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A Symposium on the Common Core

Reviews of:
The Death of Conservatism
Why Are Jews Liberals?

Plus:
The Editors cover Olmert’s visit, Ray Lotta’s ramblings, Twitterature, and more.
We at Counterpoint seek to publish thoughts which reveal the principles and practices of American politics, policymaking, religion, and society. We are conservative in the sense that we find wisdom in the time-tested, vigor in enduring morality, and greatness in the ordered liberty of the American polity.

We are accepting submissions and letters to the editor for our Spring 2010 issue. Please email submissions and letters to counterpoint.chicago@gmail.com

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The Wall Street Journal recently ran a piece by Peter Berkowitz on the role, or lack there of, for conservatism in a liberal arts education. Berkowitz laments the absence of serious discussions and analysis of the American conservative tradition in the university, lamenting that “if they can find time for feminist theory, they can find time for Edmund Burke.” What keeps his suggestion from merely becoming an attempt at a sort of reactionary affirmative action are several assumptions in the piece about that strange beast we call American conservatism.

The first assumption is that American conservatism is a well-defined (and definable) ideology. Second, that it has historical antecedents that coincide with the same foundations of American political ideology and theory. Third, that this wealth of information is worth studying. Fourth, that this tradition is itself a significant deviation from other political theories and identities. What Berkowitz in his column cannot do—for, at a minimum, a lack of space and time—is answer these questions. That is where Counterpoint comes in.

We hope to support intellectualism among conservatives by taking the left and their arguments seriously and by treating the movement with a self-critical eye.

“We hope to support intellectualism among conservatives by taking the left and their arguments seriously and by treating the movement with a self-critical eye.”

We believe that American Conservatism possesses its own philosophical and ideological tradition, rich in observations about human nature and social interaction, both suitable for and deserving of serious intellectual investigation. This tradition is built on several important core beliefs: the emphasis on moral and intellectual excellence, a sense of enduring and inescapable human frailty, the worry that certain democratic practices and egalitarian mores will threaten individual liberty, the importance of religion and the role it can play in molding good citizens, a concomitant understanding of the importance of national and local identity, the inherent fragility of the state and the importance of the use of force to maintain it, a thoughtful suspicion of utopianism, and both a vigorous defense of free-market capitalism as the best and most just socio-political system and a critique of the social consequences of capitalism, both positive (the insight that democratic capitalism is the impetus of creation and prosperity) and the negative (the destabilizing and largely nihilistic machinations of creative destruction).

We believe that these principles do not only outline the basis for what a more just society would look like, but a more prosperous and dynamic one as well.

But these beliefs, as animating or powerful as they are, do not make a coherent ideology or philosophy. The overarching idea that binds conservatism together is engaging civilly with their adversaries.” We hope that, far from acting as a talking points repository, Counterpoint will provide students with critical, scholarly analysis of the great and timeless issues facing our nation.

From The Editors:
What Counterpoint Offers

What Counterpoint Offers: Winter 2010
opposition to radicalism. Conservatism is set up as both the defender of the American Constitutional tradition and, implicitly, the attacker of those who seek to change this. What we are working to conserve, partially, is the dynamic and creative powers of the capitalist system. It is a conservatism of a radical era: it can be, at least somewhat thought of as the conservative corollary to the Western liberal tradition. As the sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote, “Conservatism arises as a counter-movement in conscious opposition to the highly organized, coherent and systematic ‘progressive’ movement.” But it is through this opposition that the liberal regime—democratic capitalism—is best expressed. As Harvey Mansfield put it:

Liberalism, based mostly on self-interest and the virtues of self-interest, is indeed too selfish and ignoble. Liberalism needs sensible defenders who are aware of its vulnerabilities, who understand its principles and are ready to use prudence in applying them. These sensible defenders are mainly conservatives, because most liberals are so devoted to liberal principles that they overlook the weakness of those principles. A partisan liberal typically pursues liberal principles regardless of the common good, and conservatives need to hold liberalism to the standard of the common good, which includes supporting the virtues of generosity and nobility, even though these virtues are not very liberal.

That, in a reflection on a minute aspect of liberalism, is the essence of an important part of the soul of conservatism: it is the moderating influence on the liberal regime that seeks to maintain the best parts of the regime in conjunction with greater traditions and ideas beyond the regime. It is not so much an idea that is separate from American liberalism, but rather an idea that was born in conjunction with it; the two political traditions are inexorably drawn from the same desires and cut from the same cloth and they differ only in their dispositional attitudes to problems and their understandings of human nature. We believe, however, American Conservatism to have the superior disposition and the richer understanding of human nature.

No discussion about American Conservatism would be complete without acknowledging the fact that as a political movement, conservatism has declined in importance and relevance since the end of the Cold War. The presidency of George W. Bush, far from revitalizing political conservatism, pigeonholed it according to the populist appeals of his governance, a stark contrast to the intellectual lineage of an essentially elitist philosophy. Whatever be the state of the political organ of the conservative movement—its natural ebbs and flows in popularity—Counterpoint will, for the most part, exist independent of this fact. Let others in the movement try and win elections; we will concern ourselves with reinvigorating the intellectual side and, in turn, the nexus of the two.

And this is why we refer to ourselves as Counterpoint; we do not wish to replace the current discourse on our campus with something new or radical, nor do we wish to be a burdensome monolith for our classmates, but we do wish to add our own elements to this discussion. Our name is taken from a noble publication of this University’s three decades our senior. Like musical counterpoint, our journal is designed not to overshadow the deliberations of and within political liberalism but to rather add our own counter melody. Naturally the multiple melodies may at times seem very dissonant and discordant, and our line may remain consistently suspended while the other ones pulsate wildly up and down our own intellectual staff paper; these deviations and contrasting actions may seem harsh and argumentative, but the sum of the parts will be a dialogue much enriched by the existence of the separate perspectives. As with music, what we seek is a campus-wide dialogue that is extremely rich harmonically and always clearly directed tonally, while keeping the individual ideologies and perspectives unique. We are not here to merely discuss conservatism as an abstraction, however, but we will apply our principles in, what we hope are new and intellectually exciting ways to the problems besetting society in general, but also our own University of Chicago campus in particular.

We hope to enlighten and engage the campus with this publication, enriching the discourse and, maybe, even sowing the seeds of real dissonance on campus. We gladly invite you, whoever you are, to read on.
Incidents on 57th Street

On Thursday, October 15th, the Harris School of Public Policy invited Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to lecture in Mandel Hall as part of the King Abdullah II Leadership Lecture. Olmert, never to be confused with a competent man, prepared twenty minutes of remarks but took an hour and a half to deliver them because of an orchestrated effort of local pro-Palestinian groups to disrupt and delay his speech with regular outbursts. About twenty-five people, mostly non-University of Chicago students, were led out of Mandel Hall by the security personnel. For anyone curious about the modus operandi of the campus and local pro-Palestinian groups, that Thursday was a revelation. Their aim: their outdoor theatrics included the chant “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!”—a geographic distribution suggesting the elimination of Israel. Their tactics: disturbance, speech suppression, histrionics, and dumb catcalls like, “Your face is ugly!” Most disturbing, a video of the outdoor protest surfaced on Youtube in which some protesters heckled the few (Jewish) counter-protesters with “I have a shiny penny” and “I love Hitler!” Yes, it is probably a mistake for the University to invite a man who will soon undergo a corruption trial as part of a leadership lecture series—that is but a minor concern. Unfortunately, the event set a precedent for an embarrassing and raucous spectacle every time a high-profile Israeli attempts to defend his country to the students at the University of Chicago. The life of the mind indeed.

The event set a precedent for an embarrassing and raucous spectacle every time a high-profile Israeli attempts to defend his country to the students at the University of Chicago.”

Incidents on 57th Street: Winter 2010

In early December 2009, University of Wisconsin-Madison Athletic Director Barry Alvarez stated that the Big 10 athletic conference will begin the process of adding a twelfth team. While Missouri, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and Rutgers figure to be the most likely additions, there is another possibility. Perhaps we are just reveling in the seventy-fifth anniversary of Jay Berwanger’s Heisman Trophy but we think the University of Chicago would make a fine return to the Big 10, seventy years later. Already larger than Division I-FBS schools Tulsa, Rice, and Wake Forest, the University of Chicago needs only the facilities before the original Monsters of the Midway are revived. Of course, there would be heavy opposition to any perceived diluting of campus nerdiness by the humorless, “Keep Chicago Weird” sort who decry the micronationalism of team sports. In the interest of having something to do on Saturdays and making the Northwestern rivalry an actual rivalry, we support all efforts to add the University of Chicago to the Big 10. We would also like to see the building of Milton Friedman Stadium to draw the further ire of the expected opposition.
On January 20th, Professor Michael Walzer gave the John Dewey Lecture in the law school on trying political leaders. In it, he covered four types of trials: revolutionary trials, show trials, victor’s justice, and election trials. We agree that show trials are categorically bad. As for revolutionary trials and victor’s justice, Professor Walzer claims that such trials “may be legally dubious, but politically and morally right.” For example, Professor Walzer mentions the trial of King Louis XVI as an example of a legally dubious trial that was good, since it brought the king under the rule of law. As for election trials, Professor Walzer is against them since they threaten the dynamic of democratic opposition. Even if a President commits a crime—like he claims President Bush did through his “torturing” of terrorists—he should be exempt from being tried due to democratic expediency. It is hard to disagree with Professor Walzer’s basic conclusions—trying leaders after an election is a recipe for the destruction of the health of a republic. However, his reasoning is an “ends justify the means” approach—the expediency of human rights trumps due process. Such a utilitarian approach may be good for a Robespierre, but not for a law professor in a nation in which the rule of law plays such an integral role in preserving our liberty.

It appears the communists in our midst don’t have day jobs. The late fall brought posters proclaiming “Everything you have ever heard about communism is wrong!” and advertising a lecture by Maoist political-economist, Raymond Lotta. This January saw a barrage of middle-aged pamphlet distributors urging “Revolution: Spread It” to those exiting Cobb Hall. Mr. Lotta took his moment to defend the Great Leap Forward and justify the Cultural Revolution. That he would endorse each should be unsurprising. He cites his enemy as a pervasive capitalist “logic” and his mission as the mobilization of students to act on behalf of a new system. The Cultural Revolution unleashed vicious student mobs, cajoled by a little red book. It is the dream of the demagogue like Lotta to see subversive power emanate from his pen. Fortunately for our nation, Mr. Lotta is of the vitiated sort. For Mr. Lotta and his advocates who believe they are so committed to bettering the lives of their fellow men, we have one word of advice: get a job!

We cannot be indifferent to the way our society entertains itself and so, when a fourth-year undergraduate, Jackie Todd attempts to revive *Vita Excolatur*, the campus sex rag, now defunct for two years, we take notice. Ms. Todd claims a desire to seriously explore sex and sexuality and has chosen the venue of intellectual-themed amateur porn alongside taboo-free columns, Masters and Johnson meets Mother Jones. Yet, if the magazine’s history and Todd’s inferences are any indication, the exploitation of human sexuality will treat questions of sex from a geometrical lens more often than from a moral lens. Indeed, the guiding moral principle of such endeavors is that, so long as the woman may transcend her generative nature, the activity is moral. “Vita Excolatur,” taken from the school motto, translates into “the life well lived.” We hesitate to equate a “life well lived” with a never ending Bacchanalia.

Speaking of how we entertain ourselves, *Twitterature* has already hit bookstores nation-wide. It is, in the words of the publisher, a “re-imagining of the classics as a series of 140-character tweets” put together by two University of Chicago second-years. When it is sold almost like a dumbed down *Cliff Notes* and yet retains the air of detached sophistication we are (in)famous for at the U of C, one knows we have stumbled upon something quite instructive. While we doubt the status of *The Da Vinci Code* or *Twilight* as classics, what is important is that this is the epitome of hipster meta-humor. It is a concept about mocking a medium while mocking a subject all the while parodying its very existence. At some point Twitter will no longer provide hipsters with an adequate avenue to express their faux disinterest, and then *Twitterature*, like trucker hats and Kanye West sunglasses, will be forgotten. Until then, we thank the authors for their tutoring in the perverse ideology of irreverence. ☂
Silicon Valley Conservatives
How conservatives can appeal to the surging American web-culture

By Kevin Jiang

“It’s just one more example of the fertile imagination of the Internet. More stuff like this will be popping up all the time.”
~President (then Sen. (D-IL)) Barack Obama on the famous “Obama Girl” video.

At first glance, this quote would seem simply to be Barack Obama commenting on a simple video featuring himself. In fact, whether he knew it or not, Mr. Obama’s comment defined the modern phenomenon that is drastically reshaping American politics: the rising influence of the Silicon Valley culture. It is quickly becoming a political force that the Republican Party can ill-afford to ignore, and unlike some other influential sub-cultures, one that conservatives have the complete ability to harness for its own gain.

What Fertile Imagination?

However, before speculating on how this particular culture will affect the future of American conservatism, we must take a moment to definitively establish what this “Silicon Valley” culture I’ve introduced really is. Admittedly, the name is fairly misleading, as the culture finds itself spread far beyond the miniscule boundaries of the Santa Clara Valley; as trite as it may seem, it exists in every household with an internet connection. The use of this name is necessary only to differentiate this culture from the classical perception of the internet’s users: the swarms of simpletons that hide behind anonymity, screaming epithets such as, “GTFO my interwebs noob, lolololol” at anything and everything. What this culture truly encompasses is, essentially, the core of today’s technological and creative elite: from the obvious (innovators of thriving internet businesses, such as the founders of YouTube), to the anonymous, (the thousands of part-time programmers that are the backbone of open-source Linux), to the simply charismatic (Amber Ettinger, the aforementioned Obama Girl). Every member of this internet subculture uses the internet as a conduit for inspired, intelligent, and addictive creations. While many do reside within the confines of Silicon Valley, they truly could be anywhere and everywhere at once, making them eccentric, brilliant, important, influential, and alarmingly, overwhelmingly liberal.

Politics for Everyone

The power of this demographics’ rise in influence was put on display in the 2008 presidential election, nearly single-handedly turning Barack Obama from a niche Democratic hopeful into the 44th President of the United States. Drawing money, support, and exposure from the vast possibilities that the internet provided him, Obama’s campaign managed to topple American political mainstays in Hillary Clinton and John McCain. It is in that last trait, exposure, that the Silicon Valley subculture truly displayed its political clout. Whereas, a candidate’s campaign once depended on wealth and professional ad-men, now, amateurs with simply a creative idea and an internet connection created ads, posters, and most importantly buzz for politicians, without any professional campaign advisor lifting a single

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finger. Additionally, when official advertisements were released, this culture made sure that the materials reached as many people as possible. And it was not just those with internet connects that were influenced by these campaign contributions; some of these creations became not only part of the web’s culture, but popular culture—the subject of casual conversation and evening news, making it nearly impossible not to have encountered such political campaigning. Almost single-handedly, this tactic managed to rally voters that never gave a second look to the American political process and did what a traditional campaign could never do: achieve nearly worldwide exposure, all without using a single campaign fund. What resulted was that 49.3 to 54.5 percent of voters 18-24 years old showed up to vote, a youth turnout rivaling only that of 1972; the first year 18 year olds were permitted to cast ballots. Add that to hundreds of thousands of dollars donated by members of Microsoft and IBM, technological mainstays, and the profound influence of the “Silicon Valley” culture cannot be denied.

It was not just mainstream candidates that reaped the benefits of this new society. Even candidates without any hope of contending for high office became known names, almost entirely through the abilities of the Silicon Valley culture. Mike Gravel was never considered a threatening candidate for the presidency, yet he found publicity in his confusingly simple, yet intriguing YouTube “Rock” ad. Similarly, the culture rewarded the craziness of Dennis Kucinich with a sizable following, drawn to him for his peculiarity and his intense ideals. This following grew to the point where some polls showed the clearly lower-tier candidate as high as 4th among Democratic primary hopefuls. It seems then that those who benefit from the Silicon Valley culture run the gamut from top level candidates, to the most obscure of niche politicians. However, there is one similarity among all of these examples: they are all Democrats.

**Making the Right Turn**

There are many reasons why this prominent demographic seems so devoid of a right-wing presence, but they all boil down to one main problem, the party line. The Republican Party has long run with a party line of moral value, business, and national security, and before the rise of the Silicon Valley culture, it was a very effective strategy. Nonetheless, what was once a winning formula that attracted droves to the conservative cause, has since become distorted into something that the Silicon Valley demographic and its followers cannot latch onto. Fervent focus on “family values,” such as traditional marriage and pro-life, has pinned the conservative cause with a reputation of hate-mongering. Likewise, conservative commitment to religion has created the impression that Republicans are against science and technology, the spiritual home of the Silicon Valley culture. Justified or not, this misrepresentation of ideals turns the culture against conservatism, and threatens to alienate the masses of citizens that are influenced by it every day. Similarly, in the pursuit of pro-business issues, conservatives are constructed as epitomes of corporate domination and manipulative big business, yet another mortal enemy of the largely informal, do-it-yourself silicon culture. Even national security has become a target for the scrutiny of this new demographic, almost entirely because of the PATRIOT Act. As a culture that values the potential anonymity that the internet provides them, the invasions of privacy that were permitted under the name of national security became yet another reason not to trust conservative politicians. Unfortunately, the ill perception of the Republican Party has not been helped by its own presence on the internet community. Instead of intellectual, reasonable conservatives, the right-wing of the internet is rife with polarizing figures; from intense radicals like Michelle Malkin, to crazed conspiracy theorists, leaving the Silicon Valley culture no other option than to turn to the left. That is not to say, however, that to win the Silicon Valley culture and the gather the benefits of its influence, the Republican party must abandon, or even drastically alter its core beliefs. Surprisingly, some of the most common values within the Silicon Valley culture are not liberal values, but rather in line with some of the right-wing’s most basic philosophies. It then becomes the responsibility of the party not to remove itself from its traditional base, but to begin to establish a new party line, one that hones in on the core values of the Silicon Valley culture.

The crucial lynchpin to this new party line is, in fact, a conviction that is a founding principle of modern conservatism: individualism. "The crucial lynchpin to this new party line is, in fact, a conviction that is a founding principle of modern conservatism: individualism."
unnamed contributors, all sharing merely a commitment to the open-source community, the source code of Firefox was fine tuned, upgraded, and adapted faster than any formally run entity could ever wish to be. A renewed focus on the individuality and libertarianism that originally shaped the rise of conservatism during Ronald Reagan has the potential to connect with the Silicon Valley culture on a level that no liberal ideal would ever be able to. The potential appeal of this libertarianism was present, even in the Democratic dominated 2008 Presidential election, in what simply became known as the Ron Paul Revolution. While hardly the ideal spokesperson for the Republican Party as a whole, the massive internet following that Ron Paul acquired is a case study in the potential that the Silicon Valley culture has for American conservatives. At final count, Ron Paul's campaign had raised over 30 million dollars almost solely from individual donors rallied in large part because of the Silicon Valley culture. This same culture helped propel the candidate to a 4th place finish in the primary, and, more notably, his single, simple ideal of individual freedom to the forefront of the minds of voters across the country. In order to seize on the opportunity that the Ron Paul Revolution allotted the Republican Party, it becomes necessary for the party to supplement the ideal of personal freedom that so resonated with the Silicon Valley culture with some other key conservative topics.

In order to win over the Silicon Valley culture, Republicans must start from its epicenter, the Santa Clara Valley itself, an area that voted overwhelmingly (69.6 percent) for Barack Obama. Silicon Valley is home to hundreds of technology businesses, some of them large, such as Google and HP, but many of them simply small, aspiring internet startups. These small businesses provide the opening needed to ground the cultures support for the Republican Party. As hinted at beforehand, the key to the support of these companies lies in supporting their growth while protecting them from the overarching intervention of bigger business and bigger government. In one sense, conservatives already support the interests of Silicon Valley, they just don't know it yet. In pushing for corporate friendly legislation, Republicans have long looked to bolster entrepreneurship in the United States; however, they have let their opposition characterize their efforts as attempts to prop up corporate bullies rather than aide small business. In order to show the Silicon Valley culture the true extent of its conservative support, the Republican Party must make a push to redefine what corporate conservatism means. By throwing its weight behind such small business friendly technological legislation like net neutrality, a sweetheart topic among the Silicon Valley culture, the Republican Party will be allotted ample opportunity to win over the hearts of the Silicon Valley culture, and in turn be able to harness what will quickly become the new model for the archetypical American Dream.

