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THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF PETER VIERECK: AN EXAMINATION
OF THE MEANING OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

To my mother, Mrs. Irene G. Sheridan

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I would like to thank God and my friends at the Wesley Foundation for helping me to endure this ordeal.

ABSTRACT

Peter Viereck is a renaissance man. He is a poet, historian, literary critic, and political and social thinker. He was the leading exponent of the post-war conservative school of thought known as the "new conservatism." Yet, Viereck has been attacked by his fellow American conservatives for not being conservative enough. Indeed, he has been called a "liberal" by many. This attack has stemmed mainly from Viereck's acceptance of the New Deal. It was the purpose of this dissertation to analyze Viereck's political thought and to find out if he is indeed a conservative, as he claimed, or a liberal as many of his detractors have charged. In doing this, it was also necessary to look at the meaning of conservatism, with a special eye toward discerning the meaning of contemporary American conservatism.

To meet these objectives, I looked at the works of Peter Viereck, of other conservatives, and of writers on conservatism and political philosophy.

I found that conservatism is a fragmented ideology. It is divided into roughly three groups: (1) traditionalists--those conservatives most concerned with a return to traditional, non-economic values, religious and moral absolutes, and duty and authority; (2) libertarians--those conservatives most concerned about individual freedom, particularly

in the economic realm; and (3) the fusionists--those conservatives who have tried to combine the above branches. Traditionalism is the dominant form of conservatism in Europe, while fusionism is dominant in America. Viereck is a traditionalist in a country dominated by fusionism. This accounts for the misunderstanding between Viereck and his fellow American conservatives. They are advocating different types of conservatism. Viereck is a conservative, but he is advocating a form of conservatism that has had little influence in America, except in figures like John Adams, Henry Adams, Herman Melville, and Irving Babbitt. Fusionist conservatism is hostile toward state intervention in the economy. Traditionalist conservatism is not as hostile. This accounts for the difference of opinion between Viereck and most American conservatives concerning social reform. He is willing to accept the New Deal and other social reform that calls for state intervention, while fusionist American conservatism is not. Viereck accepts social reform because it is humane to do so, and because moderate social reform prevents revolution.

Although Viereck is a European-style, traditionalist conservative, he is influenced by his American environment. Though he accepts the traditionalist concern for moral absolutes, he also accepts American individualism. This has caused an ambiguity in his thought. Also, it is Viereck's

purpose to make conservatism a viable force in America, a popular ideology. This has also led him into ambiguity as he seeks moderation in order to make conservatism acceptable. Despite these flaws, however, Viereck is an important thinker whose philosophy has been largely overlooked.

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INTRODUCTION

Peter Viereck is an important, and intriguing figure in contemporary American intellectual life. He is a rarity in this age of specialization--a renaissance man. In addition to being a political philosopher, Viereck is also a historian, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. While these three aspects of Viereck cannot and should not be neatly separated, the chief concern of this dissertation will be Viereck's political philosophy.

Peter Viereck is perhaps the leading exponent of the post-war intellectual movement known as the "new conservatism," a traditionalist school of conservative thought, which emphasizes the need for a return to traditional Western values. The school has included such figures as Russell Kirk, Thomas I. Cook, Clinton Rossiter, Daniel Boorstin, and Robert Nisbet. It emerged after World War II as a reaction to totalitarianism and the development of a secular, rootless, mass society in the 1930s and 40s. The new conservatives called for a return to traditional religious and ethical absolutes and rejected the relativism of the post-war age, a relativism they claimed to be eroding traditional Western values. For their inspiration they looked back to the European conservative tradition of

Burke, and particularly for Viereck, Metternich.¹ The new conservatism, especially that of Viereck, is a more reform oriented conservatism. At times, Viereck calls it "ethical" conservatism or "humanitarian" conservatism. The new conservatives, although defenders of the capitalist system and foes of big government, have also been very critical of laissez-faire economics and neo-classical liberalism.²

Viereck has been a significant and controversial figure in modern American conservatism. George Nash wrote that Viereck's book, Conservatism Revisited, "more than any other of the early post-war era, created the new conservatism as a self-conscious intellectual force."³ Thomas I. Cook called him the new conservatism's "outstanding spokesman."⁴ Ridgely Hill Pate, in a study comparing Viereck with two other modern conservatives, called Viereck "the conservative tradition's most viable exponent on the current American scene."⁵ Even his detractor, Max Eastman, termed him

¹George Nash, The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945 (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), pp. xiii, 76-78.

²Ibid., p. 81.

³Ibid., p. 67.

⁴Thomas I. Cook, "Viereck Revisited: In Search of Continuity and Values," in Tri-Quarterly (Spring 1965), p. 173.

⁵Ridgely Hill Pate, "Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, Peter Viereck: Three Positions in Contemporary Conservative Thought," 1970, in Social Science and Humanities Dissertation Abstracts International, Vol. 31, 1971, p. 3616 A.

"precociously brilliant."⁶ However, Viereck has been attacked by many conservatives. This attack stems from one of the most distinctive features of Viereck's thought, his acceptance of many New Deal reforms. Viereck is a self-proclaimed conservative who has embraced much of the New Deal as an act of salvation for American democracy. He has been highly critical of those conservatives that bitterly attack the New Deal and yearn for a pre-1932 existence. Indeed, as has been noted by Nash, much of Viereck's vehemence is not aimed at American liberals but laissez-faire conservatives, like Barry Goldwater, Robert Taft, and Ronald Reagan, for their lack of support for social reform.⁷ Viereck has been very critical of what he has seen as the unrestrained materialism and selfishness of neo-classical laissez-faire liberalism.⁸ This, along with his stated admiration for such liberals as, Adlai Stevenson and John Kennedy, has brought him much criticism from mainstream and libertarian conservatives, many of whom claim that he is not really a conservative at all but a liberal masquerading in conservative garb. Frank Meyer, of the National Review,

⁶Max Eastman, "Equivocal Conservatism," in The Freeman, Vol. 3 (March 9, 1953), p. 423.

⁷Nash, pp. 67, 155, 81.

⁸Peter Viereck, Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals, Babbitt Jr. vs. the Rediscovery of Values (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953), p. 39.

attacked Viereck for "passing off his unexceptionally liberal sentiments as conservatism."⁹ He wrote that Viereck "would seem to be asking only for derisive laughter when he puts himself forward as a conservative."¹⁰ Max Eastman wrote that Viereck's calling himself a conservative was merely a matter of "semantics." For Eastman, Viereck was not conservative on the central issue: that all freedoms in our society were dependent upon the free market economy.¹¹ Even Dwight McDonald, writing in the liberal New Republic, said that the defect in Viereck's book, Conservatism Revisited, was that it was "not deeply conservative enough."¹² He goes on to say, "Its author [Viereck] is so angry at the Nazis and the Communists . . . that he forgets his general conservative principles and tries to conciliate, as allies, the liberals."¹³ So Viereck and his political philosophy is surrounded by controversy.

Nevertheless, Peter Viereck is a key figure in modern American conservatism. He is perhaps the preeminent advocate of the new conservatism and he is a man whose classification of himself as a conservative has been called into

⁹Frank Meyer, "Counterfeit at a Popular Price," in the National Review, Vol. 2 (August 11, 1956), p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 18.

¹¹Eastman, p. 424.

¹²Dwight McDonald, "Back to Metternich," in the New Republic, Vol. 121 (Nov. 14, 1949), p. 35.

¹³Ibid., p. 35.

serious question. Yet, relatively little has been done on Viereck's political thought. The only book on him deals mainly with Viereck as a poet.¹⁴ There has been a dissertation dealing with the new conservatism and one done in 1970 comparing Viereck with two other conservative philosophers, but not a comprehensive analysis of Viereck's thought.¹⁵ I believe that such an analysis would be valuable. It will be valuable perhaps not so much for what we learn about Viereck, but for what Viereck's thought can tell us about the nature of modern American conservatism, and political thought.

The thrust of the dissertation will be along three main lines. First, I shall be attempting a comprehensive analysis of Viereck's political thought. Secondly, I will be trying to place Viereck within the American conservative tradition. Where does he fit? Does he fit, or is he a closet liberal, as Meyer and others have charged?

In order to do this I shall have to tackle the problem of what is conservatism? What does it mean, in America, to

¹⁴Marie Henault, Peter Viereck (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969).

¹⁵Ridgely Hill Pate, Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, Peter Viereck: Three Positions in Contemporary Conservative Thought (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1970); Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, The Continuity of Adaptability: New Conservatism Within the American Burkean Tradition (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1976).

be a liberal or a conservative? Does it mean anything? Ultimately, these may be the most important questions addressed in the dissertation.

Lastly, the conservative relationship with social reform will be examined in the dissertation. There seems to be an oversimplified view in America that conservatism is synonymous with no or extremely slow social reform. Is this view of American conservatism valid? What is the conservative attitude toward social reform? The dissertation will, in part, seek answers to these questions.

I will utilize several sources in trying to deal with these matters. As primary sources I will utilize Viereck's prose books, as well as various articles he has written dealing with political matters. Use will be made of some correspondence I have had with Viereck. I will also look at his poetry, for it too should lead us to a better understanding of Viereck's thought. In addition, it will be necessary to look at the works of other conservatives, like Burke, whom Viereck claims as a philosophical forefather. I will look at the works of other new conservatives, like Kirk, and of fusionist and libertarian conservatives like Meyer, and Hayek. As secondary sources, I will use general works on American political thought such as those by Kenneth Dolbeare, and Louis Hartz. Of particular use will be general works on American conservatism, such as the book by George Nash's study of post-World War II

conservatism, as well as those by Guttman, Kirk, and Rossiter. General works on political theory may also be of use, as well as general works on liberalism, conservatism, and even radical thought. Lastly, journal and magazine articles on all of these aspects will be of good use. It is hoped that through these sources I shall be able to deal with the questions mentioned above, and shed a little light on the thought of Peter Viereck and the nature of modern American conservatism.

Before we can inquire as to whether Peter Viereck is liberal or conservative, before we can probe the conservative attitude toward social change, before we can attempt to answer most of the questions we have set for ourselves, we must first look closer into the nature of conservatism. We must examine its historical and socio-economic background, and briefly analyze its philosophical underpinnings. From this it may be possible to extract the essence of conservatism and formulate some sort of definition. Then, we can examine Viereck against this definition and within a certain philosophical, historical, and socio-economic framework. This will be the main task of Chapter I. In Chapter II we will be taking a more in-depth look at Viereck and a historical overview of the new conservatism. In Chapter III we will take a look at the heart of Viereck's political thought--the idea of returning to traditional Western values,

religious and ethical absolutes. Chapter IV will examine Viereck the non-conformist, Viereck the critic of modern mass society and commercialism. Also, we will look at Viereck's ideas on democracy and equality. Chapter V will examine the most controversial aspect of Viereck's thought, his views on social reform. Lastly, Chapter VI will summarize and conclude the study.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF CONSERVATISM

Conservatism is an amorphous, fragmented ideology, varying according to time and place. Nineteenth century conservatism was somewhat different from twentieth century conservatism. American conservatism has differed from European conservatism. British conservatism has differed from continental conservatism. Thus, in surveying conservatism from its beginnings to the present, it will be simpler if we first examine Europe, where modern conservatism had its roots and then move to an examination of American conservatism.

European Conservatism

Generally, it can be said that modern conservatism had its beginnings in Europe at the time of the French Revolution. Indeed, the genesis of modern conservatism is usually put at 1790, with the publication of Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France. Burke was the first modern theorist to put together, in anything approaching a coherent system, many of the principles identified with modern conservatism, i.e., the reverence for tradition, community, and aristocracy, and an abhorrence of equality

and democracy, just to name a few. Conservatism began as a revolt against ideas that had their beginnings during the Renaissance and had come to full fruition in the eighteenth century. Principle among these was the notion that there was an objective natural law which man could perceive through reason, i.e., through scientific inquiry and deductive logic. This belief had torn society from its theological underpinnings. Faith in God had been replaced by faith in reason. Divine revelation was no longer necessary to discover natural law, one could discern natural law through reason. The sovereign Church was now replaced by the sovereign individual, for according to Locke, each man was created equal in that through reason he could discover natural law. Every individual possessed certain natural rights, perceptible through reason. Chief among these rights was the right to acquire property. The individual should have the freedom to pursue and acquire property, unrestrained by outside forces. We can see that in the economic realm this individualism would find full expression in the later part of the eighteenth century in laissez-faire capitalism.¹

¹Noel O'Sullivan, Conservatism (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), pp. 9-12; Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind, From Burke to Santayana (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953), p. 5; Alfred Cobban, Edmund Burke and the Revolt Against the Eighteenth Century (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1929), pp. 251-273.

With the decrease in importance of the Church and theology, the doctrine of original sin was discarded. Another culprit had to be found to explain human suffering. Rousseau provided that culprit--society. Reform society and suffering could be eliminated. For conservatives, it was this notion that through reason man could somehow transform society, could remold the world, could regenerate human nature and create a new social order based on a priori abstractions of equality, liberty, and fraternity that had culminated in the bloody French Revolution. Man was imperfectible. He was irretrievably tainted with the capacity to do evil, i.e., to harm his fellow human beings in the quest of his own self-aggrandizement. Man had an inerradicable streak of irrationality. Evil did not stem from society, as the Enlightenment philosophers preached, but was innate in human nature. Human nature was basically evil.²

Conservatism was not merely a reaction against the Revolution, it was a reaction against the ideas that had fostered the Revolution, against ideas that had gained ascendancy in the eighteenth century. It was a reaction against the tremendous faith in reason and optimism of the age, against individualism and secularism and against notions of equality, democracy, and excessive liberty, dangerous

²O'Sullivan, pp. 9-12.

notions which threatened the stability of the existing order. It was a reaction against a society talking more about abstract natural rights than duty and authority. It was a reaction against the ideas of liberalism, the idea that human progress could best be achieved, given man's rationality, through individual liberty and free institutions, through constitutional government, freedom of press, speech, and religion, and freedom of the individual to pursue his economic goals. In short, as Alfred Cobban has said, conservatism was part of a revolt against the eighteenth century, against many of the ideas we have come to associate with modernity.³

These ideas against which the early conservatives struggled were by and large the ideas of the burgeoning middle-classes, of the commercial and business interests, riding the rising tide of the Industrial Revolution. The principles of conservatism were the principles of the established order, the landed aristocracy, the clergy, and to some extent the upper middle-classes. These were the classes that held the bulk of the political and economic power. The Church, for example, was the largest landowner in France.⁴ Industrialism and liberalism threatened these

³Cobban, pp. 251-273.

⁴Jerome Blum, Rondo Cameron, Thomas G. Barnes, The European World, A History, 2nd edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), p. 578.

classes by calling for a greater diffusion of political and economic power in the form of wider suffrage, and greater distribution of land ownership. Although many conservatives, like Burke, as we shall see later, accepted laissez-faire capitalism, other conservatives, like Coleridge, Southey, and Carlyle were hostile to the new economic system. They felt that it was based on abstract, a priori principles and they also felt that it lacked the sense of social responsibility which had existed under the feudal system. For these conservatives, industrial capitalism had created a new class of industrial poor, which it refused to take responsibility for, and had thus created a threat to stability.⁵

It is debatable whether the masses were better off under the social responsibility of a feudal system. However, it cannot be denied that the new system wrought tremendous change in Europe. The population grew, urbanization occurred and a new class of industrial poor did indeed seem to be created, a class that toward the middle of the nineteenth century would form a revolutionary force, particularly on the European continent. It is unclear, however, whether

⁵O'Sullivan, pp. 87-88, 95; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "A Lay Sermon," in Political Tracts of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelly, R. J. White, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), pp. 108-109; Thomas Carlyle, "The Present Time," (1850) in Latter Day Pamphlets (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), pp. 3-56; Cobban, pp. 203-204.

this was indeed a new class or whether industrialization and urbanization simply accentuated already existing poverty by making it more visible in the cramped industrial cities.⁶ Nevertheless, it would be too simple to see the rise of conservatism as simply a class struggle between the upper and middle classes. It was deeper than that. Conservatives saw an entire society changing, not only economically, but politically, socially, and philosophically, and if the French and Industrial Revolutions were any indications of the direction of this change they felt they must combat it. Traditional institutions--the monarchy, the Church, the aristocracy--were being toppled in what conservatives saw as a vain and dangerous attempt to remake society.

Conservatism was indeed a revolt against the eighteenth century, for most of the principles being expressed by conservatives were in direct conflict with those ideas gaining dominance in the late eighteenth century. In an age of optimism, conservatives were pessimists. In an age in which men were looking toward the future, conservatives stressed tradition and the virtues of the past. At a time when reason was placed on a pedestal, conservatives stressed man's innate irrationality of his capacity to do evil. In

⁶Blum, et al., pp. 589-595; J. D. Chambers and P. J. Madgwick, Conflict and Community, Europe Since 1750 (London: George Philip and Son Limited, 1968), pp. 135-136.

an age when men were talking of equality, conservatives were emphasizing the importance of classes, of aristocracies and a hierarchically arranged society. At a time of secularism, conservatives emphasized the importance of religion. In an age when the individual had gained ascendancy, conservatives stressed the importance of community. In an age of great industrialization, conservatives praised the idyllic virtues of the agrarian society. At a time of great change, conservatives talked about stability. And in an age of increased liberty, conservatives talked of authority and order.

Given the conservative skepticism toward reason, we can see that, in a sense, although conservatism may have been born in 1790, it had its first birth pangs several years earlier, when David Hume attacked the concept of natural law. Although they were different in many respects, Burke accepted Hume's destruction of the concept of natural law. Burke's philosophy proceeded from this point. Since natural law and reason could no longer be considered a basis for society, as Hume had shown, something else must be substituted. Burke chose tradition. For Burke, tradition, prescription, custom were the basis for civil society. If an institution or a custom had existed for a long time it was a good indication of its worth, it was a good indication of divine sanction of that institution or custom. Burke

placed his faith in the wisdom of the ages.⁷

Even then, however, all tradition could not be good. How was one to discern a positive tradition from a negative one? Morton Auerbach suggests that, for Burke, those traditions that promoted harmony and stability were good, and those that promoted discord were bad. This may be true, for paramount in Burke's thought, and the thought of most conservatives, has been the maintenance of stability. For example, one of Burke's reasons for the maintenance of a landed aristocracy and indeed a recurring conservative reason for aristocracy was the view that the aristocracy formed a stabilizing factor, a bulwark against the passions of the masses. So, tradition and stability have been of prime importance to the conservative.⁸

What conservatives were showing here was not a mere defense of the status quo in their self-interest, but an aversion toward the idea of radical change, an aversion toward the idea that society could be recast and made better by destroying long-established institutions. Being pessimistic about human nature, conservatives have been pessimistic about man's ability to bring about substantial

⁷Cobban, pp. 78-79; George Sabine, A History of Political Theory, revised edition (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1950), pp. 107-119.

⁸M. Morton Auerbach, The Conservative Illusion (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 40-41.

progress. Basically, they have believed that we live in the best of all possible worlds and that tampering with traditional institutions will not make it better but worse. For them, this was vividly illustrated with the French Revolution.

As conservatism developed in the nineteenth century, it took a slightly different path in Britain than it did on the Continent. Continental conservatism tended to be more rigid and authoritarian than British conservatism, as exemplified by people like De Maistre and Metternich. Continental conservatives tended to favor a stronger state with almost absolute powers. They were much less accommodating than British, or American conservatives in their view toward equality and democracy, being fervent opponents of these concepts. Where British and American conservatives were willing to extend suffrage, albeit grudgingly in Britain, the Continental conservatives were less willing. Whereas, particularly in America, conservatives were willing to concede equality of opportunity, i.e., that each person should have an equal chance for upward social mobility, Continental conservatives wanted to maintain a rigid class structure. They were staunch supporters of aristocracy and many of them, like De Maistre, Barres, and Maurras were monarchists. Also, many of them tended to be staunch supporters of Roman Catholicism, not so much because they accepted its dogmas but because the

Church was useful in promoting authority and order. For example, the French nationalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Barres and Maurras, were virtual atheists in addition to being anti-Semitic and anti-Protestant. Their main purpose for supporting Catholicism was that with its hierarchical structure, it fostered order and authority.⁹

Most of nineteenth century European conservatives tended to be communitarians, believing in the primacy of the community, of society over the individual. Burke felt that a person only became human by being a part of a community, a group. Society is organic, that is, it precedes the individual and outlives him. It grows out of the past and the individual is only a small part of society for a short time. Society has a life of its own. This emphasis on community was a reaction to the individualism of Lockean liberalism. However, some British conservatives, like Burke, sometimes became individualists in their acceptance of laissez-faire capitalism. Continental conservatives seemed to be much more staunch in their stress of community. For example, De Maistre believed that, "Society is born, not

⁹ Roger H. Soltau, French Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Russell and Russell, 1959), pp. 16-24, 367-395; Klemens von Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 33-34; Thomas P. Neill, Modern Europe: A Popular History (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), p. 151.

made, and is in every way anterior to and above the individual."¹⁰ For Continental conservatives there was only a short jump here to Hegelian nationalism, and the staunch nationalism of Barrès and Maurras.

Tradition also seemed to play a greater role in Continental conservatism, but their appeal to tradition seemed to be reactionary, that is Continental conservatives seemed to be more interested in restoring an order that no longer existed rather than trying to accommodate their conservatism to the new order. They always seemed to be yearning, harkening back to a feudal society in which there was an absolute monarchy, a landed aristocracy, and a strong Church. They seemed to be blind to present realities, blind to the fact that this type of world no longer existed and would be next to impossible to restore. So, Continental conservatives tended to be reactionaries, romantics, seeking to recover a dead past, a time prior to the French and Industrial Revolutions.¹¹

This authoritarian and reactionary element has persisted in Continental conservatism even today. German conservatism was consumed by it and in the 1930s was subsumed

¹⁰Soltau, pp. 17, 367-395; Cobban, p. 52.

¹¹Soltau, pp. 16-24, 367-395; von Klemperer, pp. 33-34; Neill, p. 151.

by fascism.¹² The current "New Right" movement in France shows these authoritarian and reactionary tendencies. This group has attacked egalitarianism and called for a rejection of the "Judeo-Christian heritage" and a return to the "antique roots" of European culture. The group has been charged with racism, anti-Semitism, and undertones of fascism.¹³ So, we see that Continental conservatism has had a more rigid authoritarian cast.

British conservatism, on the other hand, has been more flexible. It tried to accommodate itself to the new social order, to the changes wrought by the Industrial and French Revolutions. Conservatives, like Burke, accepted the new system of laissez-faire economics. Also, British conservatives were more willing to accept social reform than were Continental conservatives. Britain alone among European countries managed to avoid the upheavals of 1848. This was due, in part, say Madgwick and Chambers to the fact that, "the upper classes in England never took for themselves quite the same privileges as the continental aristocracy."¹⁴ England avoided revolution due to "the demonstrable capacity of

¹² von Klemperer, pp. 191-219.

¹³ New York Times, 19 September 1979.

¹⁴ Chambers and Madgwick, p. 138.

the governing classes to reform abuses."¹⁵ Blum, Cameron, and Barnes wrote,

Paradoxically, Conservative governments carried two of the most important reforms of the century--the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and the second reform bill or Representation of the People Act of 1867, which extended the suffrage to the majority of urban workers.¹⁶

Burke advocated moderate social reform in various instances. He advocated the abolishment of the slave trade and called for comprehensive financial and economic reforms of the Parliament and the Crown. Later conservatives, like Coleridge and Southey, went even farther in their proposals for social reform, calling for stringent government taxation to help the impoverished masses.¹⁷ For these early conservatives social reform should be moderate, that is, it should not threaten traditional institutions or greatly alter the status quo, for conservatives believed in the sanctity of private property, that private property was the basis for society. Therefore, they would not advocate any reform that would greatly redistribute private property, although their conception of property was a little different from that of liberals. They did not view property so much in money terms

¹⁵Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁶Blum, et al., p. 604.

¹⁷Frank Petrella, "Edmund Burke: A Liberal Practitioner of Political Economy," in Modern Age, Vol. 8, Winter 1963-64, p. 55; Cobban, pp. 210, 213-214.

but in terms of land holdings and for conservatives ownership of property brought with it a certain social responsibility to the community at large and to those less fortunate. This was the idea of noblesse oblige¹⁸--the idea that the nobility had a duty to the community to see that the impoverished members would not starve. So, we see that British conservatives tended to be more amenable to social reform than their brethren on the Continent.

We may ask why have British conservatives been so much more amenable to social change and generally more flexible than their Continental brothers? Possibly this could be because Britain had more of a tradition of free, democratic institutions. After all, the 1688 Revolution, which Burke defended supposedly brought Parliament into parity with the King. Britain had more of a reformist tradition, not possessing the autocratic rulers and institutions that existed on the Continent well into the nineteenth century.

However, because British conservatism was more accepting of social reform than Continental conservatism does not mean that Continental conservatives were always intransigently opposed to reform. Many of them did push for reform. The German government under Bismark, for example, passed laws for compulsory insurance of workers against illness and

¹⁸Coleridge, "A Lay Sermon," White, ed., pp. 108-109.

accident. This was done in order to try to woo the workers away from socialism.¹⁹ Furthermore, as we shall see later, it has been argued that the "reactionary" Prince Metternich of Austria-Hungary also advocated certain social reforms.²⁰

Thus, we see that European conservatives have not been adamantly against social reform. They have supported social reform if it has been moderate, that is, not destructive of traditional customs and institutions or of stability. For the conservative, change should be slow and in line with tradition. Basically, conservatives seem to have supported social reform for three reasons. First of all, and most importantly, conservatives have supported social reform as a preventive measure against revolution. As we have said, it has been the purpose of conservatives to promote stability. If a certain amount of social reform will maintain stability and prevent revolution and radical change--change disruptive of stability and destructive of traditional institutions--then conservatives will support social reform. Secondly, conservatives have supported social reform for pragmatic, political reasons. Thus, as we have seen, the intent of Bismark's reform was to woo the workers away from

¹⁹Chambers and Madgwick, pp. 241-243.

²⁰Peter Viereck, Conservatism Revisited: The Revolt Against Revolt, 1815-1949 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), pp. 88-100.

the socialists. Many of Burke's reforms were probably designed to help put new life into the fragmented Whig party, and Disraeli's government extended the suffrage to broaden their political base and steal the credit from the Liberal party, who would have done the same thing if they had had the chance.²¹ Lastly, conservatives have supported reform out of humanitarian reasons, humanitarian reasons often linked with religion, like Judaic-Christian injunctions to help the poor and oppressed. For example, Alfred Cobban suggested that one reason why Coleridge and Southey advocated more far reaching reforms than Burke was that they were subjected to a religious revival in England around the first part of the nineteenth century that Burke was not.²² So, conservatives have supported social reform for humanitarian/religious reasons, as well as for practical and revolution-preventing reasons.

