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Author(s): RUSSELL KIRK
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Return to Principle in Politics

Conservatives and Liberals Take Thought

RUSSELL KIRK

EVER SINCE the Civil War, political thought has languished in the United States. For original political theory almost always is developed out of a time of troubles, when thinking men, forced to examine their first principles, seek means to avert the imminent collapse of order, or to restore some measure of justice and security to a wounded society. The political writings of Plato and Aristotle came out of such an age. So did Cicero's works, and Dante's, and Machiavelli's, and Hooker's, and Hobbes's, and Locke's, and Burke's, and Marx's. The nature of the confusion which provokes the exposition of political theory may be the inadequacy of an old order, morally and administratively, as it was in the society of Calvin or of Rousseau; or the confusion may be the product of a new order's search for sanction, as it was in the society of Bodin or of Bentham. Doubt and violence are the parents of social speculation. Prescription, legal precedent, and muddling through suffice for ages or nations that experience no serious threat to things established.

Thus the political theories of Adams, Hamilton, Madison, and Jefferson, though rooted in English and colonial experience and profoundly influenced by the legacy of English political philosophy, took form as prudent endeavors to restore order and justice to a society disturbed by revolution. Thus the ideas of John Randolph and Calhoun were expressed as a defense of established institutions in the Old South. Once the triumph of the Union, however, had put an end to the debate between North and South, and once the swelling prosperity of the United States after the Civil War combined with the nation's comparative isolation to make any foreign menace trifling, American political speculation sank to a level much lower. No political philosopher of any great stature appeared during the last third of the nineteenth century, and the bulk of what passed for political thought in this country was simply the reflection of various English and German liberal ideas, adapted to the American climate of opinion. There seemed to be no need for reference to first principles; Things were in the saddle, and most men seemed to be satisfied to let Things ride. Warning voices like those of Henry and Brooks Adams were rather despairing protests than expressions of political philosophy. As World War I approached, and

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as the economic and moral problems of the postwar era became pressing, ideas were allowed some voice, it is true, so that Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More and George Santayana had a hearing. Yet Things galloped on; the New Deal, fortunately perhaps, was the expression of vague humanitarian aspirations and positive grievances, not of any coherent "liberal" or "radical" system of thought. Nor was America's part in World War II governed by any body of general ideas: caused by the combination of moral indignation with fear of Germany and Japan, American intervention stood bewildered for want of theory when the problems of the peace had to be met.

The genius of American politics, Daniel Boorstin suggests, consists in an innocence of abstract doctrine and theoretic dogma; and this is quite as true of the genius of English politics. Yet possibly the immunity of these great nations from the curse of ideology has resulted not so much from a deliberate contempt for theory as from two peculiar advantages that today are much diminished: first, a comparative physical isolation from other states that made possible the postponement of grave decisions; second, an underlying set of moral and political assumptions and habits, common to nearly everyone in these societies, which were the products of a venerable historic experience, and which served the purpose that political philosophy serves in nations less governed by general prejudice and prescription. (Among these assumptions and habits are the Christian ethical system, the common law, the general concurrence in representative government, prescriptive private rights, and respect for personality.) It was to this body of custom and belief that Burke appealed against the Jacobin ideology; and to established ways of life and political institutions, rather than to abstract notions of social perfection, Adams and Jefferson both adhered in America.

Yet there may come a time in the history of nations when the previous security against foreign intervention is destroyed, and when tradition and established usage are so weakened that they cannot stand unaided against the assaults of ideology. Such an era seems to be America's in the middle of the twentieth century. The dissolution of America's old political and military isolation needs no comment; we survived by a single generation the end of Britain's isolation. The breaking of the cake of custom is the subject of a great many books, though all its intricacies have not yet been explored. It must suffice to say here that with the triumph of modern technology, the ascendancy of general literacy and secularized schooling, the extreme mobility and fluidity of twentieth-century American society, the disappearance of many elements of authority and class, and the diffusion of positivistic ideas, tradition and custom in the United States—though by no means eradicated—have lost much of their old power. We live, then, in an insecure society, doubtful of its future, an island of comparative but perilous sanctuary in a sea of revolution; and neither the old isolation nor the old received opinions of the mass of men seem likely to hold out unassisted against the physical force of revolutionary powers and the moral innovations of modern ideologies. This is just such a time as has required and produced,

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in the course of history, a re-examination of first principles and a considered political philosophy.