A Step in the Right Direction

Despite the relative domination of liberal thinking within the Silicon Valley culture, there is evidence that Republican Party has achieved a foothold within this influential culture, opening the door for conservatives into this elite demographic. As Scott Brown's surprise win in Massachusetts proved, even the most liberal of political spheres is capable of swinging to the right. It is simply up to conservatives to see that gaining the support of the Silicon Valley culture would be akin to the conservative resurgence under Reagan in political impact. The next case study must be California, home of Silicon Valley. Both leading conservatives for in the 2010 Gubernatorial and Senatorial campaigns trace their roots directly back to the technological culture: Meg Whitman with eBay and Carly Fiorina with HP. Their showings, whether they win or not, in the California elections will provide a vital litmus test into how well the conservative cause can adapt to the Silicon Valley culture, and conversely how the culture can adapt to conservatives. Ms. Whitman and Ms. Fiorina are only the beginning, however, because despite their connections they both represent the corporate aspect of Silicon Valley, not the core communities. It falls then on young conservatives to steer the party toward the Silicon Valley culture. By expanding the example set by the 2008 National election and the 2010 Massachusetts and California elections, a new conservative resurgence, with a young, technologically inclined Silicon culture at its base, is a very possible achievement. Q
World Managers
Describing a coherent American foreign policy

By Michael Talent

What is America’s role in the world? Should America be a global police force? Should America act only in behalf of its own vital interests? Currently, there is no coherent, overarching American foreign policy “mission statement.” Yet, an examination of the actions of the past three administrations shows a common, underlying belief: that to effectively protect its own security, America needs to manage the progress of the world order towards peace and freedom by anticipating and then preventing or minimizing threats to that progress. The failure of previous administrations to set this explicitly as a strategic goal has resulted in confusion, both at home and abroad, about America’s role in the world; this confusion has led to the atrophy of American power. By openly acknowledging that America’s role in the world is to manage the world’s progress toward freedom, and explaining and justifying that role to the American people, the US can prepare the tools necessary for achieving this goal.

The idea of America as a managerial power is not new. For a hundred years prior to World War I, European powers, including Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany, managed and maintained an international stability that prevented a major war. With all its faults, the British empire attempted to spread around a sense of freedom and rule of law. However, World War I, which the British could have prevented had they possessed the type of power the US has today, destroyed the ability and desire of the Europeans to continue managing the world climate. The resulting power vacuum allowed for the rise of the Axis Powers and a second world war. The devastation caused by two World Wars and the threat of an aggressive, nuclear USSR had a profound impact on American leaders. Under the circumstances, the United States stepped up to fill the role that the Europeans were no longer able to play—managing the world to prevent or contain threats to freedom and security without resorting to another general war. For most of the post-war era, the focus of this policy was containing Soviet totalitarianism, but it was never limited just to that. For example, the US was instrumental in creating and promoting democracy in Japan after World War II.

Today, America does not face a single, global threat like communism. Instead, the threats range from aggressive authoritarian regimes in Russia and China to rogue governments that possess nuclear weapons, to Al Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations, to drug cartels that threaten the stability of Mexico and Colombia. There are also potential threats, such as a nuclear Iran and a culturally collapsing, further Islamizing Europe, which the US faces. In addition, the United States needs to continue stabilizing both Iraq and Afghanistan while fighting the war on terrorism.

However, why should America take on a foreign policy that would necessitate intervention in many areas of the world? First, as a general rule, promoting democracy promotes American security. The logic is simple: a democratic, free, capitalist society has more in common with America than it would with a totalitarian police state, making it a natural ally—or at least an unlikely enemy—of the United States. One such commonality is a free market economy. Because of the capitalist policies of democracies, they tend to share a common desire to promote free trade. However, free trade only happens within the context of international stability. Thus, free nations are likely to work together to ensure an environment where trade can flourish.

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Another reason that democracies tend to work together is a social convention. According to Yale professor Bruce Russett, the unification of democracies against totalitarian and autocratic regimes in World War I and World War II, followed by the Soviet threat to world freedom, created an understanding among democracies that they are to function as allies. The basis of this cooperation is the Anglo-American relationship. Created after the end of the War of 1812, there are many examples of cooperation between America and Britain that predate their alliance in World War I. For example, the two nations ended a debate about the northern boundary of the US through diplomacy in 1846. This relationship established a social norm that democracies need to work together—a social norm that was strengthened through the 20th century military alliances of democratic nations against totalitarian aggression.

Second, serious aggression has a great potential for spinning out of control unless it is actively managed and contained. The proliferation of WMD’s is an example. America can provide, through its nuclear arsenal and missile defense system, an umbrella for its global allies. However, if the United States appears unprepared to confront rogue regimes who have, or are seeking, weapons of mass destruction, then nations who currently depend on America would have an incentive for creating their own WMD arsenal in response. The resulting proliferation increases the chances of terrorists gaining access to these weapons as well as the chance of a nuclear exchange somewhere in the world. Both of these scenarios are significant threats to US security. For example, allowing Iran to produce nuclear weapons would threaten the balance of power in the Middle East. This would encourage states like Saudi Arabia or Jordan to build their own nuclear arsenals. In a region with an active anti-American terrorist presence and people and governments who have openly supported these factions, the likelihood of a terrorist group gaining nuclear weapons increases exponentially with each new nuclear regime. However, the US can thwart this, and similar threats, if it actively manages nations aggressively seeking WMDs.

Stating such an explicit “managerial” mission would highlight the common foundation of foreign policy in the last three administrations. For example, both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton acted to contain aggression and genocide in Gulf War I and Kosovo. In both of these cases, the US intervened, contained, and eliminated a threat to the security of that particular region. In addition, President George W. Bush rationalized the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by arguing that both nations represented exigent threats to world stability. The Obama administration has been no less firm about the need for American global leadership. While the tactics and the rhetoric that each administration has used to first enact and then justify their policies have been different, they all have used American influence and power to manage the international order to promote freedom. President Obama is in a position to openly acknowledge and legitimize America’s historical role in world affairs. This would move the discussion to the capabilities necessary for America to achieve this goal.

What should these capabilities be? There are many other tools necessary for an effective foreign policy: such as diplomacy, aid, and trade. However, the most foundational is a strong military. This power is necessary if diplomacy and aid are to be effective and trade is to occur. For example, if the US is to use diplomatic tools like sanctions, then it must have a strong military to enforce those penalties on a country. Of all the tools that America has in its arsenal, its military power has declined the most in the post-Cold War years. For the US to function as a managerial power in the coming years, it must revitalize it armed forces and be prepared to use it.

In order to have a strong military, the United States needs to increase the size of its armed forces and step up its investment in military technology. During the 1990’s, the size of the military was halved and the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have stretched US military resources thin. The fact that the Reserves and the National Guard have been used so much in Iraq and Afghanistan testifies to the inadequate size of the army. In addition, the Air Force is approximately half the size it was in 1991 and the average age of its planes is 24 years old, compared to just 9 years in 1973. The Navy can only maintain about ninety ships at sea at any given time compared to almost 190 in the late 1980s. In addition, the Navy only has ten aircraft carriers, compared to eleven in 2003 and fifteen in 1991. Current US military strategy takes into account the possibility of fighting two regional wars, such as continuing to prosecute the current conflicts in the Middle East while repelling a North Korean invasion of South Korea. However, considering the size of the current US armed forces, such an ability is currently a pipe dream.”
the size of the current US armed forces, such an ability is currently a pipe dream.

The second ingredient for a strong military is technological superiority. During the Cold War, American technological superiority was an integral part of ensuring victory. President Reagan’s military buildup, particularly the development of weapons systems and concepts decades ahead of what the Soviet Union was capable of, forced the Soviets to reform their economy in an attempt to catch up, helping to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the US still maintains this technological edge, the gap is rapidly closing. For example, China, a nation whose own imperialistic ambitions are well known, is rapidly buying and recapitalizing its air force with the next generation of fighter aircraft. In January of this year, Russia test flew their next-generation fighter, the T-50, which incorporates the latest stealth technology and weapons system. However, Congress has stopped funding America’s own next generation fighter, the F/A-22. By ending funding for the F/A-22, Congress has jeopardized the US’s ability to achieve and maintain air superiority. The result of the decreasing technological gap between the United States and her rivals will be increased American casualties in conflicts and a decrease in American influence abroad.

In addition to strengthening its armed forces, the United States should seek to establish military alliances like NATO with democratic nations like India and Japan. Such alliances will increase the combined military strength of the United States and her allies through the pooling of resources and intelligence. However, this increase in strength can only happen if, first, the United States leads the alliance. What would happen if, for example, India substantially increased its military strength outside of an American led organization? Pakistan would see this as a potential threat and might respond, leading to a dangerous, possibly uncontrollable, confrontation between the two nations. But if India becomes stronger in an alliance under the leadership of the US, then the threat that India poses to Pakistan is tempered by the controlling aspect of American leadership. Secondly, these alliances require a clear purpose, and member states dedicated to that purpose. Clarity prevents confusion about the goal of the alliance. Without clear goals, each state will try to impose their interest on the tactical decisions made by the group. In addition, the member states of such alliances must commit themselves, through military and economic means, to providing the strength necessary for the alliance to accomplish its goals. This is in direct contrast to a body like the UN Security Council, whose lack of a clear purpose has led to internal strife among the competing interests represented in the body and an inability to act anywhere with any sort of mission. In addition, the lack of commitment by the member states has resulted in failure to preserve world peace.

America needs to do something to reverse the current negative trends in its foreign policy. Iran has ignored repeated warnings to halt its nuclear weapons program, the Chinese military has increased exponentially, and Russia’s imperialist ambitions have not been met with any real resistance, particularly when it invaded and occupied Georgia. Meanwhile, Washington has cut funding of the new high-tech military systems and sacrificed its missile defense system to placate the Russians. The cumulative effect of these developments is that the US looks uncommitted to protecting its global interests and allies. Without confidence in American leadership, other nations will begin to fall under the influence of aggressive powers and concomitantly become more hostile to US interests. By promoting new alliances, the US would show real commitment to maintaining the independence and freedom of its allied nations. For example, establishing a military alliance with the free nations surrounding China, like India, South Korea, and Japan, would confirm America’s commitment to prevent Chinese aggression and provide means to act in the region more freely when it is necessary. In addition, a United States that has committed itself, through alliances and a military buildup, to protecting the international order from aggressive nations would encourage more countries to ally themselves with America, because it would show the benefits such an allegiance would promote.

Finally, these alliances would reinforce America’s role as a managerial rather than imperial power, an important distinction in the modern world. The US should work with other nations in preserving the world’s movement toward liberty. Establishing new alliances would show the world the true intentions of America power—that it is not a dominating or conquering force, but rather a protective and liberalizing influence.

For too long, the objective of America’s foreign policy has been far too ambiguous. This resulted in a US that has appeared weak and wavering in its global commitments. President Obama has the opportunity to reaffirm America’s global commitments by explicitly stating that the United State’s role in the world is to anticipate and manage threats to the prospect of progress within the world order towards liberty. This declaration would provide clear policy guidelines for how America might best reach this goal. Time is short; the enemies of freedom are continually gaining strength. Yet there is still hope if the United States effectively makes its presence felt in the world once again.
The Party of (No) Principle
The Libertarian Party’s disintegrated and misintegrated philosophy of liberty

By Etan Heller

The libertarian movement is not exactly the easiest thing to define. The conception of libertarianism held by most people with mainstream political beliefs usually consists of specific policy positions or overly-generalized characterizations of the movement’s attitude: “They’re against any taxes.” “They hate the government.” “They want to legalize drugs.” Within the movement, these points, as well as their underlying ethos, are points of pride for any self-described libertarian or anarchist. Most libertarians one meets hold a certain intellectual self-confidence. The movement in general exudes an aura of ideological security. Why is this? What gives this diverse movement such intellectual self-assurance?

One can easily attain the answer to this question in conversation with almost any libertarian, or by reading any “liberty-oriented” media or literature: the foundation for such self-assurance is the belief that libertarianism is the principled political movement, one that identifies ethical concepts, such as non-aggression and natural rights, and defends them beyond the level of compromise that is embodied by mixed-economy advocates and mainstream political parties, and blindly endorsed by American conservative, liberal, and moderate voters. The Libertarian Party, although by no means the standard-bearer for all, or even most, libertarians, proudly advertises itself as “The Party of Principle.” Any self-described libertarian, Party-supporter or not, would identify with this label. The libertarian movement, diverse though it is, is bolstered by confidence in its ethics, asserting the free market as good and coercion as bad. From this fortress of moral certainty, it attacks statism, denouncing the evil of oppressive governments, of state controls of any kind, extolling the virtues of freedom and the evils of slavery to the state.

I used to be a libertarian. Don’t get me wrong – I didn’t have a change of heart. I did not become a communist, realize that I disagreed with the ethics of economic or social freedom, give in to doubt, or join the two-party system. In fact, I still agree with the ethos of libertarianism. I no longer describe myself as a libertarian because I realized that most libertarians have no valid philosophical justification for the ethics of liberty. This is a problem with the

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movement itself since it leaves its ethics undefined, allowing its adherents to be either ignorant of the necessary justifications of ethics, or to justify their ethical system with subjective whims and non-logical assumptions. In essence, “non-aggression” and “rights” are axioms for most libertarians. They take these concepts as givens and move on to consequentialist economic arguments, ignoring the primary to these arguments, the validation of ethical theory. There are two major ways in which this philosophical problem manifests itself within the mainstream of the libertarian movement (I will not address extreme variants such as “libertarian-socialists”): the non-integration, or disintegration, of ethics, in which the libertarian has made no attempt to integrate his ethics into a more complete philosophical system, and the misintegration of ethics, in which the libertarian has integrated his ethics into an invalid philosophical system.

First we must deal with the total absence of a valid ethical basis that is prevalent in the libertarian movement. Many libertarians can mouth platitudes about “freedom”, “liberty”, “slavery”, and “rights”, but cannot justify these concepts, and sometimes cannot even define them. In essence, these disintegrated libertarians have skipped the first steps of philosophy...

This decision is always an ethical decision, because it involves the “ought” necessitated by choice. Naturally, if one detaches ethics from choice, one will arrive at the conclusion that ethics need no basis in reality. Yet this assumption is mistaken; in order for life to achieve its teleological end—self-preservation—man must make decisions based on the objective facts of reality, and therefore requires an objective code of ethics based on metaphysical truths to inform these decisions, if he is to survive and flourish. The disintegrated libertarian does not recognize the need to identify metaphysical facts before forming ethical opinions. Out of ignorance or a mistaken acceptance of the “is-ought” gap, the disintegrated libertarian denies or ignores philosophical context and takes ethics as an unexplained primary.

This problem is present in many libertarian publications and in the Libertarian Party itself. Reason Magazine is one of the most well-known libertarian publications, a bastion of economic research and anti-regulation advocacy. Its slogan is “Free Minds and Free Markets”, and its Web site states that it plays an important advocacy role “by making a principled case for liberty and individual choice in all areas of human activity.” Yet no articles are written from the ethical viewpoint, and no philosophical rationale is given for “liberty and individual choice”. The magazine generally publishes economic articles and anti-state, pro-individual cultural pieces about current events, motivated by ethics that it apparently sees no need to justify, clarify, or talk about.

The Libertarian Party, as well, provides only vague ethical concepts as the moral foundation of its platform. Its Web site states that the “moral principle of self-ownership” is behind its political assertions, and it describes the “Libertarian way” as “caring”, “tolerant”, “free,” and “independent”. Again, these notions are left without foundation, stated as morally self-evident, as impassable ethical towers that can be ostensibly justified or else intuitively accepted. In the same way, Ron Paul libertarians see the Constitution as some sort of ultimate defining document, with...
no need to go beyond it and validate the ideas in it beyond the assertion that “freedom is good”. By themselves, these are not philosophically-integrated principles. The Libertarian Party has no right to call itself “the Party of Principle” if it sees no reason to validate its ethical precepts with the necessary philosophical premises.

In these cases, and in many more on the individual level, libertarian ethics are assumed to be self-evident. This is precisely the mistake of the disintegrated libertarian; ethics are never self-evident and must be shown to be based on a rational, logical view of reality and humanity. The alternative is to accept some sort of ethical intuitionism, where the individual intuits the correct moral precepts, or else gains it from social consensus. This mystical theory of innate, self-evident ethics leads to many contradictions, and does not account for the wide range of contradicting moral codes held by different people – it gives no way to judge with ethical “intuition” is correct, as intuition itself is the source of ethics. If many libertarians implicitly or, even worse, explicitly accept this method (as well-known libertarian/anarchist Michael Huemer does), and do not embrace philosophical justification, their views are philosophically equal to any other view that they might not agree with. Without valid philosophical justification, there is no valid ethical argument. It makes no difference if you advocate the antithesis of evil, of statism, of oppression. If you cannot justify your ethics beyond claims like “Freedom is good” and “Aggression is evil”, then you’ve chosen your ethical system the same way that many anti-libertarians have – without thinking. If you’ve divined your ethics by some sort of moral intuition, by emotion, or by any way connected to “feeling” that it’s the right way to go, then you’ve ceded any philosophical validity your viewpoint has, and abandoned the logical primaries to skip to an arbitrary ethical system.

Another philosophical problem with disintegration in the libertarian movement is that its adherents generally only discuss ethics in terms of politics. Politics is one branch of ethics, ethics applied to the organization of society, ethics in a social context. If political ethics is the only ethics you hold explicitly, then your ethics cannot inform you in any non-political context. Even if the disintegrated libertarian ignores the fact that he has no metaphysical and epistemological basis for his ethics, he still does not have an ethical system that can help him in any practical situation he encounters; only when he enters the voting booth will his ethics inform his actions. Outside of the political sphere, only a ghost of his political ethics (perhaps an individualistic, pacific, or anti-authoritarian attitude) can be a moral guide to his non-authoritarian attitude, and a weak, undefined one, at that. Why is the viewpoint that morality only applies when a government is formed accepted as rational? Ethics arise out of the existence of the concept of free will – for every “could” there is a “should.” This is applicable on the individual level, in the context of society or not. To only ask ethical questions when it comes to politics is a refusal to consistently apply a philosophical concept with universal implications.

This brings us to the second type of philosophical flaw I’ve encountered in the libertarian movement: the misintegrated libertarian, who has a philosophical basis for his or her ethical system that is incomplete or illogical. The three types of misintegrated libertarians are: religious libertarians, post-modern libertarians, and consequentialist libertarians. Many pro-liberty Enlightenment thinkers, such as John Locke and Frederic Bastiat, were early misintegrated libertarians because they believed in natural rights – rights to life, liberty, property, the pursuit of happiness – and even went to great lengths to philosophically validate them, yet ultimately justified the rights of the individual as gifts from God, or described rights less directly as divinely justified. While these men were geniuses and certainly advanced pro-liberty ideas intellectually, they ultimately relied on a supernatural being whose existence cannot be rationally proved as the source of man’s need to be free. Many secular libertarians today will quite understandably tell you to read Locke or Bastiat when you ask them to justify the concept of rights. However, a full philosophical integration of these concepts needs a rational, valid metaphysical and epistemological understanding, based not on God, an unproven, transcendent entity, but rather based on man as an existing being.

