At the outset I would like to thank the contributors to this symposium for their incisive comments and the editor for the opportunity to respond. The commentators should understand that I did not write an “authorized” study; nor was my book intended to curry favor with the rich and powerful. The facts that it came out in a very limited edition and enjoyed neither media favor nor gratifying sales should indicate my intellectual independence—or else my lack of professional smarts. In this study I try to prove something that David Frisk pointedly denies, namely that there is no significant “conservative movement” in our country. Instead we have lavishly funded enterprises that appropriate for themselves the questionable label “conservative.”

My monograph refers back to my earlier studies on the managerial state and ideology of multiculturalism. Kenneth McIntyre, Ted McAllister, and Grant Havers are all correct to stress the connection between my ideas on the American establishment Right as presented in this book and my earlier writings. Like these earlier works, Conservatism in America offers the view that the current conservative movement has drawn sentiments and ideas from the Left. The current conservatism is a milder version of its apparent Other, and it points back to two discrete American Lefts, one responsible for the democratic welfare state and a more recent Left that emphasizes the empowerment of victims.

The dominant Left embodies positions examined in my study of the “post-Marxist Left,” and it has left a heavy mark on the establishment Right. Sensitivity toward designated minorities, dramatically exhibited concern about anti-Semitism (sometimes
equated with criticism of Israel or its American Zionist backers), revisiting the sins of the American racist past while treating Martin Luther King (like Lincoln) as a redemptive national figure, and a human rights-based foreign policy have all been hallmarks of the now regnant form of American “conservatism.” This fluid movement no longer resembles anything that might have been considered “conservative” in the past, be it a gathering of aristocratic landowners or even small-town Protestant Republicans of the 1930s. One need not imagine an organic conservatism quite as rich as the one that Professor McAllister evokes in order to recognize the distinction between the ideal and reality. McAllister deals with a conservatism that diverges markedly from the one we now have.

While the new conservatism has taken over leftist thinking, it has done so in moderate doses, while mixing that thinking with particular American attitudes. From whence come its self-conscious patriotism and talk about “American greatness” and universal nationhood. Although affirming the major political and social changes that have occurred since the 1960s, this conservatism also engages in patriotic rhetoric, which is conventionally identified as “right-wing.” It urges us to spread everywhere the founding ideas of our “propositional nationhood.” Professor Federici aptly refers to a false “universality” that has shaped the present establishment Right. He is correct to notice the empty, bombastic appeal to universality that often passes for a “moral” foreign policy. He also zeroes in on the parody of a philosophically conceived “universal” that operates in today’s sloganeering establishment Right.

Mostly because of its relation to the Religious Right, this self-described conservatism has not moved toward the Left as quickly as it could have. Its alliance with the Religious Right is driven by the need for GOP votes and the enthusiastic support for Israel, both of which are generated by Christian Zionists. While it is hard to deny the symbiotic character of this relation, one must keep in mind that an activist foreign policy, and not any traditional social concerns, is paramount for those who run the conservative print and media empire.
Without its alliance of convenience with Evangelicals, the neoconservative-dominated Right would be even friendlier to gay rights and other new “family values.” Pacesetters in the conservative movement are already moving toward the Left on a wide range of social questions, such as immigration and gay marriage.

Note the celebration of gay bars by leading conservative columnist Jonah Goldberg as “cultural institutions that need to be defended” and as one of the glories of “the freedom-loving West.” For the conservative movement, this position need not be controversial, providing gay-rights advocates remain sound on foreign policy and (more or less) identify themselves as Republicans. In a recent interview with the Canadian *National Post*, popular conservative journalist Mark Steyn complained that Muslim intolerance toward identifiably gay Swedes indicates a grave threat to “the West.” Without having to endorse European immigration policy or violence against any group, one must wonder in what “conservative” universe Steyn’s or Goldberg’s “West” exists.