THREE vaguely-delimited bodies of political opinion existed in the United States when, a few years ago, thinking men began to perceive the necessity here for some return to principle, as against mere muddling through: conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism. All three of these bodies of opinion were deficient in true political philosophy. American radicalism may be disposed of quite briefly. This had come to mean the Marxist ideology, to which real speculative philosophy is anathema; the other variants of American radicalism, except for decayed remnants, had withered away or had been merged with American liberalism. The dread Russian example of triumphant Marxism, and the national antagonism between the United States and Russia, have so put down this radicalism in America—at least for the present—that its claims to represent any substantial part of American opinion need not be considered seriously. We are left with conservatism and liberalism; and neither of these categories of political belief has admitted of any clear adherence to principles until quite recently. For that matter, the great majority of American conservatives and liberals still remain ignorant of the history and the probable future of their own opinions.

Conservatism in the United States, by the end of the 1940's, had almost lost the power of language. Very often, men of conservative prejudices expressed themselves apologetically in the phrases of nineteenth-century liberals; sometimes they even echoed the slogans of old-fangled anarchism. The body of American conservative interest was composed of various elements, some overlapping: natural conservatives, believing, with Falkland, "when it is not neccessary to change, it is necessary not to change"; constitutional conservatives, attached to the prescriptive forms of American government; economic conservatives, intent upon preserving private property and a free economy; rural conservatives, vaguely opposed to the urbanization and confusion of modern life; "libertarian" conservatives, fearing for the survival of personal freedom. Most of these people expressed themselves badly, and very few were able to describe any coherent moral or philosophical basis for their beliefs. Though frequently their impulses and prejudices were genuinely conservative in the historic sense of that abused term, nevertheless they would endeavor to defend themselves by the arguments of their old adversaries—Bentham, for instance, and John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer.

American liberalism failed to crush this confused conservative rear guard simply because, as a body of belief, it was in no more coherent state. Originally dedicated to emancipation of the individual from all sorts of traditional restraints and obligations, by the forties American liberalism had come to mean, for the most part, an amorphous feeling that society ought to be improved through the agency of centralized government. The liberty which it now sought was "freedom from the consequences of freedom," and, in George Santayana's phrase, the New Liberal desired to relax no bonds except the mar-

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riage tie. This liberalism had become an ideology; from the beginning, indeed, very strong ideological tendencies had dwelt in its Benthamite sources—swearing by the god-terms Progress and Equality. It was heavily influenced by the negation of philosophy, pragmatism, and sought rather futilely to identify itself with the Popular Will. Its sources of support were even more disparate than those of American conservatism, ranging from doctrinaire zealots for emancipation upon the model of Lamartine to doctrinaire Marxists who hesitated, nevertheless, to endorse Stalinism. When the truth about communist Russia and other collectivistic states became undeniable, the liberal camp tended to break up into factions, some moving in a conservative direction, some expressing contrition for their past errors but altering very little their practical politics, and some simply repeating, as a ritual, their old slogans, as if by dint of recitation they could give them fresh life. Many spoke confusedly of effecting some compromise between capitalism and socialism, or of reconciling traditional belief and pragmatism. It was discouragingly clear that they had even less understanding of principle than had the conservatives.

But this ignorance of philosophy, this disregard of first principles among both conservatives and liberals, the forces of permanence and of change, now seems to me to be diminishing. There are signs that, without embracing the fanatic dogmas of ideology, the conservative and the liberal bodies of opinion in America are commencing to think things through. I do not mean that they are about to coalesce. Any healthy society requires an enduring contest between its permanence and its progression. We cannot live without continuity, and we cannot live without prudent change. But a conservatism of reflection and a liberalism of reflection, each aware of its own first principles, may serve separately to arrest the decay of our civilization and to make common cause against Giant Ideology, which now threatens to put an end to true philosophy and just politics throughout the world. It seems to me that the better minds of both bodies of opinion, here in America, are restoring to our consciousness the real meaning of both conservatism and liberalism. And I think that some practical consequences will be felt, in the fulness of time.

This return to principle, as yet, may be discerned only very dimly among our practical politicians: the day of the philosophical statesman has passed, though it may return. The signs of a resurgence of principle are to be found, instead, in the work of certain scholars. And their ideas already are making their influence felt upon the universities, governmental administrators, the serious journals, and even the popular press. Rather than run through a catalogue of names, I have chosen to analyze this conservatism of reflection and this liberalism of reflection through the work of two scholars, much as J. S. Mill described the great currents of thought in his century through the writings of Coleridge and Bentham. These scholars are Eric Voegelin and David Riesman. Neither of them is a "political scientist" in the narrower, or cant, meaning of that phrase; but both of them are political thinkers in the old and honorable sense of the word "politics."

