been more wrong when he predicted that Americans would recognize him as a hero and FDR as a villain in ten years’ time. Putting aside Hoover himself – who few people have ever come to see as a hero – conservatism seemed utterly routed as a political philosophy

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 150.

⁶² Ibid., p. 151.

for a very long time. In fact, in 1936, 1940, 1944, 1948, 1952, 1956, and 1960 even the Republican presidential nominees were, at least arguably, all liberals.⁶³

The principal conservative standard bearer for much of this time was Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio.⁶⁴ He had been the candidate conservatives favored for the Republican presidential nomination in 1940, 1948, and 1952. Taft's conservatism was not far from that of Calvin Coolidge. Taft believed in the free market, but was not an absolutist. The free enterprise system "has certain definite faults," he said.⁶⁵ He believed in balanced budgets and preferred to achieve them by holding spending in check, but he was willing to raise taxes when necessary. He was a pragmatist who followed facts and data where it led him, even when they led him to conclusions that were inconsistent with his general ideological preferences. He supported America's participation in the United Nations, and especially in the International Court of Justice. He did not believe in projecting American values across the globe through use of military force. He was worried that treating the Soviet Union as an adversary might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Taft was an admirable (if not exciting) individual, but his brand of conservatism – which stressed caution, prudence, fiscal responsibility, and a wariness about achieving foreign policy objectives through the use or threat of force – was not competing successfully with modern liberalism.⁶⁶

It is natural that during a long period in the political wilderness different schools of conservative thought would develop – each refining a message to appeal, first, to a community of readers, listeners, and activists, and then ultimately to voters. These schools undoubtedly

⁶³ These were Alfred M. Landon (1932), Wendell L. Willkie (1940), Thomas E. Dewey (1944 and 1948), Dwight D. Eisenhower (1952 and 1956), and Richard M. Nixon (1962).

⁶⁴ For a brief summary about Robert A. Taft and his ideology, see Bogus, *Buckley*, pp. 25-38.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29-30.

⁶⁶ Taft was, of course, a politician – not a political philosopher – and he was not always ideologically consistent.

embraced ideas that could be traced back to earlier times, but it is during this period that they wove ideas into a full philosophic fabric and built distinct followings.

The first people to call themselves “libertarians” were Albert Jay Nock and H. L. Mencken. Nock and Mencken were journalists, public intellectuals, social critics, essayists, and book authors. They also both helped start and edit magazines – Mencken, *American Mercury*, and Nock, *The Freeman*. Nock’s book *Memoirs of a Superfluous Man*, published in 1943, is considered a seminal libertarian masterpiece. It became the favorite book of a high school senior named William F. Buckley Jr., who read it because Nock was a friend of his father and an occasional guest at his home.⁶⁷ Mencken, meanwhile, had become a fan of an author who, despite denying she was a libertarian, ultimately became the single most powerful magnet for libertarianism in history – Ayn Rand.⁶⁸ Mencken read the manuscript of Ayn Rand’s autobiographical novel, *We the Living*, and helped recommend it to publishers. Thereafter, Mencken and Rand became mutual admirers who read and were influenced by each other’s work.⁶⁹ Rand’s two blockbuster novels, *The Fountainhead*, published in 1943, and *Atlas Shrugged*, published in 1957, have converted countless people to libertarianism. A couple of expatriate Austrian economists – F. A. Hayek and Ludwig von Mises – also became important influences on the growth of libertarianism.⁷⁰ When William F. Buckley Jr. founded *National Review* in 1955, he recruited libertarian Frank S. Meyer, who served as an editor and wrote a regular column for the magazine titled “Principles & Heresies.”

⁶⁷ Bogus, *Buckley*, pp. 67-69.

⁶⁸ Regarding Rand, see *ibid.*, pp. 198-218, and sources cited therein.

⁶⁹ Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press 2009), pp. 33, 43, 48.

⁷⁰ Bogus, *Buckley*, p. 118 n., 134-36.

Modern libertarianism believes in an absolutist laissez-faire economic system and a government that maintains a police force, courts of law, and a military to protect citizens against foreign attack, but does little else. There are, of course, strong and weak libertarians. While some libertarians are purists about those beliefs, others are less rigid. Taken all together, libertarianism is today the largest, strongest, and most influential of all of the schools of conservative thought.