The contrasting of British and Continental conservatism on the questions of flexibility and amenability to social reform brings out one of the biggest dilemmas that has faced modern conservatism. Paradoxically, part of the tradition which Burke and the British conservatives were trying to conserve was the tradition of the 1688 Revolution, the tradition of Lockean liberalism. In seeking to remain

²¹Neil, p. 118; Blum, et al., p. 717.

²²Cobban, pp. 197-201.

a viable force, conservatism has consistently had to give in to the relentless forces of liberalism and industrialism. Thus, in economics, Burke accepted laissez-faire capitalism, a system that was at odds with his conservative social philosophy. And, as we have seen, in order to remain a viable force British conservatism has had to consistently relent to liberal principles, such as greater democracy, as evidenced in Disraeli's championing of the 1867 extension of the suffrage. The only choices for modern conservatism seems to have been to make an accommodation with the advancing forces of liberalism, as the British have done, or remain fixed and become romantics and reactionaries as has been the case with Continental conservatives. In the latter case, due to their departure from reality, their romantic plunge into the distant past, many of these movements, such as the German conservative movement at the turn of the century lost their viability, i.e., their popular appeal.²³ The choice for conservatism seems to be to give up part of itself or become an archaic relic. This dilemma will become even more acute when we look at American conservatism.

Basically, European conservatives have revered the state. Burke felt that the state was "a partnership of all science; partnership in all arts, a partnership in every

²³ von Klemperer, pp. 33-42.

virtue and in all perfection."²⁴ We have already mentioned how many Continental conservatives advocated an almost authoritarian state. There was no great fear of state intervention in economic or other affairs by most nineteenth century European conservatives. In France and Germany, for example, the state took a very active role in the economic life of the country, and as has been mentioned, Coleridge and Southey called for state intervention to help the impoverished industrial masses and to aid agricultural production.²⁵ Liberals viewed the state in a negative sense and saw it as a necessary evil rather than a positive good. They believed in limited government, that the state should limit its functions basically to defense and maintaining order and allow the individual freedom to pursue his interest. Nineteenth century conservatives, on the other hand, as we have seen, tended to view the state in a more positive light.

However, it should be noted that although he revered the state, Edmund Burke was, in theory, a believer in laissez-faire economics, a believer in state non-intervention in economic affairs.

²⁴ Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, Thomas H. D. Mahoney, ed. (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), p. 110.

²⁵ Chambers and Madgwick, p. 133.

Burke wrote little on economic matters. However, from the one small economic pamphlet which he did write his economic views become abundantly clear. For Burke, private property was the foundation of society. Attack property and you attack government, destroy property and you destroy civil society. Burke's economic principles were the principles of free trade, laissez-faire, and the inalienable right of private property.²⁶ Both Alfred Cobban and Morton Auerbach have pointed out that these individualistic economic ideas were inconsistent with Burke's communitarian political thought.²⁷

However, though an exponent of laissez-faire in theory, Burke was often a practitioner of state intervention, calling for the abolition of the slave trade and for state intervention in the affairs of the East India Company. This supposed contradiction is probably due to the fact that Burke was, above all, a practical politician. In an age when reform sentiment was high in England, and revolution occurring abroad, Burke supported certain reforms. In addition, he probably felt that it helped him to breathe life into his fragmented Whig party. Also, Petrella argues that

²⁶ Edmund Burke, "Thoughts and Details on Scarcity," in The Works of Edmund Burke, Vol. 5, revised edition (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1866), pp. 131-169; Cobban, pp. 193-196.

²⁷ Cobban, p. 196; Auerbach, pp. 36-40.

Burke's willingness to resort to state intervention in certain instances may have been due to "the sympathetic fusion of interests" in society, i.e., his belief in a natural inclination in man toward sympathy.²⁸

Around the turn of the century important changes occurred in the European conservative view of the state. The causes of these changes were the growth in power of socialism and the development in the early twentieth century of a technocratic, bureaucratized society. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, many conservatives began to see socialism as their greatest enemy rather than liberalism. Liberalism had threatened society with an excess of freedom, now socialism was threatening society with too many limitations on freedom, too much state control of human affairs. It may be that much of conservatism had by then become so absorbed with liberalism that the two were barely distinguishable and saw themselves as having a common foe. At any rate, many conservatives now lost their positive view of the state and began to see it as a necessary evil whose power must be curbed.²⁹

²⁸Petrella, pp. 55-60; Gerald W. Chapman, Edmund Burke, The Practical Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 116-121.

²⁹O'Sullivan, pp. 111, 119-120.

Also, sometime in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, conservative thought became fragmented. According to Noel O'Sullivan, this fragmentation was due to the emergence of the technocratic society. It was a virtual nightmare to many people. Man seemed powerless and lost in an impersonal age of bureaucracies. This view was reflected in the novels of Franz Kafka. There were several conservative responses to this development, two of them very extreme. One of these extreme views, represented by Oswald Spengler's The Decline of the West (1918), merely consisted of surrendering to the impersonal forces of the technocratic society. It was the fate of every society to ossify in the end thus, it was the fate of the West to subjugate to this force. It was a very fatalistic and pessimistic view. The other extreme response was the flight into satire and irony exemplified in Orwell's Animal Farm and Huxley's Brave New World. Neither of these extreme responses offered any constructive foundation for a conservative ideology. Two other conservative responses were particularly relevant.³⁰ O'Sullivan writes,

some conservatives have sought [in different ways] an alternative to extremism through a return to older religious, cultural and philosophical values. Others, by contrast, have viewed the calamities of the age in a more restricted perspective. Instead of attempting to save civilization, they have concentrated instead upon the more limited task of

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 119-120.

establishing new safeguards for legality, liberty and moderation. Their concern, in other words, has been to combat extremism by effecting an alliance between liberalism and conservatism, but on terms which would remain recognizably conservative.³¹

The first group constitutes what is known as the traditionalist school of conservative thought. Much more will be said about them later for the chief subject of this study, Peter Viereck, falls into this category. For now, we can say that this was a group of conservatives more concerned with the recovery of traditional, non-economic values, such things as authority and order and a concern for moral and religious absolute truths, truths that transcend individual, or class lines. They were concerned with spiritual rather than material values and were usually more community rather than individual-oriented. Because they placed little emphasis on economics and were therefore, less concerned with issues of individual economic freedom, and because they placed great emphasis on authority and order they have been willing to tolerate more state intervention in the economy and other aspects of life. Many of these people have seen conservatism as occupying a middle ground between extremism on the right and the left.³²

The second group are the libertarians, or what O'Sullivan calls the liberal-conservatives. They have

³¹Ibid., p. 120.

³²Ibid., pp. 122-123, 127-128.

taken up a position approximating that of classical liberalism, expressing grave concern over the threat to individual freedom, especially economic freedom, in the twentieth century. Consequently, they have been willing to tolerate very little state intervention in the economy, unless that intervention fosters competition. For the liberal-conservatives,

the main duty of conservatism today, in a word, is to defend political liberty and constitutional government by preserving a free-market economy. Any attempt by conservatives to occupy the central ground through compromise measures of the middle way variety is rejected as completely unsatisfactory.³³

Both of these branches of conservatism are present in Europe with the traditionalist school seeming to dominate. This is probably due to its pre-modern nature, i.e., its emphasis on religious absolutes, and community, its dislike of industrialism, rationalism, and empiricism, and its sometimes romantic appeal to a kind of society that existed before the late eighteenth century.

This once again brings us face to face with the dilemma of modern conservatism. It seems to have no ground of its own to stand on. Either it has capitulated to liberal capitalism, thus becoming indistinguishable from classical liberalism, or it has accepted state intervention, thus making it difficult to distinguish from reform liberalism,

³³Ibid., p. 140.

or it has stuck to its original conservative principles running the risk of seeming impractical or reactionary. Furthermore, in accepting the ideas of classical liberalism, conservatives have found themselves contrary to the trend of the twentieth century which has been toward more and more state intervention. Also, the trend toward bureaucracies which these conservatives deplore so much in the public sector now also pervades in the private sector, with managerial boards now replacing single entrepreneurs as the wielders of power in the business world. Thus, in defending corporate capitalism these conservatives find themselves defending a bureaucratic society.³⁴ Morton Auerbach has said that the twentieth century has been a particularly hostile one for conservatives, for while conservatives seek evolutionary change and harmony the twentieth century has been a period of rapid change and disharmony. European conservatives, and conservatives generally have found it difficult trying to adjust to this century.³⁵ In the twentieth century, conservatives have been searching for identity and viability in a hostile environment. This is no less true of American conservatism than it is of European conservatism.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 119-129.

³⁵Auerbach, pp. 84-92.

American Conservatism

American conservatism is very different from European conservatism. Indeed, it has been argued by many scholars, particularly Louis Hartz, that America does not have a conservative tradition.³⁶ This is perhaps an overstatement of the case. America does have a conservative tradition but it has a distinctly American flavor. Yet, there have been few American conservatives in the European mold. America has had no European-style conservative movement since the demise of the Federalist party and some scholars argue that we have had no European-style conservative movement here since the Loyalist exile during the American Revolution.³⁷

American conservatism has deviated from Continental and even British conservatism in its acceptance of a much greater amount of equality and democracy, and a lesser acceptance of aristocracy.³⁸ The Federalist party, remember, died because it refused to accept democracy. The seeds of democracy, sown during the American Revolution,

³⁶Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1955).

³⁷Allen Guttman, The Conservative Tradition in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 14-21.

³⁸Ludwig Freund, "The New Conservatism and European Conservatism," in Ethics, Vol. 66 (Oct. 1955), pp. 10-17. O'Sullivan, pp. 32-81; Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 216-219; Soltau, pp. 15-26.

came to fruition much sooner than they did in Europe, in the form of the increased suffrage of Jacksonian Democracy. American conservatism, although it has stood totally against attempts to redistribute wealth, has generally been in favor of legal equality and equality of opportunity.³⁹ It has also been noted that American conservatism has been more materialistic and has exhibited less opposition to industrialization than has European conservatism.⁴⁰

This leads us to perhaps the biggest divergence between American and European conservatism, the fact that in a conflict between individual rights and community rights American conservatism has come down on the side of individual rights. Clinton Rossiter said, "In stark contrast to a central belief of Conservatism, the American Right has asserted the primacy of the individual over society."⁴¹ American conservatism has embraced the primacy of the individual over the community, or perhaps would say that there is no conflict between the two. Frank Meyer typifies American conservatism in the following passages:

all value resides in the individual, all social institutions derive their value and, in fact, their very being from individuals and are justified only to the extent that they serve the needs of individuals.⁴²

³⁹Rossiter, pp. 216-219.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 218-220.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 221-222.

⁴²Frank S. Meyer, "Collectivism Rebaptized," in the Freeman, Vol. 5 (July 1955), p. 560.

In talking of the consensus among conservatives, Meyer wrote,

Whether their stress is upon his freedom and his rights or upon his responsibilities and his duties, it is in terms of the individual person that they think and write. They affirm the primacy of the person in contradistinction to contemporary Liberalism, which is essentially concerned with collectives. . . .⁴³

So, we get an idea of the importance of the individual in American conservative thought, in contrast to European conservatism. The primacy of the community has been a basic tenet of conservative thought. This seems to be particularly true for the Europeans. European conservatives, from Burke and De Maistre, to Coleridge, to the German conservatives to Barres, have talked of the primacy of community.⁴⁴

The aspect of the individual that the American conservative seems most interested in is individual freedom. The conservative puts great stress on liberty and when forced to choose will choose liberty over equality. This stress on individual freedom is intimately linked with the conservative belief in the sanctity of private property. Consequently, American conservatives place considerable importance

⁴³Frank S. Meyer, "Consensus and Divergence," in What Is Conservatism?, Frank S. Meyer, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), p. 230.

⁴⁴Maurice Barres, "Scenes et Doctrines Du Nationalisme," in The French Right, J. S. McClelland, ed. (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970), pp. 159-195; Cobban, p. 52; Joseph De Maistre, "Two Extracts From The Study of Sovereignty," in The French Right, McClelland, ed., p. 40; O'Sullivan, pp. 32-118.

on individual freedom in the economic realm. The individual should be free to pursue and acquire property and to control that property without outside interference. American conservatives have been stalwart defenders of the free market economy, economic freedom being inextricably linked with political freedom. Most American conservatives would probably agree with Wilhelm Röpke when he said, "one cannot deny freedom in the economic field and grant it in the remaining sectors of human activity. . . ." ⁴⁵ So, we see the great emphasis American conservatism places on individual freedom

This accentuation of individual freedom has made American conservatism more hostile to state power and state intervention than European conservatism. The American conservative view toward state intervention can again be typified by Frank Meyer when he said that, "The key to the preservation of freedom is the limitation of the state." ⁴⁶ Government should stay out of the lives of individuals as much as possible, limiting its functions to defense, maintaining law and order, and administering justice. ⁴⁷ John Chamberlain

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Röpke, "Education in Economic Liberty," in What Is Conservatism?, Meyer, ed. p. 79.

⁴⁶ Frank S. Meyer, "Why Freedom," in the National Review, Vol. 13 (Sept. 25, 1962), p. 224.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

wrote of the state, "the less power it has, to exert compulsion on human choices between good and evil, the less likelihood that it will be able to impose on people a total mistake."⁴⁸ Noel O'Sullivan has said that, along with its common opposition to the Soviet threat, opposition to the growth of state intervention is what holds contemporary conservatism together.⁴⁹ However, due to its tremendous emphasis on individualism and individual freedom, American conservatism has tolerated much less state intervention than has European conservatism. As Freund wrote, "there is no place in this country for a conservative movement in the European sense."⁵⁰

Why has this been the case? Why has American conservatism developed so differently from European conservatism? This seems to be due to the fact, as Hartz has argued, that America has had no pre-modern tradition, no feudalism, or medievalism. America never possessed a nobility in the European sense or an established Church. There has been no class base for European-style conservatism here. America, from the beginning has been basically a middle-class society. Society was much more fluid here. There was greater social mobility. The abundance of cheap land made it possible for many disadvantaged people to carve out a decent life for

⁴⁸ John Chamberlain, "The Morality of Free Enterprise," in What Is Conservatism?, Meyer, ed. p. 182.

⁴⁹ O'Sullivan, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Freund, p. 16.

themselves on the frontier. This promoted rugged individualism and a sense of equality rather than deference.⁵¹ Auerbach argues that not even in these rural areas did a conservative sense of community develop because farms were too isolated and the area too sparsely populated. The abundance of land and resources and chronic labor shortages also aided in the development of a liberal economic system by giving impetus to mechanization. Immigrants provided an ever growing and expanding market. Geographically, the country was too large and diverse, the population too spread out for a strong centralized state to develop, as existed in Europe.⁵² So power was more decentralized. For example, Blum et al. mentioned that whereas on the European continent the state was active in the economy, in America, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the central government kept hands off the economy, it was the state governments that were active.⁵³ In short, America was a product of modernity. It was a product of the eighteenth century ideas against which the early European conservatives struggled so vigorously. As Morton Auerbach wrote, "America was born a Liberal nation and did not, like Europe, have to fight its way to

⁵¹Auerbach, pp. 69-71; Guttmann, pp. 78-99.

⁵²Auerbach, pp. 69-71.

⁵³Blum, et al., p. 601.

Liberalism against a medieval past."⁵⁴ American conservatism had no feudal tradition to look back to, as did the European conservatives, only a liberal one. Auerbach wrote,

It was a foregone conclusion that Conservatism in America would be liberal conservatism; but while Burke's Conservatism was only tempered by Liberalism, American conservatism was overwhelmed by it. . . in America there was no conservative social ethic to assert over Liberal capitalist economics.⁵⁵

Thus, we see that American conservatism has been greatly tempered by liberal ideas.

As we have said before, just because American conservatism has been tempered by liberalism does not mean that America has had no conservative tradition. America has had a conservative tradition, but one somewhat different from the European experience. American conservatives have still held some of the basic tenets we talked about in connection with European conservatism--a skepticism toward equality and democracy, a belief in some sort of aristocracy, a pessimism about the nature of man, however, they simply have not been as rigid and unyielding in these beliefs as the Europeans. As mentioned before, American conservatives had to accept many liberal principles if they wished to remain a viable force in this country. Thus, few American conservatives have spoken out openly against the concepts of equality

⁵⁴Auerbach, p. 69.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 71.

and democracy as vehemently as a Burke or De Maistre did. After the Federalist period, few American conservatives have spoken out openly on the importance of an aristocracy as even a Coleridge did. So, American conservatism has been of a different sort, closer perhaps to British conservatism than to Continental, but different from both.

However, to say that American conservatism has been different from European conservatism does not mean that America has not had exemplars of European-style conservatism. The early Federalists showed traces of a European-style conservatism, with their distrust of democracy, their belief in strong central government, their affinity for aristocracy, and their pessimism about the nature of man. To a certain extent, John Adams was a European-style conservative, with his pessimism about man's nature, his affinity for aristocracy, his belief that at times state power should be used to counter the immediate interests of the individual in order to serve the interest of society, and his belief in noblesse oblige, that with wealth came a responsibility to the community. John C. Calhoun, also showed a certain tendency toward European-style conservatism with his pessimism and concern for order and authority.⁵⁶ The anti-bellum South has often been put

⁵⁶Rossiter, pp. 105-118; Kenneth Dolbeare, Directions in American Political Thought (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.), pp. 315-318.

forward as an exemplar of a European-style conservatism in America. This has been because of its agrarian society, its plantation system, which supposedly represented a neo-feudalistic system, its hierarchically structured society and planter aristocracy, and its pervasive sense of tradition.⁵⁷ These factors do make the South a compelling candidate for a European-style conservative region. However, scholars, like Guttman and Auerbach, have disputed the South's conservatism, citing things like the middle-class nature of the Southern plantocracy, the capitalistic nature of the slave system, and the receptivity of the South to Jacksonian Democracy.⁵⁸ At any rate, the Northern victory in the Civil War effectively crushed the Southern plantation system and put an end to what may have been the last bastion of anything resembling European-style conservatism in America. After the Civil War, America's "laissez-faire conservatives" reigned virtually unchallenged.⁵⁹

After the demise of the Federalists in the second decade of the nineteenth century, conservatism in a European sense rarely emerged in the realm of practical politics. Allen Guttman has suggested that if we want to find this

⁵⁷Auerbach, p. 72.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 72-84; Guttman, pp. 32-46.

⁵⁹Rossiter, pp. 132-170.

type of conservatism in America we must look at American literature. America has had a European brand of conservatism but many times it has been submerged in its literature. Prior to the Civil War, one can find such conservatism in the writings of Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Herman Melville. In Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" we find a gentle slap at revolutionary change, in Melville's Billy Budd, a statement on the importance of obedience to authority, and in Hawthorne's writings an emphasis on the depravity of man. For Guttman, these Northern writers exemplified conservatism in the European mold much more than did the South. This is debatable, but Guttman does appear to have hit upon a point that in America, unable to find an outlet in the realm of practical politics European-style conservatism has become submerged in literary and intellectual circles.⁶⁰

In the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century, American conservatism, like European conservatism, underwent a fundamental shift in its view of the state. Early American conservatives, like Alexander Hamilton, had looked upon the state in a positive light and had supported a strong and active central government, much as their European cousins did. Early liberals, like Thomas Jefferson, were believers in a laissez-faire type role for the state, believers in decentralized

⁶⁰Guttman, pp. 47-77, 103-107.

government. The early liberals had viewed government as a threat to individual liberty; however, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the growth of large corporations, liberals begin to view corporate power as a greater threat to individual freedom. Therefore, they enlisted government as an ally to keep the corporations at bay and to bring about greater progress and equality of opportunity. In America the liberals saw themselves as the protectors of the underprivileged, the small businessmen, and the small farmers and now they saw government as a helpful agent to these classes against the concentrated power of the corporations. American conservatives, on the other hand, more concerned with economic liberty and property rights, and not at all with questions of equality, called for less government intervention in society and began to view the state in a negative light. As members of the privileged classes they now saw government as a threat to their privileges. These were the purveyors of the Gospel of Wealth, and Social Darwinism--the Andrew Carnegies, the John D. Rockefellers and the William Graham Summers. For them virtue was to be found in the accumulation of wealth. They believed in the survival of the fittest, the rich were rich because they were more adept at accumulating wealth, and the poor were poor because they were ignorant or lazy. Government should protect wealth

and privilege, not threaten it.⁶¹ Kenneth Dolbeare has claimed that they were not conservatives at all, but laissez-faire liberals, arguing out of the tradition of Adam Smith. They were liberals who were more concerned with the property rights aspect of natural rights doctrine than they were the civil libertarian or egalitarian aspects.⁶² Clinton Rossiter has more correctly asserted that although they did have liberal tendencies, they were conservatives but they were conservatives in an American milieu, conservatives in a political culture profoundly influenced by liberalism. Rossiter said that they were conservatives in that with the exception of industrial expansion they were opposed to change, they feared reform as a threat to the established order, they accepted the inevitability of a stratified society and the necessity of an aristocracy. They stressed the importance of religion, and the sanctity of private property, they believed that majority rule was unwise and that any attempt at levelling was a mistake. Where they differed from conservatism was in their belief in individualism, their faith in inevitable progress, and their fear of

⁶¹Rossiter, pp. 132-170; Dolbeare, pp. 21-22; Robert Weibe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), pp. 1-163.

⁶²Dolbeare, pp. 20-22.

government. Rossiter calls them "laissez-faire conservatives" and this seems to describe them very adequately.⁶³ The Civil War left this, by far and away, the dominant branch of American conservatism, and in its principles and beliefs American conservatism has changed very little since then.

Even though Rossiter's "laissez-faire conservatism" was the dominant form of conservatism in America at the turn of the century, there were advocates of a European-style conservatism in America at this time. These were men like Henry and Brooks Adams, Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More. These men refused to put their faith in inevitable progress. They were revolted by what they saw as the decline of morality, the decay in manners and the vulgarity of the nouveau riche of the Gilded Age. They were critical of industrialism and urbanization. They were also skeptical of democracy. The fact that leaders like Grant and Tweed had replaced leaders like Washington and Jefferson, in their minds, placed doubt on the people's ability to choose. What these men wanted was government by gentlemen, government by elite, an aristocracy of virtue, intelligence, property, and manner. They rejected rugged individualism and refused to have contempt for government or to neglect

⁶³Rossiter, pp. 152-162.

the community.⁶⁴ Of them, Clinton Rossiter wrote admirably,

Unlike most of their compatriots on the Right, they refused to equate bigness with greatness, capital accumulation with the general welfare, or invention with progress. They persisted, to their sorrow and anger, in judging nations in terms of artists and cathedrals rather than millionaires and factories.⁶⁵

Henry Adams never formulated a systematic political or social philosophy. His ideas were set down in sources like his letters and his famous autobiography, The Education of Henry Adams. From him and his brother, Brooks, part of the famous Adams family, we get a sense of brooding pessimism about industrialization and the society it had wrought. Henry Adams had a tremendous yearning for the past, for the days of landed aristocracy and feudalism. His romantic yearnings, unfortunately, took him out of practicality and all the way back to the Middle Ages.⁶⁶

Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More were the leaders of a conservative movement known as the "new humanists." This movement gained impetus after World War I had shattered men's dream of inevitable progress and left them broken and disillusioned. For Babbitt and the new humanists, World War I proved the inadequacy of liberal democracy. They believed in natural inequality and talked of education as

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 163-165.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 164.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 165-166; Guttman, pp. 131-135; Auerbach, p. 98.

a means of discovering who had natural aristocracy based on talent, virtue, and self-discipline. The humanist, they said, heeds the "inner voice" of conscience and lives a life of "vital restraint." They railed against the unrestrained individualism they saw in liberal society. What they seemed to be talking of was the submission to authority. For them liberty was not the freedom to do as one liked, but the freedom to adjust oneself to law. This was true liberty. Equality was incompatible with true liberty. They saw themselves as working out of a Burkean tradition. Where the new humanist differed from other conservatives was in their rejection of Christianity. This was particularly true of Babbitt. Both T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate attacked Babbitt for his rejection of Christianity but Babbitt countered that Buddhism had as many saints as Christianity and was less tainted by intolerance and fanaticism.⁶⁷

So, around the turn of the century there were a minority of voices for a European-style conservatism in America, but their voices were inaudible amid the churning of machinery and the jingling of cash registers.

As we mentioned earlier, it has been said that the twentieth century has been a hostile age for conservatism. American conservatism has been no exception. In the first

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 101-102; Guttmann, pp. 135-141; Rossiter, pp. 167-170.

part of the twentieth century conservatism seems to have fallen into disrepute. Writing in 1957, H. Malcolm MacDonald wrote,

To have actively supported conservative ideas at one of our major universities a quarter of a century ago would have marked one either as an impractical romanticist or a hopeless reactionary.⁶⁸

Even in 1949 Peter Viereck wrote that the word "conservative" was "among the most unpopular words in the American vocabulary."⁶⁹ The stock market crash in 1929, bringing into doubt the validity of laissez-faire conservatism, and the subsequent popularity of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal had seemingly dealt a crushing blow to American conservatism. By the 1930s American conservatism was seen as lacking in viability--that is, lacking in any acceptance in intellectual or popular circles.

However, after World War II things began to change. Just as World War I had done before it, World War II brought a sense of disillusionment with liberalism, socialism and other ideologies of the left. The utopian dreams of socialism and communism, for many, turned out to be a totalitarian nightmare, as they created rigid, oppressive states that controlled every aspect of human life. There seemed to have been a weariness of liberal change, experimentation, and

⁶⁸H. Malcolm MacDonald, "The Revival of Conservative Thought," in the Journal of Politics, Vol. 19, Feb. 1957, p. 66.

⁶⁹Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. x.

innovation, and the fear of a state that was reaching its tentacles into more and more areas of human activity. There was a religious revival as after the horror of World War II men once again became aware of the reality of evil, and lost their faith in man's capacity to bring about the perfect society. It was at this time of pessimism and despair that conservatism had a rebirth in America. Peter Viereck, the subject of this study, was a significant figure in this conservative renaissance. More and more people wrote books on conservatism, more and more intellectuals and politicians professed to being conservatives, and more and more of the populous expressed conservative attitudes.⁷⁰ So, since World War II American conservatism has made a comeback, but the dilemma facing it has not changed. It is the same dilemma facing all of Western conservatism, although perhaps more acute for American conservatism because of the dominance of liberalism in this country. The dilemma is, again, the search for identity and a constituency in perhaps the most hostile of environments, the rambunctious twentieth century. In this study, we shall see how one American conservative has attempted to deal with it.