The post-modern libertarian is perhaps the most difficult misintegration to pin down. Because the dominant philosophy in modern culture is post-modernism (or relativism), many libertarians have implicitly accepted relativist philosophical
premises as a validation of the libertarian political theory. The post-modern libertarian will insist that morality is “subjective”, that every ethical belief is valid and true relative to the person asserting it, and that therefore nobody should force anybody to do anything they don’t want to do. In this way, they justify non-aggression by rejecting any objective morality, ignoring the connection between ethics and metaphysics, between “is” and “ought”. Relativism is a flawed philosophy by itself, and when combined with libertarianism, creates a plain contradiction: if every opinion about morality is equally valid and true, and no absolute moral truths exist, how can one assert that aggression is wrong? Is this not an absolute claim about morality, an ethical statement? In reality, a truly post-modern libertarian is a contradiction in terms, in that libertarianism does indeed hold (however unjustified) objective ethical standards, while post-modernism, or relativism, or subjectivism (however you want to label it) rejects objective ethics altogether. This is the worst case of the misintegrated libertarian. He has probably unknowingly absorbed invalid metaphysical and epistemological premises which are evident in his subjectivist assumptions about ethics, and these assumptions actually contradict the political philosophy he is espousing.

Another type of misintegrated libertarian is the consequentialist libertarian. These libertarians will argue that that what is morally good is whatever works, whatever creates the most material wealth or produces the most for the most people. This free market utilitarianism gets rid of rights altogether and says, “The free market works better than a mixed economy, and much better than a communist planned economy, so it must be the best system, and therefore is the most moral.” This pragmatist argument supposes that a system’s consequences decide its morality, not the other way around.

“This free market utilitarianism gets rid of rights altogether and says, ‘The free market works better than a mixed economy, and much better than a communist planned economy, so it must be the best system, and therefore is the most moral.’ This pragmatist argument supposes that a system’s consequences decide its morality, not the other way around.”

For these utilitarian libertarians, the consequences are the standard by which one judges a social system, yet those who hold this viewpoint, in the libertarian context, usually give no account of how to judge the consequences themselves. In other words, such an argument leaves no way to determine which consequences are good – no actual ethical standard is presented. Consequentialist libertarians might assume that prosperity is the ultimate good, but there are others who instead value equality as the best consequence. If one subscribes to consequentialist libertarianism, there is no standard by which to judge which of these consequences is the right one. Furthermore, this philosophical basis leaves the means unaccounted for, as the ends justify the means in every situation. In reality, there should be no dichotomy between judgment of the means and the ends, as both are essential parts of an action. An ethical system should be applicable to all situations, and involve the entire context of the situation, not just one part of it. The utilitarian case for laissez-faire capitalism does not provide such rigorous applicability, and is therefore easily susceptible to any ideology with an argument for its specific target-consequence. Only a defense which has its morality as primary should be admitted as a valid ethical defense of capitalism.

An interesting thing about consequentialism is that it can influence those libertarians who still assert some objective moral standard for their political philosophy. One can see this in the fact that Reason Magazine, although it states that it exists on moral premises, focuses on publishing economic
articles, implying that these economic observations validate its unexplained moral premises. Although the editors of the magazine recognize that libertarianism requires a moral basis, the view that economic arguments are more important to the libertarian movement is implicit in what they choose to publish. Many individual libertarians also hold some unjustified ethical principle about coercion, but when speaking with a non-libertarian, or debating a statist, they will almost exclusively resort to economic arguments. Many libertarians believe that laissez-faire capitalism is the most moral system, yet cannot argue from the moral standpoint, only the economic. Why is that? Because they know that their belief in the morality of their political philosophy is shaky and, to some extent, ungrounded.

The central problem with the movement, a problem with American politics in general, is that people tend to view politics as a primary, thus destroying any chance of philosophical integration. Misintegration occurs, in most cases, because of a lack of explicit philosophy (as with the rampant implicit acceptance of relativism among libertarians). If libertarians were more aware of the role philosophy plays in forming political viewpoints, and in the inherent connection between morality and politics, those who hold no philosophical justification would perhaps seek out comprehensive premises, and those who hold flawed, usually unconscious philosophical justifications would recognize the contradictions within their implicit premises. Libertarians would do good to eliminate the disintegrated and misintegrated elements of the movement and not preserve them in the name of “intellectual diversity,” a euphemism for relativistic inconsistency. A political philosophy that accepts disparate viewpoints will never achieve much, as it sabotages itself by crippling its own unity, by allowing inconsistency to be its defining characteristic, and by promoting internal contradictions as signs of its “diversity.” Libertarians must recognize that the system they have been advocating for, free-market capitalism, is a moral system, the moral system, and not sacrifice this philosophically-valid claim because economic arguments are easier or because we can convert more people by accepting welfare-ethics, as many prominent libertarians have suggested. Where there is an asserted dichotomy between the moral and the practical, the moral system will never be achieved. Only through consistent and valid premises can a movement advance its ideas in a meaningful way.

The scattershot, disagreement-prone libertarian movement of today will never achieve much if its proponents continue to accept this mode of operation as valid. This is not just a strategic diagnosis, but a philosophical one; only consistent, valid philosophical ideas can lead to a consistent, valid practical system. The founding of the United States demonstrated this, to a certain extent – the philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment, although not perfect, were concretized politically because of the rational nature of the philosophy, and because the men who held them held them explicitly and consistently.

Today’s political system has lost that focus on explicit ethics as a prerequisite to governmental theory, and certainly does not recognize philosophy as connected to politics, except as a flourish in superficial rhetoric.”

Today’s political system has lost that focus on explicit ethics as a prerequisite to governmental theory, and certainly does not recognize philosophy as connected to politics, except as a flourish in superficial rhetoric. As such, politics is a philosophical branch isolated from philosophy. If the Libertarian Party, and libertarians in general, wish to portray themselves as authentically, intellectually “principled,” they should abandon the lazy, anti-philosophical, destructive paradigm so pervasive in mainstream American politics, and focus on validating ideas with rational philosophical context. Until then, the movement will continue to be as aimless and ineffective as the two-party system has been, and “The Party of Principle” will continue to be an empty rhetorical bromide.
Wishing Away Uncertainty
The problems of climate science and the dangers of policy projections

By Josh Lerner

“Scientists, like artists, have the bad habit of falling in love with their models.” - Professor George Box

With the recent breakdown of talks in Copenhagen (or, for those in an alternate universe, the agreement on “non binding” suggested carbon “targets”) and the admission by several high profile Democratic Senators that any major climate change legislation passing in this congress is “unlikely,” the political momentum seems to be rapidly escaping advocates for large-scale reform and regulation to counteract the affects of man-made global warming.

And why shouldn’t it? To the layman (also known as the average voter), the case for catastrophic consequences coming from man-made global warming seems to be getting weaker and weaker. Two major developments have recently increased the doubts that these voters have over both the predictive validity of these results and the honesty of the scientists who collected them.

The first development is the abnormally cold winter we are having in much of the country. The two massive December snow storms in Oklahoma, a state so unprepared for the snow that major cities like Tulsa were not plowed out for weeks, along with rather unremarkable temperatures in much of the country since 2006, creates the impression that this mythical warming is simply not happening. Obviously, temperature readings, particularly in such a small time frame, say very little about global climate trends. Climate scientists are right to say that these fluctuations neither prove nor disprove any element of anthropogenic climate change. This result is, unfortunately, mostly a sideshow.

But the other major development is much more significant and has drawn major attention to a more banal, yet equally important element of climate projections: the validity of the data. That would be the scandal quickly dubbed “climategate.”

This past November, a large cache of emails and other documents from the Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in Britain were either hacked or leaked to the general public. These emails, consisting of almost 10 years of exchanges, show a group of insulated scientists who, in the words of MIT’s Michael Schrage, engaged in “malice, mischief and Machiavellian maneuverings.” The scandals in these emails, with regards to the validity of their research, range from trivial (tax code “hand waving”) to catastrophic (the “massaging” of data and discussing their desire to avoid complying with the Freedom of Information Act).

The scandal, although far from disproving the claims of the scientists hereto embroiled, did cast major doubt as to the honesty and the interpretations of this data. Professor Phil Jones, the CRU’s director, is in charge of the two key sets of data the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) used to draw up the most famous reports that provided the United Nations with their catastrophic predictions. Through its link to the Hadley Centre, his global temperature record is one of the most important of the four data sets on which the IPCC relied to make its eschatological predictions. The charges of widespread malfeasance have cast serious doubt upon the whole operation.

But even ignoring the whole controversy over the emails—and given that new information has been slowly leaking over the past few months and the story of those implicated has changed just as rapidly—there exists a much more important, and often unstated, problem underlying the entirety of this climate prediction industry. The problem is essentially one of systemic uncertainty, the uncertainty that is built into the very foundation of a prediction. The greater part of the case for a radical reformation of the global economy is built on the catastrophic nature of predictions based entirely on...
long-term probability models with inputs both ancient and modern. The systemic uncertainty here, at every level of this intellectual formulation, is the crucial, and often overlooked, element of analysis. But given the gravity of the policies designed to alleviate anthropogenic global warming (hereon referred to as AGW), it is a topic necessary to discuss.

What is Uncertainty?

Uncertainty is an idea whose very nature is hard to define. It is usually thought of, in the dictionary sense of the word, as “the lack of sureness about someone or something.” This definition, however, doesn’t capture the important effects of uncertainty. A better definition would be one given by Professor Frank Knight, of our very own University of Chicago, in his seminal 1921 book Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit, which clarifies the important distinction between risk and uncertainty:

Uncertainty must be taken in a sense radically distinct from the familiar notion of risk, from which it has never been properly separated.... The essential fact is that ‘risk’ means in some cases a quantity susceptible of measurement, while at other times it is something distinctly not of this character; and there are far-reaching and crucial differences in the bearings of the phenomena depending on which of the two is really present and operating.... It will appear that a measurable uncertainty, or ‘risk’ proper, as we shall use the term, is so far different from an unmeasurable one that it is not in effect an uncertainty at all.

When we break up uncertainty we can create different categories of ignorance and how one should respond to them. At the most basic there is uncertainty, the lack of certainty, a state of having limited knowledge where it is impossible to exactly describe existing state or future outcome, and more than one possible outcome. When one has described uncertainty, there are some situations in which you can measure it. If one can measure uncertainty, one can define the set of possible states or outcomes where probabilities are assigned to each possible state or outcome—this also includes the application of a probability density function to continuous variables.

Risk, however, is a state of uncertainty where some possible outcomes have an undesired effect or significant loss. This is the crucial concept in the evaluation of policies designed to mitigate the warming. The measurement of risk is the set of measured uncertainties where some possible outcomes are losses, and the magnitudes of those losses—this also includes loss functions over continuous variables.

The classic example of uncertainty and risk would be simple weather predictions. If I do not know if it is going to rain tomorrow, I have an uncertainty. If I know there is a 70% chance of rain tomorrow, I have a quantified and qualified uncertainty. If I’m planning a picnic tomorrow, the probability it is going to get rained out versus the cost of putting it on is the risk I’m taking.

What is rather hard to do is to measure the uncertainty without an a priori knowledge of the probabilities built into the system. Quantifying uncertainty is something that becomes more and more difficult with the increased complexity of the system you are analyzing, and the simple probabilities become far more difficult to comprehend. Uncertainty that is by its very nature immeasurable, sometimes described as Knightian uncertainty, is an important factor in undermining the usefulness of a probability model.

Knightian uncertainty is best understood as an epistemological phenomenon, one that necessitates separating objective and subjective uncertainty. Objective uncertainty can be quantified: it is uncertainty that is based around what Donald Rumsfeld in a radically different context called “known unknowns.” This is uncertainty that can be planned for, quantified, and assessed. All models and scientific experiments deal with these known unknowns; the very existence of probability modeling is the measurement and use as a predictive tool of this objective uncertainty.

Knightian uncertainty, however, deals with the “unknown unknowns” or, said differently, with subjective uncertainty. This type of uncertainty creates situations in which grand systems and predictive forecasts break down in unexpected and unforeseen ways. Knightian uncertainty is something that, in say financial markets, drives people to behave very cautiously and react as if there exists highly probable catastrophic risk even if none is detectable. Knightian uncertainty arises from inherent complexities in a system, in the errors made in data collection, in the tiniest human errors in computation, etc. By the very nature of these mistakes, they are nearly random and unpredictable. Compounded Knightian uncertainty can lead to catastrophic outcomes if too much weight is given to the predictive capabilities of the models. If there exists the possibility of poorly collected, calibrated, or refined data, the uncertainty that arises renders the model useless. Going back to our weather example, Knightian uncertainty would refer to the probability of the forest burning down the night before, or a meteorite striking, or your car as you go to the park breaking down, if all you know is the weather probabilities. Given that any of these incidents have a nonzero probability of happening, and that many of them could be exacerbated by human error, Knightian uncertainty can drastically derail any sort of predictions made with incomplete information.

Which, of course, brings us back to the Climate Research Unit. The language used to describe the data
Naïve (no-change) benchmark model forecast errors

Mean and maximum benchmark forecast absolute errors from Hadley temperature data, by forecast horizon

Armstrong, Green Graefe, & Soon 2009

percent of the raw data had been lost in a data transfer. As the Climategate emails clearly show, the scientists who made the adjustments to the data are severely invested in proving the veracity of anthropogenic global warming. And they now admit that they've lost some of the data. This is by far the most damning element of it all. If one is conducting important work that he knows will be controversial, particularly if it will have public policy implications, he cannot lose the data. He should document everything he did to the data and make the data available to others. Even if a small amount of data was lost, the data becomes worthless if it is not the exact same reference they used; even the smallest difference in the data set could have humongous consequences.

This is where Knightian uncertainty rears its ugly head: if the data collection cannot be considered totally honest (and how is one to know it was totally honest when their results cannot be checked against the raw data) the unknown unknowns within the model become astronomical. The only way to test the validity of the models, if they have any left, is by back-testing their predictive validity. These models must show that they are the superior predictor of future temperatures, something they tendentiously fail to do. Scott Armstrong, founder of the International Journal of Forecasting and a professor of “marketing and projection” at the Wharton School of Business, has engaged in a rigorous analysis of the predictive power of these models, particularly the IPCC models, comparing them to what he calls naïve models, models that assume no advance knowledge of climate and simply assume precise zero growth.

The first test Armstrong performed was to compare the error in predicting temperatures over a one hundred year interval. In Armstrong's own words, “Assume that it is 1850 and you make a forecast that global temperature will be the same 50 years later (i.e., 1900). In 1851 you make another such forecast for the year 1801. . . And so on up to 1958 when you forecast to 2008. You then compare the forecasts against HadCRUT3 [IPCC model] and calculate the errors (ignore the signs). What would be the average error for the 108 50 year forecasts in degrees centigrade?” Using rolling forecasts and the UAH temperatures, the Naïve model had a mean absolute error of .215 degrees Celsius, versus the IPCC model with a mean absolute error of .203 degrees Celsius, a difference of .012 degrees Celsius. So, from this first glance, it appears that the IPCC model, for all of its refinement in the inputs and precise knowledge of climate permutations is almost no better than the assumption of steady nonexistent growth. What is even more troubling is that, the longer the timeframe, given the selected inputs, the worse the IPCC model does. For the 10-year projections, it's nearly perfect. For the 100-year projections, it is
corrections in the emails are not, by themselves, troublesome. Just because Phil Jones wants to “hide the decline” when he speaks of inconsistent tree ring data, doesn’t mean that the scientists at the CRU are, necessarily, doing things to the data that are suspect. Anyone who deals extensively with raw data can tell you, it must be treated and standardized before meaningful analysis can be done. It’s the worst kept secret of all scientific research: a lot of value judgments come into place when you are preparing the data to be used. As statistician Ronald Thisted once said, “Raw data, like raw potatoes, usually require cleaning before use.” So these types of adjustments are far from unusual.

What makes this unusual is the recalcitrance the scientists at the CRU were to making their data available to be scrutinized. Olympian efforts were made to continually squash Freedom of Information Act requests by multiple parties. Michael Mann, a key figure in this kerfuffle and the author of the infamous “Hockey Stick” projection, was particularly obstinate about turning over his data to Canadian statistician Steve McIntyre—a data fraud specialist whose work showed both drastic overestimations of global temperature projections by NASA’s James Hansen (a point NASA grudgingly admitted on their website) and misleading certainty in Mann’s Hockey Stick graph—going as far as to say that “If [McIntyre et al] ever hear there is a Freedom of Information Act now in the UK, I think I’ll delete the file rather than send to anyone.” This refusal to let others see their raw data is a troubling indicator that something else must be going on.

Indeed, there was something else afoot; Phil Jones admitted that they were unable to acquiesce to the Freedom of Information Act request because about five

1. The Hockey Stick Graph famously showed that global temperatures remained largely consistent in the millennia leading up to 1850, but has, since then, gone up like a hockey stick. It was a major selling point of the 1997 IPCC report and was one of the most inflammatory studies ever done on global temperature. Most of Al Gore's most apocalyptic predictions were at least somewhat based on this graph.

Counterpoint

19
Correlations between global temperatures and upwardly mobile time series

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<tr>
<td>NOAA expenditure 1970-2006</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books published in U.S. 1881-2008</td>
<td>.73</td>
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Armstrong, Green, Graefe, & Soon 2009; Forecasting for climate policy

almost 12 times worse, and performs slightly worse than the naïve model.

Armstrong takes it a step further and begins comparing his own selection of correlates to global temperature versus the Carbon input integral to the anthropogenic global warming. When simply looking at correlation coefficients, atmospheric carbon does fairly well, with a .86 correlation. It does about as well as US postal rates (.85), Consumer Price Index (.87), NOAA expenditures (.83), and books published in the US (.73), hardly an overwhelming result. When you break it down into fifty-year intervals, and you use these to predict these results with results from the next fifty-year chunk, atmospheric Carbon falls to the middle of the pack in Weighted Cumulative Relative Absolute Error, between NOAA expenditures and books published in the US. The predictive value of Atmospheric Carbon is, it would seem, rather pedestrian and furthers the doubt as to the long-term projections of the model. Given the long evolution of the climate model, and both its inputs and outputs, one would expect that the quality of the models, in terms of their predictive power, would increase over time. What Armstrong found, however, was that increasing the total inputs, partially by incorporating paleoclimatological data (particularly the tree ring size), has made at best minor improvements, and, in some cases, even decreasing its quality.

Which is where uncertainty reemerges: if the validity of the inputs cannot be verified and the predictive power of the models is fairly unremarkable, the level of Knightian uncertainty in these models becomes overwhelming. Further, it is the lack of care that these specific scientists have put into their statistical methodology before, particularly Michael Mann and his cadre, which drastically undermines any predictions these models make. Returning to Mann’s Hockey Stick, it was one of the only major studies the National Association of Sciences felt compelled to appoint a special review committee to inspect as to his methods, his data, and his conclusions. This committee concluded that

Kurt Cuffey, a physicist from UC Berkley and a committee member later chided the IPCC for using the Hockey Stick model stating that it “sent a very misleading message about how resolved this part of the scientific research was.”

In 2006 Mann’s Hockey Stick model was further scrutinized, this time by a group commissioned by the United States House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee. The Wegman Report (named after the head of the panel, Edward Wegman, a statistics professor at George Mason University and former chair of the National Research Council’s Committee on Applied and Theoretical Statistics) concluded:

The sharing of research materials, data and results was haphazardly and grudgingly done. In this case we judge that there was too much reliance on peer review, which was not necessarily independent. Moreover, the work has been sufficiently politicized that this community can hardly reassess their public positions without losing credibility. Overall, our committee believes that Dr. Mann’s assessments that the decade of the 1990s was the hottest decade of the millennium and that 1998 was the hottest year of the millennium cannot be supported by his analysis.

The sheer enormity of the corruption here—methodological and intellectual more than monetary—demands the totality of paleoclimatological based forecasting models be audited and recreated by an independent group of forecasting experts and scientists. Neither of these committees attempted to recreate the results of Mann’s study or any other major climatlogical study given the raw data. These committees only performed a review of his procedures and his results, not a recreation of the studies.