Religious conservatism combines fundamentalist religiosity with political conservatism. By religious conservatism, I generally mean fundamentalist views, including the belief that Scripture should be interpreted literally, or in Catholic circles, that the Church is the infallible interpreter of Scripture. Religious conservatives often believe that religion is under attack, both on the international and domestic fronts. In the formative period of religious conservatism, religious conservatives thought that religion was threatened by atheistic Communism. Today Islam, or radical Islam, may be seen as the principal international threat. Domestically, religious conservatives believe religion is under assault by liberals. For them, the terms “liberalism” and “secular liberalism” are synonymous. They believe that liberals threaten religion by promoting a secular society and squeezing religion out of public life. Some religious conservatives may believe that liberals are sidelining religion out of a mistaken but good faith belief in things such as the separation of church and state. However, other religious conservatives believe that liberals are engaged in a deliberate conspiracy to destroy religion in America. Hoover suggested something along these lines when he said that liberals were defaming Christ’s Sermon on the Mount and seeking to destroy religion.

A number of fundamentalist Protestant preachers – notably, Carl McIntire in Collingswood, New Jersey, and Billy James Hargis in Tulsa, Oklahoma – developed large radio audiences in the 1950s and 1960s by, in the words of Professor Gary K. Clabaugh, marrying the

“fundamentalism of the cross” with the “fundamentalism of the flag.”⁷¹ The fundamentalism of the cross involved a literal interpretation of the Bible; the fundamentalism of the flag involved ostentatious patriotism and alarmist anticommunism. The two were deemed not merely inseparable but the very same thing. It was, moreover, not merely preachers who made this argument. In his first book, *God and Man at Yale*, William F. Buckley wrote: “I myself believe that the duel between Christianity and atheism is the most important in the world. I further believe that the struggle between individualism and collectivism is the same struggle reproduced on another level.”⁷² Buckley was suggesting that America was in the midst of a struggle between good and evil – perhaps literally between God and Satan. On the side of good were Christianity and individualism. On the side of evil were atheism and collectivism in all its forms, which for Buckley included not only totalitarianism and Communism but central planning that permitted government intervention in the economy. Half of his book is devoted to criticizing Yale for teaching Keynesian economics, which Buckley saw as not merely the enemy of national prosperity but of “individual freedom” and “public morality” as well.⁷³ The other half is devoted to criticizing Yale for failing to “Christianize Yale.”⁷⁴ Buckley, it may be said, married Christianity and libertarianism. He saw the two as inextricably intertwined in truth and goodness.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Gary K. Clabaugh, *Thunder on the Right: The Protestant Fundamentalists* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Company 1974), p.84.

⁷² William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing Co. 1951)(Fiftieth Anniversary edition), p. lxvi.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Buckley characterizes Keynesian economics as “a doctrinaire collectivist program.” *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39. For statement that many considered Kristol the godfather of neoconservatism, see Barry Gewen, Irving Kristol, Godfather of Modern Conservatism, Dies at 80, New York Times, September 18, 2009 (available at http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/19/us/politics/19kristol.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)(notwithstanding title, article makes it clear that many considered Kristol the godfather of *neoconservatism*).

⁷⁵ Buckley argued that Christianity was “ultimate, irrefutable truth” and individualism was “if not truth, the nearest thing we have to truth.” *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

Buckley was Catholic, and his Catholicism was integral to his magazine's political views. In its early years, *National Review* ran many stories about Catholic theology and about the church, decrying liberalizations in Catholic doctrine and practice. A number of key editors wound up converting to Catholicism from other faiths.⁷⁶

Irving Kristol, who was known as “the godfather of neoconservatism,” famously said, “A neoconservative is a liberal who has been mugged by reality.”⁷⁷ The hard truth, he thought, was that some people are bad, some people are slothful, and it is a mistake to coddle them. Crime must be deterred by swift and certain punishment. People must be made to walk on their own; government handouts only make them dependent. The same was true in the international arena. Some nations are our enemies, and they must be deterred by superior military might. The Soviet Union, he believed, was bent upon world domination, and it was not going to be dissuaded from that goal through diplomacy and mutual understanding. It did not pay to be overly idealistic in this dangerous world. In a famous neoconservative article, Jeane Kirkpatrick argued America should not be squeamish about befriending dictatorial regimes.⁷⁸ If it was in America's interest to ally ourselves with an anticommunist dictator, it should do so.