Western conservatism today, as we have said before, is a fragmented ideology. It can roughly be divided into

⁷⁰MacDonald, "Revival of Conservative Thought," pp. 66-69; Nash, pp. 3-185.

three different branches: the traditionalists, the libertarians, and the fusionists.

The traditionalists are those conservatives concerned primarily with the decline of traditional Western spiritual values, placing a heavy emphasis on the transcendent, on religious and moral absolutes. They stress spiritual over material values, conforming closely with Kenneth and Patricia Dolbeare's organic conservatives, conservatives who see society as a living organism with its roots growing out of the past. These conservatives are more likely to see society, or the community, as superior to the individual. The individual is only a small part of this vast organic society, a temporary part of something that began before him and will continue after him. For traditionalists, man is basically irrational and must be restrained by the forces of ethics and religion. Though traditionalists emphasize freedom, given the irrationality of man, true freedom comes out of order, submission to authority, restraint. The traditionalist branch has a decidedly pre-modern cast about it.⁷¹

The libertarians are those conservatives concerned mainly with individual freedom, thus placing less emphasis

⁷¹Kenneth Dolbeare and Patricia Dolbeare, American Ideologies, The Competing Political Beliefs of the 1970s (Chicago: Markham Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 18-19, 215-226; Nash, pp. 36-83.

on absolutes of a religious nature. Individuals should be free to pursue their goals with as little external interference as possible. Society profits from such freedom. The individual is superior to society. The libertarians have a more economic orientation, stressing the material rather than the spiritual. They do not have as grim a view of human nature as do the traditionalists and thus put less emphasis on order and authority. This group conforms closely with what the Dolbeare's call individualist-conservatism, or what Noel O'Sullivan calls liberal-conservatism. F. A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Albert Jay Nock, and Milton Friedman are from the libertarian school. For the purpose of this dissertation, a crucial distinction must be made here between the libertarians and the radical libertarian group of people like Murray Rothbard and Jerome Tuccille, a group which carries its quest for individual freedom to the point of advocating anarchy. The term "libertarian" as it will appear in this dissertation does not refer to this radical libertarian group. At most, these radical libertarians are on the fringes of the conservative movement and it is highly debatable that they are conservative at all, given their tremendous optimism concerning man's nature and their willingness to effect radical change.⁷²

⁷²Ibid., pp. 18, 207-215; O'Sullivan, p. 140; Nash, pp. 3-35, 313-316.

Lastly, there are the fusionists--Frank S. Meyer, William F. Buckley, M. Stanton Evans and Wilhelm Ropke--who have tried to blend together the traditionalist and libertarian branches, claiming that they are not incompatible at all. A belief in the importance of authority and religious absolutes does not conflict with individual freedom. A fusionist today would probably be against too much state intervention because it would result in a loss of economic freedom, but they would also be against the prohibition against prayer in the public schools which supposedly also upholds individual freedom. There is an inconsistency here in that they defend freedom in the economic realm but are not as likely to defend civil liberties in areas of moral choice, such as abortion, or prayer in the public schools. This inconsistency seems to stem from their attempt to fuse two incompatible concepts, a belief in individual freedom and a belief in religious absolutes. This may have come from the mingling in American political culture of Lockean liberalism, with its strong emphasis toward individual freedom, and Puritanism, with its stress on religious absolutes. The fusionists have been the dominant group of conservatives in America. They are roughly analogous to Rossiter's "laissez-faire conservatives."⁷³

⁷³Nash, pp. 154-185.

Now that we have examined the historical and socio-economic background of conservatism, let us attempt to extract an essence, a reliable definition of the subject matter.

A Definition of Conservatism

As we have seen, any attempt to define conservatism must be approached with extreme caution, because conservatism is a fragmented ideology. However, this does not mean that it is not an ideology, i.e., an explicit, structural set of political values and attitudes. With qualifications, we can identify certain general characteristics which have, traditionally, constituted a conservative ideology.

First of all, conservatism is an ideology generally characterized by a belief in the natural inequality of man. Ranks, orders, and classes are inevitable and necessary in society. The conservative is opposed to any attempt to "levelling," i.e., trying to bring about economic and social equality. Any such attempt can only lead to the ruination of society. However, many conservatives, particularly British and American conservatives, may support equality of opportunity, i.e., the individual's right to have an equal chance to strive to better himself. In the frequent conflict between liberty and equality, the conservative will come down on the side of liberty. Clinton Rossiter wrote, "The preference for liberty over equality

lies at the root of the Conservative tradition."⁷⁴ A person's freedom should not be curtailed in any attempt to gain equality. However, as we have seen, freedom for many conservatives does not mean the right to do whatever one pleases, but the freedom to submit to law, to submit to authority. So, the conservative is anti-egalitarian. This belief in inequality also has had the tendency of making the conservative less receptive than the liberal of democracy, which is, after all, political equality.

Closely linked with the conservative belief in a natural inequality and distrust of democracy is the conservative's belief in some sort of aristocracy. Whether it is Burke's landed gentry, John Adams' natural aristocracy, Carlyle's "heroes," Viereck's "aristocratic spirit," or the Darwinian American business elite of the Gilded Age, conservatives have believed in some sort of aristocracy. Basically distrustful of the masses, and believing that people are not equal, conservatives have believed that some people are better able to govern and run society than are others. They have differed on who should constitute this aristocracy but they have almost universally believed in an aristocracy.

Thirdly, the conservative generally exhibits a belief in the sanctity of private property. Burke wrote that men

⁷⁴Rossiter, p. 24.

"have a right to the fruits of their industry and to the means of making their industry fruitful."⁷⁵ He felt that property was an indispensable factor in perpetuating society, and most conservatives following him have shared this or similar beliefs.⁷⁶

Fourthly, conservatism is usually characterized by a skepticism toward the idea of progress, toward the idea that social change can bring progress, that the world can be made better by changing external institutions. Rossiter has said that the conservative is committed to the "discriminating" defense of the social order. He is not against all change, but insists that change should be "surefooted and respectful of the past." He goes on to say of the conservative, "his natural preferences are for stability over change, continuity over experiment, the past over the future."⁷⁷ In the same vein Noel O'Sullivan wrote, "Conservatism as an ideology . . . is characterized . . . by opposition to the idea of total or radical change, and not by the absurd idea of opposition to change as such, or by any commitment to preserving all existing institutions."⁷⁸ So, the conservative places high value on stability and is

⁷⁵Burke, Reflections, p. 67.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁷⁷Rossiter, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁸Noel O'Sullivan, Conservatism (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 9.

not against all change, but believes that change should be gradual and in accordance with tradition. However, he is adamantly against radical change. In accordance with his belief in stability, the conservative places high value on submission to authority, for through submission to authority, order and stability are maintained.

Fifthly, the conservative often exhibits a reverence of tradition, of the past, of old and established institutions, the wisdom of the ages. He possesses what is called an "organic" view of society, that is, the conservative sees society as a "living organism with roots deep in the past."⁷⁹ For Burke, what differentiated the English Revolution of 1688, which he favored, from the French Revolution, which he detested, was that the English Revolution was made to "preserve our ancient, indisputable laws and liberties . . . ," whereas, the French Revolution featured a radical break with the past.⁸⁰ He went on to say that all the reforms the English has made, up to that time, had "proceeded upon the principle of reverence to antiquity. . . ."⁸¹ This was not the case with the French Revolution. For Burke, society could not be based on reason, for reason was limited as Hume had shown. So, society must be based

⁷⁹Rossiter, p. 27.

⁸⁰Burke, pp. 35, 39-42.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

on prescription, tradition, custom.⁸² Thus, a respect for tradition is a key component of the conservative ideology.

Sixthly, as exemplified by Burke, conservatives have generally put less faith in reason as the basis for society, or as a solver of problems than have liberals. As we have said, early conservatism began as a revolt against the idea that man, using his rationality could construct a new social order. Some, like Burke and De Maistre, were militantly anti-rationalist, others, like Meyer and Hayek have been less so.

Usually, for the conservative, there is the belief in some sort of transcendence, some sort of divinity. Consequently, religion usually plays a crucial role in conservatism. Rossiter has called religious feeling, "The mortar that holds together the mosaic of conservatism. . . ."⁸³ For the conservative, "Society, government, family, church--all are divine or divinely willed."⁸⁴ M. Stanton Evans wrote, "The conservative believes ours is a God-centered, and therefore an ordered universe; that man's purpose is to shape his life to the patterns of order proceeding from the Divine center of life. . . ."⁸⁵

⁸²Ibid., pp. 95-102; Cobban, pp. 75-82; Sabine, p. 607.

⁸³Rossiter, p. 43.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 43.

⁸⁵M. Stanton Evans, "Techniques and Circumstances" in the National Review, Vol. 12 (Jan. 30, 1962), p. 58.

Meyer wrote, "the Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man, which is the foundation of Western civilization, is always and everywhere what conservatives strive to conserve."⁸⁶ And Burke said, "religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort."⁸⁷ He went on to say that "man is by his constitution a religious animal" and that atheism is against all our reason and instincts.⁸⁸

It is interesting to note that revivals of conservatism usually accompany religious revivals. This may be because religion has often been viewed as a force for stability, a force for authority and order. Indeed, many conservatives who were not religious personally have supported religion for utilitarian reasons, because of its role in fostering authority. As we have seen, the French conservatives, de Maistre, Barres, and Maurras, were not personally religious, but were staunch supporters of the Church because it was an authoritative institution, a force of stability.⁸⁹

Although conservatives have not been personally religious, however, few conservatives have been militantly non-religious. Max Eastman and Ayn Rand are sometimes mentioned as conservatives who were strongly anti-religious.

⁸⁶ Frank S. Meyer, "The Separation of Powers" in the National Review, Vol. 12 (Jan. 30, 1962), p. 59.

⁸⁷ Burke, pp. 102-103. ⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁹ Soltau, pp. 16-24, 367-395.

However, Eastman was once a radical leftist and even after being accepted by the American conservative movement could perhaps be classified as a neo-classical liberal with the classical liberal's lack of enthusiasm for religion, with its absolute, non-empirical truths. His militant atheism eventually caused him to break with the National Review. Similarly, Ayn Rand was "read out" of the conservative movement by the National Review, partly because of her atheism. Therefore, we see that although many conservatives are not overly religious, few have been militantly anti-religious, and these few have been on the fringes of the conservative movement.⁹⁰

What about liberals? Certainly some of them are as deeply religious as some conservatives. The distinction here seems to be that most conservative thinkers tend to lean toward the Catholic and Anglican churches, older, established churches steeped in tradition.⁹¹ Of course, there are liberal Anglicans and Catholics but conservatives

⁹⁰William F. Buckley, Jr., "Notes Towards an Empirical Definition of Conservatism" in What Is Conservatism?, Frank S. Meyer, ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), pp. 222-223; Ibid., p. 214; Nash, pp. 156-158; Whitaker Chambers, "Big Sister Is Watching You," in the National Review, Vol. 4 (Dec. 28, 1957), pp. 594-596; Kirk to Editor, National Review, Vol. 5 (Feb. 1, 1958), p. 118; Garry Wills, "But Is Ayn Rand Conservative?," in the National Review, Vol. 8 (Feb. 27, 1960), p. 139.

⁹¹Nash, pp. 80, 145, 149; Rossiter, pp. 44, 209.

seem to have a particular affinity toward these denominations. Many of the most deeply religious liberal activists--like Martin Luther King, William Lloyd Garrison, and the Populists--were Protestants, Protestantism having more of a history of rebellion against authority. Also, conservatives in their religiosity have been more darkly pessimistic about man's nature than have liberals. This brings us to our final and perhaps most significant characteristic of conservatism.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, conservatives have usually exhibited a negative view of the nature of man. Man is tainted with evil, an evil that may be blunted, or contained, but never eradicated. Many conservatives use the religious term, "original sin," to describe man's nature. Russell Kirk talked of human nature as being "irremediably flawed."⁹² Rossiter said, "Man's nature is essentially immutable, and the immutable strain is one of deep-seated wickedness."⁹³ He added, "Those who are Christian, and most Conservatives are, prefer to call the motivation for iniquitous and irrational behavior by its proper name: Original Sin."⁹⁴ Of conservatism, Frank Meyer wrote, "it rejects absolutely the idea that society or men generally

⁹²Russell Kirk, "Prescription, Authority, and Ordered Freedom," in What Is Conservatism?, Meyer, ed., pp. 24-25.

⁹³Rossiter, p. 21.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 21.

are perfectible."⁹⁵ Indeed, Noel O'Sullivan has defined conservatism simply as a "limited style of politics based upon the idea of imperfection."⁹⁶ Therefore, we see an indication of the conservative belief in the imperfectibility of man, and of the significance of this belief. As mentioned above, this may be the most important tenet of conservatism, for many of the other characteristics of conservatism spring from this belief. It is this negative view of man's nature that makes the conservative skeptical of the possibilities of progress through altering external institutions, skeptical of schemes to increase equality, skeptical of democracy and the wisdom of the masses, and skeptical of reason. Conservatism is an ideology permeated by a deep sense of pessimism. Due to the immutable evil in man's nature, things cannot be made appreciably better, but, they can become worse. So, society must proceed with caution. As O'Sullivan has noted, libertarians and traditionalists may disagree on certain points of conservatism, but they both agree on imperfection--with the traditionalists emphasizing the imperfection of the individual while libertarians emphasize the imperfection of the state.⁹⁷ Even the conservative's belief in an aristocracy is related

⁹⁵Frank S. Meyer, "Conservatism," in Left, Right, and Center, Robert A. Goldwin, ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965), p. 6.

⁹⁶O'Sullivan, p. 43.

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 22-31.

to this belief in imperfectibility, for aristocrats, though also imperfect, are people who through some natural or acquired attribute can put some constraints on their evil natures. Thus, we see the overriding importance of the conservative tenet of the imperfectibility of man, its pessimism concerning man's evil nature. Having said this, we complete our survey of what seems to be the basic characteristics of conservatism.

In our definition you may notice the absence of something usually included in such definitions of conservatism--a belief in the primacy of community. It has been left out of our definition because a substantial number of conservatives are individualist and do not accept the primacy of community. As we have seen, this is particularly true of American conservatives. A belief in the primacy of community is a prominent feature of European conservatism, but not American conservatism; therefore, it was deleted from our definition.

Although we have said something of liberalism in connection with our discussion of the historical background of conservatism, it seems necessary to say more before we get into our discussion of Peter Viereck and the new conservatism, given the dominance of liberalism in America, and the accusation from certain conservatives that Viereck is a liberal.

Liberalism

Liberalism, too, is a fragmented ideology; however, it does not seem to have suffered from the degree of fragmentation that conservatism has. The Lockean liberalism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is somewhat different from contemporary liberalism; however, we can discern certain generalities.

Liberalism is an ideology characterized by a belief in individualism, the primacy of the individual. The liberal puts much more faith in reason than the conservative; therefore, puts less faith in the idea of transcendental, or universal absolutes. The liberal also holds a more optimistic view of man's nature than does the conservative. To the liberal, the individual is a rational being, and should be free to pursue his goals rationally, without as much outside interference as possible. Therefore, for the liberal individual freedom is important. Today, this belief in individual freedom seems to manifest itself most as a concern for civil liberties, but liberals are also concerned about economic freedom. This concern with economic freedom was more intense among liberals in Locke's time. Government is needed to protect individual freedom and should be limited in order not to threaten it. Society will progress when individuals are left free to rationally

pursue their individual goals. So, liberals place more emphasis on the idea of progress than do conservatives, an important distinction we shall explore in greater detail later.⁹⁸

According to liberalism, individuals have certain natural rights and perhaps the most important of these natural rights is the right of private property. The individual should be free to acquire and use his property in any way he sees fit and government is not to interfere with this right. Indeed, the purpose of government is to protect this right. Thus, the liberal and the conservative agree on the sanctity of private property. However, unlike conservatives, a key value in the liberal ideology is the concept of equality. The liberal believes that all men are basically equal. This is not a belief in economic or social equality. It is not a belief that wealth should be redistributed so that everyone has an equal portion, for this could not be done without interfering with private property rights. This equality has rather manifested itself as a belief in legal equality and civil liberties, political equality, i.e., democracy, and equality of opportunity. By equality of opportunity we mean that the liberal believes that each individual should have an equal chance to compete, pursue wealth and acquire property. We see here

⁹⁸Dolbeare and Dolbeare, pp. 58-66.

that liberalism has been closely aligned with capitalism. Indeed, Kenneth and Patricia Dolbeare have said that the two are interdependent.⁹⁹

Now, as the Dolbeares have pointed out, there is a built-in tension in liberalism between the idea of equality and the right to private property, or liberty. Sometimes, the rights of some to retain what they have obtained through the competitive market conflicts with someone else's right to compete on an equal basis. The result is that efforts to gain true equality of opportunity result in reducing someone else's property rights. Liberals have tried to juggle these conflicting values with most American "liberals" coming down on the side of equality of opportunity, although not disavowing the right of private property.¹⁰⁰

As mentioned previously, liberalism is characterized by a belief in the natural goodness of man. Man is not ineradicably evil, he can be made better through changing external institutions. Man is not basically evil, the evil in the world comes from society. Change society and you can improve man. Thus, the liberal does not fear change; he embraces it, although he, like the conservative, would be opposed to overly radical change. But, he does not

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 17, 58-60.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 60.

place as much importance on stability as does the conservative. Of the liberal, Rossiter said, "he will choose change over stability, experiment over continuity, the future over the past. In short, he is optimistic rather than pessimistic about the possibilities of reform."¹⁰¹ So, the liberal places greater belief in the idea of progress. For him, change often means progress. As mentioned before, this optimism about man and progress may be the crucial difference between liberalism and conservatism.

Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, liberalism seems to have sacrificed the idea of limited government to the idea of progress. With the tremendous success in industrial and technological productivity, liberals have come to see a real possibility in providing all people with true equality of opportunity. They have enlisted government in this effort. So, once liberals perceived government as the enemy of the individual but with what they see as the more menacing threat of vast corporations, they have come to see government as a potential ally in the effort to help achieve equality of opportunity. Some liberals want more government intervention than others. The Dolbeares call these people "reform liberals." J. K. Galbreath would be among this group.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Dolbeare and Dolbeare, pp. 80-105.

So, we see that although it, too, suffers from cleavages, we can identify certain general characteristics of liberalism.

Summary and Conclusion

Hopefully, this chapter has given us a better understanding of conservatism, and a background against which to look at Peter Viereck. We have seen how conservatism has developed and how it has developed differently according to location. Conservatism emerged after the French Revolution as a reaction against the new ideas of the eighteenth century, the ideas of individualism, secularism, industrialism, and rationalism. It was the ideology of the nobility, the Church, and the upper-middle classes as they battled the growing business and commercial interests, the forces of liberalism. We have seen how conservatism became fragmented in the twentieth century as a result of the development of a technocratic society, and how around the turn of this century many conservatives began to take up a position approximating that of classical liberalism, a position stressing individual freedom and state non-intervention in the economy. We have seen how by the 1930s conservatism was a troubled movement, beset by fragmentation and forced into a position of either accepting more and more liberal principles or appearing reactionary. However, as we have

seen, conservatism began to have a rebirth after World War II. In the next chapter we shall look closely at one branch of this conservative renaissance--Peter Viereck and the new conservatism.

CHAPTER II

PETER VIERECK AND THE NEW CONSERVATISM

Viereck's Life and Intellectual Roots

Peter Viereck was born in New York City on August 5, 1916, the first child of Margaret and George Sylvester Viereck. His father was a German immigrant, and his maternal great-grandfather had been exiled to America from Germany in the 1840s. So, Viereck was of German descent on both sides of his family. In surveying his life, it is hardly surprising that Viereck became a political philosopher and man of letters, for he was from a literary family. His great-aunt, Frau Erna Schmidt-Viereck was an author, and his grandfather, Louis Viereck, was a former member of the Reichstag, a political exile, and a writer on educational matters. Most importantly, however, Viereck's father was a poet, author, journalist, and political activist. It was probably in response to his father's activism that Viereck became involved in political issues.¹

George Sylvester Viereck was a poet of some note in the early twentieth century. He was considered to be an

¹Henault, pp. 23, 26.

"enfant terrible" whose poetry had an erotic style. In addition to poetry, he also wrote plays, fiction, newspaper stories, and biographies. George Viereck maintained extremely close ties with his native Germany, his parents still residing there. During and between both World Wars he was a staunch defender of Germany. In 1914 he founded The Fatherland, an ardently pro-German magazine. His pro-German sentiments brought him much abuse and threats of violence, as well as ostracism from many publishers and certain literary circles. In the late 1930s, George Viereck continued to be sympathetic toward Germany, regarding the stories of Nazi concentration camps and atrocities as mere propaganda. An ardent isolationist, Viereck was finally arrested for his writing and propaganda activities, indicted, and tried three times. He later served part of a prison term and was paroled in 1947.²

The young Peter Viereck disagreed with his father's political views, and it was in rebelling against these views that he was thrust into the political sphere. He became politically active in the 1930s while a Harvard student, joining a campus affiliate of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies--a group that opposed the loose isolationist organization of which his father was a member. He wrote anti-Nazi newspaper and magazine articles. His doctoral dissertation, which was published as Metapolitics:

²Ibid., pp. 23-26.

From Romantics to Hitler (1941), was a highly critical study of the origins of Nazi thought.³ In 1943, Viereck was drafted into the army and served in Africa and Italy. His brother, George Sylvester Viereck, Jr., was killed in action at Anzio.⁴ Thus, Peter Viereck first became involved in politics as a reaction against his father's isolationist, pro-German political views, and young Viereck's burgeoning anti-totalitarianism was undoubtedly solidified by his war experiences.

Peter Viereck received his doctorate in history from Harvard in 1942, having studied under Crane Brinton. After the war, he taught history at the United States Army University in Florence, Italy. Upon returning to the United States he taught history and German literature at Harvard, and was a visiting lecturer in Russian history at Smith College. In 1948 he became associate professor of history at Mount Holyoke College, and in 1955 he received a full professorship. He still teaches at Mount Holyoke. Viereck has also lectured at Oxford and at the University of Florence, where he was a Fulbright professor and the first occupant of a newly founded chair in American poetry and civilization.⁵

³Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁴Ibid., p. 13.

⁵Ibid., pp. 13-14.

Viereck returned from the war in Europe with a "suitcase full of poems," and in 1948 published his first volume of poems, Terror and Decorum, for which he received the 1949 Pulitzer Prize in poetry.⁶ He has subsequently published five volumes of poetry and Applewood, a new volume of poetry is due to be published soon. His poems have appeared in various magazines and literary journals.

In 1949 Viereck's second prose book, Conservatism Revisited, was published. Along with his 1940 article, "But -- I'm a Conservative!", this book is considered to have signaled the birth of the new conservatism.⁷ In addition to these, Viereck has written several other prose works, including books and articles on subjects ranging from politics and cultural criticism, to reviews and literary criticism. Two of his most important prose books are Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals (1953) and The Unadjusted Man (1956). Shame and Glory was critical of those liberal intellectuals who were "soft" on communism, and The Unadjusted Man attacked the mindless conformism of modern mass man. All three of these prose books have been

⁶Ibid., p. 14; Peter Viereck, "Tribute to Theodore Spencer," in Epoch, Vol. 2 (Winter 1949), p. 156.

⁷Nash, p. 67; Philip C. Chapman, "The New Conservatism, Cultural Criticism v. Political Philosophy," in the Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 75 (March 1960), p. 17.

reissued, with additional material having been added to Shame and Glory and Conservatism Revisited.⁸

In his philosophy, which is expressed in both prose and poetic works, Viereck is greatly indebted to the European school of conservative thought, to people like Burke, Coleridge, Disraeli, Winston Churchill, and particularly Metternich, who is the hero of Conservatism Revisited. Indeed, Viereck seems most influenced by Burke and the British tradition of conservatism, considering his reverence of tradition and his flexibility on social reform. Therefore, it seems somewhat odd that he should choose Metternich as his hero, a man usually considered very reactionary and autocratic--characteristics diametrically opposed to the theme and tenor of Viereck's thought. Viereck goes through great pains to show that Metternich is a Burkean-style conservative, a link in the chain between Burke and Disraeli, and although reactionary in many aspects, not as rigid and authoritarian as is generally believed.⁹ Why go through

⁸ Peter Viereck, Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978); Peter Viereck, The Unadjusted Man: Reflections on the Distinction Between Conserving and Conforming (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Peter Viereck, Conservatism Revisited and the New Conservatism: What Went Wrong? (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978).

⁹ Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 83-85; Peter Viereck, "New Views on Metternich," in The Reviewer of Politics, Vol. 13, (April 1951), pp. 211, 217.

all of this? Why not just choose Burke? Viereck seems to have chosen Metternich, more than anything, because the world situation in 1815, at Metternich's time, seemed to parallel the world situation in 1949, the time Conservatism Revisited was written. In 1949, as in 1815, the West was in crises, coming out of a period of war and threatened by the forces of nationalism. In the mid-nineteenth century the threat was from German nationalism, in the mid-twentieth century it was from Russian communist nationalism. A pervasive fear of communist totalitarianism is outstanding in Viereck's thought. Viereck saw Metternich's Concert of Europe as the ancestor to the union the post-war West was attempting to form against the Soviets. The purpose of both unions was the same: a cosmopolitan Europe, united in peace. Metternich had been successful in forging his unified peace. Viereck seemed to think that the West, in general, and conservatives particularly could learn from Metternich's example. So, Viereck seemed to seize upon Metternich because he thought Metternich spoke to the world situation in 1941.¹⁰ In the 1960s, when he seemed to feel that the Soviet threat had diminished, Viereck said that he had put too much emphasis on Metternich, which indeed he had, and sought to rectify

¹⁰Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. xi.

this in his revised edition of Conservatism Revisited.¹¹

Also among Europeans, Viereck was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly his criticism of the tyrannical possibilities of mass society.¹²

Despite Viereck's affinity toward European conservatism, Viereck did have intellectual ancestors in America. Here, he seems to have been particularly influenced by John Adams, such literary figures as Melville, Hawthorne, Henry Adams, and the new humanist, Irving Babbitt.¹³ Viereck's emphasis on self-control and the conservative exercising "inner restraints" seem to owe much to Babbitt, as do Viereck's belief that higher education should be reserved for an elite of talent. Also, Viereck's "unadjusted man," which we shall talk about later, bears a great resemblance to Babbitt's "humanist." Viereck thought that John Adams was one of America's most outstanding examples of a Burkean conservatism. He saw a certain traditionalism in Adams, but what he seemed to admire most in Adams was his stand against direct democracy and for a natural aristocracy

¹¹Peter Viereck, Conservatism Revisited: The New Conservatism, What Went Wrong?, revised and enlarged edition (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 16.