*Human Events*’ choice for “conservative of the year” in 2009 was Dick Cheney, an outspoken advocate of gay marriage and a prominent supporter of an activist “pro-democracy” foreign policy. Equally relevant, Richard Lowry in *National Review* was positively exuberant in his expression of good will toward former GOP Chairman Ken Mehlmann, when this movement conservative acknowledged his gayness and spoke about his support for gay marriage. Such trifles are no hindrance to being a movement conservative leader in good standing. But paleoconservatives on the social Right have suffered a far less benign fate. As most of the symposiasts recognize, they have been hounded out of the conservative movement and subject to professional ostracism.

Although this new “conservatism” has affinities with the now prevailing political culture, it nonetheless ostentatiously emphasizes “values.” Perhaps in contrast to some of my critics, I would argue that “value conservatism” has provided a bridge from the predominantly Catholic conservative movement of the 1950s to what is today considered “conservative.” “Value conservatives” exaggerate the constancy of their movement’s values while denying
the far more constant values of the establishment Left. “Value conservatism” is something that allows the conservative movement to appear more principled than it really is.

On a side note, European right-of-center parties, and most noticeably the CDU-CSU Union in Germany, are equally high on “values.” This has happened in proportion to how rapidly such parties have tried to adapt themselves to the cultural and political Left. Value-talk has been substituted for such no longer acceptable entities as historic nations, the aristocracy, or church establishments.

My critical perspective is no more likely to be encountered in the Academy than it is on the pages of National Review or Weekly Standard. Among academic leftists the general perspective is often the same one found in the “conservative movement.” In universities, for example, one learns that what is called conservative or Republican is quintessentially right-wing, and George W. Bush therefore must have been a right-wing president—or even the most right-wing president in American history, according to columnists in the Washington Post. Although there are differences in moral judgment between the media Right and the media Left, the latter happily accepts the self-judgment of the former, namely, that what it stands for is the entire right minus out-and-out Nazis.

An inconvenient fact that gets omitted is that neither right nor left dares to hold views that until a few decades ago were the unchallenged beliefs of both sides. By current cultural standards, Karl Marx and Eleanor Roosevelt were on the Right and even Far Right (perhaps Marx more so because of his racialist views and German nationalism). Most past leftists were not as liberal as most of today’s respectable Right in such matters as feminism, gay rights, and anti-racism. The entire cultural-political spectrum has moved leftward, a fact that is typically ignored in almost all studies of contemporary American ideologies issuing from both Republican and Democratic observers. Whether or not one likes the results, it would be nice for journalists and political partisans to acknowledge what has really happened.
This carefully nurtured illusion of immobile political fronts favors the post-Marxist Left. It renders unacceptable a return to what people in the past generally believed about their society, family, and gender distinctions. All these things are now being taken off the table. Diverting attention from this abolition of the past is what I style the “value game,” pretending that what is taking place is a struggle between value-bearers and value-deniers. Of course, no such confrontation is taking place. Indeed “conservatives” exaggerate the difference between the values of the one side and those of the other, if one assumes like many “conservative” publications that democratic equality and human rights are the premiere “conservative” values. If that is the case, then the dividing line between Right and Left is fading quickly.

There are several criticisms by contributors to this symposium that warrant attention. Professor McIntyre, in his comprehensive response, faults me for oscillating between historical analysis and “static sociological generalizations.” He questions whether there is merit in my identification of “conservatism” with a traditional landowning class and its interests, and he wonders whether my discussion of European restorationist thinking is really necessary.

My examination tries to explain what “American conservatism” has not been, as well as what it is. From its inception, the American republic exhibited a predominantly bourgeois liberal and Protestant, not European Catholic aristocratic, character. Contrary to the American traditionalists of the 1950s, my book maintains that the European conservative tradition had little to do with what transpired here. McAllister raises a fascinating point about whether Kirk’s vision, which he explicates magnificently for us, is invalid because the United States could not accommodate it. As an intellectual historian, I fully concede his point but must also insist that a history of American conservatism must deal with what is rather than with a noble ideal of organic community founded on a living past.