This, of course, would not be too much of a hassle were it not for the fact that some of the raw data had been lost. Recreating the results with only a partial sample—with reports as to what parts of the data were lost, whether it was areas affected by the Urban Heat Island effect or simply outliers, varying greatly—is just impossible. Effective recreation is simply not a viable option now, and leaves us with very little to alleviate the uncertainty about the nature and extent of the results.
Now, it has been argued that these were peer-reviewed pieces, and therefore have met these basic requirements: recreating the experiment wholesale seems time-consuming and wasteful. In most cases, this argument certainly would hold true: we simply do not have the time or the resources to recreate every single study in the sciences; nothing would ever get done, and the process of increasing total knowledge would be slowed immensely. What makes this an unusual case is the controversial and, even more important, consequential nature of the findings.

By their very nature, most scientific studies have minimal impact associated with them: the veracity of their claims affects only a very small subset of the population and the difference of magnitude within a result is not terribly important. With the climate modeling, given the prescriptive nature of the field, the reliability of the results is of absolute importance to everyone in the world: the cost of a miscalculation or other basic error would be enormous. When studies have such a wide impact on public policy, or if they theorize a radical or controversial finding, they are simply held to a different standard of ex post facto corroboration. Since these studies would directly pertain to the world of public policy and politics, the ways in which they are evaluated has to take on the far more extreme verification requirements of a policy piece or, even, prescription drug research. These requirements are far from standardized, but there are certain practices that seem to be the norm.

For some of the most wide-affecting and controversial studies, the scrutiny they are placed under is far greater than anything these anthropogenic global warming studies have been. One of the most famous examples of such a wide reaching study would be the Coleman Report, a study of the effects of racial integration and differences in income on performance in primary and secondary education. The huge implications of the study—which concluded that the quality of the school was independent of the spending and that the single biggest predictor of academic success was the background and education of the students’ parents—necessitated a major and thorough review of not only the methods Dr. Coleman used, but a recreation of his study by a panel at Harvard University. Coleman not only provided them his raw data, but he also provided the manipulations he used every step of the way to get the data into treatable form. The significance was that the Harvard panel, aside from finding a minor coding problem, largely reaffirmed Coleman’s monumental results and provided the study with the necessary legitimacy to act upon it.

But James Coleman is far from the only social researcher to provide this type of access to his models and his data. Robert Putnam, in his equally controversial study of democratic institutions, allows for his whole data set, raw and treated, to be accessed by anyone simply by going to his website. What makes the paleoclimatological research so unnerving is that there are no cases in which these researchers allowed anywhere near this kind of access to their methods, data, and models, if the intent of the person making the demanding said materials was skeptical. The procurement of data in these studies—of which there remains considerable doubt as to the validity of such seemingly arbitrary choices, a claim made by MIT physicist and climatologist Richard Lindzen—involves such a thorough and widespread population, that it necessitates direct and systematic reviews of what raw data was included and excluded, why, and how it was treated.

Given the admitted loss of the original inputs and a deliberate refusal to release the specifics of the treatments, the uncertainty about the data, models, and conclusions are simply too large to overlook. These flawed studies are not the things that good policy is made from; they seem to be the product of an over politicized and poorly constructed process that emphasizes the urgency of the results over the measured skepticism that the scientific process needs. While we cannot be certain about the eschatological predictions made by climate scientists, what we can be certain of is the economic damage caused by implementing some of the “solutions” to this problem; in no uncertain terms, enacting a cap-and-trade mechanism in the United States would cost us anywhere from 1.7 to 4.8 trillion in the next two decades. By some estimations, the bill would cause a net loss of over 1 million American jobs by 2016. The economic costs of these programs are much more likely to be knowable commodities, if for nothing else than the fact that we’ve done it before and know, to a far greater extent, the strengths and weaknesses of such analysis. It also does not involve the rampant uncertainty of the climatological predictions; these are costs one can, proverbially, take to the bank.

Where does that leave us on the issue of Climate Change? Well, a simple reading of the relative uncertainties and predictive powers would suggest that the best course of action may be to do very little or, in fact, nothing. The costs of action are high and known, the costs of inaction have yet to be fully explored and are, as of right now, mostly unknown. The obvious solutions should entail gradual and prudential changes that won’t drastically weaken the footing of the American economy, while moving us in the right direction, probably, to fight this theoretical danger. Small, not broad, strokes are what we need now; large-scale action based on poorly constructed models would seem not only imprudent, but reckless. We shouldn’t undermine the American economy over poorly constructed and nonreplicable forecasting models.
One of the most basic assumptions that most observers of mainstream American political discourse share, on both the left and right, is the idea that support for the free market is a defining feature of conservatism. When right-wing pundits who seek to question the conservative credentials of a politician or commentator are asked what, specifically, makes them true conservatives and their targets impostors, they almost always point to their support for capitalism. Libertarians are typically described as “economically conservative and socially liberal,” and our own economics department’s vigorous advocacy for the superiority of relatively unregulated markets is held up as a paradigmatic example of conservative thought.

Important tenets of conservative thought centered around the conservative account of family and community call this automatic identification of support for capitalism as conservative into question. These strands within the conservative tradition provide a basis for distinctively right-of-center objections to capitalism that differ profoundly from the standard market-failure and social-justice arguments made by its critics on the left. However, conservatism is a complex and multi-faceted political philosophy, and capitalism’s defenders can certainly find important figures and principles to draw from within it; to argue that conservatives must necessarily oppose capitalism would be beyond the scope of this piece. My purpose is merely to suggest that the range of considerations that can be labeled “conservative” is somewhat broader than is typically assumed and to highlight tensions within conservatism that are too often overlooked.

The first function that conservatism assigns to families and small communities follows logically from conservative premises about human motivation and flourishing. Conservatives have long insisted that the capacity of rational persuasion to alter human conduct is quite limited, and that prejudices and appetites will always drive much of our behavior. This position can be traced back to the defense of prejudice and custom that Edmund Burke, the 18th-century British statesman and philosopher widely regarded as the founder of Anglo-American conservatism, offers in his Reflections on the Revolution in France, and perhaps even further, to Aristotle’s discussion of how strong appetites can make reasoning ineffective in his Nicomachean Ethics. It is derived from conservatism’s deep pessimism about human nature and the concomitant doubt that creatures as limited and flawed as ourselves could be prevented from acting incorrectly by reason alone. The same pessimism also suggests that we are not born with the right appetites and prejudices but must have them inculcated in us.

Another conservative position that points to the same conclusion is the idea that certain modes of life are uniquely suited to human beings because of our nature. This view flows from the basic premise that gives conservatism its name: the idea that many of the most important truths and social goods are givens provided by the nature of reality that should be conserved and adapted to rather than transcended. It is manifested in conservative defenses of particular ways of living, such as marriage, over others. Since passions and appetites are as much a part of our nature as are beliefs, conservatives who seek to treat human nature as a reality to be adjusted to and not a problem to be solved should view the well-ordered human life as comprised of dispositions as well as thoughts. When coupled with the pessimistic insights discussed above, this belief implies that only a certain subset of human beings’ natural inclinations are actually

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Counterpoint

The distinctly conservative conception of this disposition flows from important beliefs about human nature and political life, and accords families and small communities a uniquely important role in its cultivation.

This view of human motivation and flourishing provides a natural role for families and small communities. Because the cultivation of habits and appetites requires a much more intimate knowledge of and connection to the targets of cultivation than does instruction in systematic doctrines, it can only be done on a very small scale. Furthermore, the intrusive nature of the process requires that it be performed by an entity that is unconstrained by the strict limitations that must be placed on large-scale institutions to prevent abuses of power, but is still prevented from doing harm to those whom it is supposed to shape. It is also necessary that individuals in whom the right dispositions are being cultivated should have no choice but to participate in the process and that the same network of forces should continue to shape them for an extended period. The former requirement is a product of conservative pessimism; it is a recognition of the fact that, by definition, most people will not want their present impulses to be transformed and therefore should be placed in social settings where such transformation is mandatory. The latter one flows from the simple fact that habits and desires are deeply rooted in the human psyche and thus can only be modified through a continuous effort. Families and small communities satisfy these requirements well. The deep love that parents naturally feel for their children and the social constraints generated by the necessity of living with the same people for an extended period provide effective checks on the power that must be wielded for the process of cultivation to be effective. The small scale of both institutions allows for the intimate contact that the process requires, and their closed nature prevents members from avoiding the process and ensures that the same forces will continue to shape each member for an extended period.

The second function concerns the cultivation of a specific disposition; the distinctively conservative conception of this disposition flows from important beliefs about human nature and political life, and accords families and small communities a uniquely important role in its cultivation. Conservatives depart from liberals of various kinds in insisting that the maintenance of a healthy political order requires the inculcation of certain civic virtues in the citizenry. This position is rooted in conservatism’s keen sense of the unpredictable vicissitudes of history. Conservatives’ understanding that any polity is vulnerable to unforeseeable risks leads to doubt that the enlightened self-interest which contractarian liberals see as sufficient for the preservation of the social order is really enough. Citizens are likely to need both stronger reasons to defend their society and capacities that have to be deliberately cultivated.

One of the most important civic virtues is the ability to think of oneself as a member of a group to which one has obligations. Conservatives have a distinctive account of how people acquire this quality. Burke provided one of the definitive statements of this view when he remarked that “to love the little platoon we belong to in society ... is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.” He contended that humans first develop the capacity for loyalty and self-sacrifice by directing these attitudes toward a clearly defined, particular group of people; the concreteness and particularity of such groups enables them to call forth feelings of identification and love that most people are less likely to experience in connection with abstractions like the “community of nations” or the “universal brotherhood of mankind.” Once people have developed the ability to be loyal in this manner, they can extend their sympathies outward to embrace larger and larger groups. In advancing this argument, Burke was relying on the deeper conservative insight that the tendency to identify with the particular rather than the universal and the concrete rather than the abstract is one of several fixed, immutable features of human nature that cannot be wished away, but must instead be channeled in constructive ways. This account of how we acquire the capacity for public-mindedness plays an important role in conservative defenses of the nation-state against advocates of greater regional and international consolidation and objections to mass immigration; in both cases, conservatives contend that individuals with no discrete, particular political entity or cultural tradition to be loyal to will be unable to develop the cooperative virtues needed to maintain any kind of society, let alone large-scale regional or international collaborative efforts.

However, the same premises that lead conservatives to defend political and cultural particularity also entail the conclusion that loyalties to entities like states and cultures must be founded on more direct and immediate ties to pre-political institutions, the most fundamental of which are the family and the community. Even a sentiment like American patriotism, while certainly richer and more concrete than the vague cosmopolitanism that some liberal internationalists advocate, is a feeling direct-
ed toward large masses of people whom one will never meet; it is typically conceived of in terms of symbols like the flag or ideals like democracy rather than specific individuals or places. Burke’s quotation clearly indicates that loyalty to one’s country can only develop from a more basic loyalty to one’s “little platoon.”

Therefore, the process of acquiring the capacity for loyalty must begin in relatively small-scale social settings, where individuals can interact directly and intimately without interference from impersonal institutional structures. Contact with flesh-and-blood human beings situated in concrete, specific places summons up the most visceral and intense feelings of identification in the typical person and thereby creates a sound basis for loyalty to larger groups. The requirements of extended contact with the same people and compulsoriness discussed above are of course vital, but the former one has added importance with respect to this particular virtue. If a given individual is required to interact with the same small group for a long period of time, he or she will be able to observe each member of the group closely and develop a thorough understanding of their personalities that incorporates their flaws and foibles; the identification with his community that this individual develops, will therefore be richer and more meaningful because it will be rooted in a love of people as they are, not as we would like them to be. The idealized conceptions that we frequently form of distant acquaintances or people encountered only briefly, provide too weak a basis for meaningful loyalty. All of these considerations provide an additional reason for conservatives to view thriving families and small communities as necessary foundations for a healthy political order. Both of these institutions force their members to interact with the same people intimately and regularly and thus develop capacities for loyalty and self-sacrifice within the citizenry.

The third and final function that families and small communities must perform, assuming that conservative conceptions of human nature and the social order are correct, derives from one of the most fundamental conservative principles: veneration for tradition. The term “conservatism” derives in part from the principle that it is wise to presume in favor of the established ways of doing things and to conserve them against efforts to impose innovations. It is important to note that this idea has always been construed as a presumption in favor of tradition, not an absolute prescription; conservatives from Burke onward have favored a variety of reforms, gradual as well as extensive. The conservative belief in tradition is best understood not as an unyielding doctrine but rather as an insistence that the burden of proof should always be on advocates of change, not defenders of the status quo. This respect for custom derives from conservative pessimism about the course of history and about human nature. The former suggests that social stability is so rare and precious that it is worth taking substantial effort to preserve, even if doing so conflicts with the pursuit of loftier goals like justice; since a society typically contemplates changing its traditions only when it is in a state of relative social equilibrium, this line of reasoning militates in favor of according significant weight to those traditions since their presence seems to be compatible with stability. The latter makes conservatives skeptical about the possibility that flawed individuals using their unaided powers of observation and reason will be able to arrive at sound conclusions about how their society should be organized. The conservative preference for the spontaneous order that results from concrete efforts to solve problems over systematic prescriptions arrived at through abstract reflection is also a source of reverence for traditions, which are the product of generations of lived experience.

This view of tradition implies that societies need a mechanism to transmit both individual traditions and a general respect for custom from generation to generation. Strong families and communities are well-suited to perform this function, since they bring members of different generations into intimate and extended contact with one another and thus allow the young to directly experience the varied and complex set of practices that constitute a tradition. The family is a particularly effective means of inculcating traditions because it gives members of the older generation fairly direct control over the younger one and therefore enables them to act as an effective check on the tendency of the young to challenge their society’s established practices and institutions. Furthermore, because both individual customs and reverence for tradition more generally are, at least partly, habits of thought and feeling similar to the ones discussed above, families and communities enjoy the same advantages in transmitting them that they do in habituation of other kinds.

The discussion above suggests that families and communities are able to perform the roles that they do for four principal reasons. The small scale of both types of institutions facilitates the direct and intimate interac-
tions between people that are necessary for the transformation of deeply rooted habits and dispositions that the conservative view of the social order requires. The fact that these institutions require individuals to stay in contact with the same small group for an extended period ensures that the sort of sustained effort needed for the cultivation of character can be undertaken and that people will develop the capacity for meaningful loyalty. The compulsoriness of participation in both institutions is necessary because having one’s basic impulses changed is an unpleasant process. Finally, families and communities are unlikely to perform these functions if the larger society of which they are a part does not view them as legitimate. Capitalism, therefore, is likely to undermine these institutions’ capacity to perform their roles to the extent that it can reduce the intimacy and duration of the interactions they facilitate, weaken their ability to demand participation from members, and delegitimize the projects that they pursue.

In order to understand how capitalism is able to produce these effects, it is necessary to first establish what is meant by “capitalism.” For the purposes of this piece, the most important feature of capitalism is its use, at least in theory, of the competitive marketplace to organize the bulk of economic activity. Almost all goods and services are produced by several rival suppliers who receive information about the demand for their products through the price mechanism. Each supplier retains the bulk of his or her earnings and thus has an incentive to maximize them, which can only be done by persuading consumers not to buy from his or her rivals. Since the supply of production inputs like labor is also organized competitively, virtually every person in a capitalist society must compete with other suppliers in some way.

One of the main ways of gaining an advantage over one’s competitors in any kind of competition is to increase the priority one gives to that competition relative to other considerations; those competitors who attach the highest relative importance to the competition will devote the greatest amount of time and effort to excelling in it and thus will be the most likely to emerge victorious. Furthermore, once all of the competitors have become aware of this strategy, each one will have an incentive to increase the priority that he or she attaches to the competition until all of them view it as the only important pursuit. Since capitalist competition is not limited in duration, these factors will gradually push capitalist societies toward a state in which each person is motivated almost solely by considerations involving his or her material welfare. However, such a society cannot contain communities or families of the sort that are necessary for the functions discussed above to be performed. People who believe that they have to devote virtually all of their time and effort to out-competing their rivals will have no interest in working together on complex common projects like the shaping of appetites or the handing down of traditions, since doing so would leave them vulnerable to competitors who were not pursuing such projects. The inculcation of the capacity for loyalty and self-sacrifice will be especially difficult under such circumstances because it is inimical to the competitive spirit. Thus, the role of competition within capitalism gives rise to a tendency that, as it develops, undermines social institutions and practices that conservatives should attach great importance to.

In addition to its direct role in undermining the sense of common purpose that is needed for families and communities to perform the functions that conservatism assigns to them, competition is also the root of most of the other features of capitalism that conflict with conservative principles. Foremost among these is the need for labor mobility, which flows out of the competition among laborers to make themselves more attractive to employers; those employers, in turn, want to have mobile workforces so that they can out-compete their rivals. Once a given employer decides to demand greater mobility from its workers, competitors in the industry will have no choice but to follow suit; workers in the relevant occupations will have to adapt if they wish to remain employed.

Over time, this process forces laborers to become more and more mobile in order to find jobs; its inner logic dictates that workers will eventually have to be able to move virtually anywhere in pursuit of economic opportunity, though such perfect mobility is rarely required in practice. People who are regularly moving from place to place as they change jobs will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to work together to inculcate the appropriate appetites and prejudices in their children through habituation, a process which requires the same small group of people to collaborate for an extended period. Because these rootless individuals will be accustomed to joining and leaving groups at will, they will not find the prospect of expulsion from a given community threatening and the requirement of compulsory participation in the cultivation of character will therefore be much harder to enforce. The fact that community members might leave at any time will also prevent them from developing the trust necessary for cooperation since they will not be able to observe one another closely enough to develop stable expectations of reciprocal behavior. Furthermore, they will lack the sort of visceral attachment to a particular place and community that is necessary for the development of the capacity for loyalty and self-sacrifice.

The competitive pressures created by capitalism are also an important cause of another feature of the system that should trouble conservatives: the emphasis that
it places on innovation and change. Innovation in both products and production methods is an obvious way to try and gain an advantage over one’s rivals in the marketplace. In a society whose every mature member is always competing in a marketplace of some kind, a certain comfort with and enthusiasm for rapid change is likely to become part of the collective ethos. However, this mindset conflicts directly with one of conservatism’s core tenets, the presumption in favor of tradition. As competitive pressures cause this mindset to spread throughout a society, its members will gradually lose the commitment to tradition that conservatives should value. The loss of this commitment will remove an important barrier to the left’s crusades against customary practices and institutions that have sustained our society for centuries; it will also isolate individuals and deprive them of the aids to thought and living that our ancestors developed through painstaking effort. Additionally, since the bulk of daily life in capitalist societies involves some sort of interaction with products and production methods, the frequent changes in both that competition tends to will deprive most people of the opportunity to encounter a genuine tradition and thus weaken respect for custom further.

One specific type of innovation that is characteristic of capitalism, the tendency toward an increasingly complex division of labor, has uniquely pernicious effects on families’ capacity to inculcate the habits and dispositions necessary for human flourishing and social stability in their children. The competitive benefits of the division of labor are, of course, widely known; by giving each of the participants in a production process a relatively simple task, it allows all of them to acquire substantial expertise in their respective tasks and thereby increases output significantly. However, as the division of labor grows more complex, it comes to depend on highly sophisticated and expensive technologies that must themselves be administered by experts and therefore cannot be maintained in individual homes. Therefore, parents are compelled to spend the vast bulk of their time working outside the home and are deprived of the sort of extended, intimate contact with their children that is necessary for the cultivation of character. Children must spend their days in the care of day-care providers or teachers who work for pay and thus lack the incentive to undertake a complex project like the molding of appetites, which one can only do if one feels a deep compassion for the object of one’s efforts. The people who feel this compassion the most intensely, however, are increasingly relegated to the roles of provider and perhaps playmate; their efforts to shape their offspring in a more meaningful and permanent way are made far more difficult.