¹²Peter Viereck, The Unadjusted Man: A New Hero for Americans (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956), pp. 54-62.

¹³Ibid., pp. 26-27.

to talent, an aristocracy imbued with a sense of noblesse oblige. What Viereck liked in Melville, Hawthorne, and Henry Adams was their anti-commercialism and their sense of pessimism about the nature of man and about the possibilities of progress. All of these men, it may be remembered, were exemplars of a European-style conservatism in America. Therefore, Viereck is a contemporary figure in this tradition of European-style conservatism in America. Among contemporary scholars, Viereck seems to have been influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, particularly his belief in original sin and the innate depravity of man.¹⁴

The publication of Conservatism Revisited in 1949 established Viereck as the father of the new conservatism and one of its leading spokesmen. Indeed, George Nash has said that the term, "new conservatism" was, to a considerable degree, the creation of Peter Viereck.¹⁵ Viereck's book was the first post-war book to unabashedly use the term, "conservative" in its title, and it was the first of a spate of books and articles expressing a self-conscious conservative viewpoint.¹⁶ It became clear, as the 1950s approached, that a conservative revival was under way and that the new conservatism was an integral part of this revival.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 40-41, 48-52, 130-131.

¹⁵Nash, p. 76.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 68.

Beliefs of the New Conservatism

The new conservatism was the traditionalist branch of the post-war conservative revival. Born in the late 1940s, it reached its zenith around the middle of the next decade and receded in the 1960s. In addition to Viereck, the new conservatism included such names as Russell Kirk, Clinton Rossiter, John Hallowell, Daniel Boorstin, Thomas I. Cook, August Hecksher, Erik v. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Robert Nisbet, and T. S. Eliot. Sometimes the Southern Agrarians--Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and Richard Weaver--are included in the new conservative fold, as well as such people as Eric Voegelin, Leo Strauss, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Walter Lippman. The new conservatism was born out of an attempt to make sense of the cataclysm known as World War II, the world that had spawned it, and the world it had spawned, a world numbed by a devastating world war, alarmed by the spread of repressive totalitarian regimes, and frightened by the emergence of a terrible new destructive force--the atomic bomb. The movement was born and fueled out of a sense of disillusionment with socialism, fascism, and other utopian and collectivist schemes. It was a reaction against totalitarianism and against what many people saw as the moral relativism and rootless atomism of modern mass society, the society into which liberalism had degenerated. In short, the new conservatism had its

beginnings in a world that had seen its high hopes of continuous progress shattered by two world wars, unspeakable death and destruction, repression, and the lingering threat of world decimation.¹⁷

It was repulsed by a world that was rich materially but had been drained of its spirituality, a world bereft of spiritual values. Therefore, uppermost with the new conservatism was the call for a return to traditional Western values, a return to traditional religious and ethical absolutes. Indeed, Peter Viereck has written that the new conservatism may be defined as "the rediscovery of values."¹⁸ The values which the new conservatives were seeking to recover were spiritual values, not material values. John H. Hallowell wrote, "The political and economic crises from which the world suffers are not causes but symptoms of a crises even more profound--a spiritual crises within the soul of man."¹⁹ They were idealists rather than materialists. They believed that the world was fueled by intangible ideas rather than concrete matter. Indeed, for them, the present malaise of Western civilization was caused by

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 36-83.

¹⁸ Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 245.

¹⁹ John Hamilton Hallowell, Main Currents in Modern Political Thought (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1950), p. 618.

an excess of materialism, and a view of society based on the material rather than the spiritual. What the new conservatives wanted to say, as illustrated by the title of Richard Weaver's book was that, Ideas Have Consequences.

The new conservatives were not only anti-materialist on a high, philosophical level, they were anti-materialists on a more basic level in that they felt that material things such as money or consumer goods had been placed on a pedestal in modern society. They had come to supersede ideas and spirituality in importance. People had come to forfeit everything in the quest for material goods. Thus, when new conservatives rail against materialism, this is usually what they mean. In this study when we talk about their anti-materialist nature, this is what we will be talking about, their attack on the aggrandizement of things.

Due to their fierce anti-materialism, the new conservatives showed little interest in economics or economic freedom. This brought them into conflict with the libertarian and fusionist wings of the conservative movement. George Nash wrote that a "considerable" distance existed between libertarians and traditionalists.

While libertarians tended to emphasize economic arguments against the State, the new conservatives were more concerned with what they saw as the ethical and spiritual causes and consequences of Levithan. On the whole, the new conservatives were little interested in economics--particularly what they regarded as abstract and doctrinaire economics. Instead,

they were fundamentally social and cultural critics, for whom conservatism meant the restoration of values, not the preservation of material gains.²⁰

He went on to say, "In its origins, the new conservatism was primarily a philosophic, religious, literary, and aesthetic--not an economic phenomenon."²¹ Indeed, the new conservatives were openly critical of neo-classical liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism, attacking them as blindly materialistic and condemning them, along with Marxism, as a form of economic determinism. Philip Chapman wrote that the new conservatives "had almost as much contempt for the capitalist business elite and its laissez-faire ideologists as they had for their radical opponents."²² In describing which characteristics would embody the new conservative Clinton Rossiter said, "Above all, he will avoid centering his attention on economic man and economic affairs . . . he will rise above the inverted Marxism of those who insist that 'the free market' is 'the basic institution of a liberal society.'"²³ Peter Viereck wrote that, "Economics, economic determinism, and their non-existent Economic Man are superannuated Marxist--and--Capitalist fads."²⁴ He also wrote, "Economism . . .

²⁰Nash, p. 82.

²¹Ibid., p. 82.

²²Chapman, p. 19.

²³Rossiter, p. 252.

²⁴Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 12.

whether capitalist or Marxist brand, is materialism deified."²⁵ And Russell Kirk declared, "Professor Ludwig von Mises does not seem to differ much in his postulates about the nature of man from the view of modern orthodox Marxists: both are children of Jeremy Bentham."²⁶ Thus, new conservatives have been quite vehement in disassociating themselves from libertarians, and libertarians and sometimes fusionists have been just as eager to disassociate themselves from, and to criticize the new conservatives. Libertarian, Ronald Hamowy declared that classical liberalism and conservatism were "irreconcilably at odds."²⁷ Fusionist, Frank Meyer, was very critical of the new conservatism and constantly at odds with Russell Kirk.²⁸ He attacked the new conservatism for its lack of concern for individual freedom, concluding that, "The new conservatism, stripped to its pretensions, is, sad to say, but another guise for the collectivist spirit of the age."²⁹

²⁵Peter Viereck, "But -- I'm a Conservative!," in the Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 165 (April 1940), p. 11.

²⁶Russell Kirk, "Ideology and Political Economy," in America, Vol. 96 (Jan. 5, 1957), p. 390.

²⁷Ronald Hamowy, "Liberalism and Neo-Conservatism: Is a Synthesis Possible?," in Modern Age (Fall 1964), p. 350.

²⁸Nash, pp. 159-160; Meyer, "Collectivism Rebaptized," pp. 559-562.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 562.

The new conservatives were preponderantly men of letters rather than social scientists. Indeed, they were critical of modern social science, with its dependence on pragmatism, positivism, and behavioralism. And, of course, the fact that modern social science claimed to be "value free" made it more abominable to them. Empirical social science had contributed greatly to the moral relativism of the age and thus, to the decline of values.³⁰

Being dominated by men of letters, the new conservatism was not strictly a political movement. Indeed, it was basically a social and cultural movement. Peter Viereck has said that the new conservatism was first and foremost a cultural movement, then a political one.³¹ Philip Chapman wrote of the new conservatism, "As cultural critics, as literary men, as poets, novelists and doctors of literature, their interest in political theory was slight. . . ."³²

³⁰Ralph L. Ketcham, "The Revival of Tradition and Conservatism in America," in the Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, Vol. 41 (Autumn 1955), p. 426; Nash, pp. 43-51; John H. Hallowell, "Politics and Ethics," in the American Political Science Review, Vol. 38 (August 1944), pp. 639-655; Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 9-323; Eric Voegelin, The New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 1-190.

³¹Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 248.

³²Chapman, pp. 24-25.

As we have mentioned, conservative revivals often accompany religious revivals. During the 1950s there was a religious revival in America. This revival manifested itself in higher church attendance, as well as with the popularity, at the mass level, of Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, and at the intellectual level of Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.³³ It was no accident that the new conservatism began to flourish at this time of religious revivalism, for religion played a vital role in the new conservatism. Franklyn Haiman wrote,

Whether he be concerned with raising children or teaching them; whether he be discussing political leadership, or psychiatry, the New Conservative usually operates from a religious base. He tends to believe with Toynbee and Sorokin that the absence of strong religious institutions is the earmark of a decadent civilization.³⁴

Russell Kirk wrote that, "Political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems."³⁵ For John H. Hallowell, the cause of the crises in post-war Western civilization was simple, it was, "the culmination of modern man's attempt to deny the existence of a transcendent or spiritual reality and of his progressive failure to find meaning

³³Ketcham, p. 434; Nash, pp. 58-59.

³⁴Franklyn S. Haiman, "A New Look at the New Conservatism," in the Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, Vol. 41 (Autumn 1955), p. 447.

³⁵Kirk, The Conservative Mind, p. 7.

and salvation in some wholly immanent conception of reality."³⁶ What was the solution? "Only through a return to faith in God, as God revealed Himself to man in Jesus Christ, can modern man and his society find redemption from this tyranny of evil."³⁷ And Clinton Rossiter thundered,

the Christian religion remains the most powerful of our traditions, the Christian churches the most esteemed of our inherited institutions. No man who thinks of himself as a conservative can stand idly by and watch America drift away from Christianity.³⁸

In emphasizing the importance of religion, the new conservatives tended to identify most with the older, established Christian churches, such as, the Anglican Church, and the Catholic Church, hierarchically structured churches, steeped in tradition.³⁹

Closely linked with this religiosity, for the new conservatives, was a pervasive pessimism about the nature of man. They put great stress on the doctrine of original sin. Liberalism was failing because of its naivete concerning man's nature, its belief in progress and the perfectibility of society.⁴⁰ In the wake of World War II and the

³⁶Hallowell, Main Currents, p. 651.

³⁷Ibid., p. 651.

³⁸Rossiter, p. 282.

³⁹Nash, pp. 60-61, 80.

⁴⁰Daniel Aaron, "Conservatism, Old and New," in the American Quarterly, Vol. 6 (Summer 1954), p. 106; Stuart Gerry Brown, "Democracy, the New Conservatism, and the

revelations of the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, people seemed to have become more acutely aware of the potential for evil in man. Even liberals, like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., seemed to place more emphasis on the notion of original sin. This awareness of evil, along with an uncertainty about the future, in the shadow of the atomic bomb, may also account for the rise in religiosity at this time.⁴¹

The new conservatives were severe critics of modern mass society, what they saw as rootless, alienated, mass man. They were cultural and political elitists. As cultural elitists, they attacked the conformity of mass culture. Twentieth century man had lost his individuality by unthinkingly going along with fads and popular tastes. He had forfeited his individuality in an effort to be like everyone else, like a sheep seeking to be an indistinguishable part of the herd. In seeking not to be termed eccentric, he was seeking to conform to whatever society said was "normal" or in vogue. This mindless conformity and catering to the masses had led to a drain in creativity in the arts. The quality of

Liberal Tradition in America," in Ethics, Vol. 66 (Oct. 1955), p. 2; Ketcham, p. 426; Richard Weaver, "Up From Liberalism," in Modern Age, Vol. 3 (Winter 1958-1959), p. 28.

⁴¹Nash, pp. 58-61; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "From the Vital Center," in Directions in American Political Thought, Kenneth Dolbeare, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969), pp. 406-409.

higher education was deteriorating in order to cater to mass education. For the new conservatives, college should be more selective. As political elitists, they were critical of equality and mass democracy. The quest for equality and mass democracy had led to totalitarianism. The new conservatives were for government by elites.⁴²

Esmond Wright talked of the "Europeaness" of the new conservatism, and indeed, the movement did have a decidedly European orientation.⁴³ "The new conservatism is fed largely from Europe," wrote Daniel Aaron, "and differs markedly from most earlier American conservative pronouncements and programs. . . ."⁴⁴ For their inspiration, the new conservatives looked to the European conservative tradition of Burke, Coleridge, Metternich, Disraeli, and Churchill. Many new conservatives themselves, like Eric Voeglin, Leo Strauss, and Erik v. Kuehnelt-Leddihn, were European immigrants.⁴⁵ Viereck, as we have mentioned, was the son of a German immigrant. T. S. Eliot left his native America and became a British subject, and Russell Kirk had lived for a time in Europe.⁴⁶ George Nash has said that the

⁴²Nash, pp. 46-56; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 3-62.

⁴³Esmond Wright, "Radicals of the Right," in Political Quarterly, Vol. 27 (Oct.-Dec. 1956), p. 372.

⁴⁴Aaron, p. 100.

⁴⁵Nash, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 78, 196.

European orientation of the new conservatism may be due not only to the fact that many of its number were European immigrants but also to the fact that in attacking equality and democracy the new conservatives were attacking some of America's most cherished ideals. Thus, they could not appeal to the American political tradition, so, in their war against democracy and the common man they had to look toward Europe.⁴⁷

As is the case with conservatism generally, the new conservatism has also been plagued by disagreements within their movement. Connected with the affinity toward Europe, some new conservatives seem to have a pre-modern affinity, a characteristic which we said is common to traditionalist conservatism. In their attacks on the evils of industrial and post-industrial society, many new conservatives have often seemed to be yearning for a pre-modern, agrarian existence. Peter Viereck has been very critical of these new conservatives and what he has called their "rootless nostalgia for roots," that is, their romanticism, their yearning to recover something that has never existed, or could no longer exist in the modern age.⁴⁸ For him, this was not a viable form of conservatism but a reactionary

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴⁸ Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 97-109; Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, The New Conservatism: What Went Wrong?, pp. 123-157; Viereck, Shame and Glory, 2nd ed., pp. xiv-xx, 310-329.

form. Viereck explicitly accused the Southern Agrarians and Russell Kirk of this type of reactionary conservatism.⁴⁹

It is not difficult to see why Viereck was so critical of what he perceived as romantic tendencies in the new conservatism. We have mentioned that before World War II conservatism had fallen into disrepute and that the post-war conservative revival was, in large part, an attempt to restore faith in the conservative ideology among Americans. This search for viability, this effort to restore conservatism to a place of respectability in contemporary America, where it can be a practical alternative to liberalism is key to Viereck's thought. In large part, this is what he is trying to do, make conservatism a viable force in contemporary society. Therefore, these romantic tendencies were counterproductive to this effort, making conservatism seem impractical and archaic rather than a legitimate alternative to liberalism on the contemporary scene.

Also, when they entered the realm of practical politics new conservatives would sometime disagree. For example, Viereck, a Stevenson and Kennedy supporter, bitterly attacked Kirk for his support of Barry Goldwater. Viereck also felt that Kirk was not critical enough of McCarthyism.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised and enlarged edition, pp. 124-125.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 145-146.

It is difficult to explain why new conservatives disagreed in the realm of practical politics. Claes Ryn found Viereck's "uncompromising" attack on Kirk ambiguous and shallow.⁵¹ Perhaps the explanation for the disagreement stems again, at least partially, from the question of viability. In supporting the Republican Right of the early 1960s perhaps Viereck felt that Kirk and other new conservatives were being impractical, not helping to raise the esteem of conservatism in the eyes of the American people. This is hardly a ridiculous notion, considering the disastrous defeat of Goldwater in 1964. Also, it seems that perhaps new conservatives could agree on high philosophical levels, but that the concepts they used, such as "Judeo-Christian tradition" were so vague that they could not come to agreement on them in the realm of practical politics. Perhaps their concepts were not sufficiently concrete to allow for agreement in practical terms. Finally, perhaps the disagreements stem from the fact that by the mid-1960s much of the new conservative movement had become absorbed in the dominant fusionist branch of the American conservative movement. In the 1960s, Viereck expressed disgust at the fact that many times the term "new conservative" was

⁵¹ Claes G. Ryn, "Peter Viereck: Unadjusted Man of Ideas," in Political Science Reviewer, Vol. VIII (Fall 1977), p. 358.

then being applied to such people as Barry Goldwater.⁵²

In a few instances, as seemingly in the case of Kirk, fusionism and the new conservatism had merged. Whatever the reason, we see that although the new conservatism was basically a cohesive movement, it did have its cracks and fissures, particularly in the sphere of practical politics.

Neo-Conservatism

In concluding our brief survey of the new conservatism, it must be added that the new conservatism of Peter Viereck, Russell Kirk, et al. is not to be confused with the current neo-conservative movement exemplified by Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, et al. There are similarities. They are both primarily intellectual movements. They both speak of the primacy of ideas. Peter Steinfels writes, "If the rise of neoconservatism in our day means anything at all it is this: ideas matter. . . ." ⁵³ Both movements place great emphasis on social stability. They are both cultural critics rather than strictly political critics, both movements attacking the hedonism and moral relativism they see in modern society.⁵⁴ Both tend

⁵²Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised and enlarged edition, pp. 141, 148.

⁵³Peter Steinfels, "The Reasonable Right," in Esquire, Vol. 91, No. 3 (February 13, 1979), p. 24.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 27.

to have a more flexible attitude toward social change than traditional American conservatism. Neo-conservatism is a reaction against the student radicalism and New Leftism of the 1960s.⁵⁵ The new conservatism, as we have mentioned, had its roots in the World War II era. However, the two movements have a similarity in that they followed periods of upheaval in post-war America. Lastly, the two movements differ in that, though they have attacked libertarianism, the present-day neo-conservatives are not as sharply critical of modern-day capitalism as their predecessors. On the contrary, neo-conservatives have been defenders of corporate capitalism. Steinfels writes, "Whether by choice, or by happenstance, neoconservatives are in the process of providing corporate capitalism with the ideology that it has heretofore lacked."⁵⁶ Indeed, Peter Viereck, whose movement served as the forerunner of the current neo-conservative movement, has labeled the neo-conservatives "reactionaries."⁵⁷ So, the two movements do have their differences.

Viereck's disapproval of neo-conservatism is not surprising. Neo-conservatism is not substantially different from fusionism. There are subtle differences between

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 29.

⁵⁷Correspondence with Peter Viereck, August 13, 1979.

neo-conservatism and fusionism, but these are basically matters of style. Neo-conservatism is not as vehement in its defense of the free market economy as fusionism, nor does it talk about going back to a pre-1932. Yet, it is a staunch defender of the free market economy and a frequent critic of government intervention, particularly the government social programs of the 1960s, which neo-conservatives view as ineffective. It, like fusionism is for decentralized government, more of a role for state and local government and less of a role for the national government. The only thing new about neo-conservatism seems to be that it is fusionism in a slightly different guise. It has shed the old reactionary image of wanting to go back to a pre-1932 existence. It is also new in its newfound popularity, but other than that neo-conservatism and fusionism are barely distinguishable. Viereck's critique of neo-conservatism and fusionism are accordingly similar. He would praise neo-conservatism for getting away from attacking the New Deal. However, he would criticize them, as he has fusionists, for being too materialistic and putting too much emphasis on economics. He would attack neo-conservatives for not being critical enough of the excesses of liberal capitalism, its commercialism and materialism. And he would probably attack them for not being more amenable to social reform.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that the new conservatism was a traditionalist school of conservative thought, concerned mainly with a return to traditional, non-economic values. Peter Viereck was, to a large degree, its founder and leading exponent. The movement had its roots in the post-World War II era, a confused and shattered era. It was largely a reaction, indeed a revolt against modern mass society, and the post-industrial world. It was a revolt against equality, democracy, empiricism, positivism, materialism, secularism, and extreme individualism. In short, it was in revolt against the very foundations of modern liberal society. In its antecedents and its tendencies, it was a European-style conservatism, and for Peter Viereck an effort to create a viable form of conservatism in contemporary America. Peter Viereck's new conservatism is not to be confused with the current neo-conservatism movement. There are many similarities, but mainly they differ in that the current neo-conservative movement is a bigger defender of capitalism than Viereck's movement. Indeed, there is little difference between neo-conservatism and America's dominant fusionist conservatism.

Now that we have placed Viereck and the new conservatism in some sort of context, in the next chapter we shall take a closer look at the substance of Viereck's political philosophy.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN TO TRADITIONAL VALUES

In this chapter we will move from a general survey of the new conservatism to a more microscopic look at Peter Viereck's political thought. We shall explore what is perhaps the core of Viereck's thought, his quest for a return to traditional values.

Original Sin

Conservatism, as we have seen, has been called an "ideology of imperfection." Conservatives have exhibited a pessimistic view of human nature. This is especially true of the new conservatism. Viereck places great emphasis on man's imperfection, on the doctrine of original sin. Indeed, for Viereck, it is their conflicting views of human nature that most definitively separates liberals from conservatives.¹ It has been the idea of progress, the notion that man and society are perfectible, a notion extending back to Rousseau and the Enlightenment philosophers, that has led to the destruction of values and its concomitant evils--World War, totalitarianism, and the suppression of

¹Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 11.

freedom and individuality.² Viereck writes, "So long as people believe in the perfectibility of man, they will continue to use those freedom-destroying 'bad means' [totalitarianism] that promise the quickest short cut to this 'good end.'"³ He goes on to say,

The most blood-curdling crimes are done not by criminals but by perfectionists. Criminals normally stop killing when they attain their modest goal: loot. Perfectionists never stop killing because their goal is never attainable: the ideal society.⁴

He calls earth an "uninhabitable" planet, "with a built-in cellar of error, death, decay." It matters not, "if frail children scrawl blueprints of progress on the ceiling," this will not,

conjure away the reality of the cellar. . . . Just as our planet is uninhabitable, so our society is indefensible, inately unjust, world without end. Yet somehow we must live within the unbearable but inescapable framework of this uninhabitable planet, this indefensible social order. To act as if there were no such things as error, death, decay, will not abolish but redouble their unbearableness.⁵

Viereck's ideas on original sin and his pervasive pessimism come out just as graphically, if not more so, in his poetry. His poem, "Mary, Mary" is a discourse on original sin:

Mary, long by Boss's kisses bored,
Quit desk and stole his yacht and jumped aboard.
Her lamb took she, for purer were his kisses.
Compass and pistol took she in her purse.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 302.

⁴ Ibid., p. 303.

⁵ Ibid., p. 303.

Free sailed she north to eat new freedom up.
 And her helped ocean and grew calm and snored.
 But when with bleating chum she cuddled up,
 Unleashed His typhoons Boss; therein no bliss is
 Then knew she--by four signs--whose jig was up:

Her buoyed the life-preserver down, not up;
 True was the pistol's aim, but in reverse;
 The compass steered, but only toward abysses;
 The little lamb nipped Mary's thighs and roared.⁶

The poem is an allegory. Mary, the bored private secretary, symbolizes humanity. The Boss symbolizes God. Mary's theft of the yacht and her flight north (the direction traditionally associated with the devil) symbolizes man's rebelliousness, his supposed drive toward perfectibility, his attempt to, in effect, be God. The lamb has been interpreted to be humanity's original state of innocence, which revealed its true nature in the last line when it "nipped Mary's thigh and roared," behavior atypical of a gentle lamb. The lamb has also been interpreted to be the devil, which again explains his bad temperament and the fact that it was only after Mary "cuddled up" with her "bleating chum" that the Boss unleashed His typhoons. At any rate, Mary's voyage, her attempt to flee God, to find perfection, to be God, ends in failure as everything goes wrong.⁷ For Viereck, this is the lesson for modern society. Man, and thus, society, are

⁶Peter Viereck, New and Selected Poems, 1932-1967 (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), p. 56.

⁷Henault, pp. 57-58; Richard Benton, Explicator, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1961), Explication 30.

not perfectible, and any attempt to make it so can only lead to tragedy.

According to Viereck, a further illustration of the possible shape of this tragedy for the individual, and implicitly, for society, can be seen in the lives of Vachel Lindsay and Hart Crane. In a brilliant article on these two American poets, Viereck speculates on how their naive optimism concerning human nature helped contribute to their self-destruction. In their poetry, both Crane and Lindsay expressed an optimistic view of human nature and a belief in boundless material progress. However, in the early 1930s, both of their lives ended in suicide. Viereck posits that with their tremendous optimism and faith in progress both poets tried at first to embrace industrialism. However, the loss of individuality stemming from modern mechanization was just too much for them to affirm. Finally, at the height of the Great Depression, when America's boundless material progress seemed to have come to an abrupt end, they became disillusioned and committed suicide--Lindsay in 1931 and Crane one year later.⁸

⁸Peter Viereck, "The Crack-Up of American Optimism: Vachel Lindsay, the Dante of the Fundamentalists," in Modern Age, Vol. 4 (Summer 1960), pp. 269-284.

Traditional Values

Therefore, given the pervasive strain of evil inherent in human nature, something is needed to act as a restraint on these evil tendencies. For Viereck, traditional values have provided the inner restraints necessary to blunt man's capacity toward evil. Authority and order can be maintained through the inner restraints of an adherence to traditional values rather than the external restraints of the state. Values, or ethics, act as a civilizing force in society.

Moreover, according to Viereck, these values must be rooted in tradition. They must have withstood the test of time, the wisdom of the ages. They must be traditional values. Not only values, but institutions and society generally should be based on concrete tradition, concrete historical experiences, not on abstract, a priori reasoning. In fact, for Viereck, one of the key differences between true conservatism and liberalism is that conservatism "embodies concrete traditions," whereas liberalism places its dependence on abstract reasoning.⁹ He writes, "true conservatism may be defined as the organic relationship of concrete to concrete in history, rather than the mechanical relationship of abstraction piled on abstraction (whether

⁹Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 298.

of Adam Smith, Rousseau, Paine, Marx)." ¹⁰ Thus, with his emphasis on tradition and his criticism of abstract reasoning, Viereck stands squarely in the fold of Burkean conservatism. Viereck wrote, "Conservatism is the rediscovery of tradition, the daring search for that last Grail, the value code of Western Man." ¹¹ He goes on to say,

Society is in a bad way when too many people reject every ancient value in ethics and politics and art. . . . Civilization is an infinitely fragile bundle of accumulated habits and restraints. The necessary conservative function of any generation is not just to enjoy itself but to pass on this bundle in good condition to the next generation. ¹²

And in the first edition of Conservatism Revisited, he wrote,

In his natural instincts, every modern baby is still born a cave-man baby. What prevents a 1949 baby from remaining a cave man is the conservative force of law and tradition, that slow accumulation of civilized habits separating us from the cave. ¹³

Consequently, at the heart of Viereck's political thought is the idea of a return to traditional Western values, a return to traditional Western ethical and religious absolutes. This idea permeates all of Viereck's work, his poetry, as well as his prose. For Viereck, most of the turmoil which has beset modern Western society stems from the erosion of values. The reason for our "age of terror,"

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

¹¹ Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 246.

