

American Conservatism and F. A. Hayek

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IT HAS BEEN ASSERTED often that the political ideas of F. A. Hayek are consistent with those of American conservatism.* This opinion has come from sources as diverse as the members of the American conservative community and their detractors, as well as from more detached observers.¹ The association of Hayek with conservatism is, however, subject to dispute. Hayek himself protests forcefully that his ideas are not "conservative" and that those who label them so are operating under a misunderstanding of both the substance of his thought and the nature of conservatism.² At the same time, Hayek seems to express sympathy for some of the ideas of American conservatism. This essay is an attempt to clarify the lines of this dispute and to seek a rectification through a comparison of the tenets of Hayek's thought and those of American conservatism. Central in this study will be an attempt to explain American conservatism and to discuss Hayek's thought in the light of that clarification.

Any serious investigation of American conservatism must confront a difficult problem of definition.³ In the numerous attempts to define American conservatism, recurring themes seem to center around three interrelated issues: (1) on what, if any, philosophical issues are conservatives in agreement?; (2) who are the intellectual ancestors of this tradition?; and (3) is American conservatism, in Huntington's terminology, aristocratic, autonomous, or situational?⁴ From an examination of the works of those who have associated themselves with conservatism in the United States and those who have investigated the movement, one thing is obvious: there are no easy answers to these questions.⁵ There is little consensus as to the presuppositions of American conservatism, the ancestry of the movement, or even its basic nature. As

Voegelin says concerning an analogous topic, "We stand before the question of whether there is even such a thing as liberalism as a clearly definable subject and whether this subject, should it not be clearly definable, can have a history."⁶

Recognizing the dangers and limitations of defining any broad contemporary perspective we shall tentatively adopt George Nash's division of American conservatism into three distinguishable schools: traditionalist, libertarian, and "fusionist."⁷ This division serves as a heuristic device with which one can delineate several types of American conservative thought. The distinctions will facilitate an examination of Hayek's thought in an effort to see which, if any, version of contemporary conservatism is compatible with his ideas.

I

THE MAJOR IDEAS of the traditionalist school of American conservatism are most clearly seen in its treatment of the perennial problems in the history of political thought.⁸ The universe is presented much in the manner of the platonists and the neo-platonists. It is said to be composed of two levels: a divine, or transcendental, realm and a human, or immediate, realm. The divine realm is understood to be the guiding force of human affairs and individual conscience, a model for human endeavors, and the bond that links past, present, and future. Man's attempts to replicate the divine realm must always fail because man is cursed simultaneously by an inability to discern the intricacies of that realm and an inherent propensity to act according to his instincts rather than according to programs at which he arrives by methods he considers rational. Man is fallible and the reach of his reason is limited. In comparison with the divine realm, man is inferior. Evil is

considered an inextricable part of man's nature in contrast to the "goodness" of the transcendental realm. Traditionalists believe that man is moving closer to "goodness" when he is acting, whether individually or collectively, more consistently with the divine model. As a corollary to this, traditionalists assert that man has an understanding, albeit partial, of his inferiority to the divine realm and, thus, is led naturally to being religious.

These presuppositions are reflected in the social thought of the traditionalist school. Truth, for man, does not exist in universal proportions but in concrete experiences. In daily activities prudence, experience, and habit are considered better guides for human action than reason, logic, and metaphysics. The established social order is viewed as the natural organic product of slow historical growth. Thus, the community, not the ideas of some specific individual, represents the wisdom of the past. It follows, therefore, that political rights are a function of time and traditions, not inevitability. Furthermore, what we have come to identify as political and/or social problems, at bottom, are religious and moral ones. The malfunctions of man in society result from the nature of man, not the peculiar alignment of some particular social or political institution. Prescription is favored as a means to check the passions of man and to maintain the established social order.

This clinging to tradition *per se* does not necessarily deny the ideas of progress and change. The traditionalists believe that it is through slow change that a society and culture are preserved. But "providence is the proper instrument for change; and the test of a statesman is his cognizance of the real tendency of providential social forces."⁹ At the static level, politics is viewed, in Kirk's words, as "the art of apprehending and applying the justice which is above nature."¹⁰ Just as there is a discernible order in the divine realm, traditionalists favor order within the human realm. They make a Burkean distinction between "liberty" and "license."¹¹ Man approaches his ultimate freedom when his reason dominates his instincts, not vice

versa. Since the successes of human thought are manifested in traditional wisdom, these conservatives assume that man is most free when he is living in accordance with tradition.

Traditionalists believe that except in an ultimate moral sense, men are unequal. As a consequence, civil society always will include a variety of classes, groups, and orders. Man longs for leadership. It is through the natural ordering of society that leadership surfaces. In contrast to the proliferating variety of the traditional life, radical schemes to level social classes are both doomed and contrary to the natural order of things. The "truths" of tradition are held superior to the calculations of any group of planners. If a society is governed by social engineers, the community and the individuals therein will be enslaved by the state and the planners. Private property is supported as a means of protecting the individual and the community from the infringements of the state. "Separate property from private possession and liberty is erased."¹² But as recent experience demonstrates, the defense of private property is not necessarily accompanied by universal support for strict *laissez faire* economic policies. Support for such policies is selective at best. In fact, one of the bases of the traditionalists' rejection of John Locke is their belief that he does not acknowledge this dichotomy.

While there is not unanimity on the point, traditionalists are not supporters of strict majoritarian rule. Instead they see the masses as a group more likely to be prompted to action by a desire to satisfy their passions rather than by higher ends. The elite of a society are considered better able to govern well. The great masses are more easily duped by utopian schemes and, as the recent history of the West demonstrates, will support infringements by the state in return for short-term gratification contrary to the wisdom of tradition and the model of the divine realm.