According to some historians, the first neoconservative was James Burnham, the man William Buckley recruited in 1955 to serve as *National Review's* foreign policy guru.⁷⁹ In a series of books and feature articles, and most especially a regular column for the magazine titled “The Third World War,” Burnham argued that American strategy for dealing with international Communism – the containment doctrine – was inadequate. He proposed adopting what he called

⁷⁶ Three editors who converted were Jeffrey Hart, Russell Kirk, and Frank S. Meyer. Bogus, *Buckley*, pp. 15-16. For more about *National Review* and Catholicism, see *ibid.*, pp. 98-100, 118-22.

⁷⁷ Bogus, *Buckley*, p. 19 (quoting Kristol).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20 (quoting Kirkpatrick).

⁷⁹ H.W. Brands and Richard Brookhiser have called Burnham the original neoconservative. For a summary of Burnham's work and influence, see Bogus, *Buckley*, pp. 17-21, 222-44, 308-19.

a “rollback” doctrine. Burnham argued that Communism expansion should not merely be stopped but reversed through political warfare, or “polwar,” which would employ propaganda, psychological warfare, sabotage, subversion, and guerrilla warfare. Although his main beat was foreign affairs, Burnham also argued for hard-nosed approaches for social problems at home. Liberals, he believed, were naïve in their desire to solve the problem of homelessness, or of “skid row” as it was then called. “Skid row is the end of the line; and there must be an end of the line somewhere,” he wrote. It was “part of the normal order of things” that people “who by destiny or choice drop out of normal society” wind up there.⁸⁰

The term “neoconservative” was not coined until the 1970s when a group of former liberals – notably including Kristol and Norman Podhoretz – elaborated on Burnham’s thinking, defined it as a distinct school of conservative thought, and began developing a supporting infrastructure of journals and think tanks. Neoconservatism grew in power and prestige within conservative circles, especially within the Republican establishment. One very important Republican who never became a full convert was Ronald Reagan. To neoconservative horror, Reagan vigorously pursued arms control negotiations with Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, even to the point of seeking the total abolition of nuclear weapons. While Reagan never got that far, in 1986 he – over strong neoconservative protest – reached an agreement with Gorbachev to drastically reduce intermediate-range nuclear missiles (the INF Treaty).⁸¹ Nor was George H.W. Bush a neoconservative. However, neoconservatives came more fully in power in George W. Bush’s administration. Indeed, the invasion of Iraq – fueled by neoconservative beliefs that the prior policy of containing Saddam Hussein was too weak, and that that America could export

⁸⁰ James Burnham, *Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism* (Chicago: Gateway Editions 1985), p. 106.

⁸¹ Bogus, *Buckley*, pp. 340-43.

democracy to Iraq and the wider Middle East through military means – was the ultimate neoconservative project.⁸²

Neoconservatism was discredited along with the rationales for that invasion. It may be many years before we learn whether Iraq develops into a stable democracy, but it is clear that neoconservative predictions that American soldiers would be welcomed as liberators with “flowers in the streets” – not the administration’s statement that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction – turned out to be terribly wrong.⁸³ The jolt was so great that one prominent neoconservative, Francis Fukuyama, wrote a book to declare that he no longer supported that ideology.⁸⁴

* * *

The three main conservative schools of thought were brought together by William F. Buckley Jr. in the 1950s and 1960s. It has always been a somewhat uneasy alliance. The schools contain inherent inconsistencies. Most libertarians, for example, want the individual to be as free as possible from governmental control, and therefore do not favor abortion restrictions or prayer in schools. Ayn Rand was a militant atheist, and so are some of her followers. All of these views conflict with deeply-held convictions of many religious conservatives. In addition,

⁸² Thomas E. Ricks, for example, writes that neoconservatives in George W. Bush’s administration were “essentially idealistic interventionists who believed in using American power to spread democracy.” Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press 2006), p. 22. This view was colorfully reflected by former CIA Director James Woolsey, who argued that the invasion of Iraq would get “the Arab world plus Iran” moving in the direction of democracy. “It’s not Americanizing the world. It’s Athenizing it. And it’s doable,” Woolsey said. James Fallows, *Blind into Baghdad: America’s War in Iraq* (New York: Vintage 2006), p. 40. Influential neoconservatives with the high councils of the Bush-43 administration included Paul D. Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, John R. Bolton, Douglas J. Feith, and Elliot Abrams. Even if George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld did not come into office as committed neoconservatives, following the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and surrounded by top neoconservative advisers, they governed like neoconservatives.