¹² Ibid., p. 246.

¹³ Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 10.

in which millions of people have been put to death by totalitarian regimes is our lack of values, "our lack of ethical traffic lights."¹⁴ Viereck writes repeatedly of the new conservatism as representing a "revolt against revolt."¹⁵ What he means is that the new conservatism is in revolt against the revolutionary forces that are destroying traditional values in modern society, and has as its aim the recovery of those values.

As is the case with the new conservatism generally, Viereck is not strictly a political philosopher. His call for a return to traditional values encompasses a much broader sphere than politics. It includes philosophy, education, economics, and aesthetics. Viereck is a social critic, not merely a political philosopher. Indeed, the call for a recovery of traditional values, the "revolt against revolt," is at the core of Viereck's poetry and his literary criticism. Of his poetry, he wrote, "Mine is a poetry of ideas. Above all, ideas connected with ethics or with the search for ethical values."¹⁶ In poetry, the "revolt against revolt" means not only a concern for values but a return to traditional forms of verse. It means the

¹⁴Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 3.

¹⁵Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. i; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 284-285.

¹⁶Peter Viereck, "My Kind of Poetry," in Mid-Century American Poets, John Ciardi, ed. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1950), pp. 22-23.

search for clarity in poetry. It means a return to the use of meter and rhyme in poetry, rather than the constant use of free verse.¹⁷ He wrote defiantly, "Free verse I write not at all: on principle. Unrhymed metrical verse only rarely."¹⁸ For Viereck, much of the obscure, free verse of his time had radical, or Marxist implications. Free verse was being fused with radical ideas to form a kind of "proletarian" verse. He was glad that along with himself, many other younger poets, like Dylan Thomas and Robert Lowell, were revolting against this type of poetry.¹⁹ Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, and T. S. Eliot were pioneers in this revolt, getting back to traditional forms in poetry. Originally, according to Viereck, the use of free verse and obscurity had been a welcome breath of fresh air from the stuffy staidness of Victorian poetry. Now, however, the revolt had lasted long enough and it was time to get back to the traditional in poetry, as it was in other phases of society.²⁰ He wrote,

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 16-24; Peter Viereck, "For a Third Force in Poetry Today," in the New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Vol. 27, pt. 1 (Sept. 3, 1950), p. 3.

¹⁸Viereck, "My Kind of Poetry," p. 20.

¹⁹Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 284-285; Peter Viereck, "Poets versus Readers," in the Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 180 (July 1947), p. 110.

²⁰Ibid., p. 109; Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 16-17, 246; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 283.

Just as political liberty is not based on a radical smashing of traffic lights but, on law and traditional established institutions, so poetry must be subjected to the challenge of form, the more rigorous and traditional and conservative the better. . . .²¹

So, the call for a return to traditional values extended also to poetry and aesthetics. Furthermore, for Viereck, aesthetics and values were inextricably mixed. He bitterly attacked the awarding of the Bollingen Award in poetry to Ezra Pound for his book of verse Pisan Cantos, because of Pound's support of Fascism and anti-Semitism. Pound had made several pro-Fascist broadcasts from Rome and was eventually arrested and indicted for treason by the United States Government, though he was found mentally unfit to stand trial. Viereck argued that many of the poems in Pisan Cantos were anti-Semitic. The awards committee, which included such distinguished poets as T. S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, and W. H. Auden, had argued that they awarded the prize to Pound for his poetry, not for his political beliefs. Viereck argued, however, that Pound the poet could not be separated from Pound the political activist, that ethics and aesthetics overlap.²²

²¹Viereck, "My Kind of Poetry," p. 17.

²²Peter Viereck, Dream and Responsibility: Four Test Cases of the Tension Between Poetry and Society (Washington, D. C.: The University Press of Washington, D. C., 1953), pp. 3-15; Peter Viereck, "Parnassus Divided," in Atlantic Monthly (Oct. 1949), Vol. 184, p. 67; Viereck, "My Kind of Poetry," p. 28; G. S. Fraser, Ezra Pound (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), pp. 21-23.

He was not alone in this argument. Walter Sutton wrote of Pound,

The poet's longstanding aristocratic bias, his fascist ideals of order, and his crass anti-Semitism are obtrusive faults and limiting features of his poetry and cannot be thought of as simply aberrations and personal opinions of Pound the man. The meanings of literature are among its most conspicuous formal aspects, and an analysis of the ideas and values in a poem cannot be set apart, as a function distinct in kind, from criticism concerned with its patterns of sound, syntax, and imagery. . . . A writer's work is assessed for the quality of its ideas and values, as well as for the quality of the other formal elements with which they are interrelated.²³

Although Viereck's view in this case may be somewhat meritorious, it does seem to border on setting up grounds for censorship, something atypical of Viereck, who is an ardent supporter of free expression. How can we account for this ambiguity? It stems from a conflict between Viereck's European-style conservatism and his American environment.

Being a traditionalist, a thinker greatly influenced by European conservatism, Viereck places great emphasis on moral absolutes. However, Viereck cannot escape his American environment and the individualism so pervasive in it. He has incorporated both aspects in his philosophy and at times there is a tension between them, resulting in a certain ambiguity on Viereck's part. It is an ambiguity we shall encounter again.

²³Walter Sutton, ed., Ezra Pound (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 8.

So, Viereck's "revolt against revolt," his call for the rediscovery of traditional values, is not consigned merely to the political realm but every part of society, including the arts. As indicated by his objection to Ezra Pound being given the Bollingen Award, Viereck does not see society as being compartmentalized into the political, or the literary, or the psychological, etc. He sees society as a whole in which all of these areas are intricately connected. Society is a completely woven fabric, not a series of loose threads dangling in isolation from each other. What affects one part of society affects the others.

Therefore, since he sees society as an intricately connected whole, Viereck does not see the new conservatism as a strictly political movement. Indeed, he sees politics as only a secondary phase of the movement. He wrote,

the young American conservatism is still primarily a cultural, ethical, and educational movement, not primarily political.

The proper start for a new American conservatism, aimed not at success but at truth, not at activism but at long-range education, is in the world of literature, the arts and sciences, intellectual history, the universities, the humanities. Starting there and slowly osmosing into more "practical" spheres of American life, such a movement will eventually affect politics and economics by raising in both parties the level of insight into historical and ethical processes. By being more contemplative than activist, . . . a conservative return to values will transform politics and economics indirectly. If instead it tries to start by being directly and actively political and economic, it will at best fail and transform nothing at all.²⁴

²⁴Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 248.

Again he writes, "The best rooted philosophical conservatives in America, . . . are found mainly in the literary and educational world, the creative world at its best, the non-political world."²⁵

So, for Viereck, the new conservatism is not principally a political movement. Above all, it is not a foray into the realm of practical politics. It will not affect politics directly, only indirectly by taking root in the nation's universities, in the educational system, among the intelligensia, the men of letters and arts. He seems to agree with Guttman that a Burkean-style conservatism has never had much influence in practical American politics, due to the pervasiveness of Lockean liberalism. However, this did not mean that America had no such conservatism. However, a Burkean-style conservatism does exist in America, mostly in the domain of literature.²⁶ For Viereck the new conservatism cannot have a direct effect on practical politics now because it is outside the mainstream of American politics, that is, because of their criticism of the cherished American ideals of equality and democracy. However, as an intellectual movement it can eventually influence practical politics.

²⁵Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised edition, p. 142.

²⁶Guttman, pp. 3-77.

Viereck is aware that there has been a similarity between the predicaments of socialism and European-style conservatism in America. He writes,

In Europe socialism and conservatism both had a social base, a party, a class: proletariat or landed aristocracy. In America, where the whole country is diffused with middle-class psychology, the two anti-middle class movements cannot play a role in terms of political parties or economic classes. This obvious lack of a class base for either socialism or conservatism in America has led to their being scorned as having no role to play in America. What their scornors forget is that attitudes can work through diffusion as well as through a movement. Both conservatism and socialism work in America as a unconscious diffusion, not as a movement. When they become a movement, they become small, comical splinter-groups.²⁷

So, for Viereck, the new conservatism cannot have an immediate effect on practical American politics.

We have argued that Peter Viereck's political philosophy is all about the return to traditional values. But what kinds of traditional values is Viereck talking about? There are several traditional Western values, some of them conflicting. To what values is Viereck advocating a return? First of all, we can say, as we have with the new conservatism generally, that he is recommending a return to non-materialist, non-economic values. However, Viereck is more vehement on this point than most of his new conservative comrades.

Viereck has a profound dislike for materialism. For him, the revolt against revolt is, as much as anything, a

²⁷Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 92.

revolt against the unrestrained materialism of the modern age, both the Marxist and laissez-faire varieties. This unrestrained materialism is one of the great value-destroyers of our times, and if we are to survive it must be tempered with the rediscovery and infusion of non-economic, ethical, and spiritual values.

Without the idealistic framework of ethical restraints, materialism can never achieve its material goals. It loses them in the scuffle of war of all against all. It loses them in the mutually destructive scuffle of rival egotisms. Egotisms of the nation, of the class, or of the individual. Only the idealism of Christian love can save these rival egotisms from each other. And from themselves. Therefore--

Material self-interest is suicide

Material sacrifice is survival

In place of the economic capitalist philosophy of Adam Smith and its parallel, the economic philosophy of Marx, the world through trial and error will come to see the material necessity of anti-materialism, the economic necessity of an anti-economic credo. The economic (if incidental) function of spirituality. The physical function of metaphysics.²⁸

According to Viereck, economic values have held sway for too long. We must rediscover non-economic values, spiritual values. Speaking of Marxism, Viereck wrote,

I revolt against its revolt primarily for its materialistic assault on all our non-economic values of the spirit. Economic values alone make life possible, but the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual values alone make it worth living.²⁹

²⁸Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 39.

²⁹Peter Viereck, "But--I'm a Conservative!" in Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 65 (April 1940), p. 538.

Economics is given too much prominence. It is not economics that determine the course of history or society, it is people's belief that economics determine history that is so powerful. In other words, it is values, not economics.³⁰ For instance, Nazism in Germany was brought about by the decline of traditional Western non-economic values. Nazism had triumphed in Germany because over the centuries, under the influence of such people as Jahn and Wagner, Germany had repeatedly turned its back on traditional Western values in favor of the paganistic ideas of its old Saxon heritage, which he calls "Kultur." It was the decline of non-economic values that brought about Nazism in Germany, not economics.³¹

As far as Viereck is concerned, contemporary American conservatism is not aware of the dangers of materialism. Indeed, they are perpetuating it with their deification of laissez-faire capitalism, their attempt to fuse an ardent defense of laissez-faire capitalism with the Christian ethic. For Viereck, William F. Buckley exemplifies this. In an incisive criticism of Buckley's magnum opus, God and Man at Yale, Viereck praises Buckley's attack on atheism at Yale but vociferously condemns his defense of laissez-

³⁰Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 22-23.

³¹Peter Viereck, Metapolitics: The Roots of the Nazi Mind (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961).

faire capitalism, and particularly his linkage of capitalism with Christianity. He writes of Buckley,

Is it not humorless, or else blasphemous, for this eloquent advocate of Christianity, an unworldly and anti-economic religion to enshrine jointly as equally sacrosanct: "Adam Smith and Ricardo, Jesus, and Saint Paul?"³²

Viereck is not alone in his criticism of Buckley's attempt to fuse Christianity and laissez-faire capitalism. Many of Buckley's fellow Catholics, including his brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell, have also attacked this attempted fusion.³³ Kevin Corrigan writes of Buckley, "it should be said that his position on social matters is at grave variance with the social tendency of the Church."³⁴ Christopher Fullman writes, "In Chapter I he [Buckley] is all for Christ and in the rest of the book he seems to be all for Adam Smith . . . Christ and Adam Smith have very little in common."³⁵ Finally, the neo-conservative, Irving Kristol has written that Buckley is a confusing fellow, this confusion stemming, in part, from his

. . . loyalty to two incompatible ideals: he is a devout Catholic and an exponent of laissez-faire liberalism. . . . The two simply do not mix: one

³²Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 61-62.

³³Nash, pp. 310-312.

³⁴Kevin Corrigan, "God and Man at 'National Review,'" in the New Catholic World, Vol. 192 (Jan. 1961), p. 206.

³⁵Christopher E. Fullman, "God and Man and Mr. Buckley," in Catholic World, Vol. 175 (May 1952), p. 105.

cannot believe that it is a duty of society to assist in the salvation of souls, while simultaneously asserting that the individual should have the immitigable right to order his life and property as he sees fit.³⁶

So, as Viereck and others have indicated, the emphasis to be a fundamental contradiction in the American conservative stress on the Christian tradition, with its otherworldliness, and its simultaneous emphasis on self-sacrifice, and the American conservative stress of laissez-faire capitalism, with its emphasis on the accumulation of material goods and self-interest. The two do not mix. They are from contrasting traditions, Christianity from the pre-modern world, capitalism a product of modernity. It must be remembered that capitalism began to thrive in the modern, scientific age, after the Church had been wrecked by division, skepticism, and had capitulated on such long held beliefs as the disapproval of usury. So, in accordance with his adherence to a pre-modern tradition, Viereck is concerned mainly with non-economic values, ethical and religious values, not with economics.

We see in Viereck's thought, a utilitarian aspect, an aspect that was also present in Burke's feeling on tradition. Traditional values are not only good for their

³⁶Irving Kristol, "On the Burning Deck," in The Reporter, Vol. 21 (Nov. 26, 1959), p. 47.

own sakes, but principally, for what they do for society, for taming society and making life worth living.

Viereck's emphasis on non-economic values, however, cannot be wholly attributed to utility. This emphasis also stems from Viereck's aforementioned distrust of abstract, a priori, reasoning. Viereck, and the new conservatives generally have a distrust of abstract doctrinaire, economics with its talk of an "invisible hand" and "market forces." Again, Viereck's stress is on concrete traditions, not on abstract principles.

As we have seen, Viereck and the new conservatives were not the first self-proclaimed conservatives to display this profound distrust and revulsion toward laissez-faire capitalism. They follow in the tradition of such early conservatives as Coleridge, Southey, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Metternich.³⁷ Noel O'Sullivan has pointed out that Coleridge, like the French and German conservatives, was hostile to commercial and manufacturing classes, that his conservatism was "rooted in a deep distrust of the new 'artificial' wealth produced by industry and commerce. . . ."³⁸ Coleridge felt that this new commercial wealth

³⁷Cobban, pp. 203-204; O'Sullivan, pp. 86-95; Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 104-105.

³⁸O'Sullivan, p. 87; Coleridge, "A Lay Sermon," in Political Tracts, White, ed., p. 108.

did not carry along with it any social responsibilities toward the masses, as had the noblesse oblige idea of the gentry. He felt that industrialism threatened to destroy the organic society and to destroy all traditional ties leaving the impoverished masses at the mercy of the manufacturing classes.³⁹ Likewise, Carlyle felt that the real purpose of liberal, laissez-faire legislation was "to provide a license for the rich to pursue their self-interest at the expense of stripping the mass. . . ."⁴⁰ Finally, not unlike Viereck, Coleridge and Southey felt that classical economics was an abstract entity in which the abstract economic man had replaced the real man. For them, economics did not deal with real people, only with this imaginary economic man.⁴¹

Viereck and the new conservatives have been repeatedly attacked for their lack of sophistication and knowledge of economics. That they deal only superficially with economics cannot be denied. However, whether this superficial treatment is due to a lack of knowledge or the mere fact that they just do not see economics as overly important is debatable. Probably it is due to both reasons. At any rate, to underestimate the importance of economics, as

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 95; Thomas Carlyle, "The Present Time" (1850), in Latter Day Pamphlets (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870), pp. 3-56.

⁴¹Cobban, pp. 203-204.

Viereck and the new conservatives do, is a dreadful oversight. It is committing the same type of error they accuse the libertarians and the fusionists of committing. Moreover, there is a seeming inconsistency in speaking of society as an integrated whole and then expunging economics from that whole. How can Viereck talk of society as being an intricately woven pattern and then deny the importance of economics? It is not Viereck's purpose to expunge economics completely from society, but to correct a perceived over-emphasis on economic factors by modern scholars. However, he is so intent on toning down the emphasis placed on economics that he appears to completely disavow economic matters. And, despite his criticism of capitalism, Viereck is a staunch defender of the capitalist system, as we shall see in greater detail later. He is in full agreement with the goals and utility of capitalism, but he does feel that capitalism must be restrained by values. Also, there is some economic analysis in Viereck's thought, albeit not much. This is not surprising, for Viereck perceives himself as a poet, a man of letters and not an economist. He is willing to leave economic analysis to those more qualified, though the absence of more economic analysis is weakness in his thought. Also, there does seem to be a lack of sophistication in terming people like William F. Buckley and Fredric Hayek as "laissez-faire capitalists." They are not. But again Viereck's characterization of Buckley

as a "laissez-faire doctrinaire" may be more a matter of polemics than an attempt at accuracy.

So, we have specified Viereck's call for a return to traditional values somewhat in determining that he is concerned about non-economic values. Yet, we must be more specific. Again we must ask exactly what type of values is Viereck talking about? Non-economic values, yes, but which non-economic values? Spiritual values conflict as well. To which spiritual values is Viereck advocating a return? He is calling for a return to the accumulated values of the Judeo-Christian-Roman-Hellenic tradition. Though somewhat vague on exactly which values constitute this tradition, as most new conservatives are, we can still get a fairly clear picture as to what Viereck is talking of here. This is the tradition that has shaped the West, the tradition that has distinguished Western culture. From the Judeo-Christian tradition we get a concern for social justice, a compassion for those who are oppressed or poverty stricken. We get a sense of brotherhood and of love for our fellow man, a sense of the worth of every individual person. From the Hellenic tradition, we get a love for beauty and for unfettered intellectual speculation and curiosity. From Rome, we get a sense of universality and a respect for law. The various strands of these traditions, over the centuries, have been amalgamated and passed down to succeeding generations, through our literature, art, music, philosophy, and

politics. It is this combined Judeo-Christian-Roman-Hellenic tradition that has resulted in our free parliamentary institutions, our civil liberties, social reform, respect for law, etc.⁴² However, Viereck is aware that this same tradition has also resulted in such negative manifestations as slavery, racism, and economic exploitation. Therefore, he says that some traditional values, like slavery or racism, or economic exploitation are not worth conserving. The new conservative should save only those values worth saving and discard the rest.⁴³ He should not be a reactionary, afraid of change and blindly hanging on to every value.

How is the new conservative to decide which values to save and which to discard? A constant criticism of the new conservatism is that it provides no means of choosing between conflicting values and traditions because it has discarded reason. As Burkeans, the emphasis of the new conservatism is on tradition and they are skeptical of reason. Consequently, according to their critics, they have no means of choosing between rival values.⁴⁴ This is a valid criticism of many new conservatives. Viereck, however, tries to escape this problem by not tossing reason out of the window. A belief in the power of rationality is also part

⁴²Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 28.

⁴³Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁴C. Wright Mills, "The Conservative Mood," in Dissent, Vol. 1 (Winter 1954), pp. 23-25.

of our Western inheritance, says Viereck, and although we should not place too much faith in reason, as leftists do, it cannot be completely dispensed with. For Viereck, reason must be used as an instrument in deciding which values are to be conserved and which are to be discarded.⁴⁵

Another means of choosing between rival values for Viereck seems to be consensus. He says that we should stress those values which the West has in common and minimize those on which we differ.⁴⁶

Thirdly, Viereck indicates that such abominable practices as slavery or racism, though part of the Western tradition, are so blatantly contrary to the predominate spirit of the Judeo-Christian tradition that it would make them candidates for eradication.

Finally, we may get an indication as to how Viereck might decide which traditional values to discard by looking back to the criterion Auerbach said Burke used--stability.⁴⁷ This is never explicit in Viereck's thought, but given the importance of stability to Viereck it seems reasonable to say that perhaps one criterion for deciding which values to keep and which to discard is whether or not those values promote stability. As we shall see when we discuss Viereck's

⁴⁵Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁷Auerbach, p. 41.

views on social reform, stability is every bit as important to Viereck as it was to Burke. Viereck would be hesitant about calling for restoration or preservation of a value he thought would threaten stability. However, this is not to say that this is Viereck's main criterion for choosing between rival values. Viereck's belief in values seem to go much deeper than merely their utility in maintaining stability. However, stability would seem to be a possible arbiter for Viereck in choosing between conflicting values.

So, there are several possible means of choosing between rival values. Yet, somehow they do not quite seem adequate, they do not seem precise enough. It appears that even in using reason and consensus and stability, some new conservatives could still choose different traditional values than others. Perhaps, as we indicated, this is why the new conservatives have sometimes disagreed in the realm of practical politics. Even with these arbiters, it seems that traditional values can still be a precarious vehicle on which to base a society.

Totalitarianism

Now that we have a better understanding of what type of traditional values Viereck wants to recover and conserve, let us delve more specifically into the question of what are the great value-destroyers which Viereck fears.

Probably the greatest of these value-destroyers, the one with which Viereck seems most concerned is totalitarianism, both the Marxist and Fascist varieties. This is the greatest threat facing the West today. Totalitarianism is the ultimate value-destroyer. It threatens to demolish some of our most important values, our freedoms, our respect for individuality, our representative governments, our respect for law and tradition. Moreover, the world has never seen such systematic brutality as has been visited upon humanity by these modern totalitarian regimes--Hitler's death camps, and Stalin's purges and forced labor camps. Therefore, the West must stand stalwart against the threat of totalitarianism.⁴⁸ We have already mentioned how Viereck first entered the political sphere as a reaction against his father's Fascist flirtations, and how he opposed Ezra Pound's being given the Bollingen Award because of Pound's pro-fascist sentiments. Viereck is an equally virulent anti-Communist. With World War II over and the Fascist threat diminished, Viereck wrote, "The Soviet threat to the West is the most important political fact of our day."⁴⁹ His book, Conservatism Revisited, is in part, a call for the West to unite against the threat of Russian communism. Just as Prince Metternich fought the

⁴⁸Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 84-190, 298-300.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

German nationalism of a century ago and forged a one hundred year peace in Europe, so now the West must fight the "proletarian nationalism" of Stalin's Russia.⁵⁰

In his fight against the Soviet threat, Viereck is more than willing to enlist trade unions and the democratic socialist parties of western Europe, something which other American conservatives have found objectionable.⁵¹ He argues that the Soviets are not friends of the working man, but in actuality the exploiters of the worker. The Soviet Union has developed a rich ruling class and a class system that is more rigid and oppressive than those of the West, an argument similar to that of Milovan Djilas and given credence by Hedrick Smith's excellent book, The Russians.⁵² In the West, the worker has achieved an increasingly higher standard of living, and if mistreated by his employer he can remedy the situation through strikes, or a union. This, of course, is not allowable in the Soviet Union. Thus, trade unions should not side with the Soviets for they are not, as they claim, a friend of the worker.⁵³

⁵⁰Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. ix-xi.

⁵¹Ibid., p. xi.

⁵²Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 141-144; Milovan Djilas, The New Class, An Analysis of the Communist System (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1957); Hedrick Smith, The Russians (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1976), pp. 25-52.

⁵³Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 143.

Viereck tried to woo the workers with honey. He was, however, less charitable with another group in society--his fellow intellectuals. In Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals, Viereck blasted American intellectuals for not taking the same tough stand against the Soviets that they had taken against fascism. Viereck argued that intellectuals should not be fooled because the Soviets were our allies during World War II. There is little difference between the Soviet and Nazi tyrannies. Both were anti-Semitic, both ran concentration and forced labor camps, both ruled through brutality and terror. They are two sides of the same totalitarian coin.⁵⁴ Viereck relentlessly berated the liberal "fellow travelers" who downgraded the Soviet threat and were "soft" on communism, claiming that Stalin was not all that bad and that the oppression in the Soviet Union was not that much worse than oppression within America. He dubbed these people "Gaylord Babbits," borrowing from Sinclair Lewis's novel, Babbitt. He accused them of closing their eyes to Soviet oppression. Sure, there was oppression in America, and this was deplorable. But, it was not oppression on the scale of that in the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Viereck accused these "Babbits" of being unthinking individuals who were "soft" on communism just because it was chic in their liberal circles. The trouble with many of these liberal

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 17-29.

intellectuals, said Viereck, was not that they were pro-communist, but that they were non-communists, that they refused to take a strong stand against communism. According to Viereck, intellectuals could not afford to sit on the fence where communism was concerned. Rather they must fight it as ardently as they fought fascism.⁵⁶

How did Viereck propose that we fight communism? Internally, communism could be fought through the use of social reforms, to prevent the discontent that leads to communist revolution.⁵⁷ Externally, Viereck seemed to support America's policy of containment and seemed to hope, rather naively, that we could woo Soviet citizens away from their government and perhaps initiate some sort of internal upheaval that might topple the Soviet regime.⁵⁸ In addition to these measures, Viereck was for tight control on the domestic activities of communists. He was strenuously opposed to the actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy, believing that McCarthy's heavy-handed methods indirectly aided the communist threat by giving anti-communist forces in America a bad reputation.⁵⁹ Yet,

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 20-29.

⁵⁷Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 135.

⁵⁸Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 165-166.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 58; Peter Viereck, "Revolt Against the Elite," in The New American Right, Daniel Bell, ed. (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), p. 95.

at times, Viereck's pronouncements about the domestic communist threat in America sounded almost as acrimonious as McCarthy's. He wrote,

Membership in the Communist party is morally an act comparable to murder. Mass-murder, in fact. Morally every Communist or Nazi party member is up to his elbows in the blood of his party's victims . . . provided he has joined that party voluntarily, not under duress.⁶⁰

Normally an outspoken advocate of civil liberties, he applauded the American Civil Liberties Union for barring communists from its membership, and advocated that known communist not be allowed to teach in schools, or hold government jobs.⁶¹ Because communists usually gain power by subversion and violence, every free nation has the right to democratically pass laws to arrest and expel them. But, somewhat paradoxically, Viereck still claimed that basic civil liberties, such as free speech or trial by jury should not be denied to communists. However, the right to hold a government job or teach school did not fall into the category of basic civil liberties. Viereck is here adhering to a position held by most conservatives, most notably Willmoore Kendall, that society should be semi-closed. If a society is to survive it cannot allow for complete civil liberties. Communists have as their aim the destruction of

⁶⁰Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 298.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 282-287.

free democratic society and thus cannot be allowed complete freedom.⁶² There seems to be an inconsistency here in championing civil liberties for everyone except communists. However, it can be argued that it is no more inconsistent than pornography laws which in contradiction of the credo of free speech and press ban certain materials as obscene. Inconsistent or not, there is a tension here, again a result of Viereck's belief in moral absolutes, gathered from his European leanings, and his individualism which stems from his American environment.