Finally, certain aspects of the worldview that capitalism tends to encourage undermine individuals’ belief in the basic conservative project of molding appetites, which weakens the ability of even intact families and communities to perform this task. A society whose every member is constantly searching for advantages over his or her competitors will tend to accord all appetites a certain basic legitimacy, regardless of their effects on human flourishing or the social order. This is because any appetite that no producer is currently satisfying represents an excellent business opportunity; therefore, the more appetites that producers can legitimately endeavor to satisfy, the more chances there are to secure a competitive advantage. Furthermore, many of the appetites that conservatives are likely to view as either destructive of social stability or inimical to a well-ordered human life, such as lust and the general desire for immediate gratification, are much easier to satisfy with competitively priced goods and services than are nobler dispositions like the preference for permanent rather than transient things; the latter often tend to discourage the acquisition of material goods and their possessors generally require less in the way of external stimuli to be satisfied than do possessors of the former. The worldview of a capitalist society, therefore, tends to actively work against the efforts of families and communities to mold their members’ habits and dispositions and gradually widens the range of appetites that are deemed socially acceptable; the coarsening of our own culture over the past several decades exemplifies the truth of the latter claim.

How can this conflict between social institutions that conservatives are inclined to view as valuable be resolved? It would be presumptuous to offer a fully worked out solution to a problem of this scope here, but I would like to close by pointing to two considerations that should frame any effort to deal with this tension. First, we should take seriously the possibility that the conflict between the goods of the market and those of the family and the community cannot admit of a final and lasting solution. As conservatives whose observation of the often-bleak realities of life and history has led us to a sober pessimism, we should be skeptical of the proposition that all tensions can be smoothly resolved, all Gordian knots slashed. It may be that the best we can
do is to manage the inevitable conflicts between the two sets of institutions, or to choose the one we believe to be more fundamental to the conservative project while remaining sensitive to what we are giving up.

If we do seek a solution, however, the analysis of competition given above suggests one place that we might begin. In that analysis, I suggested that all competitors in the marketplace would come to be motivated solely by considerations of material welfare because they would assume that each of their opponents were doing the same. However, if all of the competitors could be persuaded to set fixed limits on the extent to which they would allow their behavior to be driven by such considerations, there would be some chance of forestalling the threat capitalism poses to family and community life. The coercive power of the state is clearly too blunt an instrument for the task of shaping human motivation; only a cultural approach has any chance of being effective. Social models such as that of contemporary Japan, in which a reasonably efficient market economy coexists with voluntary efforts by firms to give their employees space for family life and the development of strong communal ties within companies, might provide some guidance in constructing such an approach. Conservatives who wish to reconcile the family and the community with the market should therefore work to develop cultural institutions that keep the motives associated with the latter within reasonable bounds.

A Symposium on the Common Core Curriculum

Over a decade since the Sonnenschein reforms, our contributors examine The Core, where it succeeds, where it fails, and what should be done now.

Josh Lerner

The issue of the Core comes down to two separate, yet equally important aspects of educational direction: the general education requirements themselves, and the courses that fulfill those requirements. The reforms introduced under President Sonnenschein fundamentally altered both, and any serious discussion of changing those reforms must deal with both. With regards to lessening requirements, the Sonnenschein reforms were largely successful, and, for the sake of the college, necessary. However, the expansion of what could fulfill those requirements served only to further distract from the original purpose of the Core, and in doing so, continued the watering down of the Great Books tradition at the University of Chicago. As per the requirements, the first thing these reforms did was to allow more students the opportunity to graduate on time. What is important to remember is that the University of Chicago in the 1990s had an on time graduation rate comparable to third tier public universities: the whole reason the euphemism of “first year” instead of freshman exists here was the sheer number of students taking fifth and sixth years. Referring to them as “super-seniors” or anything else would be somewhat demeaning. But how many schools have to adopt an entirely new language about the relative seniority of students because there are so many who stay far longer than is the norm at other schools?

This model, unfortunately, was financially unsustainable for the university and students alike. The cost of an education at the University of Chicago comes in at around $56,000 a year if you are in university housing. The financial burden placed upon students who require a fifth or sixth year is a truly severe one, and there are too many students who cannot finish a degree on time and are paying their way through college, all of which provides a tremendous disincentive to prospective students who lack the financial means. While we still
have an on time graduation rate that is considerably lower than other elite institutions, it is no longer as disproportionately low. Expanding the prospective student pool for the university is beneficial not only from a financial perspective, but from an educational one as well, especially when one considers the prevalence of Socratic Seminars on campus. A student body that reflects a myriad of interests can partake in discussions of the big questions from differing perspectives; an attempt to narrow it, or scare away people who seek careers in the sciences, can only hurt this. But on time graduation is not only a function of getting enough credits to graduate, but also for having enough technical experience to study at the graduate level.

The problem with the way the Core was designed was that it necessarily punished students who study cumulative, hierarchical, knowledge growth based studies, like a hard science or mathematics, because it didn’t allow them enough time to complete all of the requirements necessary to study their discipline at the graduate level. The biggest problem for many students in such fields is that there is a lot of technical knowledge that must be acquired before being able to conduct research, the raison d’être for graduate school; if said students are unable to take all of their Core classes, and fulfill requisites for studying the discipline at the graduate level, they are forced to stay at the University of Chicago longer or forgo graduate study. One of the major red herrings in the liberal arts debate is the line that it is unwise or even destructive to think of an education as in anyway practical, rather than as an introduction to the “best that has been thought.” While this is certainly one important part of education—an oft-neglected part, I’ll grant you—it is far from the only part. What many of the reformers of the core fail to consider is that many disciples have real prerequisites and a real cumulative component to its acquisition. There is a danger in treating all elements of the Core as essentially interchangeable with respect to the way they are taught. No one should be recommending that the University of Chicago emulate St. John’s methodology for teaching mathematics or the sciences; building a core curriculum around the great texts in these fields introduces students to far too many errors—knowable and clear errors—without requiring them to work out the logic of the current knowledge. Besides, there is a palpable humanities bias in most discussions of Core education—humanistic in that it focuses on non-quantitative fields of study—because of the very nature of humanistic versus positivistic pedagogy. The way one accumulates knowledge in the sciences is nothing at all like the way one would do it in the humanities or the social sciences—the nature of the respective disciplines necessitate this.

What, however, does need to be changed are the choices offered within the revamped Core. For each class that properly presents what should be desired in a liberal arts education, there are at least three that openly defy it for the sake of political correctness or a misguided intellectual pluralism. Within each of the three sections of the Core originally designed to study the great ideas of the West—the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Civilization Core sequences—are courses that seek not only to offer an alternative to that very vision, but rather to deny the validity of any such vision itself.

The present form of the Social Sciences core is a good example of this detrimental tendency. Besides “Classics of Social and Political Thought,” one is not introduced to a single pre-modern thinker in any of the other classes; the best remaining class, “Power, Identity, and Resistance,” acts as if social thought began with Hobbes and the social contract theorists of the 17th and 18th centuries. The worst of the bunch, “Mind,” is essentially a continual diatribe in favor of the conventional wisdom of current intellectual trends in psychology. This class somehow avoids any text reading at all and instead fills in the blanks with excerpts from modern psychology articles and papers.

Ultimately, however, the intent of the Core has become muddled and has conflated an introduction to interdisciplinary analysis and study with the original purpose of the Core, which was, as stated by former President of the University of Chicago Robert Maynard Hutchins “to reassess the tradition in which it lives, to discard what it cannot use, and to bring into context with the distant and intermediate past the most recent contributions to the Great Conversation.” The purpose of the Core was laboring over the Great Conversation; a methodological overview of the social sciences, although interesting, does little to advance the Great Questions or the Great Conversation. It was why the Core classes were always to be Socratic Seminars and not lectures; it was why they were to be structured around Great Books and not great social movements; it was why the classes were structured to ask the great questions of our civilization not answer them; and it is why the Core today seems so adrift, so purposeless.

The Core today cannot tell if it is designed to introduce people to as many disciplines as possible to give them an idea of what they want to study, or if it does this simply because there are things that should be known, questions that should be asked, and problems that should be scrutinized. It has become (with some exceptions) trite, topical, and pluralistic: attributes that are characteristic of sophomoric college students (and I speak as one), not those that teach them.

There are reasons to be weary of the Core as it is currently constituted, but one would be wrong to suggest that it is an unredeemable mess. Simply by limiting the
Counterpoint

Bryant Jackson-Green

The University of Chicago admissions website has a charming description of the common core. Reading it again as a second-year, I recall that this was precisely what I found so enthralling about the University. The idea of a rigorous liberal arts education— one in which I would have the opportunity to study the social sciences, humanities, hard sciences, and other academic fields as a means of crafting an intellectual basis to extend the “life of the mind” well beyond my college years—seemed appealing.

I was, I feel, rather quickly disabused of this illusion not long after I began my studies here. To clarify, it’s not that I did not always enjoy my core classes— I consider the ideas discussed and debated in the social science and humanities sequences I took to have been well worth studying. I can also appreciate the usefulness of language instruction and some degree of exposure to the sciences. The problem is, rather, the nature of my own interests. Broad core curriculums are useful for those who have no idea of what fields they are interested in and perhaps for aspiring “rennaissance men,” as well. I, however, am primarily interested in the humanities and social sciences, and discovered that, although the core is designed to widen my academic horizons, its burdensome, unfocused nature prevents me from pursuing my interests to the fullest extent possible. Instead of being able to take the class on Hellenistic philosophy that I’m interested in, I need to complete a second quarter of core biology or physics, courses I have comparatively little interest in and that have no relevance to my academic or career goals whatsoever. That the core takes up approximately a third of our course distribution requirements borders on insanity. I admit that, in principle, the breadth the core offers may in many ways be beneficial for certain students, but it should not be so expansive that we be forced to forgo self-directed inquiry—what education is truly about.

The core curriculum appeals to a specific sort of student, one who seeks a “well-rounded” education, which is perfectly fine for such a student. However, the core, in its conceited paternalism, artificially imposes a uniformity of experience and program on a student—body with diverse intellectual inclinations. The University of Chicago describes the core as designed “to cover the whole scope of human knowledge, and to teach not facts but the tools of inquiry.” This is surely a nice sentiment, but there are severe consequences for disregarding the freedom to direct one’s own course of study. With all due respect to Robert Hutchins, neither he nor any individual or collection of academics can possibly know what series of courses will best enrich the educational experiences of their students. If an aspiring biologist has an interest in learning about the history of Near-Eastern art over cell biology, this is all well and good. If he would prefer to take the latter—or a course in any other field he deems appropriate—the University commits two sins: squandering the student’s resources in time and money, and also preventing him from acquiring the knowledge he was compelled to forfeit on the basis of arbitrary distribution requirements. The same applies to the English major trudging through calculus. To the extent that her time and academic potential is wasted, the University has done her a great disservice under the guise of education. The knowledge of personal academic preferences, and where efforts for fulfilling them should be applied, lies only with the individual student, unknown to those who design such programs, who imagine themselves as omniscient in matters of education.

I cannot help but look at universities like Brown and feel a hint of envy; free from the restrictions of any course quotas to fill (save for those of their major), students may take whatever class best suits their interests. Some may reasonably criticize their system for its supposed laxity in academic standards. I would respond that this is largely the result of Brown’s concurrent (with the adoption of its “New Curriculum”) abandonment of pluses and minuses in their grading system and allowance of taking any class “pass/fail,” a virtual invitation for rampant grade inflation. I would, of course, propose nothing of the sort here. Freedom need not mean lack of rigor. Yet there is something to be learned from their commitment to academic freedom.

This ideal is, of course, nothing more than a
pipe dream at the University of Chicago, but I do believe that some reform in this direction is called for. First: an option to choose between several core programs could be a possibility, with each one emphasizing a different theme or discipline (for example, a social science discipline), including the option to study under the current system for those so inclined. The best thing about choice is that it maintains the possibility of a rigorous core course of study, while opening up the range of academic study all too frequently denied to inquisitive minds. Second: while I do believe that it is unacceptable to dictate to students which fields they are to study, I do not assert that the knowledge and experience of academic professionals are not a resource to be taken advantage of. There is certainly a role for such figures to play (particularly college advisors and faculty) in an advisory role: discussing and engaging with developing intellectuals to assist them in exploring where their academic interests lie and consulting with them on the optimal strategy to pursue them. This is a constructive relationship, preserving the freedom of inquiry and informing it with the insight of experience. The “life of the mind,” in order to fulfill what we expect from our education, should in this way be more concerned with the facilitation of our intellectual pursuits, rather than hindering it by placing obstacles in our way.

Jeremy Rozansky

The Common Core Curriculum at the University of Chicago is neither common nor core, to the detriment of the University and its students. It is not common when very few texts and experiences are shared within the core classes that one attends. Additionally, the many choices of classes are rarely core—they narrow themselves into strange subdivisions and knowledge of ephemeral importance.

Imagine the first few weeks at the University. Two roommates have just met, they are from opposite sides of the country, have different upbringings and dispositions, and are thrilled to be, at last, of the Academy. They should be registered in a common core: a
set of shared texts determined by the faculty—not a hodge-podge of registration week whims. This brings us back to our two roommates, studying in isolation, with no central knowledge from which their studies may expand. The university is built based on the view that the life of the mind is best lived communally. We should not be alone in our venture, we should have help, and we should help. Xenophon recollects Socrates saying, “Just as others are pleased by a good horse or dog or bird, I myself am pleased to an even higher degree by good friends... And the treasures of the wise men of old which they left behind by writing them in books, I unfold and go through them together with my friends, and if we see something good, we pick it out and regard it as a great gain if we thus become useful to one another.” For the University to fulfill its aims—the shaping of the ignorant into the excellent—it must provide an education that links its attendees, forming friends and thinkers.

Meir Dardashti
What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Trilingual.
What do you call someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual.
What do you call someone who speaks one language? American.

The Common Core is an ambitious venture. Its stated goal “to cover the whole scope of human knowledge, and to teach not facts but the tools of inquiry,” is generally reflected in the courses and topics mandated. However, the Core is only as strong as its weakest component. While nearly all of its disciplines maintain high standards and rigorous requirements, languages, despite their centrality to the development of an inquisitive and worldly personality are disappointingly deemphasized and their requirements surprisingly lax. So much of a culture is tied up in its language. How can one really understand another culture thinks without understanding how it speaks? In order to truly educate for today’s competitive, globalized world the College must shore up its core language requirement by raising placement standards and personalizing language requirements for each major.

In today’s Core, scoring a 3 out of 5 on a language Advanced Placement test or passing a placement test created by each language department exempts a student from the core language requirement. No other core discipline has such low placement standards. In order to pass out of biology, for example, a perfect AP score is required, and for some core topics such as social sciences no test or previous experience suffices to place a student out. As it stands today, many students with minimal linguistic experience graduate having gained nothing from the University in the study of languages.

Furthermore, the study of language holds a unique position among core studies as a discipline broad enough that no amount of previous experience precludes further study. To return to our example of biology, once one has mastered its study in high school, there is little to be added with further study in college. Simply put, once one understands biology, repeating the curriculum in core biology produces frustratingly diminished returns. The same is not true of languages. Even after having mastered Spanish, one still has much to gain from the study of Arabic, Swahili, Yiddish, Hindi, etc. Each language is a world of its own, a glimpse into a foreign mindset and culture, as well as an alternate vantage point from which to observe our own idiosyncrasies. Despite the core’s emphasis on social sciences and civilizations, can a student truly understand the inner social workings of an ever shrinking globalized world without a broad understanding of world languages and culture?

Therefore, I propose that the University either dramatically raise core language placement standards or, (as is true in core social sciences and humanities,) preclude the possibility of placing out of languages altogether. Every effort should be made so that languages, often seen as irrelevant and difficult, are made more approachable. The beauty of language is that its value transcends any specific department and can advance students in nearly any field. A student drawn to classics should be encouraged to learn Greek. Another drawn to psychology should be encouraged German. Though few debate the worth of languages, surprisingly few are willing to voluntarily put in the requisite efforts to learn them. The University, in its conviction that knowledge of fuller scope enriches life, ought to see to it that no major avenue of intellectual enrichment go underemphasized. Let us not add a fourth line to the above joke: What do you call someone who speaks one language and might be able to put a sentence together in a second? A UChicago Alum.

Meir Dardashti is a first-year in the College.

Counterpoint 31
Cory Liu

Before I'd even set foot on the University of Chicago campus, I was already intimately familiar with the impressive language used to describe the Core curriculum. The college admissions website describes it as familiarizing students with “the powerful ideas that shape our society” as part of a liberal arts curriculum concerned with “the moral considerations that we come across in our daily lives.” But after hearing this grand, sweeping description repeated over and over, I began to wonder to myself, “what exactly makes the Core so great? What’s so special about having everyone learn a few subjects and read classic texts?” I spent last quarter studying abroad in Beijing, and I learned some interesting things about the Chinese education system that taught me how unique and empowering our Core curriculum truly is.

At Chicago, every single undergraduate is required to take seminar courses where they discuss texts addressing issues fundamental to the human condition: from the nature of happiness to the role that government should play in society. But in China, higher education is primarily career-based and students rarely take courses outside their field of study. The name of a typical university in Beijing reflects this. Two of our study abroad program’s Chinese instructors graduated from Beijing Normal University (schools of education are translated “normal university”), and another is a doctoral student at Beijing Language and Culture University. One of my cousins attends the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications, while another is a fashion designer who recently graduated from the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology. Other institutions include the Beijing Institute of Petrochemical Technologies and the China University of Political Science and Law.

As I mentioned earlier, there are a few courses that a typical Chinese college student will take outside of their field of study. Much like the Core, these courses are required of all students and form a shared experience in college. But quite unlike the Core, there is only one set of powerful ideas and only one perspective of moral consideration taught in these classes. These are the courses mandated by the Chinese government that students must take during all four years of college, which deal with topics such as “Mao Zedong’s Thought” and “Socialism with Chinese characteristics.” These classes are nothing more than political indoctrination by the Chinese government. The damaging effect of this on the educational environment did not fully dawn on me until my Chinese roommate told me one day that plagiarism is rampant in these classes as well as others. When he told me that, it suddenly dawned on me that if students were neither taught nor actively encouraged to formulate their own ideas and express them in writing, how would the professors even know if these students were plagiarizing? I could not imagine this happening in the Core humanities and social science classes at Chicago, simply because, to perform well on any assignments, students must be able to argue about their own ideas. It would be extremely obvious if students copied each other, or copied from another source.

After experiencing the lack of intellectual diversity in China, I realized that the Common Core is unique in the way it empowers students with an education that, although likely unrelated to their eventual career, teaches them to personally consider important moral questions, and gives them the skills needed to discuss them clearly and persuasively.

K. Paul Dueck

The University’s policy toward our common curriculum can only be dictated by the College’s purpose. The split between those who would loosen or dispense with the core and those who would tighten it largely shows the deeper split between those who see the College as a credentialing service/social club/job training program and those who see the College as an engine of personal development and transformation.

Master Drive, a defensive driving school that helps students get their driving licenses, typifies the first kind of institution. The difference between the students at the beginning of the program and at the end is minute, a couple of skills and six square inches of plastic laminate. Kids all over the country may have fun for a couple of weeks in programs like Master Drive, but those programs don’t change anyone’s life. The skills are the thing that matters, and every institution that teaches driving skills is basically the same.

On the other hand, the United States Marine Corps fundamentally transforms the people who participate in it. It doesn’t take ‘marine-people’ and give them certain skills, it takes people from every kind of background and transforms them into Marines – a transformation that studies have shown will last a lifetime. Marines earn more money, volunteer more, are less likely to commit crime, and generally behave better in every social metric than do people of similar academic achievement who were never Marines. Being a Marine comes to define the people who have passed through the Corps, long after their active service commitment is over.