The traditionalists view the United States as part of the greater Western political tradition. From an examination of their thought, the influence of classical and medieval church writers is obvious. There is also

widespread support for Burke as the father of modern conservatism.¹³ Their sympathies within the American experience lie more with Publius than with Jefferson.¹⁴ While traditionalists believe that their brand of conservatism is based on autonomous values, there is substantial slippage between theory and practice. The autonomous values do not provide an unambiguous guide for discerning positions on specific public practice.¹⁵ Thus, what may be considered "conservative" varies according to the particular context in which the term is used.¹⁶ In particular this school has usually designed its practical suggestions as a reaction to those it considers "The Enemy," whether it is the "progressive liberals" in domestic affairs or "communists" in international. In this sense, at least, the positions of the traditionalist school are as much situational as autonomous.¹⁷ The connection between the philosophical level and practical politics is forced at best. At its worse, traditional conservatism is an endorsement of the *is* (or possibly the *was*) as a manifestation of the *ought*, standing in blind opposition to more radical shifts in the political arena.

The libertarian school, which is often characterized by its close kinship with "classical liberalism", is distinguished from the traditionalist one by its position on several interrelated issues.¹⁸ For one, it can be argued that the libertarian universe exists without meaningful transcendental values. That is, if such values do exist, *e.g.* in the form of natural rights, they are not useful as models for measuring human actions. Values, at bottom, are the manifestation of individual wills and thus, individual value judgments. The only way that human actions can be measured is according to the effectiveness of the means devised to attain a given end. In the human realm, *i.e.*, libertarian "reality", the immanent authority of human reason is acknowledged. Since individual valuations of particular ends are not subject to dispute, the emphasis of all evaluation is on the freedom of the individuals from the imposed will of others. Only men free from such interference can seek to realize their own values.

In seeking their personal ends, individuals, whether in isolation or in groups, often intrude on the freedom of other individuals to pursue *their* individual goals. The state is seen as an entity whose sole function—if indeed its existence is seen as necessary at all—is to protect individuals, and groups of individuals, and especially to prevent other nations from interfering with people seeking the manifestation of their individual wills. The public sphere is but a mechanism for the protection of individual freedom. Libertarians believe that support for "the community" (as something more than the sum of the individual parts) or "the transcendental" (as an organic entity) is often a disguise for infringements on individual liberties and the maintenance of the status quo. The state and other collectives are viewed as the enemy but, as a possible paradox, the state is granted a monopoly of violence in society as a means of preventing others from infringing on individual rights. Libertarians do not believe that the state is the source of order in society. To the contrary, they believe in a harmony of interests, *i.e.*, that order flows naturally from enlightened self-interested individuals acting in concert with one another. The state is to use its monopoly of violence only to protect this activity.

Thus, in the economic realm there is an unequivocal support for *laissez faire* policies. Economics is seen as the area in which the clever individual can most readily seek his sources of pleasure. The ownership and utilization of resources is viewed as a private matter, never to be a concern of the public sphere. Thus, the libertarian concept of "freedom" includes also the freedom to fail in the process of seeking relief from uneasiness. The libertarians, like the traditionalists, view "radical" collectivities that attempt an artificial leveling of society as aberrations of the natural ordering of things and, as a consequence, doomed to failure. This is, in fact, the major area of agreement between traditionalists and libertarians. It is the rise of communistic and socialistic nations and groups that has forced libertarians and traditionalists into intellectual cohabitation.

They both view the movements of foreign communist nations as the focal point of international violence and as a constant threat to the security of "free nations." Within the free world, they also see domestic movements toward the "welfare state" and nationalization as dangerous but for what seem to be different reasons. The libertarians oppose these movements universally and on principle, whereas the traditionalist opposition is somewhat more selective.

Other areas of similarity between the two schools are diffused by close examination. There is some agreement in their views of human nature. Traditionalists and libertarians both view humans as acting according to instinct as well as reason. Libertarians accept instinctive behavior as a "given" and base their evaluations of human endeavors only on the successfulness of the means chosen to attain a personally conceived end. In contrast, traditionalists feel more comfortable with the view that action is based on instincts tempered by reason, what Burke called "sound prejudice." This difference indicates that the traditionalists place greater emphasis on long-term goals than do the libertarians. Libertarians believe that men act continually to remove felt uneasiness but will never be successful in removing all uneasiness. Traditionalists agree that man will be ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts to gain complete happiness but their reasoning is based on the belief that man is cursed simultaneously by a faulty rational faculty and original sin; libertarian thought does not generally contain the latter of the two characteristics. In addition, libertarians do not share the traditionalists' willingness to preserve political institutions simply because they have endured. Their criteria flow from the usefulness of any given institution to the individual; it is not a function of time *per se*. In the same vein, the libertarian notion of progress envisions the increasing of liberty and, as a consequence, the ability of more individuals to fulfill their desires, whereas the traditionalist notion of progress is based on a transcendental model that is difficult, if not impossible, to attain.

From this partial examination of the differences between the traditionalist and libertarian schools, it is difficult to imagine that they could be fused into a common movement except for their shared opposition to state interference within the private economic sphere and to international socialistic movements in the world arena.¹⁹ Nonetheless, such a fusion was attempted by Frank S. Meyer.²⁰ As one might expect, in attempting to emphasize the practical similarities between the traditionalists and libertarians, Meyer strains to reconcile philosophical incongruities. According to Meyer, conservatives "assume the existence of an objective moral order based on ontological foundations."²¹ The role of religion is modified, however, to the point of acknowledging a "theistic tradition" regardless of the personal views of the individual conservative. In this manner the fusionist's universe is said to be "in Richard Weaver's phrase, a world of essences to be approximated, (whereas) the liberal's world is a world of problems to be solved." The implication here is that the libertarian essence of "liberty" is as valid a model for approximation as the traditionalists' divine realm, both are given transcendental qualities.