In his later writings, during the 1960s, when Cold War tensions had diminished, Viereck partially softened his harsh anti-communist rhetoric. Though still wary of the Soviet threat he was willing to extend a cautious olive branch to the Kremlin. Gone was Stalinist Russia, with which coexistence was impossible and immoral. Though still a "tough, ruthless, oligarchic dictatorship," Russia had changed. They wanted to avoid atomic war as much as we did, so a cautious coexistence was not only feasible but indispensable. The chief threat to peace now was not the liberal intellectuals but the radical right who insisted on maintaining a tough, unyielding cold war stance against the

⁶²Willmore Kendall, The Conservative Affirmation (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1963), pp. 100-120; Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 283-287.

Soviets.⁶³ So, with the changing times, Viereck softened his erstwhile tough anti-communist position.

Therefore, for Viereck, the greatest value-destroyer is totalitarianism, both fascist and communist. In his vicious pronouncements against communism Viereck is no different from most other American conservatives, most of whom perceive communism as perhaps the preeminent threat to the Western world.

Pragmatism and Empirical Social Science

Another great value-destroyer of our age is moral relativism, the lack of ethical absolutes. The lack of universal values, values which transcend national, class, and individual differences, has made it easier for totalitarianism to take hold.⁶⁴ This moral relativism, this nihilism has been spawned, in part, by the advent of positivism, pragmatism, and the so-called value-free social sciences. Thus, Viereck is critical of these movements. Of modern science he wrote,

Our boast made of science by one kind of pragmatic liberal is that it is "ethically neutral." This is supposed to be science's greatest achievement. The supposition illustrates the value-destroying character of one kind of relativistic liberalism.⁶⁵

⁶³Viereck, Shame and Glory, 2nd edition, pp. xvii-xviii, 329.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 195.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 195.

He attacks the idea of an exact social science, approximating the natural sciences writing,

Sheer self-deception is the hope of overcoming man's doom by founding a more exact social science. How can there ever be an exact science dealing with man? Science is exact when dealing with predictable chemicals; only art can deal with flesh.⁶⁶

However, Viereck is not unrelenting in his attack on pragmatism and the social sciences. He says that despite their relativism, the "Deweyites" do manage to smuggle into their philosophy a belief in universal values. Now, whether this is done through legitimate philosophical logic, or a contradiction in their philosophy, Viereck is uncertain. But, he does see them exhibiting a belief in universal values. The moral relativism associated with pragmatism stems not so much from the original Deweyite philosophers but from the "vulgarpragmatists." Here Viereck draws upon the distinction made between theoretical Marxism and vulgar Marxism. It is the vulgarpragmatists who have distorted Dewey and follow an "anything goes" philosophy that has led to moral relativism. For Viereck, pragmatism is more relativistic now than it once was. Today, as espoused by many liberals, it is "an active and malignant value-destroyer and uncivilizer. . . ."⁶⁷ But

⁶⁶Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 304.

⁶⁷Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 44.

here Viereck leaves us hanging. He does not explain how the original pragmatist philosophy differs from vulgar-pragmatism. Viereck is not a very incisive critic of pragmatism. This may be because he has a weak grasp of it. Indeed, he admits to lacking "the training in technical philosophy to follow the arguments, pro and con, on the theoretical level."⁶⁸ He recognizes his limits in the realm of technical philosophy. Nevertheless, in his attack on positivism and modern social science, Viereck finds himself in the company of many other scholars, including fellow new conservatives Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, who made similar, more incisive criticisms of the positivist movement.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Viereck is for moral and religious absolutes, universal values. He wrote, "if moral absolutes do not exist, it is not so much the worse for them, but so much the worse for existence."⁷⁰ Now in the modern age, under the relentless challenge of empiricism and positivism, a belief in

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁹Strauss, Natural Right, pp. 9-323; Voegelin, The New Science of Politics, pp. 1-190.

⁷⁰Viereck, "But--I'm a Conservative," p. 541.

moral absolutes does not enjoy wide acceptance in scholarly circles. A belief in moral absolutes may be derided because it is not subject to empirical proof. But does the lack of empirical "proof" necessarily belie its existence? Perhaps all belief systems, even empiricism are ultimately based on faith, for as phenomenologists endeavor to show, even the empiricist accepts on faith the objective reality of the external world. H. Malcolm McDonald wrote that what the new conservatives have in common is, "a belief in transcendent morality." He went on to say,

the basis of their position is therefore an act of faith just as real as the previous liberal belief in reason and science, or the Communist assumption of historical materialism, or the Nazi concept of Blut and Boden. Such faith-held values cannot be subjected to logical proof but only to logical exegesis.⁷¹

Consequently, we must ask, is Viereck's call for a return to moral absolutes, to universal values any less tenable because such values cannot be "proven" to exist empirically? Perhaps not, perhaps before any "proof" can be given, all belief systems require what Kierkegaard has called, "a leap of faith."⁷²

Now Viereck is quick to emphasize, in a characteristic swing toward the middle, that he is not calling for a return to the days of the Spanish Inquisition. An

⁷¹McDonald, p. 72.

⁷²Søren Kierkegaard, Either/Or, 2 vols. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1959).

absolutism that is too rigid can be just as dangerous as relativism.⁷³ A mid-point must be found.

Thus, Peter Viereck's political philosophy is all about the need for a return to traditional values. To understand him one must first grasp this fact, for all other parts of his philosophy flow from this central theme. Viereck sees the perils of our modern age, particularly totalitarianism, stemming from the loss of values and says that if the West, as we know it, with its parliaments, and civil liberties, and individuality is to survive, we must recover and conserve our lost values.

In this chapter we have encountered a characteristic of Viereck's thought which we shall encounter again--his persistent attempt at moderation, to seek the middle ground. Thus, for example, Viereck attacks moral relativism but then cautions against falling into rigid absolutism. He attacks reason, but uses it as an arbiter for choosing between conflicting values. He attacks pragmatism as causing moral relativism but says that all pragmatists are not relativists. Viereck views the new conservatism as a moderate set of beliefs, standing between the two extremes of Marxism, and the radical right.⁷⁴ Again, Viereck is trying to present

⁷³Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 44-48.

⁷⁴Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised edition, pp. 123-155.

conservatism to the intellectuals, and through them to the American public as a viable, acceptable alternative to liberalism. He is trying to restore public confidence in conservatism. However, this attempt at moderation presents a disturbing weakness in Viereck's thought, leading him to sound vague and ambiguous. It is often hard to determine exactly where he stands. He seems many times to be perched on a fence arguing one side of a question, and then the other side. Viereck's disturbing tendency toward ambivalence is also fueled by the tension between his belief in moral absolutes, stemming from his European legacy, and his individualism, stemming from his American environment. This tension surfaces on Viereck's somewhat ambivalent attitude toward civil liberties for communists. We shall encounter this ambiguity in the following chapter when we look at Viereck's views on equality and democracy.

One further thing must be said about Viereck. No matter how he may rail against "reactionaries" wanting to turn the clock back, his philosophy, with its talk of moral absolutes, tradition, and the dangers of mass industrial society, has a pre-modern tinge to it. Viereck might deny this, indeed, he may not even be aware of it, but the pre-modern aspect persists. This, however, is not necessarily a negative comment, for I believe we must get away from the idea that there is something inherently good in modernity and evil in pre-modernity.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWS ON EQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY:

THE REVOLT AGAINST MASS MAN

The new conservatives were cultural and political elitists. Their movement was largely a revolt against modern mass society, against mass-man. In this chapter, we will explore Viereck's cultural and political elitism, his views concerning the problem of massness in contemporary Western society. We will be looking at these views as they relate to society generally, and as they relate to the political concepts of equality and democracy.

The Unadjusted Man

We have already observed that American conservatives tend to be individualists. They tend to stress individual over community rights (or claim that no real distinction exists), whereas European conservatives, particularly those on the Continent, stress community over individual rights. In many aspects of his philosophy--his emphasis on tradition, religious absolutes, anti-materialism, and his hostility toward equality and democracy--Viereck leans toward European-style conservatism. However, in his views on the individual, Viereck is strictly American. At heart, Viereck's

political philosophy puts great stress on the individual. He writes that at its core conservatism is a "humanist reverence for the individual soul."¹ However, it is not economic individuality with which Viereck seems most concerned. Viereck's individuality deals more with artistic creativity, and intellectual freedom than it does with economics or economic freedom in the libertarian sense. It is not that Viereck is unconcerned about economic liberty, he is. He is a supporter of the capitalist system. But today, the cry for individual economic freedom, in Viereck's eyes, is often a call to continue the unrestrained materialism that is wrecking modern society.

For Viereck, the individual has become lost in modern mass society, i.e., a society of crowded, traffic-jammed, smog-choked cities, in which success means the acquisition of more and more commercial goods. Modern mass society is a society in which popularity is the main criteria of worth so that every new artistic achievement, or innovation which attains any popularity--be it a way of painting, or a type of car, or a type of television program--is mass produced and copied in an effort to appeal to the general public and make money. It is a fad-ridden society in which people dress alike and think alike, and read the same books because according to some television commercial, it is considered

¹Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 6.

chic to do so. Individuality, creativity, reflectiveness, have all become stifled by this massness. It is the goal in modern society to be well-adjusted, to fit into a niche which society has set for you. Well-adjustedness is no longer a means to a higher goal, but an end in itself. Everyone wants to be well-adjusted. This has led to the depersonalization of modern society. People are voluntarily surrendering their personalities to be well-adjusted, to be "in" or "chic." They have capitulated to crass commercialism, to the mindless pursuit of material possessions, of things. We are living in a conformist society. We are living in the age of what Viereck calls the "overadjusted man," the non-reflective, unthinking, mass-man. This is the man who has forfeited his individuality, his personality, his self in the quest to be well-adjusted, to be like everyone else.² He has become, in effect, a mindless robot.

The result of this overadjustedness has been a loss of individuality and creativity, or as Viereck has put it, "no Shakespeares, no Leonardos, no personal genius. . . ."³ When someone struggles today and emerges with a creative piece of work, or an idea, it is immediately copied and mass-produced in an effort to cater to the masses. For example, the "stream of consciousness" style of writing

²Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 3-7.

³Ibid., p. 4.

which a James Joyce creates through years of struggle soon becomes the standard prop for every young writer seeking to sell a piece of fiction. Many young writers and artists today are, thus, not striking out in new directions but are becoming captives of popular fads. We have seen that Viereck sees this problem in poetry, but he sees it, as well, in other artistic endeavors and indeed, throughout the whole of Western society. Even Europe is succumbing to overadjustedness. It is becoming more Americanized, "more gadget-giddy, T.V.-avid, traffic-jammed."⁴ It is surrendering to commercialism. Becoming, like America, a mesmerized, unthinking society. Creativity is dying, art is degenerating, due to overadjustedness and the attempt to cater to mass tastes.

Consequently, in this age of overadjustedness Viereck puts forth a new hero, the unadjusted man, a concept that in its emphasis on inner conscience seems to owe much to Irving Babbitt. The unadjusted man is the non-conformist. He does not blindly follow the crowd, he thinks for himself, he retains his individuality, and his creativity. The unadjusted man is not a non-conformist just for the sake of being a non-conformist, what Viereck calls the "never-adjusted" man. Nor is he a person who flaunts his non-conformity. He is the thinking, reasoning man, a man who adheres to his

⁴Ibid., pp. 9, 25.

inner conscience rather than the whims of popular opinion. But, non-conformity can also become conformity. Viereck says that today many people are declaring their non-conformity just because it is chic. Non-conformity has become popularized and mass-produced. Everyone wants to jump on to the bandwagon. Everyone wants to be a non-conformist. However, the unadjusted man is not a non-conformist because it is popular, but because he came to that decision through careful reasoning.⁵ Although ostensibly skeptical of reason, Viereck again gives reason a prominent place in his philosophy, making it an important tool of his unadjusted man. This is again perhaps a manifestation of the tension between Viereck's European-style conservatism and his American environment.

For Viereck, unadjustedness is not an "anarchic individualism" or some kind of "bohemian non-conformity" in isolation from society. The unadjusted man has an "organic" belongingness to society, he is not divorced from it. The unadjusted man sees the importance of tradition and of traditional values because he is not conforming to the values of the moment, the fads so endemic to modern mass society.⁶ He is not conforming to the present liberal status quo. He is thinking for himself, he is viewing

⁵Ibid., pp. 4-7.

⁶Ibid., p. 21.

society, organically, and thus, escaping the mesmerizing clutches of contemporary liberal society. Therefore, for Viereck, unadjustedness has a decidedly Burkean-conservative flavor to it.

We can see from this that Viereck's unadjusted man was not meant to serve as any hero for the counter-culture, or the New Left movement of the 1960s. Indeed, Viereck was openly critical of the counter-culture and the New Left, calling them "Red Brownshirts" and "leftist users of Storm Troop methods." He compared Woodstock to Wagner, making a link between the romanticism he saw in the student movement, and the romanticism he saw as a prelude to Hitler's rise to power.⁷ He argued that the previous generation, which the New Leftists attacked as being inactive, had been anything but inactive. They had fought a war against Nazi tyranny, achieved black rights, and established the New Deal. What had the New Left occupied? "These new-world liberators," he wrote, "all they ever set free was their hair."⁸ Viereck's attack on the New Left here is simplistic and naive. Surely, he could not believe that black rights had been achieved in the 1960s in the light of continued economic deprivation among blacks, or

⁷ Peter Viereck, review of The Wisdom of Conservatism, Peter P. Witonski, ed., in the New York Times Book Review, Oct. 31, 1971, p. 57.

⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

that the New Deal had solved all of our social woes. However, despite his simplistic attack on the New Left, Viereck did see a value in the movement. Contemporary America needed the New Left because, despite their shortcomings they were individualists. They were non-conformists in a conformist world. "Without their spontaneity," Viereck wrote, "we'll all end up as I.B.M. cards."⁹

Where Viereck's non-conformity seems to depart from that of the New Left is in the adherence of the unadjusted man to tradition. Viereck's unadjusted man is a man who is in tune with tradition and traditional values. He ignores popular whims and fancies and follows tradition. He does not become part of the "God is dead" movement or express hedonistic slogans like, "if it feels good, do it." Viereck might even say that in an age when it is popular to be a liberal, the unadjusted man might follow conservative principles. At the same time, the unadjusted man does not succumb to the crass materialism of modern capitalism and lose himself in the search for commercial goods.

The New Left movement did not revere tradition. If anything they seemed to want to break with all types of tradition. They seemed to be hostile toward convention and tradition. This in itself would have turned Viereck against the movement. Moreover, with the sometimes violent nature

⁹Ibid., p. 57.

of the New Left and their inflammatory rhetoric about "tearing down the system," Viereck would have seen them as a threat to stability. Therefore, again he would be hostile to the New Left movement. So, although he praises their non-conformity, Viereck was critical of the New Left, this hostility probably deriving from the scorn for tradition, and the rebellious nature of the New Left movement.

Educational Reform

The culprit of this overadjustedness is mass-man. The reign of mass-man has been brought about by the ascendancy, in modern times, of the concepts of equality and democracy, which have put the common man on the throne. This has led to massness and the concomitant degeneration of creativity and individuality in contemporary Western society. In Conservatism Revisited, Viereck writes, "We don't need a 'century of the common man': we have it already and it has only produced the commonest man, the impersonal and irresponsible and uprooted mass-man."¹⁰ We must note here that "common man" is a broader term than simple reference to the lower classes or the working classes. Viereck says that many Americans mistakenly see the masses as composed of only working class people. This is not true. The

¹⁰Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 9.

rootless mass-man does not include merely the working class but the middle classes as well, the Babbitts. Many people who flatter themselves as not being part of the masses are.

He writes,

Self-flattery is self-deception; on the one-way traffic, ever upward, of America's ladder to heaven, each massman defines the masses as everybody below whatever rung he left one jump ago. Never is our new suburban more fully a creature of the masses he despises than when he is in the act of despising them.¹¹

As causes of massness, Viereck attacks equality and democracy in both the cultural and political realms. He is a cultural and political elitist. Culturally, we have already mentioned how Viereck felt that creativity was dying as a result of artists trying to cater to the whims of the masses. He feels that we could go a long way toward ending this drought in creativity and innovation by reforming our higher education system. Mass education is fine at the elementary school level, but a university education is not for everyone. A university education should only be for the elite, and by elite he means an elite of ability.¹² Again, Viereck seems to owe much here to the thought of Irving Babbitt. He does not go into specific details, but it seems safe to assume that he is calling for tougher admission standards, perhaps a system similar to that of

¹¹Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 12.

¹²Ibid., pp. 20, 42-43.

many European schools in which grade school students take tough examinations to determine whether or not they are college material. As far as college curriculum is concerned, Viereck leans toward a heavy emphasis on the classics and literature and a deemphasis on the more "utilitarian" subjects, like economics.¹³ This reflects Viereck's belief that literature and especially the classics are a depository of traditional values. Also, the stressing of literature at the expense of economics is consonant with Viereck's view that modern society has overstressed the importance of economic factors. So, we see that Viereck is a cultural elitist, who says that higher education should be for an elite based on ability, not for the masses.

Political Elitism

Peter Viereck is also a political elitist, though this does not come through as staunchly as his cultural elitism. Here, Viereck's anti-egalitarianism seems tempered by his American environment, so much so, that his views on equality and democracy seem almost schizophrenic at times. He can sound like an ardent defender of democracy, and at other times he can sound like its severest critic.

¹³Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 7.

Like most American political thinkers, Viereck embraces the ideas of equality of opportunity and legal equality, but basically he is very critical of equality and of what he calls direct democracy, or mass democracy. Like any "good" American conservative Viereck supports liberty over equality. He says that the conservative should resist the modern trend of sacrificing liberty to equality.¹⁴ He attacks "leveling" (any attempt to create absolute social and economic equality), and goes on to say that "freedom should be the goal of all political action. . . ."¹⁵ However, unlike most American conservatives, Viereck's emphasis tends to be on civil liberties rather than on economic freedom. This again seems to stem from Viereck's coolness toward economics and his belief that in our society economic freedom has become a watchword for materialism, the subjugation of the spiritual to the material. But there does seem to be an inconsistency here in supporting civil liberties on the one hand and being less supportive of economic freedom on the other hand. Here, Viereck seems guilty of the same inconsistency he accuses American fusionists of, only in reverse.

According to Viereck, civil liberties have been the products of aristocracy, not democracy. He says that the

¹⁴Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 18.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 19.

British Parliament of Burke's time was aristocratic, yet it was more of a bastion for free speech and free debate than today's mass parliaments.¹⁶ He writes, "feudal privilege and aristocratic individualism may be considered the true root of liberty; a leveling, democratic egalitarianism would then be liberty's true foe." Viereck praises America's aristocratic beginnings, saying that American freedom had its foundations in aristocracy. America's early leaders, from Jefferson to Adams, were all aristocrats. They were not Frederick Jackson Turner's log cabin-dwellers. The foundation of American liberties was laid by aristocrats.¹⁷ So, for Viereck, equality and democracy are not the parents of liberty, but its enemies.

However, Viereck is not against all democracy. He makes an important distinction between what he calls direct democracy and indirect democracy. He defines direct democracy as,

government by referendum, mass petition, and popular recall of judges, government by Gallup poll and by intimidating conformity of the lowest common denominator of public opinion.¹⁸

It is direct democracy, mass democracy that is a threat to freedom, for it can quickly become the tool of dictators and

¹⁶Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 219-221.

¹⁸Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 131.

demagogues. And direct democracy is doubly dangerous today because of the advent of the modern mass media, aiding the ability of charismatic figures or demagogues to reach a wider audience. Direct democracy today bears little resemblance to the old-fashioned New England town meeting where people might personally know the candidate and what kind of person he was. Direct democracy today is much more dangerous than a New England town meeting.¹⁹

Viereck is thus critical of mass democracy, saying that it is "a depressing potential danger to liberty" in that it can degenerate into mass-man, and mass-man can quickly degenerate into totalitarianism.²⁰ He attacks the Jacksonian extension of democracy, and the democratic egalitarian process it initiated.²¹ Mass democracy has led to Nazism in Germany and McCarthyism here at home. Adolf Hitler was a product of mass democracy. Both he and Mussolini praised "democracy" and called their movements "democratic."²² According to Viereck, Nietzsche, whose thought is usually considered part of the philosophical underpinning of Nazism, warned of the tyrannic dangers of mass democracy. He warned Germany against the nationalism and "herd-collectivism" which eventually culminated in Hitler.²³

¹⁹Ibid., p. 138.

²⁰Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 220.

²¹Ibid., p. 220; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 24.

²²Ibid., pp. 136-137.

²³Ibid., pp. 54-57.

Hitler, as is the case with many other freedom-destroying demagogues and dictators, could never have come to power but through mass democracy. Viereck writes, "Although demagogues like Hitler, Peron, Huey Long destroy democracy and equality, they are only possible in a background of democracy and equality. . . ." ²⁴

In the United States mass democracy has also proved to be an adversary to liberty. Out of the democratic egalitarian tradition of Jefferson and Jackson came William Jennings Bryan and the Populists, with their rigid Biblical Fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism, anti-urbanism, racial bigotry, and attacks on academic freedom. Moreover, for Viereck, McCarthyism and the American radical right, with their "thought-control," had their origins in the Populist and Progressive movements, in radical egalitarianism. ²⁵ Joseph McCarthy started out as a LaFollette Progressive. ²⁶ Such pro-Nazi sympathizers as Father Charles Coughlin and Ezra Pound came out of a Western Populist background. They defended Hitler and Mussolini, not for fascist but for Populist egalitarian reasons. ²⁷ All of these movements shared a belief in direct democracy, a faith in the wisdom of the masses. They shared a certain anti-elitism, and anti-intellectualism. They were conspiracy-hunting movements.

²⁴Ibid., p. 138.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 45-46. 165.

²⁶Ibid., p. 181.

²⁷Ibid., p. 207.

McCarthy's hunt to root out communist conspiracies was analogous to LaFollette's fear of international business conspiracies, his "witch hunt" against big business.²⁸ Perhaps most importantly, Viereck says that all three movements were class-oriented movements. They were movements spurred by status resentment. They represented a revolt by the lower classes emanating from the West and Midwest, against America's social and intellectual elite. McCarthyism was a holdover from the Progressive-Populist days. The McCarthyites were attacking the same people the Populist-Progressives attacked, i.e., the Eastern establishment, intellectuals, and Wall Street bankers. McCarthyism was a class resentment movement. These were lower class people who were helped by America's intellectual elite, during the New Deal, now turning on the people who had helped them in order to bolster their sagging self-esteem.²⁹ Many of them were new immigrants displaying what Viereck calls transtolerance--the proclivity of many new immigrants to prove their Americanism by showing a certain ideological intolerance toward certain "unAmerican" ideas or thinkers or groups, an overzealous patriotism.³⁰ Viereck expresses

²⁸Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²⁹Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite," in The New American Right, Daniel Bell, ed., pp. 92-95.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 98-99; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 219.

his idea on the connection between Populism-Progressivism and McCarthyism in his poem, "To a Sinister Potato":

O vast earth-apple, waiting to be fried,
Of all the starers the most many-eyed,
What furtive purpose hatched you long ago
In Indiana or in Idaho?

In Indiana and in Idaho
Snug underground, the great potatoes grow,
Puffed up with secret paranoias unguessed
By all the duped and starch-fed Middle West.

Like coiled-up springs or like a will-to-power
The fat and earthy lurkers bide their hour,
The silent watchers of our raucous show
In Indiana or in Idaho.

"They deem us dull, a food and not a flower.
Wait! We'll outshine all roses in our hour.
Not wholesomeness but mania swells us so
In Indiana and in Idaho.

"In each Kiwanis Club on every plate
So bland and health-exuding do we wait
That Indiana never, never knows
How much we envy stars and hate the rose."

Some doom will strike (as all potatoes know)
When--once too often mashed in Idaho--
From its cocoon the drabbest of earth's powers
Rises and is a star.

And shines.
And lours.³¹

The "sinister potatoes" are the McCarthyites and Populist-Progressives. These potatoes grow in "Indiana" and "Idaho," in the "starch-fed Middle-West." Thus, Viereck establishes

³¹Viereck, New and Selected Poems, p. 119.

the Western and Mid-Western origins of these movements. Their "secret paranoias" seem to refer to their anti-intellectualism and anti-Eastern establishment attitudes. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas, however, Viereck goes on to establish full-blown the status resentment of these movements and their revolt against the "establishment." ("They deem us dull, a food and not a flower/ Wait! We'll outshine all roses in our hour.")

Thus, for Viereck, McCarthyism was not a conservative movement. It was a part of a status resentment movement, a revolt of the lower classes of the West and Midwest against the elitist, Eastern establishment. Viereck was not alone in expressing these ideas. This view enjoyed great currency in many scholarly circles during the 1950s. Richard Hofstadter was probably the most noted exponent of this thesis, but Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Seymour Martin Lipset also expressed similar views on the link particularly between Populism and the American radical right.³² These men, along with Viereck, were contributors to a book, edited by Bell, which expressed this point of view.³³ This idea, however, has been attacked and largely discredited by such

³² Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform, From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 131-171.

³³ Bell, ed., The New American Right.

scholars as Norman Pollack, Lawrence Goodwyn, and to some extent by C. Vann Woodward.³⁴ Moreover, it has been argued convincingly by Walter Dean Burnham that the Progressives were not democratic egalitarians at all, as Viereck asserts, but middle-class elites whose reforms limited rather than extended democracy.³⁵ The Populist may have been radical egalitarians, but the Progressives were not. They had a loathing for Populism and its objectives and fought those objectives by making moderate reforms, like increased government regulation, in lieu of the more radical changes the Populists desired, such as government ownership of certain industries.³⁶

Moreover, as Claes Ryn points out, in his argument on status resentment, Viereck comes close to making an economic deterministic argument. Viereck's speaking of McCarthyism, Populism, and Progressivism in terms of class

³⁴Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise, The Populist Moment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 13-143; C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 31-109.

³⁵Walter Dean Burnham, Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 71-90.

³⁶Wiebe, pp. 164-195; Hofstadter, pp. 131-212; Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), pp. 203-233.

conflict sounds rather Marxist for a man who is a staunch critic of Marxism and economic determinism.³⁷ Thus, Viereck's argument here seems weak and somewhat ill-conceived.