⁸³ Regarding predictions of flowers in the streets, literally and figuratively, see Fallows, *Blind into Baghdad*, pp. 64 n., 79-80, 99; Ricks, *Fiasco*, pp. 96, 98, 111.

⁸⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale 2006).

libertarianism's live-and-let-live view clashes with the hardnosed neoconservative support for the war on drugs, its desire to project democracy across the globe, and its willingness to make common cause with friendly dictators . Many libertarians opposed the American military interventions in Vietnam and in Iraq, and in today's post-Cold War environment, oppose maintaining American military bases on foreign soil. America should defend its homeland, they believe, and let other countries take care of themselves. This view is anathema to neoconservatives and religious conservatives who passionately believe, for example, that America should defend Israel militarily.

William F. Buckley Jr. exemplified how to make a coalition possible by tempering purity with doses of moderation, pragmatism, and good-natured wit. At the beginning of the movement, *National Review* served as the hub of the conservative wheel, connecting the three disparate schools of ideological thought and stressing their commonalities. An even more powerful gravitational force pulling the schools together was international Communism and the Cold War. But Buckley is no longer with us; *National Review*, while still important, is not the one main home of intellectual conservatism; the Soviet Union no longer exists; and the Cold War is over. As the three schools of conservatism separate and compete, their representatives are becoming more absolutist, more extreme, and more mean-spirited.

I write this in the midst of the 2012 election campaign. The major parties have just finished their conventions, and the fall campaign between the Republican ticket of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan and the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joseph Biden is now underway. Although Romney started the campaign for the Republican nomination as the presumptive favorite, he did not have an easy path to the nomination. He faced six challengers, and at some period during the race, five of those challengers spent some period of time as the frontrunner in

national polls.⁸⁵ The seven candidates slugged it out over personal matters – accusing one another of being flip-floppers, grandiose, Washington insiders, out of touch with real people, and the like – but they also engaged in a less obvious struggle with ramifications beyond this election. They were fighting over the future of conservatism.

This somewhat under-the-surface debate showed up in the candidates’ repeated claims about being the “real conservative,” the “true conservative,” or the “genuine conservative.” A search in one electronic database reveals that those three phrases have appeared more than 3,500 times in periodicals and news broadcasts during the battle for the Republican presidential nomination – and that’s not counting “consistent conservative,” which has a different meaning.⁸⁶

There may be a tendency to assume this rhetoric was about who was *more* conservative – that is, further to the right on a one-dimensional ideological spectrum – but actually something else was going on. After all, “real,” “true,” and “genuine” mean something different than “more.” At bottom, this was an argument about what conservatism means. The candidates were saying that their brand of conservatism is the one and true conservatism.

Though it is seldom articulated explicitly, this question may have been the most compelling of all to Republican voters. If God – or more appropriately, Ronald Reagan – had descended from heaven and declared a particular candidate to be the true conservative, much-relieved Republican voters would happily have fallen in line and propelled that candidate to victory at the Republican National Convention in Tampa. But there was no word from heaven.

⁸⁵ The seven major candidates for the Republican nomination were Michele Bachmann, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, Jon Huntsman Jr., Tim Pawlenty, Rick Santorum. For at least some time during the race, each of those candidates – with the sole exception of Jon Huntsman – led in the polls.

⁸⁶ I ran the three phrases through the Westlaw “all news” data base to see how often each appeared between July 1, 2011, by which time the campaign was unofficially well underway, and May 30, 2012, when Romney captured enough delegates to secure the nomination. The numbers are “genuine conservative” 147, “real conservative” 770, and “true conservative” 2,654.