Faced with these two institutional patterns, I believe the College should desire to be transformational in the lives of its students – that the Core should cajole Cory Liu is a second-year in the College.

K. Paul Dueck is a second-year in the College, majoring in Mathematics and Philosophy.
and exhort us to become something more than we were when we first arrived in Hyde Park. Obviously, the fact that graduate programs require a certain degree of preparation limits the scope of the Core, but its intensity – and the intensity of the College generally – can be changed. The fact that people can take three classes, and that they can make them easy classes like Core Bio or “Media Aesthetics,” undermines the ability of the College to shape students into disciplined and focused students who are well prepared to engage all sorts of ideas.

Two brief examples of how we could bring that about.

First, the College should strip from the Core any alternate sections for Humanities, Social Sciences, or Civilizations, and replace them with year long reading studies (with a writing program that isn’t a joke), where every student is forced to read Plato and Aristotle, Marx and Locke, and come to a firm grip on the History of Europe and America from Ancient Greece to the Second World War. Such a curriculum would also require the College to get serious about preparing instructors to lead real discussions, and develop and unified set of assignments that force every student to do the reading. Imagine that, instead of the blizzard of Humanities classes we now have, third week of fall quarter next year saw the entire first year class wrestling with *The Republic*.

We could have a campus culture where sarcasm about Plato could be joined by a general discussion of what justice really is. A campus where we recognize that we are an American University, and that we must prepare our students to be American citizens, and in service of that aim show them the Western world from which we come.

Second, the College should strip Nat Sci and Core Bio and Math Stat and every other way students try to run from doing studying actual science or math. Instead the college should require every student to receive three quarters of Calculus (and not 130s either) and to take the introductory Biology and Chemistry (or Physics) classes that majors have to take. Since Anaxagoras, it has never been the case that a person could be counted well educated if they were ignorant of the science of their day, and that remains true today. The fake “science” of the Core devalues the University, and robs those who participate of the profound good they might have gained.

Essentially, if the University wants to have a transformative effect on the lives of its undergraduates it must reinforce today’s culture of curiosity into one of transdisciplinary achievement and inquiry. In light of the brilliant students the University attracts, that requires a core curriculum that is demanding across all disciplines – one that maintains its difficulty, and that difficulty’s ability to challenge students, no matter the gifts or preparation of the student. By supercharging the Core, the University can ensure it challenges the weaknesses of all its students, and does so in a corporate way that feeds a common culture of achievement.

Building a transformative institution is hard, and doing so while our peer institutions long ago abandoned a core of their own would take courage on the part of the administration and discernment from students and faculty to see that the rough and narrow path is the one where the true prize is found. We are already one of the great universities of the world, but we could be special.
If conservatism believes politics is the art of the possible, then the limits of possibility constitute the key conservative political question. In the case of human cloning, euthanasia, transhumanism, and other bioethical concerns, the proper limit of human action is often stated succinctly by the conservative as, "playing God." For the Hayekian and others, the idea that rational control can improve upon the spontaneous and frustrating market is a treacherous temptation. William F. Buckley was fond of the novel injunction taken from Eric Voegelin to not "immanentize the eschaton"—in other words, do not build a heaven on earth. The conservative correctly recognizes such enterprises as debasing and dangerous.

It is not clear, however, why utopianism is worse than being merely naive. Nor is it immediately evident that politics should avoid far-off ideals and dodge sweeping innovations. Politics as the pursuit of dreams makes a compelling, seductive challenge to the modesty and restraint of conservatism. The conservative must not only set boundaries, he must justify the existence of boundaries in the first place.

In this way, Genesis 11:1-9 becomes a foundational text of conservatism. The story of Babel describes the eternal boundary. Moreover, it gives reason for this boundary verifiable by any human through the act of political observance. In nine lines, Babel contains a classic and convincing rebuttal of universalism, utopianism and its concomitant scientism, transhumanism, and urbanism.

On the surface, Babel is the etiology of languages and nations. Universal man is scattered into unique national groups separated by tongues. Yet, immediately before the nine-lined story, there is a catalogue of the descendants of Noah, many of whom have names that will be shared by nations to come. Ashkenaz, the origin of the Jewish distinction “Ashkenazi” (Eastern European or Germanic), is one example. Indeed, Chapter 10 ends with, “And from these [clans] the nations branched out on the earth after the flood.” Babel’s place in the narrative is not immediately justified—its practical result is redundant. But Babel gives a “how” and a “why” to the creation of nations. Babel also marks the fulcrum of Genesis wherein a narrative of universal man suddenly transitions to the story of one man, Abraham, and his nation. Taken in whole, a reading of Babel necessitates the question: Why are nations a necessary creation?

And all the earth was one language, one set of words.
The same language links all men in all parts of the earth. Different languages make nations and tribes necessary. It is the barrier of language that seals off peoples more than anything else. While the text has just given the ancestry of the nations, differentiating peoples, this line asks us to disregard that and understand the world of Babel as a world devoid of separation between peoples. This inability to separate makes us wonder in what ways we can distinguish between men. We have moral distinctions—Noah was “righteous in his time.” We also have sexual distinctions—there is ish (man) and there is isha (woman). But, for those with the same ancestor and the same tongue, many fundamental distinctions fall apart. What we call “identity,” so often derived from belonging, is nonexistent. Man can be righteous and man can be free of loneliness, he lacks much else.

Our language is also the medium through which we contemplate, wonder, conceive, and understand. Sharing a language offers similar inner worlds and the tendencies, quirks, attachment, and partialities of that language help shape the inner world and how we think. We are not just dealing with a universal language; we are dealing with universal man.

And it happened as they journeyed from the east that they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.

God instructs Noah to “be fruitful and multiply”—to spread out over the earth. Here, however, the humans act as one unit, webbed together. They make their homes in a valley and they do what valley-dwellers do: they farm. Cain, we remember, was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. The farmer lives a life reliant on the earth’s mechanics, sun and rain. This fact is not obviously problematic. But the farmers’ produce is not entirely his own; if rain and sun do not come in correct proportions then it does not matter how well he tills, his crop will not flourish. The shepherd does not rely on nature the same way. He does not need much in the way of natural compliance to raise his livestock; his skill is the key to his success. The shepherd’s task is self-contained and he must therefore rely on wit and character. His god is a personal god, a god who calms and sustains. The farmer is tempted to pray to the heavens for an external gift. His god is an external god, a god who gives material, not moral, gifts. Agriculture, without proper reinforcements, is a slow path to idolatry.

Agriculture is also a slow path to city dwelling. Settled farming gives rise to trade, which in turn accelerates commerce and divided labor, culminating in the need for urban life. After Cain slays Abel in his field, his ancestor, Enoch builds the first city. Enoch’s ancestors make up the classes of the city. They live in tents, raise cattle for wealth, entertain and memorialize through arts and song, and forge tools and weaponry. The city exists to institutionalize what founded it. It is therefore self-reverent and morally vacant, it places man’s achievements alongside God’s: it’s on par with the idolator. Also, urban life historically has carried with it a deviant underbelly. The city is deeply flawed, even if also unavoidable.

And they said to each other, “Come, let us bake bricks and burn them hard.”
And the brick served them as stone and the bitumen as mortar.

Creation begins with speech. God says “Let there be light.” Here each man and all men parrot God with the exact same opening (“Come, let us”) as when God builds woman from the rib of Adam. This mimicking is not, superficially, different from following the description in Genesis 1:26 where we are told that man is made in the likeness of God, imbued with the capacity for both moral judgment and creation that we see in the Creator. The men of Shinar create, yet the what, how, and why of their creation are anything but godly.

So far we have only heard of tents. Bricks are invented and come from a fashioning of the earth, just like Adam was. However, God makes man softly, He breathes a spirit into him, He gives him habitat, He tutors him, and He recognizes the lacking element and makes him a companion. Man is created with care. The men of Shinar take the formless earth and with white-hot fire make it square and solid and uniform. There is a violence to their technique. They do not just solidify—they burn. To create, they need to destroy. They create in order to use. There is no love and no care, only efficiency.

And they said, “Come let us build us a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, that we may make us a name, lest we be scattered over all the earth.”

With this line, the idolatry present in urbanism comes to a head. They have their bricks and we can imagine them deciding what they should build with it. The idea strikes them to make a city, the inevitable outcome of an agricultural community. This is not just any city, it is built for their use and glorification—it is the city of the monoculture.

They desire a ziggurat, a great tower stretching into immortality. The tower is a portal to the heavens, a way to connect them and the mysterious mechanics of the sky they so rely on. It is great and imposing, the culmination of and a monument to human effort and power. Their idolatry quickly morphs into self-worship. “That we may make us a name,” shows their guiding ethic to be one of accomplishment. They are the symbolic ancestors of those for whom science does not need the
tempering of morality—science is accomplishment and accomplishment is good. Idolatry and self-worship are dangerous because they know no moral order, no natural bounds. For the idol-worshipper, the earth works on the whims of personified elements. For the self-worshipper, the order is created by human faculties aided by human tendencies. Compared to the God-worshipper who derives morality from divine legislation, the idol and self-worshipper thinks of morality as transient, temporary, and the product of shaky ground. Morality, for him, is therefore relative and toothless.

The monoculture fosters this in part because of its idol-worshipping urbanism but also because of its self-worshipping power. These many humans of great skill and without any rivals know no mitigating power. The only power they know, aside from the rain and sun, is their own. It is therefore not entirely surprising that they use their power to attempt to subvert rain and sun—unless something comes in the way of technological progress. They seek to rise into the heavens to harness sun and rain lest they be “scattered all over the earth.” They seem to be aware that some other power might more than rival their own. They realize that this power would do: it would scatter them and make their project impossible. They fear being scattered most of all because their civilization is all they have. Should their civilizations be destroyed, their great power in collective would be broken up and greatly diminished. Even worse for them, we hear no mention of individual identities, factions, disagreements, or differences among the men at Shinar. They may not even know how to live as an individual, as a household, or in a small village. Scattering is complete destruction.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the human creatures had built.

God has permitted human volition and now surveys its result. Surveying is critical. The humans presumably saw the earth before they made the bricks and the heavens before they built toward it, but nowhere do we read of the men of Shinar looking upon their portion as if to consider the right course of action. The humans are impulsive and deluded by the appearance of their own ability. God, on the other hand, pauses. He descends in order to consider the situation from a new vantage-point. He is determining the problem and considering the justness of the possible solutions. God gives an example of the proper technique of political decision-making. Politics requires prudence and the neglect of impulse.

And the Lord said, “As one people with one language for all, if this is what they have begun to do, now nothing they plot to do will elude them.”

Creating the tower is not outside the limits of practical possibility—if humanity remains with one language and as one people then they will accomplish it. Building the tower is, however, beyond the limits of spiritual and moral possibility. Should they build the tower, their mastery over nature confirmed, they will be able to invent an inherently relative moral order. Their ethos is technological and scientistic: names, glory, fame, and honor derive from creating bigger towers and more advanced technologies. This is the ultimate diminishment of human life. Men would no longer dream and inquire, only build and tinker. Love, like God’s love, could not exist when human energy is devoted to the harsh practice of material construction. Universalism quickly becomes the path to our diminishment.

This should not be a foreign possibility. When there is no identity, no heritage, no distinct code to separate peoples, there is no differentiation of spirits. Life has no dynamism, no conflict, and no spiritual opposition when shared universally. It becomes boring, betterment is unknown, and so the spirit becomes auxiliary. Without competing spiritual lives, all that may grant meaning to a human life is technology and production. If no one is morally better than anyone else, greatness can only be a subsidiary of productivity. All man can know is production.

The unlimited pursuit of technology comes at the expense of the soul. And, since there is no alternate example of human life for the men of Shinar, they will never know their error. Nothing that they design to do will elude the men of Shinar because they will produce ad infinitum.

“Well, let us go down and baffle their language there so that they will not understand each other’s language.”

And the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth and they left off building the city.

Therefore it is called Babel, for there the Lord made the language of all the earth babble.
The solution follows from the crisis. The universal community has made men harsh, amoral, and spiritless idolaters. They must be separated and made discrete. Universal language is the origin of universal man and so, by “baffling” the language into new tongues, universal man is so annihilated. Instead, nations compete, define themselves in opposition, and remind each other that there are other ways. Nations are the impetus of moral reflection and the rivalry of peoples gives rise to modesty. Men must be different in order for at least one of them to be good.

More specifically, we have one nation, the Hebrew people, whose narrative begins with the first words of Chapter 12. Genesis goes on to chronicle the formation of a specific tribe which grows into a nation, acquires law in Exodus, and, at the conclusion of the Five Books of Moses, is bequeathed land. Babel helps make the argument for this path: why a distinct civilization and not a single method to which everyone assimilates is necessary for the betterment of mankind.

The conservative understands this. He promotes national sovereignty, federalism, and faction against the temptations of centralization and planning. He rejects cosmopolitanism as vacuous and global governance as subversive. He does this, not out of unthinking jingoism, but because he knows the world needs faction, tribe, nation, religion, and identity to keep away from human self-worship and moral blindness. Rivalry sustains the moral conscience of man: he wants to be better than his rival. In addition, mass society is loveless; universalism leads to massive human power which in turn leads to self-infatuation with production. Conversely, discrete society is built on sincere relationships, starting with the family. In this way, faction, tribe, nation, religion, and identity are cultivators of the noble life.

He opposes the utopianism of the entitlement state and the social engineering of modern politics in part because he sees the necessary failure of its utopianism now that humankind is post-Babel. This politics of prudence reminds us of God surveying the scene before He takes His action. The use of power requires consideration and restraint so as to avoid the failure of good intentions. More deeply, the conservative suspects utopianism because social engineering and rational control are types of scientism. Their utilitarian ethos gradually subverts all others. The conservative fears the creeping influence of the technocrat who cannot understand the spiritual and moral dynamism of an individual life. Because he understands the eternal nexus of utopianism, scientism, and universalism, he prefers organization in small communities and the use of mediating structures like religious institutions that organize with an eye to spiritual and moral dynamism.

Similarly, the conservative is concerned about the reimagining of the natural order in movements like transhumanism and the sexual liberation. Both also serve a narrow ethos of transcendence. Against the limits of human ability and mortality, transhumanism seeks to supplement the human body with mechanical appendages and chemical treatments. This obsessive pursuit of ability undermines the desire to be truly happy, a possibility in our natural, constrained world. The sexual liberation, by removing the constraint of sex’s teleology (procreation), makes sex into an experience of only pleasure at the expense of its multidimensional human significance.

The conservative is wary of this focus on the material as it comes at the expense of the moral and spiritual. The attempts to transcend and reengineer nature are met by the conservative with an eye of suspicion, because he believes the good moral and spiritual life is attainable within the natural order.

The last and most difficult idea for the modern conservative is a rejection of urbanism. Urbanism is not merely the building of cities but the activity of commerce and life among the human mob. The conservative rejects urbanism while still often living in the city and being an advocate of capitalism. The city-dweller is a constant witness to the power of human ability and productivity, a power that convives its witness of the singular power of human society. It, too, breeds an ethic of human accomplishment and, through the infatuation with human power, a concordant blindness to divine legislation and the social underbelly of depraved humanity. Yet, outside of the Southern Agrarian tradition, most conservative intellectuals have been city dwellers and have benefited from the city’s rich intellectual, economic, and cultural resources. Cities, like capitalism, are an inescapable fact of modern human life. The conservative must therefore remind his fellow city-dwellers that the city does not exist for its own sake. The conservative must remind the capitalist that profit is not the same as virtue.

We live in a post-Babelian world in which the extremes of universalism and scientism are distant and unlikely. The seeming impracticability of the result of universalism and scientism does not mean that the dangerous principles are missing from modern life. Whether universalism percolates in Davos or scientism drives the agenda in Washington, it must be countered by the steady voice of the prudential conservative. The conservative reminds his fellows of the primacy of moral living, the need for loving bonds, the importance of restraint, and the dangers of the dual temptations of universalism and scientism, lest they be scattered all over the earth. Q
Books in Review:

On The Death of Conservatism

By Josh Lerner

“When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.” - Lucius C. Falkland

There have been many fascinating reviews and rebuttals of Sam Tanenhaus’s latest book, an interesting, if deceptively polemical work, entitled The Death of Conservatism. Most of these rebuttals, particularly the wonderful one written by John Podhoretz in the September 2009 issue of Commentary, chastise the book for ignoring the political realities of the day. Podhoretz focuses on the electoral and political success of conservatism, as it is currently constituted in the past 25 years: successes that range from welfare reform to the inability of self-proclaimed liberals to win the presidency in well over 40 years. Podhoretz, rightly, attacks the apparent short-sightedness of the eulogy for the American Right and given the seismic political shift of the last 6 months against the very ascendant liberalism Tanenhaus is accused of supporting, one can conclude that he was on to something. Instead, Podhoretz proclaims that the movement has been “jolted back to life the way political and ideological tendencies usually are: by the actions of its opposite number.”

Fair enough, but Tanenhaus has stated that the focus of his work is not on the success or failure of conservatism as a political force, but rather as an intellectual movement: how lively and interesting are those who think about the big questions within the movement and how does this compare to those outside the movement. The question must be asked: is intellectual conservatism really so dormant as Tanenhaus suggests it is, and, if so, is this due to the influence of what Tanenhaus calls the revanchists, members of the movement who are “more devoted to orthodoxy than to compromise”? Or is it Tanenhaus’s own ideological baggage and desire to see conservatism enter a dormant point intellectually that drives his narrative?

Tanenhaus is an idiosyncratic figure himself. He’s the editor of the New York Times Book Review, and has written for many of the de rigueur publications of the New York intelligentsia (The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, The New Republic, etc.). He is, by all accounts, a fairly unremarkable liberal; although he does attempt to maintain his “journalistic neutrality” by remaining unaffiliated and unregistered with any political party—an antiquated, if somewhat refreshing, attempt at objectivity. His liberalism is somewhat less pronounced than those other prophets of conservative doom, like Frank Rich or Paul Krugman, and the way in which he has run the New York Times Book Review has been far more even-handed, in respect to the publications reviewed and the disposition of the reviewer, than previous iterations have been. So, one must give credit where credit is due.

For an openly liberal commentator, Tanenhaus is certainly very familiar with the ins and outs of the conservative movement. Tanenhaus cannot be summarily dismissed as an outsider with malicious intent; he wrote a particularly charming biography of Whittaker Chambers, the star witness in the Alger Hiss trial and a founding father of National Review and the modern conservative movement, and is in the process of finishing a massive biography of William F. Buckley. In fact, Tanenhaus has a very peculiar relationship with the conservative movement, stating during a speech at the American Enterprise Institute of all places that, although he disagrees with most of what is said by conservatives, “they are the only vibrant American political philosophy of the last 40 years.” Listening to Tanenhaus, what is readily apparent is that he is both fascinated by, and an admirer of, conservative ideas (or, at least conservatives in theory or history books). At the same time, he has almost nothing positive to say for the conservative movement in and of itself.

Tanenhaus, however, does not get a free pass
on the accusation of a premature eulogizing of political conservatism: although he focuses on the discussion of the intellectual degradation of the movement, his book is dotted with lines chastising members of the conservative movement, like Charles Krauthammer and Rush Limbaugh specifically, for “ignoring public opinion” in their continued opposition to President Obama’s attempts to, as Krauthammer himself puts it, create a “European style social democracy.” Tanenhaus is aghast that these “so-called conservatives” would so directly flaunt the “prudential wisdom” of the democratic process—which in his mind means a European social welfare state—which, retrospectively, probably seems a bit premature (given the latest poll numbers on health care reform or cap-and-trade). This is, unfortunately, a problem that Tanenhaus repeatedly partakes in throughout the book: bizarre assertions of the political defeat of conservatism and, therefore, the Republican party, coming less than, when the bulk of this book was written, six months since the inauguration. But what can one reasonably expect from the editor of the New York Times Book Review? I will give Tanenhaus credit for attempting to transcend his acknowledged political bias, but parts of the book read as if it were written in a Pauline Kael alternative universe.