Nevertheless, for Viereck, McCarthyism and the radical right have their roots in the democratic egalitarian Populist-Progressive movements. These movements, with their hostility to liberty, gained sustenance from direct democracy. The McCarthyites were "revolutionaries of savage direct democracy," against America's traditional aristocratic Courts and Constitution.³⁸ They threatened liberty "precisely" because they were so egalitarian, ruling foreign policy by means of mass telegrams to the executive branch, radio speeches and the Gallup poll.³⁹ Equality and democracy are thus the enemies of freedom. "The spread of democratic equal rights facilitates . . . the equal violation of rights."⁴⁰ Viereck's abhorrence of direct democracy can be summed up in one chilling, if exaggerated question. In a time when the lynch mob was still a dispenser of "justice" in the South, he asks, "what are lynchings but the logical final stage of direct democracy?"⁴¹

³⁷Ryn, p. 361.

³⁸Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite," p. 96.

³⁹Ibid., p. 96. ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 96.

⁴¹Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 202.

Viereck is not so naive as to believe that we have attained true mass democracy in America. He still believes that government is run by elites, and that is the way it should be. However, since the Jacksonian revolution the drift toward mass democracy has been alarming, as far as Viereck is concerned, and in this age of mass communication could threaten the health of the American polity.

The type of democracy of which Viereck is most receptive is what he calls indirect democracy. Indirect democracy, like direct democracy, fulfills the will of the people but by first "filtering it through the people's representatives, through the parliamentary, judicial, and Constitutional sieve, and through the ethical restraints of religion and tradition. . . ." ⁴² Both types of democracy allow for majority rule, as should be the case in the American context, but direct democracy "facilitates revolution, an unrestrained dictatorship by demagogues," while indirect democracy "facilitates evolution, a self-restrained leadership of noblesse oblige, and the judicial safe-guarding of civil liberties." ⁴³ What Viereck is talking about here seems to be a Federalist-style republicanism. Indeed, Viereck has great veneration for the American Constitution,

⁴² Ibid., p. 131.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 131.

particularly as it was in its original form, saying that it was a conservative document. He points to the fact that three of the main branches of the government were not chosen directly by the people, and that the Supreme Court is still a "non-elective, non-removable elite," not responsible to democratic majorities.⁴⁴ Viereck highly approves of the anti-majoritarian nature of the Constitution, as it was before being diluted by the push toward mass democracy. He is even somewhat critical of the direct election of Senators, writing,

Suppose America had retained the indirect election of Senators. . . . In that case, our Senate would today contain more pompous asses and more stealers of graft but fewer stealers of civil liberties. The gain would have been worth the price. . . .⁴⁵

To Viereck, the Constitution was a welcomed conservative reaction against the "mob-excesses and the democratic-utopian rhetoric" of the Declaration of Independence "with its grand abstractions about 'life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.'"⁴⁶ Yet, Viereck thinks that even the American Revolution had a largely conservative intent, since the revolutionaries were trying to obtain their traditional rights as British citizens. He prefers to call it the

⁴⁴Peter Viereck, Conservatism, From Adams to Churchill (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1956), pp. 90-91; Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, "Conservatism," by Peter Viereck, p. 66.

⁴⁵Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 134.

⁴⁶Viereck, Conservatism, From Adams to Churchill, p. 91.

"Conservation of 1776" rather than the American Revolution. These same ideas are expressed by Viereck's new conservative colleague, Daniel Boorstin in his book, The Genius of American Politics.⁴⁷ So, Viereck admires the indirect democracy of America's early Constitution.

Viereck seems skeptical of any type of democracy. He seems to view it as a volatile entity with as great a capacity to do harm as to do good. However, he is willing to accept indirect democracy. Indirect democracy provides all the benefits of direct democracy, without the corresponding danger to liberty. Indirect democracy is controlled democracy, democracy held in check. Viereck writes, "Democracy is housebroken, is tolerant, humane, civil libertarian, only after being filtered, traditionalized, constitutionalized through indirect representation."⁴⁸ Viereck sees the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) as an example of the liberty-saving advantages of indirect democracy. Here was a non-elective, non-democratic institution moving to protect liberty in the face of tremendous adverse mass pressure.⁴⁹ Viereck seems to be one

⁴⁷Encyclopedia Britannica, "Conservatism," by Viereck, p. 66; Daniel Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

⁴⁸Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 134.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 149-151.

of the few American conservatives to laud the Supreme Court's decision in the Brown case.⁵⁰

So, Viereck is staunchly opposed to direct democracy, but endorses indirect democracy. Generally, however, Viereck's support of any type of democracy seems somewhat less than whole-hearted. He seems to accept democracy rather than really embrace it. At times, he does not even appear to be an enthusiastic supporter of universal suffrage. He writes,

In the exceptional historical context of America, universal suffrage is too deep-rooted to permit even a bit of discussion of less quantitative, more qualitative alternatives (even though it was no reactionary but John Stuart Mill, himself a democratic liberal, who demanded a double vote for the educationally qualified).⁵¹

Viereck seems to accept universal suffrage only because it has become an engrained part of the American political environment. Universal suffrage is fine for America, because it has become part of our democratic tradition. It may not, however, be the best mode of leadership selection for other countries. This points out a disturbing aspect of Viereck's political philosophy. Implicit in Viereck's thought is the gradual acceptance of almost any institutionalized change worthy of conserving. Sometimes

⁵⁰Nash, pp. 200, 202.

⁵¹Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 130.

Viereck seems to accept a thing just because it is old and has become engrained. This would seem to make his style of conservatism, as Hayek argues, merely the follower of liberalism's lead.⁵²

This also reveals Viereck's somewhat ambiguous stand on democracy. In one place he appears to viciously attack it, while in another he appears to say that the American conservative must staunchly defend it because it is part of our tradition, although it is not really the best form of government. What he seems to be saying is that democracy is all right for America, because of our peculiar political culture, but not for everybody else.

What Viereck really seems to prefer is some sort of aristocratic or elitist system. He has a particular fondness for the old European system of aristocracy and constitutional monarchy. We have already mentioned his admiration for the Federalist period of American history, with its limited suffrage and aristocratic leadership, and his belief that American civil liberties had their beginnings in aristocracy. For Viereck civil liberties and social reform came not from democracy, but from aristocrats, acting out of a sense of noblesse oblige. Most humane social reform

⁵² Hayek, "Why I Am Not a Conservative," pp. 89-90.

was carried out by "highhanded, aristocratic actions" carried out against the will of the masses.⁵³ Looking back to his hero, Prince Metternich, he writes,

Monarchy, aristocracy, and what remained of medieval feudalism in the Central Europe of Metternich were a freedom-enhancing, countervailing force against middle class attempts to set up, in the name of liberal democracy, a mechanizing dictatorship of urban capitalism over peasants and workers.⁵⁴

It was those undemocratic, New England aristocrats, John and John Quincy Adams who called for an end to slavery long before liberal democrats like William Lloyd Garrison made that cry. Also, the most rabid lynchers of blacks in the South have not been Southern aristocrats, but the so-called "poor white trash," people who, with the exception of the race issue, are radical egalitarians.⁵⁵ Thus, Viereck seems to favor aristocratic or elitist rule.

However, the elite which Viereck is calling for is not a rigid, 17th century-style elite. Viereck says that anyone can possess what he calls, "the aristocratic spirit," without regard to social class. The "aristocratic spirit" is the spirit of "dutiful public service, insistence on quality and standards, the decorum and ethical inner check

⁵³Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 145.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 149-151.

of noblesse oblige. . . ."⁵⁶ Viereck seems to be calling for a natural aristocracy of intellectuals. Perhaps this is why he berates the intellectuals so in Shame and Glory, because they are not providing the kind of leadership he expects of them. Despite the fact that the "aristocratic spirit" can be possessed by members of all classes, Viereck seems to have a great affinity toward the intellectuals of the "Eastern establishment," the Ivy League educated social elite.⁵⁷ Viereck's controversial support of Adlai Stevenson, John Kennedy, and to a lesser degree, Franklin Roosevelt, probably had to do with their intellectual, or Eastern establishment backgrounds. He saw Roosevelt, Charles Evans Hughes, and Adlai Stevenson as coming out of the same tradition as Washington, Adams, and Hamilton, what he called the "aristocratic, selfless service-tradition."⁵⁸ Viereck's support of leaders like Stevenson and Kennedy got him into trouble with other conservatives, who did not perceive these leaders as conservatives at all.⁵⁹ So, what Viereck is calling for is rule by an elite. He sees aristocrats as the great initiators and protectors of civil liberties and

⁵⁶Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁷Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁵⁹Meyer, "Counterfeit at a Popular Price," p. 18; Nash, pp. 155-156.

humane, moderate, social reform. It is not clearly delineated who should form this elite, but Viereck does have a partiality toward Eastern educated intellectuals and social elites.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that Viereck is both a cultural and political elitist. As a cultural elitist, Viereck is critical of what he sees as the propensity in modern society to cater to the masses, to popular whim. In the arts this has led to a lack of creativity as new innovations and techniques are immediately copied by less talented artists for mass consumption. It has also led to a decline in individuality, to what Viereck calls the overadjusted man, the unthinking non-reflective man who has lost his individuality in the quest to be "chic," to be in vogue, to be like everyone else. As his hero, Viereck puts forth the unadjusted man, the non-conformist who thinks for himself and resists mass pressures. The unadjusted man, however, is not a rebel, he is a person who is in tune with tradition and traditional values. In many respects, his work on mass society and unadjustedness bears a similarity to much other writing in the 1950s and 1960s being produced along this line, work by such people as Riesman and Marcuse.⁶⁰ However, Viereck's unadjusted man

⁶⁰ Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 1-119; David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 3-375.

has a definite Burkean-conservative flavor in his attachment to tradition.

In order to restore creativity, Viereck suggests that the higher education system be reformed. He believes we should get away from the idea of mass education at the college level. Higher education should not be for everyone, but only for an elite of talent. In both his ideas on the unadjusted man and on education, Viereck seems to owe much to Irving Babbitt and the new humanists.

Viereck is also a political elitist, but here his position becomes fuzzy. He is critical of the inroads which he believes direct democracy has made in the American political system, linking an increase in mass democracy to a loss of civil liberties. However, his use of a supposed link between Populist-Progressivism and McCarthyism to strengthen his contention is suspect, for it is debatable that Progressivism was a democratic egalitarian movement. Also, in attempting to make this connection, Viereck uses an argument that smacks of economic determinism and is thus contrary to the general tenor of Viereck's thought. Viereck's use of poor Southern whites as an example of the link between democratic egalitarianism and loss of civil liberties is perhaps a better example, for as Dye and Zeigler have pointed out, in everything but race, George Wallace was an egalitarian

democrat.⁶¹ So, Viereck attacks direct democracy, preferring what he calls indirect democracy or republicanism. He is an ardent defender of democracy in America, but his reason for defending it seems to be his acquiescence to the fact that democracy is an integral part of the American political culture and is not about to go away.

Once again we encounter an ambivalence in Viereck's thought. Most of the time he is critical of democracy; however, at other times he tends to soften this criticism saying that the American conservative staunchly defends democracy. Again, this is probably due to Viereck's proclivity toward European conservatism, which draws him in a direction hostile to democracy, and his American environment which tugs him the other way. Also, Viereck's criticism of democracy may be tempered somewhat by his quest to make conservatism acceptable again to an American audience. This would be hard to do if Viereck is seen as being intransigently critical of democracy. Basically, however, Viereck is a reluctant supporter of democracy, but from aristocracy. Empirically, it has been argued that the upper classes have a more tolerant attitude toward civil liberties than do the

⁶¹Thomas R. Dye and L. Harmon Zeigler, The Irony of Democracy, An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics, 4th edition (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1978), pp. 137-138.

lower-classes.⁶² Here, and in his attack on poor Southern white egalitarians as enemies of civil liberties, Viereck seems to have pointed out the tyrannic potential of democracy. In an area of his philosophy that is murky and muddled this may be his most important point. At any rate, it can hardly be denied that his skepticism toward democracy, and his advocacy of some sort of aristocracy places Viereck outside the mainstream of American political thought. Next we shall turn to a part of Viereck's thought that, unlike his views on democracy, is one of the clearer and most interesting areas of his political thought--his views on social reform.

⁶²Samuel A. Stouffer, Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties (New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 139.

CHAPTER V

VIEWS ON SOCIAL REFORM

Probably the most controversial area of Viereck's thought, the area which has brought his self-proclaimed conservatism under its severest scrutiny, has been his views on social reform. In this chapter, we will be closely examining these views in an attempt to more clearly discern what they are, how they fit into the whole of Viereck's political philosophy, and how they compare with other conservative ideas on social reform. Here, social reform, or social change is being used in the rather broad sense of describing political, social, legal, and economic reform. Social reform is being defined as change leading to a wider diffusion of political, social, or economic benefits (not necessarily an equal distribution). Examples of such change might be wider suffrage, which would be a change leading to a greater diffusion of political benefits, or some kind of monetary public assistance law which would lead to a greater diffusion of social or economic benefits. It could be a change to rectify some inequality before the law. All these things are examples of what we might call social reform, or social change, which for the purpose of this study shall be used as interchangeable terms.

Viereck's Acceptance of the New Deal

The main point of contention concerning Viereck's views on social reform is his acceptance of the New Deal. Viereck is one of the few self-proclaimed American conservatives to embrace the New Deal. Indeed, he goes so far as to call it the "Overdue Deal," saying that many of these reforms, such as minimum-wage and social security laws had already been passed in England, and should have been instituted in the United States long before the 1930s.¹ Perhaps no other aspect of his thought places him in starker contrast to the mainstream of American conservatism. He seems to base this acceptance on three points. An examination of these points should shed greater light on Viereck's ideas on social change.

First of all, Viereck endorsed many of the New Deal reforms because he felt that they were in line with traditional Judeo-Christian values, injunctions to help those who are suffering and in distress. In attempting to show that the New Deal could be construed as conservative rather than radical Viereck writes, "a compassionate and humane approach to economic suffering is the logical outgrowth of the oldest Christian, Jewish, and Hellenic ethics."² He

¹Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 270.

²Ibid., p. 260.

frequently speaks of social reform in terms of "humane" social reform, or "humanitarian" social reform, and indeed, at times, he classifies his brand of conservatism as a "humanistic" form of conservatism.³ Part of Viereck's scorn for laissez-faire capitalism is due to his belief that it has shown a callous attitude toward human suffering. He vigorously criticizes what he calls the "hurtless Manchester liberalism" of the 19th century, which he says was "hostile to decent compassion for child-labor and slum conditions."⁴ It did not show the sense of noblesse oblige that had been shown by the aristocracy. He goes on to say that "decent compassion was more often felt by aristocratic conservatives and by democratic socialists than by 19th century 'economic' liberals."⁵ So, Viereck supports the New Deal, partially out of humanitarian reasons.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, for Viereck, the New Deal reforms represented "revolution-preventing" reforms.⁶ They helped maintain political stability. According to Viereck, if something had not been done to relieve the economic suffering caused by the Depression, the United States

³Ibid., pp. 4, 11, 12; Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 16.

⁴Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 83.

⁵Ibid., p. 83.

⁶Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 277.

would have drifted toward totalitarianism. The "moderate" reforms of the New Deal prevented more extreme reforms from taking place, such as the toppling of long-standing government institutions, or the radical redistribution of wealth. They saved America from the very brink of revolutionary disaster, while keeping America's ruling elite in tact. He described the situation this way,

Starving unemployed masses, embittered to the brink of radical revolution. Unemployed apple vendors at every corner. Hooverville shacks and bonus-marchers dispersed by armed force. Farmers burning mortgages. Workers shot down by company guards or in turn lawlessly taking over factories in sit-down strikes. In short, a revolutionary powder-keg, needing only a spark.

In America the spark never came. Why? All over the rest of the world, the same depression was goading the masses into revolutionary extremes: usually of the communist left, as in France's trade unions and Front Populaire; sometimes of the radical right, as in Germany. Even sober, evolutionary England felt temporarily the violent passions of class war. The American masses proved the solitary exception to the universal radicalism, meekly letting the New Deal canalize their grievances back into the old, middle class, parliamentary framework. The New Deal reforms may seem drastic from the smug and prosperous viewpoint of today, but they were small potatoes from the viewpoint of the economic and psychological desperation of 1933.⁷

Viereck believes that certain aspects of the New Deal were radical. For example, he mentions the NRA, although he does not explain why he felt it was radical. Probably it was due

⁷Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 232.

to the fact that the NRA was an effort in government economic planning, something almost universally scorned by conservatives as a threat to individual freedom. In its efforts to obtain "fair competition" and increase wages, the NRA was accused of price fixing and arbitrarily limiting production. So, in this aspect, Viereck probably felt that the New Deal went too far in tampering with the economic system.⁸ However, in its effect the New Deal was definitely conservative, for it maintained stability and averted revolution, without toppling ruling elites. Viereck even calls Franklin Roosevelt a "crypto-conservative," writing, "the crypto-conservative Roosevelt won the worker, the farmer, the Negro, and the 'underprivileged minorities' away from revolutionary extremism by giving them a stake in America."⁹ Therefore, the American conservative should not indiscriminately attack Roosevelt and the New Deal, or yearn for a pre-1932 existence, but praise the New Deal as the salvation of America. Viereck writes,

The year 1933 killed radicalism and communism in America by proving to the plutocrat-resenting masses that their aspirations for economic liberty could be met--via the Squire of Hyde Park--within the traditional Constitutional squirearchical framework; hence, no need for communist or even socialist alternatives to the plutocrats. The day will

⁸Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 270.

⁹Ibid., p. 273.

come when 1933 occupies for American conservatives of the future the same ancient and sacred aura, . . . that 1688 has occupied for British conservatives like Burke and Churchill and America's Federalist party. When that day comes, maturer conservatives than many today will hail the Roosevelt inauguration of 1933 with the same phrase with which Burke hailed the bloodless inauguration of King William III: not as a revolution but as "a revolution averted."¹⁰

In his acceptance of the New Deal, Viereck saw himself as acting out of the conservative tradition of Burke, Coleridge, Metternich, Disraeli, and Churchill, all of whom advocated social reform of a moderate nature. He pointed repeatedly to Burke's warning that "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation."¹¹ After all, had not Burke called for an end to the slave trade?¹² According to Viereck, the sometimes autocratic Prince Metternich had also called for reform in Austria-Hungary, but his proposals for an embryonic parliament and educational reforms were vetoed by Emperor Francis. Long before Marx, Metternich had charged that the liberty for which the capitalists fought was really the liberty to substitute an economic oligarchy for the existing political aristocracy. Their representative

¹⁰Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 235.

¹¹Ibid., p. 79.

¹²Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised edition, p. 141; Petrella, p. 55.

institutions were not instruments of the people as they claimed, but instruments of the business classes.

Metternich called himself a "conservative socialist," not in the Marxist sense, but in the sense that he felt that the rule of moral and economic law must restrain the new middle-classes from exploiting the masses. Metternich's sin lay in not fighting harder for his reforms.¹³ As we have seen, the British conservatives, under Disraeli, extended the vote to the working classes and passed labor legislation which made possible the right to strike and codified minimum-wage laws.¹⁴ Thus, according to Viereck, the conservative is not against all change. To be staunchly against change is to invite revolution. The conservative is for evolutionary change, slow, moderate change. For Viereck, this is what distinguished British conservatism from the rigid conservatism of Eastern Europe, of De Maistre and Czar Nicholas I. This is why the British crown survived while Russia succumbed to communist revolution. Evolutionary change prevents revolution.¹⁵

Liberalism also advocates evolutionary change. What, then, differentiates him from the conservative? Viereck

¹³Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 89-112.

¹⁴Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 258; O'Sullivan p. 99.

¹⁵Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, pp. 13-14.

argues that social reform itself is no criteria for differentiating between liberals and conservatives. Both liberals and conservatives have advocated social reform.¹⁶ It is the motive behind the reform that is the criteria for making the distinction. Viereck writes, "the same social reform in politics may be supported for very different philosophical reasons."¹⁷ The conservative supports moderate change in an attempt to prevent radical change, i.e., change disruptive of traditional institutions and stability. He supports social reform in order to avoid revolution. Reform is a means of conserving. For the liberal, however, reform is a progressive measure. It is part of the march toward bigger and better things, part of the inevitable trek towards progress.¹⁸ Liberalism believes society is "maleable," i.e., like clay it can be shaped, molded, and changed. Man is basically good. The evil in the world comes from society and existing institutions. By altering existing institutions one can eliminate some of the evil and change the world for the better. The conservative, on the other hand, believes that little improvement can be made in the world. The world cannot get much better than it is

¹⁶Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 11.

¹⁷Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, revised edition, p. 138.

¹⁸Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 11.

already. Certainly changing existing institutions will not automatically lead to progress, for the evil in the world does not originate in institutions, but has its basis in man's innate tendencies toward self-aggrandizement, i.e., original sin.¹⁹ Traditional institutions are usually a stabilizing force in society, a civilizing force, not a detriment. Reforms, therefore, should be slow, well-considered, and moderate. Its purpose should be to help maintain what we have accumulated, not to reach for some grand illusion of progress.

The argument that Viereck is using to support the New Deal, that it prevented revolution, is hardly a new one. It is the same argument used by liberals and radical leftists to either praise or condemn the New Deal. Many radical leftists and elite theorists have claimed that the New Deal was really not revolutionary at all, but crumbs to assuage the masses while ruling elites remained in control.²⁰ Elite theorists, Dye and Zeigler, have written, "The New Deal was not a new revolutionary system but rather a necessary reform of the existing capitalist system. . . . Relief, recovery,

¹⁹O'Sullivan, pp. 9-13.

²⁰Tom Hayden, "The Politics of 'The Movement,'" in Dissent, Vol. 13 (Jan.-Feb. 1966), pp. 76-77; H. Mark Roelofs, Ideology and Myth in American Politics, A Critique of a National Mind (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), p. 238.

and reform, not revolution, were the objectives of the New Deal."²¹ Viereck would obviously agree with this assessment but rather than criticize the New Deal on this score, as radical leftist do, he applauds it. Moreover, this is an argument used by liberals as well. They would also praise the New Deal for preventing revolution. Where, then, does this leave Viereck's distinction between liberals and conservatives? It indicates that even in motive the view of some conservatives and liberals are indistinguishable on the question of social reform. This is perhaps due to the tendency of some conservatives in the twentieth century to move toward a greater acceptance of state intervention, and a tendency of liberals, disillusioned after two world wars, to give up the idea of progress. Now this does not necessarily mean that Viereck is not a conservative because he accepts social reform any more than it means Arthur Schlesinger is a conservative because he does not believe in inevitable progress. What it does mean is that by itself, acceptability of social reform is not an adequate criterion for distinguishing between liberalism and conservatism.

Finally, Viereck's support of the New Deal stems from his belief that the New Deal has become rooted in the American political tradition. The New Deal has now become institutionalized. The New Deal reforms are not about to disappear

²¹Dye and Zeigler, p. 83.

so there is no need in talking about going back to pre-1932 existence. Such talk is unrealistic.²² Viereck is trying to be practical. His argument is that American conservatives are being unrealistic in their continuing fight against the New Deal. The New Deal is here to stay. Calling for a pre-1932 existence can only hurt conservatives in the minds of most Americans. The revival of conservatism depends on their ceasing to cleave to this archaic position. Only then can conservatism be a viable force in American politics. Consequently, Viereck's acceptance of the New Deal is partially an acquiescence to what he sees as existing realities.

We see, therefore, that Viereck's endorsement of the New Deal is based on three things: humane, ethical consideration for the poor and destitute; a belief that the New Deal reforms prevented America from slipping into radicalism and revolution; and an acceptance of the New Deal as a concrete reality of contemporary America. While the third is a more narrow, pragmatic consideration, the first two are broader justifications for social reform as a whole. We can, therefore, say that Viereck believes in moderate social reforms for ethical reasons and, most importantly, because moderate

²²Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 275; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 236.

social reform is necessary to prevent radical change, and maintain political stability.

Contrasting Views on Social Reform

In looking at these reasons, we can see that Viereck does indeed seem to be acting in accordance with the conservative tradition, for as we saw earlier these are the same three reasons for which conservatives have historically supported social reform: (1) to prevent revolution; (2) for ethical considerations; and (3) for practical political reasons. Yet, perhaps nothing has gotten Viereck into deeper trouble with his fellow conservatives than his stand on social reform. Why has this been the case? We have already seen that European conservatives, particularly the British, were not inflexible foes of social reform. Neither have American conservatives been firmly opposed to social reform. John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were both foes of slavery (though not overly active).²³ Allen Guttman has reminded us that it was the "conservative" South that insisted on a right to revolution in the Civil War, and William F. Buckley and the National Review circle of conservatives approved of

²³ Charles Francis Adams, ed., The Life and Works of John Adams, Vol. 10 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1856), p. 380; David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 172.

the Montgomery bus boycott by blacks.²⁴ Even libertarians, like F. A. Hayek, insist over and over again that they are not against moderate social change.²⁵ If conservatives support limited social change, why all of the controversy over Viereck's views on the New Deal and social reform? Why has he been literally read out of the American conservative movement for expressing these views?

What we have said is that conservatives have traditionally supported moderate social change. The difficulty arises when they try to decide on what is moderate. Here, there is disagreement. Viereck considered the New Deal reforms moderate and revolution-preventing. To most American conservatives, however, these reforms were anything but revolution-preventing; they were a revolution in themselves, ushering in the tremendous growth of state power and the shackling of individual freedom. For example, Frank Meyer said that American conservatism is a "delayed" reaction to the "revolutionary transformation" of America begun with Franklin Roosevelt's election.²⁶ Clearly there is a difference of opinion here between Meyer and the dominant

²⁴Guttmann, pp. 32-46; Jeffrey Hart, The American Dissent, A Decade of Modern Conservatism (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966), pp. 116-117.

²⁵F. A. Hayek, Economic Freedom and Representative Government (The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1973), p. 14.

²⁶Meyer, "Conservatism," p. 3.

fusionist school of American conservatism and Viereck, as to what constitutes moderate reform. This difference seems to turn on their contrasting attitudes towards economics.

These stem from the aversion American conservatives have for state intervention in the economy. As fusionists, profoundly influenced by liberal capitalism, particularly since the late nineteenth century, American conservatives have been scornful of state intervention as an encroachment on individual freedom. Indeed, this distaste for government intervention has come to be the preeminent characteristic of contemporary American conservatism. However, traditionalist conservatism, with its European focus, has been less concerned with questions of individual economic freedom; therefore, it has also been less hostile to state intervention. European conservatism, historically, has not been as adverse towards state intervention as American conservatism. But, as we have said, European-style conservatism, traditionalist conservatism, has had few adherents in the United States, particularly since the Civil War. Fusionism has been the dominant form of conservatism in America. Thus, in being basically a traditionalist, Viereck is advocating a type of conservatism that has had little moment in America, except perhaps, as Guttman has said, in the realm of literature.²⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that Viereck

²⁷Guttman, pp. 46-77.

would find himself at odds with the bulk of American conservative opinion. His endorsement of the New Deal seems consonant with the more flexible attitude of traditionalist European conservatism toward state intervention. It is an attitude that extends back, to a certain extent to Burke, to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But to American conservatives, who place great stress on individual economic freedom, Viereck would seem a traitor and threat to American capitalism.