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"THE TRUE dividing line in the contemporary crisis," Mr. Voegelin writes (in the *Review of Politics,* January, 1953), "does not run between liberals and totalitarians, but between the religious and philosophical transcendentalists on the one side, and the liberal and totalitarian immanentist sectarians on the other." This theme runs through his influential little book, *The New Science of Politics,* and will be prominent as a conclusion, probably, in the six volumes of his great work —of which the first volume is due to be published within a few months—*Order and Symbol.* The delusion that human reason can convert the world into a terrestrial paradise is, in Mr. Voegelin's view, the principal source of our modern political disasters. For politics, like science, like art, comes out of belief in a transcendent religion; and when that belief decays, politics decays, and the fancied terrestrial paradise becomes a very real terrestrial hell.

Mr. Voegelin, born in Austria, is steeped in classical and Christian learning, and is thoroughly familiar with English and American political philosophy. One of the very few benefits conferred by World War II was the bringing to the United States of European scholars whose work is elevating the whole character of our education; and among these, Eric Voegelin is one of the most eminent. Describing himself as a "pre-Reformation Christian," he is most closely associated with Lutheran theologians. The very fact of his European origin is related to his influence upon American conservative thought: he sees in the United States and Britain the two nations least seriously infected by ideology and Gnosticism, and in them a hope for the regeneration of our civilization. And America, as the chief bulwark of conservative social principles among the nations, now requires such an understanding of principle as Mr. Voegelin is developing in his books.

Gnosticism, the heresy which substitutes a dream of a perfect mundane society for the City of God, lies at the root of the clamorous ideologies which compete for the support of the modern masses. Ideology, as Mr. Voegelin correctly defines it, is a set of rigid convictions, fanatically held, which endeavors to reduce the complexity of human affairs to a few simple formulas, calculated to solve all the ills to which flesh is heir. To ideology, Mr. Voegelin opposes science, or understanding of man and society founded upon observation throughout history. In disavowing ideology, Mr. Voegelin espouses political philosophy, which is a very different thing: like Burke, he establishes a distinction between "abstraction" (an a priori assumption unsupported by history or logic) and "principle," or a justified deduction from what we know about man and society through Revelation and history. And with Burke (being strongly influenced, as was Burke, by Richard Hooker), he makes the virtue of prudence the means of political wisdom:

> In classic and Christian ethics the first of the moral virtues is *sophia* or *prudentia,* because without adequate understanding of the structure of reality, including the *conditio humana,* moral action with rational co-ordination of means and ends is hardly possible. In the Gnostic dream world, on the other hand, nonrecognition of reality is the first principle.

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Here Mr. Voegelin invokes the conservative principles by which Burke and Disraeli, Adams and Calhoun, were guided. Recognition of a transcendent order in the universe does not make the statesman into a dreamer, but into a realist. Knowing his theology and his history, he takes it for granted that man is not a perfect nor a perfectible being, and that the prudent politician will endeavor to make life in the civil social state tolerable, not perfect. It is utopianism, the Gnostic delusion, that leads (in Mr. Voegelin's words) "with increasing theoretical illiteracy" to

> the form of various social idealisms, such as the abolition of war, of unequal distribution of property, of fear and want. And, finally, immanentization may extend to the complete Christian symbol. The result will then be the active mysticism of a state of perfection, to be achieved through a revolutionary transfiguration of the nature of man, as, for instance, in Marxism.

Human nature, by definition, is unchangeable; the conservative statesman knows this, and he knows that human longing never will be satisfied upon this earth. For him, politics indeed is the art of the possible, and he remains satisfied with patching and improving society here and there; he feels he has done very well if he has preserved a tolerable measure of justice and order.

In modern political action, Gnosticism has two manifestations, its left wing and its right: communism and liberalism. "If liberalism is understood as the immanent salvation of man and society, communism certainly is its most radical expression; it is an evolution that was already anticipated by John Stuart Mill's faith in the ultimate advent of communism for mankind." In the year of the Communist Manifesto, Orestes Brownson declared that communism was a Christian heresy; and this view is Voegelin's, as it is Toynbee's. But liberalism is only a more moderate form of the same heresy, the notion that Progress consists in material aggrandizement. A civilization which abandons knowledge of God for creature-comforts is already far gone in decadence:

> A civilization can, indeed, advance and decline at the same time—but not forever. There is a limit toward which the ambiguous process moves; the limit is reached when an activist sect which represents the Gnostic truth organizes the civilization into an empire under its rule. Totalitarianism, defined as the existential rule of Gnostic activists, is the end form of progressive civilization.

