

Confronting the Environmental Crisis?: Anti-Environmentalism and the
Transformation of Conservative Thought in the 1970s

By

Alex John Boynton

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Chairperson Sara M. Gregg

Donald E. Worster

Edmund P. Russell

Jeffrey P. Moran

J. Christopher Brown

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The Dissertation Committee for Alex John Boynton
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson Sara M. Gregg

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Abstract

“Confronting the Environmental Crisis” examines the role anti-environmentalism played in the unification of conservative thought in the 1960s and 1970s. American conservatism during these decades was no monolith. Rather, it was an incredibly diverse political philosophy capable of sheltering a number of disparate strains of thought under its broad canopy. But these strains did not always exist in harmony with one another. In fact, for much of the period under consideration, the four major conservative philosophies – traditionalism, libertarianism, fusionism, and neoconservatism – existed in explicit tension within one another. Unless the ideological barriers separating these contrasting impulses were somehow smoothed over, American conservatism would remain fractured and incapable of influencing national politics in any meaningful way.

This dissertation argues that opposition to environmentalism in the 1970s served as a unifying force for American conservatism. It served as the glue that held together the opposing varieties of conservatism despite the persistence of ideological divisions in other areas of thought. The emergence of conservative anti-environmentalism in the 1970s owed much to the transformation of the American environmental movement. In the 1960s, many conservative intellectuals supported the environmental protection because they believed their philosophical principles supported environmental protection. But beginning in the 1970s, the environmental movement transformed into something that American conservatives no longer recognized. They perceived that their values no longer aligned so neatly with those held by environmentalists. Some conservative intellectuals continued to support environmental measures, but for many more this divergence in values led them to repudiate their former position and to embrace an unyielding opposition to environmentalism. By the end of the 1970s, anti-environmentalism had become a defining feature of American conservatism.

The unification of American conservatism around anti-environmental ideas created aftershocks that altered not only the political landscape of environmental issues in the 1970s, but the whole of twentieth and twenty-first century America. Translating these ideas into politics in the 1970s and subsequent decades proved extremely difficult. But, as “Confronting the Environmental Crisis” demonstrates, conservative anti-environmentalism in the 1970s helped contribute to the polarization of American political rhetoric concerning the environment in lasting ways. Contemporary polarization of issues such as global warming and climate change, for example, demonstrates the impressive resilience of the conservative intellectual opposition to environmentalism. The contemporary American political landscape bears scars that can be traced back to the tumult of the 1970s.

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Introduction

James Buckley's Paradox: Conservatism and Anti-Environmentalism in Postwar America

In an 1973 article for *National Review Bulletin*, U.S. Senator and environmental advocate James L. Buckley (R-NY) expressed trepidation about the conservative response to the reevaluation of the Clean Air Act by the Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution. The brother of influential *National Review* founder William F. Buckley, Jr. harbored no doubt that that the proposed revisions would “spark a lively national discussion of the merits and shortcomings of recently enacted environmental laws,” but he feared that conservative voices would be conspicuously absent from the conversation. In particular he lamented the fact that conservative intellectuals would not “contribute much that is constructive or thoughtful to this highly important debate.”¹ The fact that the conservative intellectuals whose ideas filled the pages of *National Review* likely would have nothing of substance to say about the re-evaluative process disturbed him. “What particularly saddens me,” Buckley informed his readers, “is that their conservative instincts ought to have propelled them into the forefront of the environmental movement.” Arguing that conservative intellectuals “understand the dangers that can accrue from thoughtless destruction of systems or institutions that have successfully served man’s needs,” he continued, and “perceive the existence of natural laws that man in his own highest interest is bound to observe; they acknowledge a moral obligation to conserve the inheritance received from generations past for the benefit of those to come.” For Buckley, conservative intellectual opposition to the environmental movement presented a vexing paradox. Conservatism and environmentalism should have been able to find common ground based on a set of shared

¹ James L. Buckley, “Washington,” *National Review Bulletin* (July 27, 1973), B110.