Although Viereck is very critical of neo-classical liberalism and laissez-faire economics, he is certainly no anti-capitalist. Indeed, he is an enthusiastic supporter of the capitalist system. He writes, "the economy healthiest for democracy is more certainly the free market and free consumer choice that encourager of individual diversities."²⁸ He goes on to say, in an argument reminiscent of scholars like Hayek and Ropke, that individual political rights cannot exist under a system of economic collectivism. The two are incompatible.²⁹ He warns that reform should be limited and stay within certain bounds to prevent the creation of a welfare superstate and the resulting loss of liberty. He writes,

A more substantial objection does arise when the proposed reforms cross a line which welfare laws are inflated into the welfare superstate. . . . It is the line of diminishing returns for humanitarianism. Beyond it, the increase in security

²⁸ Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 265.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 264.

is less than the loss in liberty. Here arises the problem of bigness,³⁰

Viereck calls this line the "Statist Line"--the point at which the welfare state threatens liberty. Reform should not be allowed to cross this point.³¹ Viereck does not clearly define this point, but he does imply that some of the democratic socialist countries in Europe have already crossed the Statist Line. Yet, he does not identify these countries. He merely mentions that the Atlee government in Britain, and most of the French and Scandinavian socialists are not among those who have crossed or advocated crossing the Statist Line. America should not cross the Statist Line, and it should warn the European socialists against doing so. The Statist Line can be avoided by expanding social welfare laws only where needed, and not in an effort to garner votes. It can be avoided by always having two party participation in the reform process, and by not regimenting more of society than is necessary to achieve order and justice.³² Viereck prefers voluntary restraints to state intervention. He puts great stress on the importance of inner restraint, on the belief, for instance, that a person who acts in accordance with

³⁰Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 16.

³¹Ibid., p. 16.

³²Ibid., p. 17-18; Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 264-266.

traditional Judeo-Christian ethics will voluntarily choose not to exploit the poor without the government stepping in.³³ Viereck may be naive in this belief. It is uncertain that modern capitalism, with its emphasis on profits and self-interest, can coexist with an infusion of altruistic Judeo-Christian ethics. Certainly, such a capitalist system would not work to its maximum efficiency.

So, Viereck is no anti-capitalist. He merely feels that capitalism must be restrained, to avoid crass materialism, a disregard for the poor, and creating conditions conducive to revolution. He writes,

I have faith in American capitalism because I believe its profit system has been sufficiently modified by ethics--and because I believe it can continue to be revised peacefully, without need of socialism, when it does violate the demands of humanity. Defending it on this basis, we can create faith in our system in Europe, in India, and at home. But if we adopt the un-American principle of putting profits above humanity and ethnic, we shall discredit American capitalism and aid Moscow.³⁴

His attitude toward capitalism can be summed up in this way, "Capitalism has many . . . merits but happens not to be a sacred religion."³⁵

Aristocratic Roots of Social Reform

There is one final question to address before concluding our discussion of Viereck's views on social reform. As

³³Ibid., p. 275.

³⁴Ibid., p. 262.

³⁵Ibid., p. 263.

we have seen, Viereck has a great hostility toward equality and democracy. How then can a man so hostile to equality be such an advocate of social reform? For Viereck, social reform and equality are not the same things. Indeed, social reform is often the product of inequality; social reforms are many times enacted by aristocrats, acting out of a sense of noblesse oblige.³⁶ Viereck seemed to view Franklin Roosevelt in this light, calling him "the aristocratic Squire of Hyde Park."³⁷ He said that Roosevelt was,

fulfilling the aristocratic British Tory ideal of the highborn nobleman joining with his yeomen of factory and farmer--in defiance of laissez-faire shopkeeper commercialism--in order to give them a stake in our traditional status quo, the American equivalent of throne and altar.³⁸

So, as with civil liberties, social reform is not the product of mass democracy, but elitism. For Viereck, social reforms are not enacted to bring about equality. This is a utopian illusion set aside for leftists. Social reform should be enacted for ethical reasons and to prevent radicalism. It may be argued here that although Viereck is hostile to equality theoretically, his endorsement of the New Deal and other social reform makes him, in effect, a supporter

³⁶Viereck, Conservatism Revisited, p. 18; Viereck, Shame and Glory, pp. 220, 273; Viereck, The Unadjusted Man, p. 83.

³⁷Viereck, Shame and Glory, p. 260.

³⁸Ibid., p. 262.

of greater equality, and many of his fellow American conservatives would add, at the expense of liberty. However, Viereck is not inconsistent. He is looking over his shoulder at the growing spectre of communist totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is the big enemy. It destroys all liberties. If America is to maintain most of its liberties, if it is to avoid radical change, some liberties must be given up through social reform, some concessions to equality must be made. This is Viereck's message to his fellow American conservatives.

Conclusion

Thus, in summation, we have seen that Viereck supports social reform for humanitarian reasons, and as a preventive measure against revolution, the latter being particularly important to Viereck in light of the perceived threat of totalitarianism in the twentieth century. Viereck has been criticized for his position on social change, most especially for supporting the New Deal. However, he has been criticized not so much because he is amenable to social change, but because he is amenable to a greater degree of social change than most American conservatives. Contrary to what many people seem to believe, conservatives throughout history have been receptive to the idea of moderate social reform. Consequently, receptivity to social reform, by itself,

would not seem to be an acceptable criterion for delineating between liberals and conservatives. Viereck's disagreement with American conservatives seems to stem from the fact that he, like many European conservatives of the traditionalist school, is more tolerant of the idea of state intervention than most American conservatives, who are predominantly from the fusionist wing of the contemporary conservative movement. Therefore, Viereck's feud with the bulk of American conservatives reflects the tremendous fragmentation of contemporary conservatism, a fragmentation that separates Viereck from his fellow American conservatives.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

What, then, can we conclude from our analysis of Viereck's thought? Is he a conservative, as he claims, or is he a closet liberal as many of his detractors have asserted? What, if anything, does his political philosophy tell us about the nature of contemporary American conservatism, and about conservatism in general? What light does it shed on the nature of contemporary political philosophy? In this chapter, drawing upon what we have learned about Viereck's political thought, we shall seek to answer these questions and perhaps explore new implications and questions which have arisen from our analysis.

Peter Viereck--European-Style Conservative

Is Viereck a conservative, or is he a liberal masquerading in conservative garb? It seems ludicrous to claim that a man who is skeptical of equality and democracy; believes in aristocratic rule; is a fervent, almost monomaniac anti-communist; is a confirmed pessimist; and at times seems to be in revolt against modernity itself, is not a conservative. Yet, Viereck is also at variance

with the bulk of American conservative opinion on a very crucial issue: state intervention. Viereck is willing to tolerate more state intervention in economic affairs, and in other aspects of life than are the majority of American conservatives. The gravity of this disagreement should not be underestimated, for a concern for individual freedom, and a corresponding aversion toward state intervention in the individual's life is at the core of contemporary American conservatism. This seems to be the issue, which in terms of practical public policy, most definitively separates American liberals from American conservatives. This is where the two ideological camps split, with liberals more tolerant of state intervention than conservatives. There may be exceptions, but basically, American liberals and conservatives diverge on this issue.

Where, then, does this leave Viereck? It leaves him outside the pale of contemporary American conservatism. How, then, can Viereck be a conservative? He is a conservative, but not an American-style conservative. He is a European-style conservative, a traditionalist in a land dominated by fusionism. As we have seen, conservatism is a fragmented ideology. It shows a different face in different environments. Thus, American conservatism is different from European conservatism and Continental conservatism is different from British conservatism. Moreover,

conservatism seems to have become even less cohesive in the twentieth century. The fragmentation has become more pronounced, with contemporary conservatives splintering into roughly three groups: (1) the traditionalists--those conservatives most concerned with the erosion of traditional values; (2) the liberal-conservatives (libertarians)--those conservatives most concerned with the loss of individual freedom; and (3) the fusionists--those who have tried to blend the two branches. (The current neo-conservative movement of Kristol, et al. would fit into this third category.) So, even within these three groups, as we have seen when examining the new conservatism, there is not complete cohesion.

Traditionalism has a decidedly pre-modern tinge, with its talk of moral absolutes, aversion towards classical economics, hatred of mass industrial society, affinity towards aristocracy, and its dislike of equality and democracy. This has been the dominant form of conservatism in Europe, a continent which had a long pre-modern existence to which to harken back. In America, traditionalism has never gained dominance, for America is a product of modern liberal society, with its emphasis on industrialism and materialism. Perhaps because of this, coupled with the religious influence of Puritanism, fusionism has become the dominant brand of American conservatism. American conservatives have combined a concern for individual freedom,

especially in economics, with a sometime concern for religious absolutes. That this meshing is not a smooth one has not seemed to bother them. Thus, the new conservatives and Viereck in particular, are like fish out of water in the American environment. Viereck's acceptance of state intervention, particularly the New Deal, is very much in line with traditionalism and much of European conservative thought. We have seen how European conservatives, like Coleridge, Southey, Metternich, Disraeli, Churchill, and even Burke were not overly squeamish about state intervention and social reform. This is partly because they, like their traditionalist grandchildren, have shown little concern with the question of individual freedom, particularly in the economic realm. Indeed, much of European conservative thought has shown a pronounced hostility toward laissez-faire or neo-classical economics. However, to American conservatives, Viereck's acceptance of the New Deal is anathema, for American conservatives, due to liberal influences, places great stress on individual freedom in economics and are therefore critical of any state intervention that threatens that freedom. So, the criticism which Peter Viereck has received from American conservatives comes from the fact that he is a European-style conservative in an American milieu. However, he is not a liberal. Due to the weakness of a European-style

conservatism in America, American conservatives do not know exactly how to classify Viereck. They do not know what else to call him, so they call him a "liberal," and he responds by calling them "reactionaries." It is all a matter of polemics. The feud between Viereck and American conservatives seems reminiscent of the Papal Schism of the fourteenth century in which rival popes excommunicated each others followers. So, Viereck is a conservative, but he is not an American-style conservative.

However, Viereck cannot completely escape his American environment: his conservatism is still tempered somewhat by it. At times he appears to be a man standing with a foot on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. For the most part, he is a European-style conservative, with his call for a return to traditional values, his staunch anti-materialism, his affinity toward aristocracy and his aversion toward equality and democracy. But at the same time, Viereck puts great stress on the individual. There is little talk of community or community rights in Viereck's thought, no doubt a product of his American environment. This focus on the individual, however, does not manifest itself in economic terms, again in deference to Viereck's European leanings. Also, although Viereck attacks the concept of equality and democracy, he seems somewhat restrained in

these attacks. It is as though he is holding back, as though his mind is somehow divided on these concepts, again perhaps a reflection of his American environment. And even though, as mentioned, there is a pre-modern cast implicit in Viereck's philosophy, this never becomes explicit. Indeed, Viereck would probably deny that it exists, for he is always attacking other new conservatives for their pre-modern leanings, their "rootless nostalgia for roots." Viereck prides himself as a practical, post-industrial conservative, telling us how to live the conservative life in harmony with the post-industrial world. His inability or unwillingness to take cognizance of the pre-modern aspect of his thought is probably a product of his American environment. So, Viereck is a man torn between two worlds, and this rift sometimes gives Viereck's philosophy a vague and ambiguous flavor.

Flaws in Viereck's Thought

This points out one of the major flaws in Viereck's political philosophy: his ambiguity. He seems at times a fence-sitter, unable or unwilling to take a definite stand. Basically, he is critical of democracy, but he staunchly defends it for America. He attacks pragmatism, but concedes that all pragmatism is not bad. He is sometimes anti-rationalist but at other times he is fiercely rationalist.

And he defends individual choice and universal absolutes in almost the same breath.

This lack of clarity permeates many aspects of Viereck's thought. It seems to have several sources. First, there is his lack of understanding of certain issues and concepts, such as his admittedly weak grasp of the technical arguments concerning pragmatism. Secondly, and more importantly, Viereck's ambiguity seems to stem from his effort to make conservatism more acceptable to America, first to the intellectuals then filtering down to the general public. By the 1930s, conservatism had fallen into disrepute, because of the perceived failures of laissez-faire conservatism, resulting in the Great Depression, and the seeming conservative lack of direction. The post-war conservative renaissance in America had as one of its chief aims the restoration of confidence in conservatism. They want to offer conservatism as a viable, workable, practical alternative to liberalism. It is only in the last decade that conservatism has emerged from the intellectual circles and gained a popular following in the sphere of practical politics. This quest for a workable, practical conservatism is uppermost with Peter Viereck. In trying to come up with a conservatism that would be acceptable to the American people, yet true to what Viereck believes to be conservatism's legitimate roots--a Burkean, European-style conservatism--Viereck becomes ambivalent. He mixes

contradictory concepts like a belief in moral absolutes and individual freedom, or inconsistencies like an emphasis on civil liberties but not economic freedom. Viereck is putting conservatism forth as a moderate alternative to liberalism and socialism on the left and laissez-faire conservatism on the right. His gripe against American fusionist conservatism is that by being so critical of any social reform involving state intervention it is not only ignoring its Burkean roots, not only defying traditional Judeo-Christian ethics, but it is being impractical, setting itself up to become obsolete. It is interesting to note that in pushing a kind of conservatism that scorns attempts to cater to the masses, Viereck is trying to cater to the masses. So, Viereck's ambiguity stems, in part, from his quest for a practical, more popular conservatism.

In a sense, it seems that Viereck's thought would be much more valuable and coherent if he was truer to his European roots and would drop his insistence on individualism. This is where much of his ambiguity derives from, his insistence on fusing individualism with a concern for moral absolutes. But, it seems that many of the problems plaguing America today stem from an excess of individualism in its most selfish form. Solutions to problems such as inflation and the energy crunch call for less spending and less gasoline consumption on the part of consumers and less profits

on the part of producers, all in the name of community good. But America, steeped in the tradition of individualism, finds it hard to give up individual rights for community good. It seems that a philosophy stressing community may be more valuable today than one stressing individualism. Now, such a philosophy might not be immediately popular in America, but as Viereck himself has said, ideas sometimes begin in intellectual circles and diffuse to the rest of society. So, some of Viereck's ambiguity could be solved by more of an emphasis on community.

On another plane, Viereck's ambiguity, his confusion, his lack of cohesion may be a reflection of the state of contemporary conservatism. For example, Noel O'Sullivan has talked of the "messiness and incoherence" of much of post-war conservative thought.¹ Contemporary conservatism seems unable to stake out ground for itself. Either it drifts toward reform liberalism by gradually accepting more and more state intervention or it edges in the direction of classical liberalism, with an all-consuming concern about individual freedom. If it tries to cling to its eighteenth century principles, it is condemned as irrelevant to the modern age.² Indeed, Morton Auerbach charges that this incoherence is inherent in modern conservative thought,

¹O'Sullivan, p. 123.

²Ibid., pp. 122-123, 150.

stemming all the way back to Burke.³ We have already pointed out the incompatibility between Burke's communitarian political theory and his individualistic economic theory. We have also pointed out the inconsistency between his economic theory, in which he stressed state non-intervention, and his economic practice, in which he often called for state intervention. So, Viereck's inconsistency and incoherence may be a reflection of the state of modern conservatism.

There are other flaws in Viereck's thought. Some have to do with his defense of tradition. As Gerald Weales has pointed out, Viereck attacks pragmatism and relativism, but are they not spawned by the same virtuous Judeo-Christian-Roman-Hellenic tradition which Viereck wants so badly to conserve?⁴ Has not laissez-faire economics been spawned by that same tradition? Try though he may, Viereck does not adequately show how we are to separate "positive" aspects of Western tradition from "negative" aspects.

Secondly, as other critics have noted, Viereck does not seem to have a good understanding of economics.⁵ He

³Auerbach, pp. 60-66.

⁴Gerald Weales, "Strike Through the Mush," a review of Shame and Glory in the Hudson Review, Vol. 6 (Summer 1933), p. 318.

⁵Eastman, "Equivocal Conservatism," p. 424.

deals only superficially with economics, relegating it to a relatively unimportant position in society. In ignoring economics, he commits the same type of error he accuses the Marxists and the neo-classical liberals of doing, only in reverse. Instead of putting too much emphasis on economics, he tends to understate the importance of economic factors. He claims that society is an integrated whole but in his efforts to rectify a perceived overemphasis on economics he ignores a vital part of that integrated whole. Consequently, he puts great emphasis on individual freedom in most aspects of life but not in the economic sphere. There seems to be somewhat of an inconsistency here.

Thirdly, Viereck contributes to the confusion about his ideological preference in that he is more sharply critical of his fellow conservatives than he is of liberals.

Claes Ryn has written of Viereck,

He is usually inclined to show understanding and patience toward those just to his own left. The ideas of men like John Kenneth Galbraith or Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who share many of the premises of the present Western intellectual mainstream which Viereck rejects, are found to be not without redeeming value. . . .

while,

The intellectual to his right often gets thrown together in an indiscriminate manner with more extreme groups or individuals. . . . Distinctions are blurred and the reader sometimes has difficulty recognizing the tendencies or individuals treated because of exaggeration or far-fetched associations.⁶

⁶Ryn, pp. 361-362.

Such behavior is not unusual. Domestic quarrels are often the most bitter. Viereck feels that he should cultivate good relations with the liberals, because they have a common enemy in totalitarianism. This is the most dangerous foe, not liberalism. Also, because he considers himself a conservative, and because he is desperately trying to advance the cause of conservatism, he may feel particularly bitter towards those conservatives whom he feels are retarding the conservative cause, pulling against him, so to speak. So, this may account for Viereck's overly critical attitude toward his fellow conservatives.

Merits of Viereck's Philosophy

Despite these weaknesses, however, there is much of merit in Viereck's philosophy. He has much to say to us, not only about conservatism but about contemporary Western society. First of all, Viereck has shown us that conservatism can be a force for social change. It does not have to be, and indeed often is not, a stale defense of the status quo. He has shown us that a concern for social justice is not the exclusive property of liberalism and that a conservative can accept "liberal" social reform without accepting the secularism, materialism, and moral relativism that have accompanied modern liberalism, forces that can sap the spiritual core of a society. Although most of his writing was done

more than twenty years ago, Viereck and the new conservatives seem particularly relevant today in a society that seems to be in a spiritual upheaval. We can see what are perhaps indications of it in the rhetoric of our national leaders, such as in Jimmy Carter's nationally televised speech of July 1979, in which he talked of America's problems stemming from a "crises of spirit." We can see it in the continued clamor for a constitutional amendment for prayer in the public schools and in the mushrooming of private "religious" academies. We can see it in the growth of Christian fundamentalism and in the increased interest in Eastern religions. We can see it in the pessimistic "live for today" attitude which Christopher Lasch talks about in his book, The Culture of Narcissism.⁷ We can see it in high rates of drug and alcohol abuse in a society which, although undergoing rough times economically, is still the most materially affluent in the world. Something is wrong. There seems to be a yearning, a searching to fill a void that cannot be filled by material goods. Liberals have not spoken to this spiritual crises. Indeed, as Viereck has asserted, it is partly responsible, for the secularism and positivism that accompanied the rise of modern liberalism

⁷ Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 1-75.

do appear to bear some of the blame for the spiritual crises by bringing into doubt man's belief in absolute truth, thus leaving him spiritually adrift without anything to cling to. Liberal capitalism has tried to inject commercialism into the void but it has not worked. American conservatism has spoken to this spiritual crises but its speech has been muted by its acceptance of liberal capitalism, which in a sense fuels the fire it is attempting to put out. Moreover, whereas American conservatives have been concerned about spiritual needs, they have been unconcerned about material needs of the poor in their reluctance to accept social reform that involves state intervention. And whereas liberals of the twentieth century have been concerned about material needs of the poor, they have appeared unconcerned about spiritual needs. Viereck and the new conservatives have attempted to bridge this gap, showing that conservatives can accept social reform and greater material prosperity without accepting spiritual poverty.

Viereck's brand of conservatism has also provided an alternative to the libertarian and fusionist branches of conservative thought, branches often criticized as exhibiting a cold and callous attitude toward human suffering in a monomaniac defense of individual economic freedom. Although Viereck goes too far in dismissing the importance of economics, I believe he is correct in pointing out

the economic determinism implicit in these branches of conservative thought. He shows the danger of depending too heavily on abstract economics and adds a humanitarian aspect to conservative thought. In doing so, he is attempting to make conservatism a viable force again, to broaden its base of support. Libertarians and, sometimes, fusionists seem impractical. It seems unrealistic to believe that the poor and uneducated will accept suffering or deprivation passively while waiting for slow, abstract, market forces to work, forces they cannot understand. Why should they, in a world that places such high value on material prosperity? As O'Sullivan has argued, even though all groups in society may benefit from a system of neo-classical liberalism, some will benefit more than others and should the economic growth rate start to decline social discontent could easily develop. He points to the increase in political radicalism in the early 1970s in Germany, the country most liberal-conservatives put forward as the shining example of the validity of their theories.⁸ O'Sullivan, along with Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell have attacked liberal-conservatism as being devoid of any concept of social justice. For example, F. A. Hayek has written that, "nothing has done so much to destroy the judicial safeguards of individual freedom as the striving

⁸O'Sullivan, pp. 143-144.

after this mirage of social justice."⁹ Without a concept of a "just society," says Kristol, liberal-conservatism will never appeal to the masses in modern society, because there is no legitimating myth to make them accept the inequality which Hayek and others see as necessary if progress is to occur in a capitalist economic order.¹⁰ Likewise, French economist, Pierre Rosanvallon, has attacked liberal-conservatism as unworkable. According to Rosanvallon, any conservative government that attempts to implement a Hayek-inspired solution is going to meet stiff social resistance. Think of the social upheaval in New York City alone should welfare payments be drastically cut.¹¹ People have come to rely on government social assistance too much to passively let it be taken away. Thus, Viereck's conservatism emerges as an alternative to the libertarian and fusionist varieties of conservative thought, and perhaps a more practical alternative.

Furthermore, Viereck, in his own ambiguous way, asks some hard questions about democracy. As Americans, we are

⁹Hayek, Economic Freedom and Representative Government, p. 13; O'Sullivan, p. 145.

¹⁰Irving Kristol, "'When Virtue Loses All Her Loveliness'--Some Reflections on Capitalism and 'Free Society,'" in Public Interest, No. 21 (Fall 1970), pp. 6-11.

¹¹Barbara Ellis, "Who's Turning Back the Clock," in Forbes, Vol. 124 (Oct. 1, 1979), p. 50.

so enamoured of democracy that we rarely take a long, hard, objective look at it. Viereck has done this and has warned us about the tyrannical possibilities of democracy. He has pointed out that many times, direct democracy has led to the destruction of civil liberties, as in the South where it was the poor whites, the Democrats, the egalitarians that were most destructive of the civil rights of blacks.

Finally, Viereck has pointed out that society must be viewed as a whole. He is not original in this respect; Marxists have always spoken of the necessity of viewing society dialectically, as a totality. But Viereck's voice would seem an important contribution to the growing number of scholars, of all ideological persuasions, who seem to be espousing this viewpoint. Society cannot be compartmentalized into the political, or the economic, or the aesthetic. All the parts of society are interconnected and come together to form a whole. Thus, for Viereck, the new conservatism cannot deal with the political system in isolation from the other parts of society. To alter the political system one must first alter the culture, for the political system is merely a product of the culture in which it exists.

Conclusion

So, Peter Viereck has much to say to us today. His philosophy is flawed, but nevertheless provides valuable

insights into the nature of contemporary political philosophy. It points out most graphically that conservatism is not a cohesive ideology. There are several deep-running cleavages. Can we then speak of a conservative ideology at all? Yes, I believe that somewhere under the murk there lies a conservative ideology, an ideology loosely characterized by a belief in liberty over equality, a cautious attitude toward social change, a belief in some sort of aristocracy, a fear of too much government control, a belief in the importance of some sort of transcendence, and perhaps most importantly, a pessimistic view of the nature of man. But the degrees to which conservatives hold these beliefs vary considerably.

For most of the twentieth century, conservatism has been a broken, fragmented ideology without direction or a great deal of viability. It is to Peter Viereck's credit that he has tried to rectify this situation. He is a practical man who has tried to lend practicality to the conservative ideology. Has he succeeded? In a sense, yes, for the past decade has seen the increasing growth of conservatism in America. It has been the age in which the neo-conservatism of Kristol, Glazer, Bell, and Moynahan has gained increasing stature and acceptance in intellectual circles. It is an age in which popular acceptance of conservative ideas has grown so much that conservatives

have been able to gain control of one of our major American parties and seriously challenge for the presidency. Moreover, they have been able to do this in an electoral system based largely on primaries, thus indicating rather broad popular support. This conservative takeover is hardly the work of a few party regulars. Now, Viereck can hardly be credited with single-handedly bringing about the growth of conservatism in the 1970s. Much of this growth has been due to a bad economic situation. However, when conservatism emerged from the tombs in the 1940s, all but forgotten, Peter Viereck was one of its leading standard-bearers. And though he may be somewhat critical of the current neo-conservative movement in America, he is, for better or for worse, one of its forefathers. So, Viereck has been successful in lending viability to conservatism.

However, in another sense he has been a failure, for the conservatism that has gained prominence in America today is not Viereck's traditionalist conservatism, but fusionist conservatism, laissez-faire conservatism. Perhaps it is less doctrinaire, but it is still laissez-faire conservatism with the same overriding concern for individual freedom and reducing the role of government in society. So, at the moment Viereck seems wrong in his contention that fusionist conservatism is impractical. Even neo-conservatism is more of a defender of corporate capitalism than Viereck's

new conservatism. Viereck has become a forgotten man. Although they traced the various roots and branches of contemporary American conservatism in a 1979 article on neo-conservatism, the editors of Esquire did not mention Peter Viereck!¹²

He is a practical man who has tried to lend practicality to the conservative ideology. But, the immensity of this endeavor becomes clear when we find that in trying to be practical he has become entrapped in the incoherence so endemic to contemporary conservatism. Nevertheless, Viereck does have much to say to us today. Unfortunately, many of his fellow conservatives are not listening, just as they did not listen to Henry Adams or Irving Babbitt before him. This is because Viereck, like Adams and Babbitt, is a European-style conservative in an American milieu.

¹²The Editors, "The Neoconservative Establishment Chart," in Esquire, February 13, 1979, pp. 32-33.

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