Now this is repudiation of liberalism root and branch, whether old-style individualistic liberalism, or new-style collectivistic liberalism. The premises upon which liberalism is founded, Mr. Voegelin declares, must lead, sooner or later, to a totalitarian state; for the Gnostic passion to alter society and human nature endures no opposition, and when it can, it destroys all the traditional political and economic institutions which impede its consolidatory progress. If the only purpose of life is terrestrial and material success, why should reactionaries be allowed to delay the advent of utopia? Mr. Voegelin cites Harold Laski, in *Faith, Reason, and Civilization,* to illustrate his point: "It is, indeed, true in a sense to argue that the Russian principle cuts deeper than the Christian since its seeks salvation for the masses by fulfilment in this life, and,

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thereby, orders anew the actual world we know."

It would be presumptuous to endeavor to summarize the whole of Mr. Voegelin's work before his six fat volumes have appeared. My present purpose is to suggest that such principles as Mr. Voegelin expounds are the principles which increasingly are being recognized by thinking American conservatives as the foundation of their beliefs. The names of Bernard Iddings Bell, R. A. Nisbet, Leo Strauss, Ross Hoffman, and Reinhold Niebuhr* may suggest the range of conservative views founded upon belief in a transcendent order, in an unalterable human nature, and in a natural law.

This is not the conservatism of complacency, or the conservatism of mere compromise. This body of opinion does not look upon our present confused society as the best of all possible worlds, nor does it use the word "conservative" as a mere term of relation, a kind of stumbling and timid liberalism. This conservatism is bent upon reform of society because, as Mr. Voegelin writes, the hour is very late, our society is terribly corrupt, and "it will require all our efforts to kindle this glimmer into a flame by repressing Gnostic corruption and restoring the forces of civilization. At present the fate is in the balance."

But this conservatism does not entertain the notion that any ideology, or even any set of reasoned principles, will make society perfect. This conservatism begins with the premise that we must be obedient to a transcendent order, which has given us natural law.

The nature of man being complex, no simple set of positive laws, universally applied, will suffice to make him happy or good. And the nature of man being flawed, the evil part of his nature, lusting after power and aggrandizement, envious and violent, must be restrained by custom, authority, and balanced government which checks power with power.

This conservatism holds that man finds his happiness in fulfilment of his duties, in purposeful work, and in being part of a true community and a great continuity, rather than in the satisfaction of every material desire. This conservatism thinks that the truly good society is not that in which the abstractions of Liberty and Equality and Fraternity are enforced by positive law, but rather that in which the higher natures among men are free to develop in accordance with the laws of their being, so long as they do not tyrannize over the mass of men. We were not born yesterday; and the bank and capital of the ages is the source from which comes our knowledge of our own nature. This is a conservatism of reform; but it is pure conservatism, aware of its ancient inspiration, and not merely the disputed middle.

IN Mr. Voegelin's terms, Mr. Riesman is a Gnostic of the extreme right wing: that is, a very moderate and amiable liberal, disavowing ideology nearly as strongly as Mr. Voegelin himself does. Although Mr. Riesman's historical perspective never goes back beyond the middle of the nineteenth century—and only rarely so far—he is (in *Faces in the Crowd)* no doctrinaire apostle of progress:

*Although Dr. Niebuhr's periodical articles generally continue politically "liberal," his books grow increasingly conservative. It may suffice to say that though many people retain the political tags of their earlier days, their real principles may be something else.

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My own view, which smiles on compromise, also has nineteenth-century roots, especially in the English tradition of Burke, Morley, Bagehot, Acton. But in a way, one has to have lived through the mid-twentieth century properly to appreciate the virtues of the bourgeois age and class, and to regard the terms "bourgeois" or "middle class" as ones of amiable praise rather than Sorelian or Marxist epithets.

In a time when even the more enthusiastic liberals confess that intellectual initiative has passed to the conservatives—a time when the remaining unreconstructed liberals of yesteryear, like Henry Steele Commager and Archibald MacLeish, sound curiously obsolete — the most influential liberal writer in this country is Mr. Riesman; and he is influential precisely because he is not a ritualistic or doctrinaire liberal. There is reform in the liberal camp nowadays, as well as in the conservative camp.