But as to his central contention about the state of intellectual conservatism: what is the proper role of intellectual conservatism, and how can we tell when it is flourishing or floundering? Tanenhaus proposes a fascinating dichotomy of conservative thought: the aforementioned revanchists on one side, and the Burkean (at least on Tanenhaus’s reading of Burke) realists on the other. Without getting too mired in the details of what each element is, it can be safely stated that the essential characteristic of the realists is that of the conservative impulse in the already existing liberal regime; it exists to temper and provide the balance to counter “liberal overreach.” Realists, as Tanenhaus sees them, act to reach out to liberals on issues in which we, as sensible Americans, all agree on, and work to provide a stable and sustainable consensus on the issues of the day. The virtues of the realist are prudence and modesty; the realist recognizes where the political zeitgeist of the day resides, and opposes what reforms to the system would risk its destruction. In an entirely unironic sentiment, Tanenhaus declares that the great virtues of conservatives are their unwillingness to change; they are best served when they believe that “when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change,” a quote he (bizarrely) approves of. According to Tanenhaus, this is Burkean statesmanship at its finest: conservatives act as the moderating impulse to the great liberal progression, pushing back against liberalism when it over reaches.

But, just as realists provide Tanenhaus with his great intellectual heroes, the revanchists act the part of the boisterous villains, the rowdy and intemperate disrupters of our great consensus. They are radicals who, far from wanting to maintain the current order, are rather bent on destroying and refashioning it after their own visions. In many ways, Tanenhaus seems to despise the revanchists for behaving ideologically; he resents conservatism as an answer, rather than just a corollary, to liberalism. But where does this revanchist spirit come from? Tanenhaus recognizes the absolutes postulated by these men as not terribly dissimilar to that of their polar opposites, scientific Marxists. This is because, as many of the newly christened converts to conservatism were themselves ex-Marxists “they retained their absolutist fervor, replacing the Marxist dialectic with a Manichaean politics of good and evil.” How dare conservatives, Tanenhaus all but says, have an intellectual movement entirely separate from the liberal consensus; how dare they establish political principles to go with an antipathy towards imprudent change.

From here, Tanenhaus weaves a very interesting, if often rough, history of the intellectual conservative movement in America, primarily between the end of the Second World War and 1975, the year he claims intellectual conservatism began its decline. To the surprise of no one with at least a glancing familiarity with his work, Tanenhaus credits two men as the ultimate embodiments of every thing that is right about the conservative movement, men who can authentically spout realism because of their impeccable conservative credentials: Whittaker Chambers and William F. Buckley.

Buckley at his best, according to Tanenhaus, provided conservatism with both an authenticity and an intellectual joie de vivre. He created waves, certainly, but he was never one—at least in his “golden years”—to actually threaten the existing intellectual structure. Buckley, Tanenhaus later admits, is far too complex a figure to pigeonhole into one role or another: his “standing athwart to history yelling Stop!” is essential realist politics, but Buckley, especially post-1975, became too ideological for Tanenhaus. This, of course, is an exercise in selective memory; Buckley certainly made huge waves when he attacked the “myth” of academic freedom in God and Man at Yale, and when he defended the practices of Joseph McCarthy in McCarthy and His
**Enemies**, both occurring during these so-called “golden years”. Certainly, there is an element of Buckley as the quaint or peculiar conservative that Tanenhaus seemed to admire (Buckley was suave and cultured—the epitome of the wonderful dinner party guest—and Tanenhaus, it can be inferred, admires Buckley for being the same kind of intellectual as he is, the sophisticated aristocrat), but even more, it was the hopelessness of what Buckley represented. Particularly in its early years, National Review was much more focused on critiquing policy rather than creating it. When it started to try and change things in a constructive way is when it became far too ideological. Buckley, ultimately, does not provide Tanenhaus with the proper measuring of realism: for that, he would have return to an old favorite of his, a man of impeccable conservative credentials who also saw conservatism as a series of compromises: Whittaker Chambers.

To Tanenhaus, Chambers embodies all of the elements of the realist conservative: he is weary of change, skeptical of any great reforms projects, and entirely pessimistic about the fate of both democratic capitalism and a free and virtuous United States. He waxes poetic about the inability of the right to fight the left on equal grounds because those very grounds of the intellectual movement have changed so rapidly. According to Chambers, the “regulatory economics of the New Deal had become the basis for governing in postwar America” and that conservatives not only would not, but could not “provide a comprehensive alternative.” Chambers laments that “any conservatism that does not accept this is not a political force or even a twitch: it is a literary whimsy.”

But here we again see one of Tanenhaus’s bizarre blending of electoral politics and intellectual movements. Chambers opposes overturning the great political consensus of the New Deal partially because it cannot be done, but also partially because it would undermine the newly created social order. And yet, this realist compromise did very little to prevent the further degradation of what American conservatives would hold near and dear during the 1950s. This accommodationist stance, as embodied by the Eisenhower administration (an administration Tanenhaus lauds for its realism), could do little to prevent the overreaches of the Great Society. And, as a political organ, accommodationism has not shown itself to be any more politically viable as an electoral tool than adversarial conservatism (compare and contrast the accommodationist Republican party of the 1960s to the far more combative party of the 1990s). But again, this is Tanenhaus making an unnecessary step towards talking about the electoral side of conservatism. Although it is significant that he often confuses intellectual vitality with electoral viability, it does not mean we should disregard his discussion on the state of intellectual conservatism. Even if Tanenhaus is a flawed messenger, his message is still quite important.

The general thesis of the book can be summarized simply: the conservative movement collapsed under the presidency of George W. Bush, and that Barack Obama’s victory in 2008 marked the commencement of the new liberal era in American politics. A collapse partially caused by the corruption and an unprincipled pursuit of power amongst self-proclaimed conservatives and partially caused because said conservatives lost the support of the American people due to their devotion to right-wing “orthodoxy.” Tanenhaus says at various points that conservatives are out to destroy the country, that they are driven by revenge and resentment, that they dislike America, and that they behave more like extremists and revolutionaries (“Jacobins”) than as genuine conservatives. Later on, he does back away from the political prognostications here and reiterates that he is primarily focused on the state of intellectual conservatism, but how much of that has to do with the developments of the last six months I cannot answer.

If Tanenhaus isn’t speaking solely to electoral politics, but rather to intellectual vitality his theory doesn’t hold up too well either. His narrative on the history of intellectual conservatism has some real idiosyncrasies—he speaks of the rise of the neoconservatives in the 1960s and 70s as a moment when “the right held out its hand and compromised with the moderate left”, when most historians of the movement (let alone those who participated in this great intellectual migration) see it as the complete opposite: the moment when great thinkers of the left (at least the anticommunist left) began to shift rightward until they could describe themselves as nothing else but conservatives. The examples he cites, naturally, are some of the more moderate neoconservatives, particularly Daniel Bell and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and yet even there his narrative suffers, because it was not with the left that these two men (or any other prominent neoconservatives for that matter) had the greatest impact, but rather on all forms of moderates, pragmatists, realists, and, ultimately, conservatives.

But what must not be forgotten is that the intellectual makeup of the neoconservative movement was revanchist to the core. Tanenhaus himself he cites a particular essay by the oft-described “Godfather of neoconservatism” Irving Kristol *The Republican Future*, as the moment where conservatism stopped being incrementalist and dispositionally opposed to change and became reformist and radical. What’s remarkable is that this essay, and much of Kristol’s writings at this time, was written with the expressed purpose of making the Republican Party—as the modern political instrument of conservatism—a “modern and competitive party.”
Kristol exhorts conservatives to think “in terms of shaping the future,” not just in vague political niceties or abstractions. Fine, all that stuff seems relatively reformist. What confuses me about the Tanenhaus thesis is that this essay is as much a call to conservatives to ground their philosophical principles in concrete political goals (reforming welfare as opposed to outright ending it) and at the same time, use these principles to ground the actions of the party that must ostensibly represent it (the Republicans). Tanenhaus seems to object most violently to the notion of the symbiotic relationship between principles and politics when it comes to the conservative side. What he finds irritating about Kristol’s essay is that Kristol demands conservatism modernize politically so that it can become useful intellectually. Tanenhaus would much rather conservatives be, in the words of Jonah Goldberg, like Alfred Jay Nock, interesting eccentrics whose only use is making one’s social gatherings far more interesting (as Nock himself most certainly did: he did have both a long black cape and a pearl handled cane).

What is really odd about his discussion of conservative intellectual vitality is his exclusion of the great Chicago economists, the Classical liberals/libertarians, and the Straussians in the conservative intellectual tradition. His grand intellectual narrative makes almost no mention of any of these groups, a very telling omission, because each one of them would probably be considered revanchists in Tanenhaus’s system, and all were first rate intellectuals whose influence far exceeded even the most major of figures in Tanenhaus’s book (save for Buckley, Kirk, and Kristol). Whether it was Leo Strauss, Milton Friedman, Allan Bloom, Ludwig Von Mises, Robert Nozick, etc. all these figures were both exceedingly influential inside the movement and none could be considered reformist conservatives. Of course, perhaps it was the fact that these men made their great intellectual contributions far from the island of Manhattan that causes Tanenhaus to ignore them. I doubt if Leo Strauss or Milton Friedman would make a particularly good dinner guest at one of the many WASP parties Tanenhaus would like conservatives to be confined to, but this may be unfair to Tanenhaus. He may just think the only intellectuals worth talking about live in New York City. Even then his exclusion of these men is rather unforgiveable.

Each one of those in the aforementioned groups had a clear understanding of what constituted a good or a bad regime (or at least what constituted traits of desirable and undesirable regimes). Each had little consideration for the sort of political realism Tanenhaus lauds as the intellectual backbone of conservatism, and none of them are particularly interested in conserving something for the sake of conservation. It is undeniable that these men were giants intellectually both within the conservative movement and in academia generally. And yet, they are not even mentioned in the book. Friedrich Hayek, the iconic classical liberal and author of The Road to Serfdom (and another intellectual giant all but excluded from Tanenhaus’s narrative), called himself a Burkean, but it is rather the Whig reading of Burke as an aristocratic democrat, not Tanenhaus’ proto-Hegelian reading, that Hayek modeled himself after. The multiple readings of Burke provide an interesting purview into the differing use of Burke as a justification for whatever political ideology one wishes to represent. Hayek’s reading is, largely, one of Burke as a defender of tradition, whereas Tanenhaus views Burke as a product of his time and decides that it is the temporal nature of Burke’s thought, rather than the principles governing his thought, that is significant. It is an absurd reading of Burke, in the sense that it makes Burke the defender of all traditions for the sake of defending tradition, ignoring the nature of the very tradition Burke represents: Burke as a milder, courtlier Hegel.

But it isn’t just Burke that Tanenhaus takes a quasi Hegelian vision of: his entire narrative of societal change is extremely historicist. By recognizing the liberal consensus as the element of society that is worthy of conserving, Tanenhaus embraces the progress narrative, where liberal policies are inevitably leading to a perfectible society and there are very few things that can prevent this ultimate coalescence. In the progress narrative drawn up by Tanenhaus, the realist conservatives act as a moderating factor, something that allows this great progress to come together in a much more prudent and considerate way. The reason the revanchists are so lamentable in Tanenhaus’s account is that they disregard the progress narrative: working instead to create their own historical narrative and, in doing so, threaten the very notion of progress in and of itself. For Tanenhaus, it is clear that history is advancing with a progressive inevitability, and that reformist conservatives are destabilizing this narrative. Progressive inevitabilism is the pathology found amongst those who believe in a perpetually ascendant liberalism that leads them to believe that very little, if
anything, can or should stop the march of progress. It is the eschatological side of modern liberalism. This creates an intellectual dissonance within Tanenhaus’s own work that forces him to regard any deviations from this narrative to be intrinsically flippant or deleterious. If the reformists are serious conservatives, then Tanenhaus’s narrative falls apart.

The underlying assumption in Tanenhaus’s book is that conservatism is only intellectually vibrant when it is working on enhancing some element of grand progress, when conservatism ignores or wholly disregards this, progress is thwarted. The danger of the historicist narratives are that they all presuppose a knowable end: that history must, inevitably, be leading somewhere, and that somewhere is knowable in the here and now. The certainty of the historicist narrative is what makes it such a tempting one; by providing an intelligible framework with which every event and idea throughout history is explained, it provides certainty and comfort to the intellectual class. It is the belief that all of what has happened in the past culminates in the present situation of man, and that the future can only build upon this framework. The temptation towards self-importance and the inevitability of one’s ideas makes progressive historicism the opium of the social theorist. It is the linear reading of history that makes this such a powerful idea. Tanenhaus’s progressive inevitabilism is a secular version of the Christian idea of Providence with the important distinction that Christian fatalism culminates with the End of Days, while the secular idea of progress envisions a perfect future ahead. Like the Christians, the way one deals with those acting in direct opposition is very clear.

If we are to break this down into ideological terms, the progress narrative can be seen as recognizing both the perfect state of justice, and the absolute ends by which that state can be accessed. The underlying assumption in the liberal version of the progress narrative (there are such things as conservative progress narratives, but these are built on pessimism and millenarianism, not intellectual hubris) is that this perfect state is achievable through the proper level of political intervention into society, and that the ultimate standard by which intervention is judged is a heuristically derived egalitarianism. Because this change is by its very nature political, the liberal recognizes that they, as political actors, must be the agents of human progress. It is why the progress narrative has so much power and is a reflexive part of American liberalism; it knows no limitations to the end of the just state except those actors who oppose progress.

Tanenhaus compromises the usual nature of the progress narrative by extolling the virtues of conservatives as a mild correction to liberal excess. However, one shouldn’t mistaken Tanenhaus’s supposed temperance with anything resembling conservatism; he believes that the conservatives serve an instrumental purpose in the furthering of progress, because ultimately a more measured progress is still progressive. It is the conceit of the Third Way in politics. Tanenhaus, like many American liberals (but usually not leftists and especially not Marxists), believes in essentially a pragmatic politics, something informed by “political realities,” not orthodoxies or ideologies. He believes that there is a general historical narrative that acts independently of ideology and that this political conceptualization is either aided or impeded. But, unlike other progressives, Tanenhaus at least concedes that a conservative impulse is part of this great narrative. What he cannot comprise on, however, is the notion of narrative destroyers as, essentially, pernicious forces of radical reaction. It is why, to Tanenhaus, the revanchists must be Jacobins and cannot be true conservatives.

“He is fine with conservatives as long as we know our role and don’t get too uppity.” Conservatives that he likes—or at least readings of conservatives he likes—accept their role as part of this cosmic narrative. The reason a figure like Whittaker Chambers is so agreeable to Tanenhaus is not that there is anything about Chambers as a thinker that he finds ennobling, but rather that Chambers was unable to shake away the Marxist historicism, the dialectical materialism, he possessed even after he, in the words of Tanenhaus, “replaced his Marxism with Christianity.” Underlying much of what Chambers wrote—or at least what Tanenhaus cites—is a belief in the predestination of the collapse of democratic capitalism: history is inevitably leading to the downfall of our cherished system, therefore, as conservatives, all we can hope to do is delay the inevitable. It is no mistake that when Chambers left Communism behind, he quipped that he had now “joined the losing side.” What Tanenhaus finds endearing about Chambers is that he is willing to go quietly into the night and offer only the mildest push back against the great progress.

Ultimately what Tanenhaus dislikes about modern conservatism is that it both rejects its role as philosophically and politically subservient to liberalism and wants to establish and behave like a modern ideology. It is no mistake that once conservatism began to proactively provide solutions to society’s problems, not just correct liberal overreach, that it started to win both elections and, concomitantly, policy fights. So when Tanenhaus says he “respects conservatism and admires its intellectual vitality” he is speaking not of what most people would consider the conservative movement in
America, but a quaint dialectic about progress and reaction. He is fine with conservatives as long as we know our role and don’t get too uppity.

But Tanenhaus is right in one very important way: it is not enough for conservatism to just be one of many ideologies; it must also appeal to the pragmatic opposition to change. It must be both an ideology and a disposition; it must stand athwart to history yelling “stop!” and tell history where to go. The American public will never be overwhelming ideologically conservative. An ever-present political pragmatism overrides ideological concerns for most Americans. What Americans do have is a natural fear of overarching and radical change, something that both the “reformist” and the “revanchist” dispositions can, and will, address (if there’s any doubt to this, one need look no further than the latest polling on the Obama healthcare reform bills currently circulating through Congress). If anything, the recent kerfuffle over healthcare has revived the electoral spirit of conservatives and their moderate allies. The same independents that made up the bulk of the Obama coalition some 15 months ago are now fleeing the alters of “Hope and Change” as rapidly as they arrived. And the political tide turns again, showing that an electoral demise is only as long as the time between elections. So, if conservatism can remain ideologically consistent and provide a good counterweight to the liberal program, while not veering too far from the natural reflexive reactionism of the American people, we can get the most out of both worlds. For conservatism to continue as the “dominant intellectual movement in American politics,” it must be able to embrace both the arguments of the realist and of the revanchist.

Books in Review:

God Only Knows

By Jeremy Rozansky

“They are the trustees of tradition, and the conservators of the religious element. They are a living and the most striking evidence of the falsity of that pernicious doctrine of modern times, the natural equality of man… Thus it will be seen that all the tendencies of the Jewish race are conservative. Their bias is to religion, property, and natural aristocracy.” – Benjamin Disraeli, 1852

There is a common Jewish adage that if you take any two Jews you will find three opinions. What the adage fails to mention is that, if you’re asking about politics, you very easily could get the same opinion from not just two Jews but most of any congregation. Jews are, by-and-large, liberals. Democratic presidential candidates have accrued, on average, 75% of the Jewish vote since Al Smith lost to Herbert Hoover in 1928. Barack Obama enjoyed 78% with only black voters giving him a greater proportion. The Jewish propensity for liberalism is known to the student of politics, the student of American Judaism, and especially to the Jewish conservative.

Quarrelsome for the sake of survival, Norman Podhoretz is all three. An original neoconservative, Podhoretz edited Commentary Magazine under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee for decades. Podhoretz, as he tells us, dealt often with the tension between Commentary’s heterodox neoconservatism and the default liberalism of a mainstream Jewish organization. For him, the question “Why are Jews liberals?” calls up autobiography and history, political science and theology, dumbfoundedness and perspicuity. Why Are Jews Liberals? has each in spurts: a Jewish-political history, a contemporary political survey, narratives of

1. The term neoconservative is, unfortunately, used mostly as an epithet today for the Jewish hawks certain fringe and not-so-fringe political paranoids believe to have orchestrated defense policy under George W. Bush. It is better used as the description and self-description of a political movement conservatives who gradually broke ranks with their fellow New York Intellectuals and Alcove-2 Trotskyites after witnessing the left’s excesses. They have been and are largely Jewish with many excellent gentile exceptions.
times on the frontlines, arguments and explanations fill the gaps. Podhoretz provides sharp remarks that scratch at the heart of the matter, bringing the question to new depths. He asks a big question so, for his answer to be comprehensive, he will need to cover all fronts, including why the other theories are wrong. As an introduction to the question, the book succeeds, providing several vistas for further inquiry. Read as a comprehensive answer, Why Are Jews Liberals? is incomplete and often finds itself distracted by a related question, “Why should Jews not be liberals?”

Podhoretz first provides a short survey of Jewish political history. History offers Podhoretz the basic answer to why Jews are liberals—since they are not liberals by theology (as Podhoretz will later address) they are liberals by virtue of historical circumstance. The story of Jewish liberalism begins with the formation of the Europe they would come to live (and become liberals) under, namely, the rise of Christianity. As Podhoretz tells it, by the end of the Middle Ages Jews knew the worst enemy they had was Christianity which, Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic, had often wedded itself to anti-Semitism.