Professors McIntyre and Havers remark that I quote Louis Hartz on the liberal founding of the American government. Although I do not make it as clear as I should have in my book, I differ with Hartz in certain critical respects, namely in his stress,
which is even stronger among Straussian, on the secular and
Lockean origins of the American republic. On this point I agree
rather with Barry Shain on the Protestant and more specifically
Calvinist character of the early American republic. McAllister is
correct to suggest that a fuller study of early American character
would have had to include one of his favorite commentators,
Tocqueville.

I accept Richard Ashcraft’s heavily demonstrated argument
that much of what may have appealed to American Protestants
about Locke went back to the contractarian notions of government
that arose among sixteenth-century Presbyterians and other
Protestants. Like the Straussians and Russell Kirk, Hartz assumes
a high degree of continuity between eighteenth-century and
present-day liberals. Outside of their shared habit of invoking
“rights,” I am not sure this is the case. An older liberalism was a
bourgeois ideology, while the current variety stems from a post-
bourgeois managerial state and its multicultural defenders. The
fact that both of them resort to the language of rights does not
make their beliefs identical.

Professor McIntyre also criticizes the timelines of my analysis
and particularly my decision not to reach too far back in order to
understand the political present. I may, therefore, be slighting what
my critics perceive as certain continuities. Supposedly the modern
state and its centralizing tendencies already existed incipiently in
the early modern period and even before.

Like Michael Oakeshott, Professor McIntyre states that the
battle against arbitrary power has gone on for centuries. This strug-
gle has taken place between nomocratic and teleocratic enter-
prises. Although Oakeshott’s distinction may have some heuristic
merit, it has limited value in unraveling political history. Most
political enterprises have been what Oakeshott rejected as “tele-
ocratic.” Governments in the past did not confine themselves to the
narrow range of protective functions Oakeshott deemed accepta-
ble. In reality Oakeshott took his model from the nineteenth-
century liberalism analyzed in my book After Liberalism. This may
be the closest one can come to locating a historical counter-paradigm
to “rationalism in politics.” But this liberal tendency in government was the exception even in Western history. And when it flourished, it usually coexisted with an ordered, hierarchical society based on well-defined sexual and other distinctions.

If this point is granted, then what we are left with are various teleocratic enterprises, not all of which were or are the same. Nor do all of them exemplify the peculiarly modern “rationalism” that Oakeshott opposes to the limited, self-regulating state. “Teleocratic” can be used to describe among other forms of government the democratic managerial state. But that particular kind of state is different in kind from older teleocratic enterprises. Although all these regimes try to control their subjects’ lives, they are certainly not interchangeable.

The subject of After Liberalism is not an outgrowth of an older nation-state. It features social engineering, and particularly the reconfiguring of family and gender roles and the redistribution of income as “social policy.” Throughout the West this administrative regime rejects ethnic nations and has moved from being tolerant of bourgeois Christian civilization to trying to supplant it. I am, therefore, discussing a recent political and social development, which presupposes other changes that have occurred mostly during the last century. Since this enterprise barely existed before a particular time period, it seems unnecessary to trace it into the more distant past.

The two World Wars and then the Cold War affected the course of the managerial state in the United States—and among governments that followed our lead. The same would be true for the prevalence of ideas and concerns that are clearly cultural Marxist. These came into vogue at about the same time that Western administrative states made stupendous leaps forward, in the 1960s and 1970s. Political resources became available to carry out social reeducation, particularly government-subsidized education for the masses of people, which worked toward sensitizing them to new “democratic” practices and attitudes.

Fortunately for the cultural Left, the traditional, parliamentary Right in almost all Western countries has embraced some form of
neoconservatism, by becoming accommodationist toward the center Left. It is amusing to read Irving Kristol’s widely cited comment in *The Wall Street Journal*: “European countries would do well to imitate our example of neoconservatism.” Europeans have done exactly this, although it is hard to tell who is imitating whom. The general retreat toward the Left by the respectable Right-Center, underlined in *Conservatism in America*, was not insignificant. It was a contributing cause in Western countries to a general move toward the cultural and political Left.