Meyer also sought to explain the major difference in focus between the schools, *i.e.* the "community" versus the "individual," as essentially a nonconsequential dispute over the hierarchy of rights and responsibilities. Thus

There may be among some conservatives a greater emphasis upon freedom and rights, as among others a greater emphasis upon duties and responsibilities, but whichever the emphasis, conservative thought is shot through and through with concern for the person.

There is a common suspicion of the points of reference of progressive liberalism, *e.g.* "minorities," "labor," "the people," which the traditionalists and libertarians both see as implicit indications of a lack of concern for the person. Again, these two schools are fused by reaction to the tenets of a perceived

enemy. The point is driven home in Meyer's assertion that "the cast of American conservative thought is profoundly antiutopian."

From this Meyer induces that all American conservatives are opposed to the "liberal mystique of 'planning,' which no matter how humanitarian the motives of the planners, perforce treats human beings as faceless units to be arranged and disposed according to a design conceived by the planners." It should be noted here that Meyer loads the issue by claiming that those who are not conservative believe men are perfectible. This obscures the significant distinction between "infinite perfectibility" and "perfectible," but this exaggeration does fuse libertarians and traditionalists in opposition to such "unrealistic" notions. By the same token, "planning" is used so as to obscure the difference between public and private planning activity. The antagonisms that might be cause for polemics in either school are softened by Meyer's insistence that on essential points they are in agreement.

This agreement is found also in the fusionist attitude toward the state. While the government, as it has evolved, is very powerful in its control of individual lives and while conservatives may differ on the degree to which the power of the state should be limited, "they are agreed upon the principle of limitation and upon the firmest opposition to the liberal concept of the state as the engine for fixing the ideological blueprints upon the citizenry." Even a superficial understanding of Meyer's rhetoric in this regard reveals a wide field for variation among conservatives within this area of general agreement. The attempts to satisfy both schools are no more evident than in the fusionist treatment of economics. Meyer says, "American conservatives are opposed to state control of the economy, in all its liberal manifestations, whether direct or indirect. . . ." The trite simplicity of this observation fuses libertarian and conservative sentiments, but also begs several questions. Are all liberals in favor of "state control of the economy"? Is such control merely a "liberal manifestation"? Would conservatives oppose "conservative"

attempts to control the economy, *e.g.* defense industry subsidies?

Meyer's fusionism also makes an assertive statement about the peculiar position of America within the history of man. He notes the conservatives' "firm support of the Constitution . . . as originally conceived" but goes on to say much more.

Conservatives believe that this conception was the closest that human beings have come to establishing a policy which gives the possibility of maintaining at one and the same time individual liberty, underlying norms of law, and necessary public order . . . [As a consequence, conservatives] see defense of the West and the United States as the overriding imperative of public policy.

The "concern for the individual" is restricted to a concern for individuals as understood at a particular point in time under a particular form of government at a given location on the globe.

Meyer's attempt to "fuse" the traditionalist and libertarian schools of American conservatism is certainly open to more extensive criticism than that offered above. Despite these shortcomings his efforts bring three important points to light. First, there are areas in which the two schools at least seem to converge, especially on specific policy issues. Second, some conservatives do not fit precisely into either of the primary schools. This indicates that there exists the possibility that some who may be considered "conservative" hold beliefs not consistent with either libertarian or traditionalist thought. This fact, in turn, shows, third, that American conservatism is a broad spectrum, including members supporting tenets that are philosophically contradictory. An examination of Hayek's thought will serve to highlight these points.

II

AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT with any contemporary social philosopher addressing particular problems of the day, it is difficult to discern a systematic philosophic position underlying his orientation. Despite his various attempts

to present such a perspective, Hayek is difficult to summarize in a logically consistent manner.²² At least a portion of this problem is due to his somewhat loose and ambiguous terminology and another part is attributable to the particular intellectual tradition from which he comes. Before considering these two problems it will be necessary first to present a brief overview of the main parameters of his social and political thought.

While his writings seldom address the specific issue, it is clear that Hayek's view of the nature of man, unlike that of the traditionalists, roughly approximates that of Locke, Smith, or even Jefferson. In short, man is rational, capable of handling his own affairs if left alone, motivated primarily by self-interest—but not necessarily by economic desires—and freedom is the highest value.²³ Hayek believes man has the capacity to constantly improve his condition, provided the advance of knowledge, one of the principal aims of human existence, is not impeded by politically imposed controls.²⁴ Because men are naturally diverse with some clearly superior to others, social systems should permit those naturally superior to assume their rightful positions.

Hayek seems much more comfortable with those who view freedom as the absence of restraint than with competing notions of positive freedom or freedom to live in a specified manner.²⁵ Thus Plato's and Rousseau's views that the truly free man is the one living as he ought to live are rejected in favor of the Lockean or Kantian position that a free man is one who is not subject to the arbitrary will of any person but only to the laws—and the fewer of those, the better.²⁶