ideological principles, but, at least by 1973, no such synergy had emerged among the two groups.²

This divergence raises questions that strike at the heart of the relationship between conservative thought and environmentalism in postwar America. The first set of questions arises from Buckley's remarks about the supposed ideological unity between the two. Did the core precepts of American conservatism in the postwar period suggest that conservatives should support the environmental movement? If the central tenets of conservative philosophy mentioned in the article jibed so well with those of the environmental movement, then why had the two strains of thought failed to merge with one another by 1973? If, in other words, conservatism and environmentalism were so compatible, then why had no appreciable "conservative environmentalism" come into being despite broad public support of environmental issues following the first Earth Day in 1970? "Confronting the Environmental Crisis" argues that conservatism and environmentalism *could* have forged an alliance based on shared philosophical principles in the 1960s, but that this moment of potential synergy had passed by the early 1970s. This failure to develop commonalities ultimately created aftershocks that altered the landscape of environmental political ideology not just in the 1970s, but in the whole of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century America.

But it was not just the lack of support for the environmental movement among the shapers of conservative thought that distressed Senator Buckley, but also the fact that many intellectuals on the Right seemed vehemently opposed to the movement. "If editorial past is prologue," Buckley speculated, "we can anticipate from otherwise thoughtful conservative writers an ecological innocence and outright bias that boggles the informed mind." Despite the seemingly self-evident damage that humans had done to the environment in the preceding

² Buckley, B110.

decades, damage that had been pointed out by the likes of Rachel Carson and Barry Commoner, conservative intellectuals refused to give any credence to environmentalist fears. According to Buckley, “three sets of intellectual blinders” lay behind this uninformed opposition. “First they are put off by the excesses and politics of the ‘eco freaks.’ Second, they are unlettered in matters ecological. Finally, they rebel at the thought that the dangers cited by the environmentalists could have developed, as it were, overnight.” Buckley did his best to assuage conservative doubts on these points in the short space he had, but he feared that unless more conservatives joined the environmental cause they risked, in the words of Edmund Burke, leaving “to those who come after . . . a ruin instead of a habitation.”³

Buckley’s analysis of the emerging opposition to the environmental movement raises a second set of questions that “Confronting the Environmental Crisis” attempts to answer. Even if intellectuals on the Right did not embrace environmentalism as Buckley seemingly hoped, why should they have bothered to oppose it with enough force to make cause for comment? Was Buckley’s assessment of the causes of intellectual hostility toward the environmental movement – the “intellectual blinders” as he put it – correct? Why, at bottom, did conservative intellectuals take up an active position at the vanguard of the emerging environmental opposition in the 1970s that culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s? As it turns out, Buckley’s assessment of the situation was only partly right. Transformations occurring within the environmental movement undoubtedly played a role in generating a vitriolic conservative response. But, as “Confronting the Environmental Crisis” demonstrates, Buckley would also have been well served by taking a look at the realignment in values occurring within the intellectual movement to which he had alluded. Transformations in the form and character of American conservatism in the 1970s also influenced the vituperation with which conservatives

³ Buckley, B110.

viewed environmentalism. These transformations, too, heralded seismic changes that continue to influence American environmental politics more than forty years after they began.

This dissertation seeks to change the way we think about environmental history, intellectual history, and political history in America since 1945. It argues that the 1970s should be thought of not as a decade marked by consensus on environmental issues, but as one marked by ideological polarization. It does not deny that conservatism and environmentalism have existed synergistically with one another at times, and nor does it argue that, on a philosophical level, the two are oil and water, never capable of mixing fully with one another. It does propose, however, that this decade witnessed the emergence of an organized and potent opposition to environmentalism in the United States, and that developments within the history of American conservatism played a formative role in that process.