Professor Federici may believe that I am being short-sighted by not identifying this turn of events with the failure of “conservatives” to study certain authors. And I would agree with him that there is more food for thought in Eric Voegelin, Irving Babbitt, and Russell Kirk than there is in our present movement conservative journalism. But my book focuses less on what is worth reading for moral traditionalists than it does on the broad political circumstances that led to the current situation. Those who are born into our political culture and subject to American political education and the entertainment industry (all of which work in a generally complementary way), including our conservative activists, were not intellectually or cosmologically influenced by what influenced Professor Federici and myself. But that is the present reality that I had to address in my book.

Grant Havers does me too much honor by comparing me to Leo Strauss. Although I have written critically about Strauss, I nonetheless continue to admire him as a humanistic scholar. If I also disagree with his interpretations, I would like to follow the examples of Strauss and Eric Voegelin, both of whom were critics of Max Weber but also respected the quality of Weber’s mind. Particularly in comparison to many of his acolytes, Strauss comported himself with dignity, even when he strayed into error.

Moreover, some of his shortcomings, e.g., a fixation on the Nazi experience, an overly negative view of the German intellectual tradition, and a blanket condemnation of Weber and historicism, were equally characteristic of other refugee scholars, some of whom contributed to the postwar American conservative movement.
Strauss was not the exception here, but, as I have noted in studying Voegelin, Mises, and Hayek, someone who typified his generation of émigrés. In an alternative universe, Strauss would have left behind a helpful way of interpreting classical texts, but not ideologically driven disciples.

Havers’s otherwise illuminating comparison between Strauss and myself as friendly critics of liberalism needs qualification. Unlike Strauss and his disciples, I have never extolled “liberal democracy” but in fact attack it as misleading praise for the democratic managerial state. Defenders of the status quo like to pretend that they are upholding a liberal heritage, which I suggest is becoming more and more vestigial.

As a critic of the administrative state and its social engineering imperative, I am closer to Nisbet than Strauss. Unlike Strauss and the Straussians, I do not equate liberalism with the materialistic, atomistic, and rights-driven conceptions of Locke. Rather, I emphasize liberalism’s bourgeois and Protestant, and more specifically Calvinist, character, and I stress the contradictions between modern democracy and the older liberal tradition. I also make clear that I am in no way opposed to classical conservatism, and like Nisbet, I deeply respect European counterrevolutionary thought for its luminous insights. But I also underline the practical irrelevance of that tradition for the development of the American conservative movement since 1945.

Clearly my interpretation does not sit well with all the sympatisists. Professor Frisk identifies me with the unhappy few who peevishly left the movement as it was about to enter its Salad Days. I am sorry if my comments often appear to be mere “slurs” or perfunctory demonstrations of the “anti-conservatism of the Right.” On one point in particular, however, Frisk seems to have missed my drift, when he suggests that I fail to appreciate how neoconservatives provided “hardheaded critiques of social sentimentalities.”

My book does take note, especially in Chapter Three, of the non-leftist tendencies of Podhoretz, Kristol, and other first-generation neoconservatives before their lucky ship came in. The old issues of
Commentary and Public Interest are full of critiques of social programs interspersed with statistics. What I deny is what Murray Friedman tells us in The Neoconservative Revolution, that the American Right was a wasteland inhabited by yahoos and bigots, before his friends took over. I also point out that Podhoretz wrote nastier things about underclass blacks than one would likely hear from today's movement conservatives. The neoconservatives moved leftward once they were in control, and although to my knowledge, no intergenerational tensions ever surfaced, second-generation neoconservatives are socially to the left of their parents.