By the same token, Hayek rejects the basic ideas of later liberals like Green and Dewey who align freedom with an active state creating the material conditions in which man can most fully enjoy the advantages of liberty. Hayek believes that the principal threat to freedom comes primarily from the political arena or the state. Certainly the thrust of Hayek's writings supports the contention that the major obstacle to freedom can be traced to well-meaning but misguided administrators

who want to utilize the instruments of political power to promote the "public good."²⁷ He does not consider economic deprivation a serious threat to freedom contra Marx and, in fact, considers socialist rhetoric about "economic freedom" to be essentially spurious.²⁸ Thus, freedom must be maximized by limiting the areas in which a government can meddle. This implies that in a country whose basic institutions promote freedom, *e.g.* the United States, one can be a defender of the existing institutions, *i.e.* "conservative," and simultaneously a defender of freedom.²⁹ This position may seem a trifle confusing when one remembers that in the origin of liberalism the defenders of freedom *opposed* existing institutions and worked for radical change, *e.g.* Jefferson. Changed is the nature of governments, not the concern for freedom. Hayek's personal concern for freedom has been the hallmark of his thought for the past thirty-five years. "The guiding principle that a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy remains as true today as it was in the nineteenth century."³⁰ The principal question for Hayek becomes "not who governs but what government is entitled to do."³¹

This is the question to which our study must now turn. Again, Hayek's position seems to contrast with "positive states" like Rousseau's and comes closer to the ideas which present the state as "a piece of utilitarian machinery intended to help individuals in the fullest development of their individual personality (*sic*)."³² In language reminiscent of Locke or Jefferson, Hayek calls for a very limited government whose primary purpose might well be "to facilitate relations among men." But, however similar he may be to seventeenth and eighteenth century liberal perspectives, he is contemporary enough to recognize that the Jeffersonian state is going to have to be expanded in the twentieth century. "The range and variety of government action that is, at least in principle, reconcilable with a free system is thus considerable."³³ This expansion, though, must be watched carefully and checked constantly since modern tendencies are

clearly toward too much government rather than too little. Hayek concludes, without specifically developing the implications, that the modern state has a legitimate role in promoting economic stability and preventing major depressions.³⁴ Further, somewhat like Adam Smith, he sees provision for indigent, unfortunate, and disabled, as well as involvement in public health and education as legitimate functions of government. It might be significant to note that he believes that these areas of what he terms "pure service activities" should properly continue to increase as the developed societies become wealthier.³⁵ Thus, there is even here *some* movement toward the position of welfare state liberals.

Hayek's justification for this type of government involvement can be observed in the following typical, albeit perplexing, sentence: "There are common needs that can be satisfied only by collective action and which *can be thus* provided for without restricting individual liberty."³⁶ The sentence is perplexing in that he seems to be saying that because there are collective needs which can be addressed only by collective action such action will not conflict with individual liberty. Why not? It is difficult to comprehend the causal connection between the necessity for collective action and noninterference with individual liberty. However, if some (which begs the question "which ones?") collective actions do not interfere with individual liberty why does Hayek oppose collective action in general, *e.g.* labor unions? It would seem more defensible to argue that these collective action do slightly constrain individual liberty, as indeed they do, but this restriction is acceptable in light of the realization of some greater good. It is obvious, however, why Hayek would not word the proposition in this manner: once he admitted that there may be a competing hierarchy of values whose fulfillment is desirable even though they diminish slightly personal political freedom, he would be opening the door he most emphatically wants kept closed. Through that door would come all of the contemporary political efforts to "improve" people's lives by providing

another value with the corresponding marginal diminution in personal freedom. One would then be faced with a dilemma of which "pure service activities" to oppose on principle and which to accept. The principal guideline offered by Hayek is not equal to the task, perhaps because his conception of liberty is inadequate.

That guideline, of course, is Hayek's view of the "rule of law" to which he turns in his opposition to excessive government interference.³⁷ This concept has been an integral facet of his thought for thirty years. It is essentially an appeal to "self-evident truths" which are difficult to define precisely and are also somewhat undermined by his view that many of our most cherished values are determined by our particular economic setting.³⁸ Hayek believes that in a political environment characterized by a constitution and separation of powers the rule of law is the greatest single protector of the individual against arbitrary and capricious government that the Western world has developed.³⁹ The rule of law protects against the personal, discriminating kind of law that the modern world has seen all too much of because it provides an objective standard equally applicable to all people and conditions. It is odd that Hayek does not attempt to redefine this concept but takes it essentially from the Western tradition. He seems almost oblivious to the fact that the love affair of this century with "scientific" methods has cast serious doubts on all concepts not possessing empirical import. It seems plausible to argue that Hayek's failure to address this point specifically is his way of showing his disapproval of the positivist position.

How is one to characterize this philosophy containing so many elements of the various forms of American conservatism when the author does not consider himself a conservative? Using language from another century, Hayek has characterized himself as an "unrepentant Old Whig."⁴⁰ What that may mean in contemporary terms might best be discovered by considering why he feels he is not a conservative. At the epistemological level, Hayek both agrees and disagrees with

what he sees as conservatism. His own definition of conservatism comes closest to the "traditionalist" view that has already been discussed. He shares with these conservatives a clear recognition that there are severe limits to what we presently know or will ever know.⁴¹ This is for Hayek, as it is for most American conservatives, the main epistemological reason to oppose planning. As a result both Hayek and the three schools described above support an active private sphere in which economic activity is to take place.