Instead, there was an often coded argument over who the real conservative was, and the fact that argument took place was evidence of uncertainty. Paradoxically, Republican voters may have considered being a true conservative a candidate's most important attribute, even though they were plagued by doubt and division about what being a true conservative meant.

I am by no means suggesting that the primary contest was just about ideology. It was about candidates – their personalities, competence, integrity, and electability. And it was about specific issues of public policy too. Yet in this particular election, questions of public policy seemed less important as ends-in-themselves than as examples of what conservatives should believe.

Michele Bachmann, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum battled for the right to represent religious conservatism. Many assumed that after winning that struggle, Santorum would soft-peddle social issues. Most committed religious conservatives knew Santorum was faithful to their cause; he didn't need to continue beating their drum to win them over. To win over other types of conservatives, Santorum needed to emphasize issues they care about. But Santorum doubled down on religious conservatism. He questioned whether public education should continue, or whether education should become the exclusive province of private, parochial, and home schools. He made contraception a campaign issue. He said John F. Kennedy's famous Houston speech about the separation of church and state made him want to "throw up." He seemed to relish a 2008 speech turning up, in which he warned that Satan is embarked on a scheme to destroy America, and that the first two institutions to fall to the Father of Lies were academia and mainline Protestantism.⁸⁷ Some commentators assumed that Santorum's strategists

⁸⁷ "Romney, Santorum Take Widely Divergent Tacks," *Boston Globe*, February 21, 2012, p. 6; Ronald Brownstein, "Santorum's Legacy," *National Law Journal*, April 12, 2012 (2012 WLNR 7930892); Mitchell Landsberg,

calculated that whipping up religious conservatives would be more effective than making a more broad-based appeal. But there is another possible explanation for Santorum's campaign choices: He was a true believer who thought that battling evil and promoting religious conservatism – which, as he saw it, is the same endeavor – was more important than becoming president. After all, he had to know that even if pushing those issues led to pluralities in some Republican primaries, it was a strategy doomed to disaster in the general election.

Discredited by the invasion of Iraq and the unpopularity of George W. Bush's administration, neoconservatives laid low during the primaries. While none of the primary candidates could be clearly classified as a neoconservative, Romney and Santorum sought to make themselves acceptable to neoconservatives by vowing not to permit Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Gingrich tried to one-up them by suggesting he would also pursue regime change.

Ron Paul represented libertarianism expressly. His goal was not to become the Republican nominee but to increase the influence of libertarianism, especially among young voters. He was enormously successful, drawing large crowds on college campuses and doing extremely well with voters under 30. By contrast, social conservatives are in trouble with young voters. According to Gallup, most voters under 35 are pro-choice on abortion, and 70 percent support same-sex marriage. Paul's popularity flowed exclusively from his ideas, not from a scintillating personality. Although he made some concessions to the other schools of conservatism – he opposed abortion, for example – his concessions were few and far between. He rejected neoconservative foreign policy root and branch. In attacking Santorum for supporting earmarks, Paul called Santorum a “fake conservative.” His message was that

Santorum, Under Fire for Satan Comments, recalls Reagan's 'Courage,'" Los Angeles Times, February 22, 2012 (available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/22/news/la-pn-santorum-satan-20120222>).

libertarians – who oppose government spending so ardently that they will not compromise by funding projects in their districts with government largesse – were the real conservatives.

What about Mitt Romney? During the primary contests, Romney was not perceived as a libertarian, neoconservative, or religious conservative – and therein was both his weakness and his strength. Members of none of these three schools were confident that he represented their views. Moreover, because he was not an identifiable kind of conservative, people questioned whether he was a conservative at all. If he clearly belonged to one of the three schools, his compatriots would have cut him slack for having taken pragmatic stands on particular issues while he was governor of Massachusetts.

Sometimes Romney was classified as a country club Republican. That's basically saying that Romney defends the prerogatives of the well-to-do. Republican Party officials and operatives may believe the party is about representing the wealthy; but Republicanism and conservatism are different things, and few conservatives think that is what their philosophy is about. The difference was observable during the last months of George W. Bush's administration, when the government bailed out large investment and commercial banks, insurance company AIG, and automobile manufacturers, as well as the government sponsored entities Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. This was great for the wealthy, but many conservatives – libertarians especially – were outraged.