An eminent European economist, indeed, recently asked me whether Mr. Riesman ought to be classified as a "New Conservative." I said that he ought not; but there are a number of conservative elements in Mr. Riesman's thought, at least if one employs "conservative" simply as a term of relation. He observes that "the rich are a minority and have their rights, too"; he implies that much "social legislation" and the enthusiasm it inspires are quite out of date, since the nineteenth-century problem of urban want is being solved by modern productivity, rather than by positive law; he is concerned for true individuality; he shies away from cant and slogan; he pokes fun at many stereotypes of "intellectuals and academic people." Yet his premises are thoroughly liberal; they are almost identical with those of John Stuart Mill, whom he takes for his model in much. It is not the fact that he has effected a synthesis of conservatism and liberalism which makes him one of our more important modern social critics: he has done nothing of that sort. His accomplishment is to restore to American liberalism, long sunk into the condition of an ideology, a measure of candor, moderation, and keen perceptivity.

I do not mean that Mr. Riesman himself is quite contemptuous of every King Charles's head of ritualistic liberalism: whenever he turns to the "emancipation of woman," for instance, he is back in Harriet Taylor's parlor with John Stuart Mill; he regrets that recently women have been turning back to their old duties and status, and implies that they really ought to be emancipated, "deprivatized," and taught sexual freedom, whether they relish it or not. (Here, by the way, is an instance of what Mr. Voegelin describes as the obsession of the liberals with altering a human nature that really is unalterable.) Yet, by and large, he stands for reformed liberalism. Perhaps his ideas may best be compared with Mr. Voegelin's by a summary of Mr. Riesman's notion of utopia.

"I suggest that the utopian tradition has gone sour," Mr. Riesman writes in *Individualism Reconsidered,*

because of collectivist, especially Communist, abuse, and gone stale (especially in America) because so many of our earlier hopes for equality and abundance have been attained—leaving us either to try to put meaning back into outdated struggles or to find a political agenda not in planning for a better future, but in postponing a worse one.

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The old Fabian and social-democratic slogans have worn thin, he continues; and the utopianism of American business enterprise, the promise of a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage, also has lost its meaning: "First, given our resources, it is not difficult to fulfill them; they are, in fact, just around the corner. Second, attainment of these goals would not make the great mass of well-fed Americans noticeably happier." Populism and the New Deal merely aped the spurious utopia of business enterprise, without having any concept of a fundamental change in the quality of American life; the New Dealers, indeed, were glad to escape into the war and so avoid any re-examination of their own principles.

What we require, then, Mr. Riesman says, is not an ideological enthusiasm for some vague scheme of economic abundance or "fair shares for all," but a utopia founded upon new concepts of community and individuality. He is forever recurring to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and he commends the Goodmans' *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*. But the ends and means of his own utopia remain amorphous. He mentions "more spontaneous pleasures and more democratic cooperation"; he takes up town planning; he has various suggestions for "autonomous play." Still, when all this is said, Mr. Riesman leaves us groping for purpose in this utopia—supposing it really is something quite different from the social-democratic or business-enterprise pseudo-utopias.

IT SEEMS to me that Mr. Reisman's ambiguity is caused by his pragmatism. If he were asked, "What is the end of man?" he might have difficulty in replying; one gathers from his books that he might be compelled to say, "diversion." Man is not made for work, in Mr. Riesman's eyes, or for duty, or for high loyalties; grand hopes and ideologies are disastrous; therefore all man can hope for is a round of small pleasures; he may experiment in consumption and sex and urban living. Teleology, the foundation of Mr. Voegelin's politics, simply does not exist for Mr. Riesman. Although tolerant toward religious belief, he remains condescendingly incredulous. All theological concepts and nearly the whole body of inherited belief are repugnant to him: "A concept of original sin is typical of a view of life which makes the past an authority over the present, in which the individual is mortgaged to society, and both the individual and society are mortgaged to the preceding generations." This debt to the past and obligation to the future, which Burke called "the contract of eternal society," has been the cement of classical and Christian social order; yet Mr. Riesman heartily dislikes it. It is not easy to construct a utopia which denies the legacy of dead generations and the rights of those yet unborn; but Mr. Riesman is logical in disavowing natural rights and inherent obligations when he disavows religious principle.