Furthermore, my book does not exclude other explanations, beside the neoconservative ascendancy, in accounting for the leftward course of the establishment Right. Its operational merger with the GOP would have caused this to happen, even without the neoconservatives’ control of conservative resources. My book merely stresses the centrality of the neoconservative presence in accelerating this trend and in helping to drive uncooperative elements out of the movement. But even this development, as I make abundantly clear, did not start with the neoconservative era. It went back to the founding of National Review and to practices already adopted in the 1950s.

I cannot resist pointing out, from personal experience, the degree to which the new princes marginalized dissenters. No one, to my knowledge, who stood in opposition to the takeover has ever again been invited to write for a popular movement conservative publication or been allowed onto FOX News, with two exceptions, Ron Paul and Pat Buchanan. And those notable exceptions were people who acquired media and political fame outside the established movement. Since this fateful rupture, not one of my many books, including those published by top-of-the-line presses, has ever been reviewed by a neoconservative-controlled magazine or newspaper. Indeed, book review editors have been emphatic in refusing to call attention to my work or to that of other right-wing heretics. No such ban has been placed on the left. Clearly right-wing heretics are far more loathsome to the conservative establishment than any other group that disagrees with it.
Frisk assumes a degree of cohesion in the “anti-conservative Right” that it never had and which I myself have not attributed to it since 1986. In my relevant writings, including this book, I specifically deny any strong unity on the anti-neoconservative Right, beyond the consciousness of having been expelled from the conservative cause. Unlike Murray Rothbard, I am not an anarcho-libertarian; and unlike other paleos, I do not prefer the Catholic Church to the Protestant Reformation or the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie. One of the reasons that all alliances on the anti-neocon right have proved so fragile is that very little has held them together, beside a shared exile experience. The neoconservatives and the GOP have kept their movement far better united than the collection of dissenters being referred to as the “anti-conservative Right.”

From Professor Frisk’s no-holds-barred comments, I learned what movement conservatives might have said about my work if they had bothered (or been permitted) to review it. But let me concede one point! My style is deliberately sarcastic, and I am less than overwhelmed by the brilliance of those I patronize in my book. I respect their power but nothing else about them.

I am also reminded in comparing two generations of American conservative “intellectuals” of the glaring differences between them. The most obvious difference concerns the question of character, that is, the indifference to earthly possessions and openness to debate in Eric Voegelin, Russell Kirk, Frank Meyer, Will Herberg, Leo Strauss, and Thomas Molnar and the conspicuous consumption and dogmatic intolerance of the present movement cognoscenti. Despite my stated reservations about the leading conservatives of the 1950s, reservations Professors Federici and McAllister may consider excessive, these figures were giants of the spirit next to the “conservative” journalists I see on TV.

And yes I do feel “contempt” for the Republican Party, but vote for its candidates faute de mieux, while holding my nose. I am astonished by how savagely “movement conservatives” scold me for my insufficient appreciation of the GOP. This institutionalized, tax-supported national party seems to mean more to them than even
God and only slightly less than the religious mystery of “human rights.” Rarely has so much been made of so little.

Paul Gottfried

Notes

1. Jonah Goldberg, syndicated column, New York Post, August 12, 2010. Goldberg’s was not an isolated opinion among “conservative” personalities but written in support of another FOX celebrity, Greg Gutfeld, who proposed (presumably not as a joke) opening gay bars for Muslims. Although Goldberg happily defends gay bars as a “tough-minded libertarian,” his tolerance does not extend to a libertarian statement by then GOP candidate for the U.S. Senate Rand Paul. Paul angered Goldberg when he mildly criticized Provision II of the 1964 Civil Rights Act for interfering in an employer’s right to run his business as he sees fit without having to worry about anti-discrimination agents and suits. According to Goldberg in a syndicated column (May 2, 2010) “it’s bizarre and repugnant for Paul to lament the lost right of bigots rather than to rejoice at the restored rights of integrationists.” In this case the government’s regulation of behavior supports “economic freedom,” just as presumably political and moral tolerance with regard to gay bars and gay pride parades has the same salutary effect. In both cases, Goldberg is taking a PC view while appearing to make a value judgment in favor of “freedom.”