Romney's weakness was also his strength because no one school of conservative thought saw him as promoting a competing vision of conservatism. Each school of thought recognized that in the battle for the future of conservatism, he would not be their champion – but he would not be their enemy either. The best guess would have been that a Romney administration would probably include representatives of all three of the conservative schools, and the battle for the

future of conservatism would continue. But the school of conservatism that mistrusted Romney the most was religious conservatives – Romney was both pro-choice and pro-gay rights as a Massachusetts politician – and it was not a surprise that a religious conservative wound up contesting Romney most forcefully and persistently. Rick Santorum was the last of Romney’s competitors to finally concede the nomination.

It surprised many people, including me, that Romney selected Paul Ryan as his running mate. I expected Romney to pick a running mate who would appeal to independent voters – a homogenized conservative who was not clearly identified with any ideological school of conservative thought, and who was as moderate as possible without upsetting the Republican base. I considered Senator Robert Portman to be Romney’s most likely choice; according to one analysis, Portman is the seventh least conservative Republican in the senate.⁸⁸ Romney surprised me – and reportedly President Obama’s team too – by choosing Paul Ryan. Ryan is a strong ideologue who claims that Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* was a powerful influence on his political development. But Ryan is not a pure libertarian. He has adopted the blend of libertarianism and neoconservatism popular in the Republican establishment, that is, libertarian on issues of laissez-faire economics and a desire to shrink government and reduce regulations, and neoconservative on social and foreign policy issues.⁸⁹

What does the future hold? No one can say. I am not a determinist who believes that the future is predictable if we can trace the trajectory of history with enough skill. I do not believe that certain ideas are fated to triumph over other ideas. The future of conservatism will, in significant part, be determined by contests among the three main ideological schools of thought.

⁸⁸ Analysis by GovTrack, a service by Civil Impulse, LLC (available at http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/robert_portman/400325).

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Jason Brennan, “Paul Ryan, Randian? No, Just Another Neocon.” Oxford University Press Blog, August 24, 2012 (available at <http://blog.oup.com/2012/08/paul-ryan-randian-neocon>).

Religious conservatism is under the greatest stress; the younger generation is rejecting many of its messages, including its condemnation of same-sex marriage. Moreover, the rejection of science by so many religious conservatives strikes me as unsustainable over the long term. Three candidates for the Republican presidential nomination, for example, did not believe that climate change is real and caused by human activity, and two of the candidates did not believe that evolution has been scientifically established.⁹⁰ Then again, I did not think the rejection of science in religious conservative ranks would be sustainable for as long as it has been. Libertarianism appears to be growing, especially among young people, and especially the version that mistrusts the military-industrial complex and opposes anything that smacks of American imperialism. Moreover, leaders of this brand of libertarianism believe the future of their movement is more important than the current election. Ron Paul has declined to endorse Mitt Romney, and former New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson is running for president on the Libertarian Party ticket even though his candidacy may cost the Romney-Ryan ticket electoral votes in some close states.⁹¹ We are likely to witness an increasingly intense struggle for the soul of libertarianism. It will be interesting to see, for example, what happens to the Cato Institute. Will it continue to be controlled by libertarian purists, or will the Koch brothers seek to ally it with the establishment blend of libertarianism and neoconservatism?

Conservatism today is an increasingly unstable alliance among three distinct and difference groups. The gravitational forces – especially the Cold War – that held these groups together have weakened. The groups are pulling apart and sparing. What each of them wants is to be perceived as the one and true school of conservatism, and appropriate the conservative banner

⁹⁰ Karl W. Giberson and Randall J. Stephens, “The Evangelical Rejection of Reason,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2011, p. A21.

⁹¹ See, e.g., Jeff Zeleny and Jim Rutenberg, “Five Crucial Factors to Watch, Just 58 Days From the Election,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2012, p.1.

for itself. The future is unknowable, and it is impossible to say whether one of three schools of thought will prevail; whether a particular alliance or blend – such as what I call the “establishment blend” of libertarianism and neoconservatism – will prevail; whether some previously vanquished school of conservatism reemerges, such as the traditional conservatism that honors the thinking of Edmund Burke; or whether some new variant of conservatism develops. What we can say with some certainty, I think, is that the future of conservatism depends on the outcome of the struggle over the conservative banner.