What literature exists on the history of conservative anti-environmentalism has typically focused on its attention on three separate developments. First, a constellation of economic interests, including farmers, workers, and the extractive and chemical industries, began to attack environmentalism in the 1970s and 1980s on the grounds that it was inimical to their established economic interests and values. Second, beginning in the late 1970s grassroots organizations championing states' rights and private property arose to battle environmentalists over the fate of wilderness areas and the "Wise Use" of federal lands in the West. Third, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 inaugurated an "anti-environmental revolution" that sought to restrict the role of government and roll back the gains made by the environmental regulatory state during the previous decade.⁴ These narratives have helped to challenge the notion of the 1970s as the

⁴ The first explanation comes from Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York, 1987), 287-328; and *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 109-121; see also Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Green Backlash: The History and Politics of Environmental Opposition in the U.S.* (Boulder, 1997), 21-99; the second comes from R. McGreggor Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger: The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics* (Lawrence, 1993); David Helvarg, *The War against the Greens: The Wise-Use Movement, the New Right, and Anti-environmental Violence*

“environmental decade,” but the third narrative especially perpetuates the notion that conservative opposition to environmentalism began with Reagan’s election.

The overarching problem with the existing scholarship on the environmental opposition has been its tendency of concentrate on politics while relegating ideological issues to the margins. Political concerns undoubtedly played an important role in shaping the contours of American anti-environmentalism, but acknowledging this should not obscure the formative role that ideas played in the process. A further problem arises from a number of scholarly works that argue that environmentalism cut across the rigid ideological barriers separating liberals from conservatives in the postwar period. In his classic treatment of the environmental movement, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence* (1987), Samuel Hays observed that environmentalists “could be described as liberals in that they expressed values associated with the advanced industrial society, were instruments of innovation and change, voiced the concerns of consumers, and advocated intervention in the economy,” but could also be “conservative in that they objected to the radical role of private and public developers in altering the face of the earth and disrupting more stable ways of life.”⁵ Recently, Brian Drake’s *Loving Nature, Fearing the State; Environmentalism and Anti-Government Politics Before Reagan* has provided the most exhaustive examination of conservatism’s relationship with environmentalism in the postwar period prior to 1980. Citing Hays directly, Drake contends that environmentalism and conservatism had much in common in the postwar period. “Pick the two up, and you find them

(San Francisco, 1994); Switzer, *Green Backlash*, 171-279; James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics Since 1964* (Seattle, 2012), 225-262; on the Reagan Administration’s environmental opposition, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 491-526; Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992* (New York, 1993), 47-70; Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: the American Environmental Movement* (New York, 1993), 203-230; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth, 1998), 169-192; and Richard N.L. Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy* (New Haven, 2006), 255-283.

⁵ Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 248; also see Hays remarks in “From Conservation to Environment: Environmental Politics in the United States Since World War II,” in *Out of the Woods: Essays in Environmental History*, Char Miller and Hal Rothman, eds. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 124.

hitched” in surprising ways, he states.⁶ For Hays and Drake, environmentalism appeared to be the ultimate bipartisan issue, one that transcended traditional ideological divides by appealing to the philosophical principles of Left and Right.

But if environmentalism proved so effective in transgressing boundaries, then what explains James Buckley’s remarks? If no ideological dividing line existed with regard to environmental issues, then why did Buckley seem to believe the opposite? “Freedom Tradition, Environmentalism” argues, building on the work of recent scholarship in the field of environmental policy, that a dividing line separating conservatism and environmentalism came to exist, and that its development can be traced to the political and intellectual ferment of the 1970s.⁷ Of particular interest for this study are the ideas of conservative intellectuals, those men and women responsible for defining and articulating the core tenets of American conservatism in the postwar period. As James Buckley noted, much of what conservative intellectuals had to say concerning the environmental movement of the 1970s was far from positive. In fact, the vast majority of conservative intellectuals in that decade vocally condemned environmentalism in nearly all of its manifestations. It is only when we understand the reasons *why* conservative intellectuals came to oppose environmentalism that we can answer the questions raised by Buckley’s article.

⁶ Brian Allen Drake, *Loving Nature, Fearing the State: Environmentalism and Anti-Government Politics Before Reagan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 18.