On the other hand, there are at least three major ways in which Hayek differs from what he considers to be the traditionalist position on knowledge. In the first place, he is convinced of the long range power of ideas and, as we have seen, he believes that the advance of knowledge is one of the chief aims of human effort. He believes that conservatism, in contrast, is bound by a stock of ideas inherited at a given time.⁴² In the second place he sees no particular value in the conservative tendency to claim the authority of supernatural forces at the point beyond which reason is unable to go. Hayek simply admits that that point is the limit of reason and lets it go at that. Like Adam Smith and many others in this tradition, Hayek places a great emphasis on the role of uncertainty in human action, but his emphasis is not animated by religious beliefs. While he has no particular quarrel with formal religion as did the Enlightenment thinkers he often resembles, Hayek simply does not find it necessary to ground his epistemology in religion or call upon it to answer questions his reason cannot resolve. The third and perhaps most significant way he differs from the conservatives is in the implications he draws from the limits to reason. For the traditionalists the frailty of human reason is a strong argument for relying upon traditional institutions and the community—given their assumption that there is greater wisdom in numbers. In contrast, the whole thrust of Hayek's thought stresses the individual and allowing him freedom to make his own decisions. The individual may not know everything nor will he fully understand his

world but he is still the one most qualified to know himself and his own best interest. Thus, reason is limited in the sense that it is unable to comprehend fully the entire market economy, but it is a reliable guide to what the individual perceives to be his own interest.

However, Hayek's objection to conservatism (as he perceives it) runs broader than the issue of the role of reason. At the level of social and economic policy, Hayek rejects conservatism for two principal reasons. One is that modern conservatives offer no alternative to present conditions but simply object to the *rate* of change. An unfortunate by-product is that this gives a *de facto* endorsement to the *direction* of change. Since the principal direction of change today is toward socialism and planning Hayek objects to both the rate and direction of that change. Therefore, he only seemingly looks like a traditional conservative when the two oppose a specific proposal but the one is only saying "not yet" while Hayek would stress "not ever."

His second objection arises from his belief that traditionalists oppose governmental control not on principle but only on an *ad hoc* basis in the economic sphere. Thus, many traditionalists support socialistic measures in agriculture but oppose state interference in business.⁴³ This is an inconsistency Hayek feels he avoids by stressing opposition to government activity in either sector. (As we have noted, though, even Hayek sees a legitimate role for government in many more areas than the libertarians or his eighteenth and nineteenth century counterparts.) Thus, the traditionalist school is bound to be a defender of established privilege by using the state to grant and protect rights for some that are not available to all.⁴⁴ Using only the rule of law as a guide, Hayek would limit the role of government throughout the society in a way that provided equal opportunity to all and special privilege to none. He believes that conservatism does not do this.

Hayek's thought also does not cohere with the libertarian school with which he is often identified. He has come under criticism by libertarians for his unwillingness to more fully minimize the role of the state in areas of

economics and law. His economics has been characterized as supporting "planning for capitalism."⁴⁵ Hayek's rejoinder is that in some instances the greater good to be derived from an economic sphere protected formally from the infringements of the state is better in the long term than strict libertarian policy. In such instances libertarian states would too easily dissolve into anarchy without the buttress supplied by the rule of law. While the economic sphere might in theory operate well in such an environment, the chaotic disorder of the political would spill over into the economic and cause long-term dislocation of essential resources and services. That Hayek even acknowledges the need for government is a point of contention for many libertarians. They would argue that Hayek's ambiguity on the issue of the ability of an individual to have the potential for fulfilling his own desires and needs is a backdoor abandonment of principles. Furthermore, it may be argued that Hayek's acknowledgement of the many varieties for aligning government while protecting individual liberty is evidence of his being too soft on what they view as an essential issue.

From this presentation of comparative tenets in the thought of Hayek and American conservatism, it seems obvious that Hayek is not at home with many of the presuppositions of the traditionalists. Their agreement is most often in specific policy areas but that agreement is based on diverse underlying principles. By the same token, Hayek's thought contains major modifications of the most radical libertarians. Hayek's agreement with them seems more based on common principles but, in this sense, Hayek is not nearly so radical as one might assume if his thought were labeled "libertarian." He is a libertarian, but in his own understanding of the term. Thus, if Hayek is to be considered a "conservative," it is clear that he must be placed in Meyer's fusionist school or in some other variety of conservatism.⁴⁶

Hayek's association with the fusionist school is at best tentative given his disagreement with Meyer on several essential points. First, in Hayek's understanding of the "objective moral order based upon ontological

foundations" there is a strong emphasis on the inherent value of economic laws. To place Hayek in full agreement with this point, it would be necessary to argue that he regards laws derived from his study of economic history as metaphysically based. One would be tempted to go so far as to argue that Hayek's understanding of economics and society takes on natural law qualities in defense of this position. Second, Hayek does exhibit concern for improving institutions and, as much as any economist can whose basic principle is *laissez faire*, does not treat "human beings as faceless units." Third, Hayek is not so strong on the need to repel the "armed and messianic threat" of Communism by force as is Meyer, but it might be argued that if any collectivist state would pose a direct threat to the United States or any other Western democracy, Hayek would undoubtedly justify war as a legitimate means of defense. On the other hand, in some areas Hayek's positions seem quite consistent with those of Meyer. Hayek is ambiguous on the issue of responsibilities versus rights to the point that he seems to fit Meyer's conception perfectly. That is, his primary concern is for the individual; other questions become peripheral. In addition, Hayek supports federalism and would be sympathetic to many aspects of the United States Constitution. The discovery that Hayek does not fit precisely into any of the three categories proposed by Nash requires us to conclude with a more thorough critique of both.

III

AS WITH MOST other writing in the tradition of classical liberalism, Hayek's thought centers on the concept of freedom. His treatment of this idea is ambiguous at best. For one thing, Hayek is not precise as to the place of individual liberty in the structure of values of his social system. We may ask, is liberty the highest value and desired for its own qualities, or is it an intermediate end that leads to something higher? It may be argued that there is no explicit hierarchy of competing values within Hayek's system. Or, if there is a hierarchy, the determination of the

specific rankings is left to each and every individual. Hayek provides no definition of values which might transcend individual liberty. It is clear that Hayek does not feel that anyone, especially the state, should be given the authority to dictate the ranking of values. It appears initially, therefore, that his understanding of the proper role for the political authority is nothing more than to insure the existence of conditions within which each individual might pursue his individual goals. However, Hayek does see a legitimate role for the state in education; this is especially important given his belief that the growth of knowledge is one of the chief aims of human life.