From this we reach the first “puzzle.” Where, previously, the “kindest” monarchs to the Jews had been those who needed their economic contribution, with the Enlightenment and the invention of religious tolerance, new, enlightened monarchs like Joseph II were kinder than any previous. It makes sense then that the forces of Enlightenment and their seeming heirs in the 19th Century, the liberals, would draw the political support of European Jews. Yet, and Podhoretz emphasizes this, men like Voltaire and other opponents of Christianity during the Enlightenment were often Anti-Semites themselves. Voltaire called Jews, “the most detestable [nation] ever to have sullied the earth” and saw Judaism as a more backward Christianity. And still Voltaire and men like him set off the trend that improved the condition of European Jews. The first puzzle of how Jews became liberals is how they needed to reconcile the fact that those who protected them did not admire or support the essence of traditional Jewish life.

Podhoretz goes on to point out that during the Age of Faith Jews could sometimes escape persecution by conversion to Christianity, in the Age of Reason Jews could escape persecution by converting to the Religion of Reason. The latter being a more straightforward transformation. This transitions him into a discussion of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment and Emancipation, the seed of Jewish assimilationism and the beginning of liberal Jewish theology. He, however, does not enumerate its causes other than to draw a questionable line of “Jewish rationalism” from Maimonides to the inspiration of the Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn had two primary concerns: obtaining greater recognition and rights for the German Jew and modernizing Judaism through a cultural and philosophical synthesis of Judaism and the liberal Enlightenment. He does this by making Judaism essentially voluntary, a choice among religions in a liberal society. His motivation was both practical and theoretical: to elevate the position of the Jew in the era in which Jewish entry into any city was taxed like cattle and to transfer persuasive secular ideas to a Jewish audience. Podhoretz partially accounts for the former and ignores the latter. More problematic, he never mentions Baruch Spinoza, who may be considered the first Jewish liberal.

The story continues with the oft nationalist anti-Semitism of the European Right in the 19th Century. Just as the secularists were more pleasant than the Church during the Enlightenment, the liberals were more pleasant than the rightists for the 18th and 19th Century Jew. Suddenly, however, the left became less hospitable. Men like Fourier, Proudhon, and Marx were not just prone to vicious anti-Semitism but, for Marx, it was the center of his argument about liberal society—liberal society was too Jewish, i.e. too self-interested. But the rising number of Jewish socialists ignored, were indifferent to, or diminished the importance of Marx's anti-Semitism.

It is worthwhile to reflect upon at the two transitions so described. In the first, Jews join the liberal fray because continental liberals offered them greater political status and new opportunities that the old regime did not. The attraction of many Jews to radical liberalism and socialism, however, is not easily explained. Considering how Jews make up a disproportionate portion of the modern radical Left, this is a vital turn to understand. Podhoretz, unfortunately, does not give a theory for the attraction of Jews to Marxism.

The narrative moves from Europe to America for most of the final three quarters of the book. Jews found opportunities unlike any others in America, but also assimilated a greater whole than in liberalizing Europe. Reform Judaism, an especially American phenomenon, as Podhoretz summarizes, “decreed [in 1885’s Pittsburgh Platform] that all traditionally binding beliefs and practices that separated or distinguished Jews from the surrounding society were to be abandoned.” In more fair terms, Reform Judaism followed Mendelssohn and conceived of Judaism as a religion with universalistic reach and not a particular peoplehood. In this way, Jews adapted the norms of secular society while enunciating an ethical message rooted in traditional views insofar as traditional views remained in the zeitgeist. Podhoretz seems to think that the reason for the Jewish attachment to assimilation was defense against anti-Semitism. But why didn’t Jews fully secularize? Why did they remain Jews, albeit Reform Jews? Would the gentiles’ anti-Semitism not let them? Reform Judaism sprouted from
a reasonable desire to culturally assimilate (motivated, in part, by anti-Semitism) and from the legacy of Haskalah rationalism, among other things. Had Podhoretz carried these strains through to their eventual conclusion (the modern, liberal Jew) he would better trace the role of ideology in making Jews liberals.

In America, Podhoretz tells us, recent immigrant Jews often found themselves as unskilled, garment workers. Thus, a Jewish labor movement with radical European roots gained relevance. Podhoretz goes on to chart a process by which the language of class warfare was slowly undermined by the necessity of collective bargaining. As Jewish political action became more and more practically-minded, the Marxism dissolved into progressivism which dissolved into contemporary liberalism. The Jewish median moved away from socialism and embraced a sort of progressivism whose banner would be taken by the 20th Century’s Democratic Party and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The greatest predictor of voting behavior of any individual is the voting behavior of his or her parents. Just as blacks became Democrats with Kennedy, Jews became Democrats with FDR (and Al Smith) and have been ever since. While Jewish radicalism is left unexplained, the position of the Jew during the Depression as marginalized, urban, and working class made him ripe for the New Deal Coalition, not to mention that the Republican Party at the time had its share of isolationists, German sympathizers, and opponents of labor. The question is now: why have Jews stayed liberals?

Within two decades of the New Deal Coalition’s formation, Jews had predominantly left the working class. Moreover, there was a new issue of American politics of particular Jewish importance: the nascent state of Israel. The remainder of Podhoretz’s narrative (half-of-it) is told in the first person. He is the radical Jew who split from his co-religionists publicly and dramatically, whose banner would be taken by the 20th Century’s Democratic Party and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

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Podhoretz quickly returns to his earlier pattern of describing why Jews should not be liberals. He shows the Democratic Party’s shift from the party of Truman and Kennedy to the party of McGovern and Carter. The expansion of Jewish wealth, the proliferation of anti-Semitism on the left (especially among black radicals) and the mainstream left’s blindness to it, affirmative action, and the liberal penchant for moral equivalence in the Israeli-Arab conflict all would seem to move the self-interested Jewish voter to the right. On social issues especially, Jews are entrenchedly left-wing. Abortion-rights are heavily favored by Jews, with some polls showing nearly 90% support. Similarly, school prayer, censorship of pornography, and public displays of religion are opposed by dramatic majorities of Jews. Jews support gay rights at an 85% rate while Non-Jewish whites indicate 57% of support. Indeed, the only issue on which Jews are more conservative than Non-Jewish whites is affirmative action.

The Republican Party also hurt itself in any attempt to get a greater section of the Jewish vote by repeating some of Carter’s mistakes on Israel in the Reagan and Bush Sr. years. In fact, Reagan’s 1980 victory over Carter is the only time Jews have ever split for a Republican. Podhoretz believes Carter’s policy toward Israel is the reason for the ephemeral moment of Jewish conservatism. Yet, less than 35% of American Jews have visited Israel and American Jews’ interest in Israel appears to be diminishing. Moreover, Evangelical Christians are more likely to cite Israel as a voting concern than Jews are. Carter’s ineptitude in the Near East, policy toward Israel, and cultivation of domestic malaise certainly hurt him with Jews, as with all voters. What should not go unnoticed, however, is that Carter was never the liberal-of-choice for the Jews. He was an evangelical and wore his faith on his sleeve. Jews did not give up on liberalism in 1980; the just gave up on Carter. In an opposite circumstance, Rudy Giuliani received a substantial chunk of the Jewish vote in his mayoral elections. Giuliani, largely secular and socially permissive, distinctly New York in tone and approach, was the type of Republican Jews could find themselves supporting. Jews are liberals for whom social issues are paramount and cultural perceptions are critical. Podhoretz places too much emphasis on Israel as a political motivator when both study and anecdote show Jewish voting centrally concerned with social issues.

As the chapter titles state, Podhoretz leads the reader from “How did the Jews become liberals?” to “Why are the Jews still liberals?” to answer “Why are Jews liberals?” They became liberals at some point and for some reason and they stay liberals for some reason. This is, first of all, assumes that Jews became liberals at some point; that to be a Jew is not necessarily to be a liberal. Podhoretz deflects the suggestion that Jewish liberalism emanates from Jewish traditions and texts by saying, first, it would be absurd to think the Torah endorses

“Jews are liberals for whom social issues are paramount and cultural perceptions are critical.”
specific policies when it commands individuals to care for the downtrodden and, second, if Jewish traditions and texts were the source of Jewish liberalism then one would expect the Orthodox to be the most liberal, which they are not. I will deal with the latter first. Yes, the Orthodox are more politically conservative than any other segment of American Jews. However, given how steeped in traditionalism their practice of Judaism is, one would expect more than the estimated 51% of Orthodox who voted for Bush in 2004 to vote Republican. The fact that the Orthodox have such a proportion of liberals demonstrates how down-the-line Jewish liberalism is.

Podhoretz makes a good, albeit general case that Jewish liberalism is not the result of Jewish ethical traditions. However, it is an argument too often used and too often relied on to justify the quick treatment he gives it. While he is right to say the Torah is silent on many specific policies, the Torah and other texts touch on both political principles and specifics that can be interpreted and applied. He needed to address specific points to make his case more compelling. I took three contemporary issues and saw how Reform Judaism’s lobbying organization (the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism) formulates an opinion from Jewish sources: abortion, affirmative action, and “economic justice.” I found that the Religious Action Center (RAC) often reads in liberal prerogatives to subtle and complex texts.

The Jewish view on abortion is highly idiosyncratic. If the mother’s life is in danger she must have the abortion preformed (Mishnah Ohaloth 7:6). Moreover, when one causes a miscarriage it is not as if they have killed another but it is also not without penalty. The fetus is in an in-between stage according to this view—it is not a full life but it is not worthless either. We also see the fetus referred to as a “human within a human” (Sanhedrin 57b) and the Medieval commentator, Rashi’s view that the child becomes a human upon birth. The RAC, however, interprets the mother’s life being in danger in the above passage as, “if the mental health, sanity, or self-esteem of the woman is at risk.” They expand the criteria to a subjective one. It is fair to say that the believing Jew should support access to abortions in some cases but to leave the decision entirely up to the mother does not have textual grounds. The text cited mandates the abortion when her life is in danger; it never leaves the decision to the mother. This is not the first self-fulfilling reading.

On affirmative action, the RAC cites the fact that all men are created in God’s image as evidence of a fundamental equality. They go on to quote the Babylonian Talmud without a trace of irony, “If one sees a great crowd, one should thank God for not having made them all of one mind. For just as each person’s face is different from another, so is each person’s mind different from any other mind.” (Berakhot 58a) Yet, this praise of diversity specifically refers to intellectual diversity, not racial diversity. It is probably better read as an argument against affirmative action as it affirms the primacy of ideas and character, not race.

With regard to a concept termed “Economic Justice,” the RAC cites biblical commandments to leave open the corners of one’s field, be generous, and champion the needy. As Podhoretz says, it would be absurd to claim that minimum wage laws are somehow spoken for here. The injunctions of individual generosity can be understood as the catalysts of mediating structures such as churches, families, and volunteer organizations that more successfully diminish poverty. It neither prohibits nor commands government anti-poverty efforts. Moreover, what we have learned about moral hazards and welfare links well with Maimonides’ description of the highest form of charity as helping an individual become self-sufficient. In line with this, in 1603, the Jewish Council of Padua mandated that anyone receiving welfare must engage in some sort of labor. It should not be lost here that Judaism’s view of wealth does not contain the moral reprobation of certain Christian doctrines (“it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”). The truly wealthy man, according to the Mishnaic period book of Jewish Ethics, Pirke Avot, is he who is happiest with his wealth. Judaism is not anti-capitalist, nor does it obviously come down on the side of entitlement expansion.

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In his summary of the history and has dismissed the argument of Jewish liberalism arising from Jewish traditions—now he must tell us why Jews are liberals. His answer is strange: attachment to Marxism became attachment to social democracy which became attachment to liberalism through constant confrontation with the need to act practically. This genealogy of the American left has some truth to it, but it leaves open the question of why Jews were attracted to Marxism in the first place and how many actually were. Reform Judaism began before Marx’s writings and generally considers itself an heir to the rationalist strain of Spinoza and
Mendelssohn. Moreover, how does Marx figure into the relative liberalism of the Orthodox? Marx may have been adopted by a group of elite Jews of German descent, but not in the wide swaths that would account for the liberalism of the American Jew.

Podhoretz goes on to claim that this attachment to liberalism has become a religion in its own right, a “Torah of Liberalism” to which Jews attend with Tertullian faith. For a claim so bold and seemingly excessive, he is onto something. Within the liberal movements one can often find prayers like Yom Kippur’s confessional, Al-Chet customized for the transgressions du jour: carbon footprints, classism, and Israel. For many what resonates about Judaism is a notion of tikkan olam (repairing the world) which, despite its original meanings, has taken on the definition of the pursuit of “social justice.” Tikkan olam certainly is a part of the whole of a well-lived Jewish life, the problem is when it dominates and excludes all that Judaism can inspire, teach, and aid in. Worse still, tikkan olam is too often treated as a call to political activism, not helping one’s neighbor. When Leviticus says “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” it is intentionally eschewing abstract love for all mankind in favor of a practicable method for human goodness. The message is clear, activism is less than action. For some, liberalism has exceeded Judaism and, for others, Judaism has been infused with liberalism. This defining Judaism down has caused a void in the Jewish soul—we can only hope the Jewish soul continues its self-correcting ways.

While Podhoretz touches on a serious problem of contemporary Judaism, he still has not answered his question. His tendency to explain why Jews should not be liberals carries forward his feelings of dumbfoundedness. It is a perplexing thing to the Jewish conservative why his co-religionists are so attached to this ideology. The book suffers, though, without an answer to the question asked in the title.

The greatest contribution of Podhoretz in this work is the fleshing out of certain aspects of the development of Jewish liberalism. Jewish suspicion of Christianity, Haskalah rationalism, Reform Judaism, the attraction of Jews to Marxism, Jewish labor interests, the New Deal Coalition, support for Israel, and the vigor with which Jews vote liberal on social issues all play a role in this development.

My own conclusion is that Jewish liberalism is mainly the legacy of emancipation. Jews have been taught during their time in Europe to fear the Church and the 19th Century right. Those who provided them opportunities were of the early left. Marxism probably appealed to a segment of Jews who found the steady liberalization of central Europe inadequately dramatic (similar to how Marxism found its supporters among blacks in the 20th Century). By the period of immigration to America, there was a Jewish population predisposed to fear Christian authority with pockets of Marxist radicals. Labor and the New Deal Coalition soon came into play, as Jews, still acting with perceived self-interest began their longtime membership in the modern Democratic Party. It should not be forgotten that within forty years Jews moved from labor activism to mainstream politics—they became more conservative. Today Jews are largely mainstream Democrats with a few hardcore leftists who make up a disproportionate amount of Jewish intellectual life. The mainstream Democratic Party is not as counter to Jewish interests as Podhoretz might suggest. Compared to most other Diaspora nations, the American left-of-center party is pro-Israel. This fact may partially explain why Jews are more on the left in America than in any other Diaspora nation. Similarly, Jewish attitudes on social issues emanate from feelings about Christian authority rooted in life under the First Estate. It also explains why Jews supported Giuliani but opposed Carter. When Jews sense traces of Christian authority or continental conservatism, they proceed cautiously.

Yet, Jews should not be so liberal. American conservatism is not continental conservatism; it, too, is a legacy of the Enlightenment. Conservatives seek to conserve much of the Anglo-American classical liberalism against the Rousseauian and Hegelian trends that have produced modern liberals. Conservatives understand the separation of Church and State and the coexistent necessity of religious life to social stability and moral prosperity. American conservatism is not the conservation of the Christian Ancien Regime. Thus American conservatism has been the product of many Jews: Milton Friedman, Will Herberg, Frank Meyer, Ralph de Toledano, Frank Chodhorov, Harry Jaffa, Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Charles Krauthammer, and others.

The data from 2008 suggests the slow movement of Jews toward conservatism is possible. Jewish men under the age of thirty voted nearly identical to Non-Jewish men under the age of thirty. For those who wind up answering “Why are Jews Liberals?” with dumbfoundedness: hope, it appears, is on the way.
Excerpts from: *A People's History of Howard Zinn*
by Howard Zinn

Page 113
I knew pretty early on that [my classmates] were just Western chauvinists, more concerned with their colonial power than the spirit of our games. Just because hegemonists usually play kickball with absurd social constructions like ‘scoring’ and ‘outs’ didn’t mean that we were beholden to such bourgeois fascism. It was obvious to me that I should oversee or otherwise destroy this bourgeois institution. When they ignored me, I left for the imperially-named “jungle gym.”

Page 455
Being a bombardier during WWII was a really eye-opening experience. Sure, it was one thing to be a part of the jingoist, corporatist, and pseudo-fascist organization that is the Amerikkkan military, but given the nature of the enemy we were fighting (and that we were on the same side as the People’s Army no less!), I knew it was the right thing to do.

Page 475
“but still,” I said to my plutocratic commander, too overcome with his authoritarian personae to really understand, “we could liberate these camps with an army of the people. It would be such a marvelous symbol!” Naturally, given his corporatist tendencies, he ignored my pleas, but that wouldn’t deter me. Clutching my *Antonio Gramsci for Dummies*, I grabbed any peasants I could and began to march on the camps. Once there, they threw a parade in my honor and declared me King of May Day. What a liberating experience!

Page 965
I was never really comfortable at Columbia or Harvard. My scholarship always needed to be connected to the people, and being at such institutions always left me alienated and alone. So it was that reason, and nothing about “substandard research” or “sloppy historical methods,” that moved me to work at Boston University. My teaching needed real people and real problems, things like “prestige” and “high paying salaries” just got in the way of being authentic. Because if I was going to be anything, it would authentic, and authentically authentic, not pseudo authentic or bourgeois authentic but true, honest-to-Engles, authenticity. And what’s more authentic than that?

Page 1203
One of the things I was always really adamant about was always keeping in my heart and my mind the essence of the struggle. I
would never let any imperialistic or megalomaniacal capitalist structures of oppression keep anyone down. I applied this standard to my classroom where my grading, a remnant of hegemony if there ever was one, was determined by choosing a slip of paper from a hat with a grade already on it. This became my primary way of subverting all of the capitalist infrastructure I could. One day my maid came to me and asked me for a pay raise. Now, being the empathetic man I was, I couldn’t let this woman go away empty handed. I had her, our butler, our gardener, and our cook all choose new salaries out of numbers I had put in my hat. It was as fair a system as I could come up with, and just because it violated bourgeois social norms like “contracts” and “labor laws” didn’t mean it wasn’t just. It’s just a shame the Boston DA didn’t see it the same way, although he probably enjoyed punishing me, the real advocate of the people, due to some unresolved punishing me, the real advocate of the people, due to some unresolved fascist tendencies.

Page 1742
Of course I knew that A People’s History of the United States was going to be a huge hit. It was so glaringly obvious that this was possibly the greatest book ever written, that it could do nothing less than sell a million copies. You know, we were working on making the publishing of my book a movie at on point? I was going to be played by Matt Damon, a personal friend and protégé of mine, and it was going to end with a dramatic reading of the last 500 pages, done by Morgan Freeman, all showing me being paraded around the streets of Havana and declared the People’s Champion. If only corporate Hollywood wasn’t so scared of my liberating message. And it wasn’t going to be that cop out adaption they did make of it. Nope, nothing at all like that: it was going to be a grand monument to my achievements, not some silly movie about US history.

Page 2010
The play “Marx in Soho,” was a tremendous success in every way imaginable. I felt I truly understood what Marx was saying when he equated the Jew with the capitalist and decried Judaism as a plight on mankind: he must have worked on Broadway!

Page 2523
Honestly, death was the best thing to ever happen to me. I mean, I’ve already championed the cause of the poor and downtrodden so much in this life, it was natural that I move on and restore hope to the community of the damned. Besides, most accounts of Hell, particularly those of known theocratic sexist Dante, are inherently self-interested, exaggerating hell’s great terrors out of unsubtle deathnocentrism. I think this will be topic of my next book A People’s History of Hell. I wish to ask that when the histories of hell are written that they too consider the position of that victim of deathnocentrism, Lucifer. It’s the least we, as willing benefactors of hegemony, can do.

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-Irving Kristol

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