One principle does seem to govern the Riesman utopia: the motto of the Abbey of Thélème, "Do as you will." Since the frowning collectivism of the modern age menaces this principle, Mr. Riesman desires to check somehow the growth of centralized political authority and—more particularly — the sheep-conformity of the modern masses, the "other-directed"

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men. In the last paragraph of *The Lonely Crowd,* he writes, "The idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading: men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other." The silent and impalpable democratic despotism over opinion and conduct which Tocqueville foresaw is often in the foreground of Mr. Riesman's mind; yet when he approaches the problem, he leaves out of consideration Tocqueville's transcendent view, which was founded upon the Christian idea of personality and the Christian doctrines of morality. It is John Stuart Mill to whom Mr. Riesman turns, rather; and Mill's idea of individuality, as expressed in his *Liberty,* had no sanction but difference for the sake of differing—a substitution, in R. P. Anschutz' phrase, of "Bohemian nonsense for bourgeois nonsense." That man has an end which is more than immanent; that man finds his happiness through the performance of duties, and his freedom through the acquirement of moral character—these concepts are lacking altogether in Mr. Riesman's thought.

Thus we are brought back, after all, to a Gnostic concept of man, a being who finds his whole duty in the triumph of self in this world, and whose highest hope is to be "autonomous"—somehow different from most dull conformists, though severed from tradition, from duty, from hope of much attainment in this world, and from any expectation of reward in another world than this. How satisfying such autonomy would be, if practicable at all; how long such a utopia would continue to gratify the longings of men and keep them from ideology and violence; whether, indeed, even the utopia-life of small experimental pleasures and improved cities and abundant leisure and innumerable creature-comforts might endure even in America for any length of time, what with the dismaying rate of destruction of moral capital and natural resources—all these questions Mr. Riesman does not take into account. Along with ideology, he has discarded theory; and he implies that human nature is simply what the drift of society makes it, and therefore requires no further attention.

Yet, this said, Mr. Riesman's writings represent a reformed and chastened liberalism. Prudence, at least in its lower aspect, governs this liberalism, not ideology. There is no intention of creating a classless society, or a universal state, or an equalitarian monotony. If there is no appreciation of human dignity, still there is an understanding of the importance of individuality. Just this rather humdrum and compromising liberalism, I am inclined to think, will become the common pattern of American "progressive" and secularistic thought, now that American liberals have recoiled from collectivistic ideology. There is no crusading spirit in it: the modern age has experienced enough secular crusades.

The lofty and austere "new science of politics," the conservatism of regeneration for which Mr. Voegelin speaks, will contend in America and much of the rest of the world against this Bellamy-utopia liberalism. Some things this conservatism and this liberalism have in common: a detestation of ideology, a respect for prudence, and a recognition that modern

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society, with its tendency toward a deadening conformity and its "devil's sabbath of whirling machinery," either must be humanized, or must perish. These common understandings, and certain common practical interests in opposition to the grim ideological collectivism of the mass-state, are likely to keep the debate between American conservatism and liberalism, for the rest of this century, reasonably moderate. Both conservatism and liberalism are experimental and exploratory now, groping for a realization of community that is not collectivism, and for a purpose in work and leisure that is not mere heaping up of industrial products. Yet the gulf between true conservatism and true liberalism remains infinitely deep. What is the purpose of life? Is life worth living? Is this life the be-all and end-all? These questions forever separate conservatism and liberalism; nor should we ask that the gulf be bridged, for then all struggle and search would have gone out of existence here below. The conservative holds by the tragic view of life; the liberal, by immanent hopes of lotus-land. This being a time of troubles, I am inclined to think that the conservative will be the intellectual master of American social thought for a great while to come.

The Wood of the Self-Destroyers SAMUEL YELLEN

Dante: *Hell,* Canto 13

We enter the dismal wood where boughs black,
Gnarled, and thorny cradle the befouled nests
From which the harpies swoop to crunch and crack
Those wretches who jump to streets, slash their wrists,
Inhale exhaust fumes, gulp the sleeping pills,
Drink the lysol and tear their burning breasts.
Our eyes grow used: the gloom but half conceals
Those who welcome sickness, cut off an ear,
And to ease the inward sore gorge and swill;
Who waste in apathy or cynic sneer,
Always deny and in denial smart,
Subvert the self by coward lie or fear,
And solitary, crouching each apart,
Snuffle No! No! *to proffered hand and heart.*

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