Insofar as the interpretation of Hayek's thought revolves around his understanding of freedom, one must question the basis of his understanding of that term. According to Hayek, freedom is to be valued because it gives the individual an opportunity to choose among a variety of alternatives. However, just as the understanding of freedom has changed in the evolution of liberalism, Hayek has modified his position, perhaps unknowingly. One of the generally acknowledged characteristics of freedom is an acceptance of the fact that there are natural conditions which intercede in the performance of one's choices. From this it may be induced that "the growth of knowledge or anything else that increases our capacity to employ natural conditions for the achievement of our purposes *ipso facto* enlarges our freedom."¹⁷ Hayek's insistence that the state is the legitimate body for insuring this freedom is a point of disagreement with the more radical libertarians. But this prompts the question of whether anyone can hope to achieve the radical libertarian notion of freedom under any type of government. In turn, the question can assume a different dimension: can any government insure this type of freedom without entering directly into the process of providing its citizens some type of "equality of opportunity"? Of course, in recent years Nozick and Hospers have achieved great acclaim answering "yes." And whereas Hayek rejects such government intervention on principle, it

seems to be a logical extension of the notion of freedom he defends.

This leads to a question of the sphere in which freedom is viable in Hayek's thought. Is his freedom essentially a political idea, or does it encompass the economic realm as well? Is the individual more free when obstacles to his ability to choose between options or to secure a desired alternative are a function of economic rather than political circumstances? It is fair to assert that Hayek does not confront these issues *per se*. Instead, he derives his conception of freedom from the premise that restrictions on political and economic freedom emanate from the political arena. Coming full circle to this realization, a central point of agreement between Hayek and the various types of American conservatism emerges. All agree that restrictions on freedom which flow from the state or public sphere are of far graver consequence to the individual than those which flow from the private sphere in which he is a protected member. This reveals much about the transition from the term "liberal" to the term "conservative." As long as one accepts the assumption that the private and the public sphere are distinct, it is plausible to attribute causation and other qualities to one or the other. In classical liberalism, the villain was the state, but with the appearance of the Marxist proposition that the state is but a manifestation of the status quo in the private sector and serves as its bodyguard, classical liberals were forced into other views. Some dove for the cover of "conservatism." Others embraced certain Marxist principles, while still others merely modified their liberalism to cohere with Marxian insights.

Another problem with Hayek's political thought involves the issue of planning and democracy. He suggests that the two are incompatible but the examples he gives, most forcefully in *The Road to Serfdom*, are from the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany. "To imagine that the economic life of a vast area comprising many different people can be directed or planned by democratic procedure betrays a complete lack of awareness of the problems such planning would raise."¹⁸ One

could argue that the Common Market does not represent "planning" as Hayek uses the word but it does seem as if it is possible to do a significant amount of central direction within the framework of democratic institutions and not curtail political freedom. Are the peoples of the E.E.C. less "free" in whatever sense than they were before its inception? In evaluating this one must pay close attention to his retraction concerning England:

Of course six years of socialist government in England has not produced anything resembling a totalitarian state. But those who argue that this had disproved the thesis of *The Road to Serfdom* have really missed one of its main points: that the important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration of the character of the people.⁵⁰

Such observations cloud the distinction Hayek tries to make between his social thought and the conservatism he opposes. Perhaps here a different perspective is needed. In Voegelin's words, "[Hayek] is liberal, that is, conservative with respect to socialism, communism, or any other variant of the phase of revolution which has overtaken liberalism."⁵¹ The revolution which began in the embryonic stages of the Enlightenment has progressed far beyond the point at which those who see order as an essential ingredient in human existence are comfortable. Like Hayek, they are interested in the preservation of the conditions of freedom that existed at a certain point in time. When they assert that there are limits to liberty, it is a *de facto* endorsement that there are transcendental values which must be preserved. Within American conservatism, there are representatives of schools which support two views of what these values are. The libertarians support the idea that freedom is essentially the absence of political constraint; the traditionalists argue that freedom is to be found in a stable society. In this sense, their dual existence seems incompatible; there is a constant tension between the two values being "conserved." And through the examination of

Hayek's thought it seems that not only does this tension exist in society, indeed within the liberal tradition, it also exists in the ideas of one man. Those who argue, as Hayek, Huntington, and others do, that the proper role for conservatism in the United States is to "reassert liberalism" are caught in a quandry. They are, in effect, asking simultaneously for liberalism to initiate social, political, and economic movements and to control them.

If man is a social animal, as we have been led by experience and authority to believe, it is difficult to understand how he can be psychologically free when he is constantly witnessing the tension of social movements pushed forward and then pulled backward. It is little wonder alienation results when some members of society are insufficiently endowed by the changing milieu with the opportunity to achieve a given goal or even to know of the existence of that goal. For Hayek to argue that the alternatives should be publicized via education is to chance the origins of another activist episode in Trotsky's permanent revolution. For traditionalists to thwart the movements is to increase alienation. As Hayek himself notes: "Nothing makes conditions more unbearable than the knowledge that no effort of ours can change them. . . ."⁵²

In conclusion it should be noted that American conservatism is best understood as a part of the liberalism that dominates the modern era of Western civilization.⁵³ It also reflects the two ways liberalism has come to be understood: (a) in opposition to authoritarianism, and (b) in opposition to the conservatism within the liberal tradition. As such, both major schools of conservatism will be identified as situational and autonomous: their political postures are determined by more radical elements within the common intellectual tradition and by basic principles. For this reason one is led to understand Rossiter's explanation that conservatism is at once an ideology and a political philosophy. The thought of Hayek reflects this insofar as he acknowledges implicitly that basic principles are transformed when manifest in the empirical political arena. Those labeled "conservative" are often comparable only on

one of the two levels. In the case of recent American conservatism, the common denominator seems to be an opposition to socialistic and communistic movements abroad, and what are perceived to be variants of those movements in this country. To understand conservatism as only traditionalists and libertarians do is to deny the dichotomy between theory and practice. Efforts to strictly define the wide middle area between the two schools

are futile because the multiple facets which characterize the area are a combination of theoretical and practical tenets. As such the umbrella of conservatism changes in response to specific situations. It is for this reason that Hayek's thought, at its foundation a genre of classical liberalism, is identified as conservative. His notion of liberty coincides with the contemporary conservative perception of political realities.

*This is a revised version of a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association held in Chicago in September of 1976. The authors wish to express their appreciation to Warren Roberts, Jr. and William Baumgarth who have read and criticized the earlier version.

¹In a recent major work, the American publication of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* is characterized as an important, if not the essential, date of the origins of modern American conservatism. See George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945* (1976), esp. pp. 5-9. See also Eric Voegelin, "Liberalism and Its History," trans. Mary and Keith Algozin, *Review of Politics*, 36 (Oct. 1974), 504; and the coverage of Hayek's being named a Nobel laureate in economics: *New York Times* Oct. 10, 1974, p. 79; *Washington Post* Oct. 10, 1974, sec. A, p. 27. This is not to say that the grouping of Hayek with American conservatism is unanimous. For instance, two well-received anthologies of articles by and about conservatism exclude Hayek completely, except for a brief mention in the former: William F. Buckley, ed., *American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century* (1970); and Peter Witoski, ed., *The Wisdom of Conservatism*, (1971). ²F. A. Hayek, "Postscript: Why I Am Not a Conservative," in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1972), pp. 393-411. Cf. David Wright, "When You Call Me a Conservative, Smile," *Fortune*, 43 (May 1951), 76-77, 190, 192. ³For an excellent treatment of the genesis and personalities of the conservative movement in the United States, see Nash, *op. cit.* See also representative attempts to describe, define, and explain American conservatism in the following: Stuart Gerry Brown, "Democracy, the New Conservatism, and the Liberal Tradition in America," *Ethics*, 66 (Oct. 1955), 1-9; David Brudnoy, *The Conservative Alternative* (1973); Phillip C. Chapman, "The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism v. Political Philosophy," *Political Science Quarterly* 75 (March 1960), 17-34; Francis W. Coker, "Some Present-Day Critics of Liberalism," *American Political Science Review*, 47 (March 1953), 1-27; Samuel Dubois Cook, "The New Conservatism versus American Traditions: Ideals, Institutions, and Responsibilities," in *Varieties of Political Conservatism*, ed. Matthew Holden, Jr. (1974); Bernard Crick, "The Strange Quest for an American Conservatism," *Review of Politics*, 17 (July 1955), 359-376; Ludwig Freund, "The New American Conservatism and

European Conservatism," *Ethics*, 66 (Oct. 1955), 10-17; Allen Guttman, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (1967); Jeffery Hart, *The American Dissent: A Decade of American Conservatism* (1966); Willmoore Kendall, *The Conservative Affirmation* (1963); Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (1954); Gordon K. Lewis, "The Metaphysics of Conservatism," *Western Political Quarterly*, 6 (Dec. 1953), 728-741; H. Malcolm MacDonald, "The Revival of Conservative Thought," *Journal of Politics*, 19 (Feb. 1957), 66-80; Frank S. Meyer, *The Conservative Mainstream* (1969); *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo* (1962); Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America* (2nd rev. ed. 1962); Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited* (rev. enlg. ed. 1962); D. Atwell Zoll, "Philosophical Foundations of the American Political Right," *Modern Age*, 15 (Spring 1971). See also note 20. ⁴Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *American Political Science Review*, 51 (June 1957), 454-473. This conceptualization and the resulting conclusions were challenged by Murray Rothbard, a prominent libertarian: "Huntington on Conservatism: A Comment," *ibid.* (Sept. 1957), 784-787. Huntington's reply is found at *ibid.* (Dec. 1957), 1063-1064. ⁵Cf. Freund, *op. cit.* p. 10; Nash, *op. cit.* pp. xi-xiii; Witoski, *op. cit.* I, 15. ⁶Eric Voegelin, *op. cit.*, p. 504. ⁷Nash, *op. cit.*, *passim*. ⁸This section is based upon the understanding that the following are among the major works of the traditionalist school: Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, (4th rev. ed. 1968); Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948). The specific tenets of the traditionalist school are developed from the tenets listed in Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, pp. 17-18; Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 454; and, with some revisions, Rossiter, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65. ⁹Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, p. 18. ¹⁰*Ibid.* ¹¹See Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3. ¹²Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, p. 18. ¹³Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, uses Burke as the prototypical modern conservative. Huntington, *op. cit.*, follows this suggestion in his development of the tenets of conservatism. Viereck, on the other hand, uses the model of Metternich. The use of Burke as a model for American conservatism has been the subject of some dispute. See, for example, Arnold Rogow, "Edmund Burke and the American Liberal Tradition," *Antioch Review*, 17 (June 1957), 255-265; Stephen J. Tonsor, "Disputed Heritage of Burke," *National Review*, 10 (June 17, 1961), 390-391. ¹⁴See Rossiter, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 252, 262. ¹⁵See Chilton Williamson, Jr.'s review of Nash's

book: "Some Poor Boys Make Good," *National Review*, 18 (June 11, 1976), esp. 630-631. ¹⁶Voegelin suggests that the historical context is essential to an understanding of any political movement. Voegelin, *op. cit.*, pp. 504-508. ¹⁷See n. 4. ¹⁸Prominent among the membership of the libertarian school are the authors of the following works: Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action* (1949); Frank Chodorov, *One Is a Crowd: Reflections of an Individualist* (1952); Albert Jay Nock, *Our Enemy, the State* (1935); and Murray Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State*, (2 vols.; 1962). Nash's treatment of the libertarians is at *op. cit.*, pp. 3-35 and 320-324, plus other references. ¹⁹See Voegelin, *op. cit.*, p. 507; Nash, *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 123-130. ²⁰This section is based on Meyer's description of "fusionism." Statements of his notions about conservatism are to be found in the following: "Conservatism," in *Left, Right, and Center*, ed. Robert Goldwin (1965) 1-17; "What Is Conservatism?," in his (ed.) book of the same title (1964), pp. 7-20; and "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism," *Modern Age*, 4 (Fall 1960), 355-363. See also Nash, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-181, 340; Ronald Hamowy, "Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism: Is a Synthesis Possible?," *Modern Age*, 8 (Fall 1964), 350 ff.; and Murray Rothbard, "Conservatism and Freedom: A Libertarian Comment," *Modern Age*, 5 (Spring 1961), 217-220. ²¹This and all quotations in the remainder of this section of the paper are from Meyer, "Conservatism," in ed. Goldwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5. ²²The most explicit statements of Hayek's political thought are *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960); *The Road to Serfdom* (1944); *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948); *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (1967), esp. "The Principle of a Liberal Order," *ibid.*, 160-177; and "Principles or Expediency?," in *Toward Liberty: Essays in Honor of Ludwig von Mises on the Occasion of his 90th birthday, September 29, 1971*, see F. A. Harper, (2 vols. 1971), I, 29-45. (These will be cited hereafter as *Constitution*, *Road*, *IEO*, *Studies*, and *Toward*, respectively. Supporting statements are to be found in *The Sensory Order* (1952); and *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (1955). (These will be cited hereafter as *Sensory* and *Counter-Revolution* respectively.) Among the English-language studies of political topics in Hayek's thought are Herman Finer, *The Road to Reaction* (1945);

Roads to Freedom, ed. Erich Streissler (1969); Christian Bay, "Hayek's Liberalism: The Constitution of Perpetual Privilege," *Political Science Reviewer*, I (Fall 1971) 93-124; J. C. Rees, "Hayek on Liberty," *Philosophy*, 38, 146 (October 1963), 346-360; Richard Vernon, "The 'Great Society' and the 'Open Society': Liberalism in Hayek and Popper," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 9 (June 1976), 261-276; and Morris Wilhelm, "The Political Thought of Friedrich A. Hayek," *Political Studies*, 20 (June 1972), 169-184. ²³*Road*, p. 89; *Constitution*, pp. 11-12, 71-84; *IEO*, pp. 11-19; *Studies*, p. 229. ²⁴*Constitution*, pp. 22-70, 404; *Counter-Revolution*, p. 86. ²⁵See the discussion in P. H. Partridge, "Freedom," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, (8 vols.; 1967), III, 221-225. ²⁶*Road*, p. 82; *Constitution*, pp. 155, 181, 210, 238, 409. ²⁷*Constitution*, p. 262. ²⁸*Road*, pp. 25, 102, 119. ²⁹*Constitution*, p. 410. *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 62-65, 79, 103-117, 181-182; *IEO*, pp. 22-27, 29-30, 271; *Studies*, pp. 243-244; *Road*, pp. 56-71; 75-77. ³⁰*Road*, p. 240. ³¹*Constitution*, p. 403. ³²*Road*, p. 77. ³³*Constitution*, p. 231. ³⁴*Road*, 124. ³⁵*Constitution*, 251. The rejection of strict laissez faire economic policy is explicit. See *ibid.*, pp. 143-145, 224-226, 264, 300-302, 324-339; *Road*, pp. 17-19, 38, 80-81, 121; *IEO*, pp. 12, 111, 134-135. See Nash, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33. On laissez faire in Smith's thought, see Jacob H. Hollander, "Adam Smith and Laissez Faire," *Journal of Political Economy*, April 1927, 198-232. ³⁶*Constitution*, p. 257, emphasis added. ³⁷*Road*, pp. 82-83; *Constitution*, pp. 200-232. ³⁸*Road*, p. 110. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 101-130; *Constitution*, pp. 6, 13, 17-21, 37, 54, 60-61, 133-147, 212-217, 230-231; *Studies*, pp. 166-167. ³⁹*Constitution*, pp. 131-249, *passim*. ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 409. ⁴¹*Sensory*, p. 185; *Counter-Revolution*, pp. 18-23. ⁴²*Constitution*, p. 404. ⁴³*Constitution*, p. 403. ⁴⁴*Road*, pp. xi-xii. ⁴⁵Nash, *op. cit.*, p. 18. ⁴⁶See Meyer's comments on Hayek *vis-a-vis* fusionism in *ibid.*, pp. 170f. ⁴⁷Partridge, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-223. ⁴⁸*Road*, p. 223. ⁴⁹*Ibid.* ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. xiv. ⁵¹Voegelin, *op. cit.*, p. 507. ⁵²*Road*, p. 94. ⁵³On the liberal heritage of American political thought, including conservatism, see Brown, *op. cit.*; Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 60; Crick, *op. cit.*; Freund, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Guttman, *op. cit.*; Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), pp. 1-32; Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 473; and Rogow, *op. cit.*