⁷ See Richard Harris, “Environmental Policy from The Great Society to 1980,” in Brian J. Glenn and Steven M. Teles, eds., *Conservatism and American Political Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 119-153; and Judith A. Layzer, *Open For Business: Conservative Opposition to Environmental Regulation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). Both Harris and Layzer have done an excellent job demonstrating how conservative ideas translated into opposition to the environmental developments of the 1970s, but in general they abstain from commenting on anti-environmentalism’s unifying role in the sectarian struggles among conservatives in the 1970s.

Environmental Ideas in the Tumultuous 1960s

In one respect, James Buckley's remarks concerning conservative opposition to environmentalism in the 1970s seems strange, for in the 1960s – perhaps the most polarizing decade in American history – environmentalism *did* cut across ideological boundaries. The 1960s represented a formative time in the history of the American environmental movement, an important moment of transition in the process by which the old conservation movement – originating in the Progressive Era and organized around an alliance formed between the federal government and a small cadre of trained scientific experts for the purpose of more efficient use of natural resources in the American West– transformed into the modern environmental movement.⁸ Unlike the conservation movement, the environmental movement emerged in the postwar period as a result of what Hays called a “transformation in values.” This process began in the 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s as Americans became more interested in preserving the “quality of life” beyond the narrow focus on the efficient use of resources⁹

In the 1960s, a number of developments helped propel the transition from conservation to environment. Rachel Carson's landmark *Silent Spring* (1962) convinced many Americans about the adverse health and environmental effects of synthetic chemicals and became a runaway best seller. Barry Commoner and a group of concerned scientists working out of Washington University in St. Louis provided many Americans with a new reason to worry about the Cold War when they published research showing the dangers posed by the use of atomic energy. The passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, which marked millions of acres of federal public lands as

⁸ The historian Donald Fleming first noticed this transition in the early 1970s. See Fleming, “Roots of the New Conservation Movement,” *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972), 7-91.

⁹ The classic treatment of the Progressive Conservation Movement can be found in Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For the most important works that reiterate Hays' interpretation of events, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); and Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

off limits not only to development, but to any human alteration, demonstrated a new concern among Americans for nature's ecological, scientific, and moral value. Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson used their considerable political influence to support the "Keep American Beautiful Campaign" and to secure the passage of the Highway Beautification Act of 1965. The crusade against pollution also gained momentum in the 1960s as suburban homeowners across America witnessed their water supply tainted by chemical detergents and events like the Santa Barbara oil spill and Cuyahoga River fire received national attention in 1969. Clearly the 1960s represented a time of great environmental ferment.¹⁰

Despite environmentalism's transcendental nature, however, most of the scholarly attention paid to environmental ideas in the 1960s has focused on the Left, though not without cause. During that decade, leftist intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse, Murray Bookchin, and Paul Goodman all advanced critiques of advanced industrial society and the discordant relationship with nature it encouraged. Politically influential intellectuals including the economist John Kenneth Galbraith and the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. openly urged their fellow liberals to embrace the new environmental values taking root in America. The New Left and the student movement frequently incorporated environmentalism into their radical critique of American foreign and domestic policy. And finally the counterculture of the 1960s used nature as an inspiration for alternative lifestyles that could liberate humanity from its morbid relationship with the consumer culture.¹¹ Among recent examinations of environmentalism's

¹⁰ On the Passage of the Wilderness Act, see Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness*, especially Chapter 1; On the role Commoner's research on atomic energy played in generating environmental awareness, see Michael Egan, *Barry Commoner and the Science of Survival*, especially Chapters 1 and 2; also see Fleming, "Roots of the New Conservation Movement," 40-51; On the influence of Rachel Carson and *Silent Spring* on 1960s environmentalism, see Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 85-90; and Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 121-127; On the environmental activism of Lyndon and Ladybird Johnson, see Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 96-98; and Rome, "Give Earth a Chance," 532-534; On the relationship between detergents and concern for the environment, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 105-110; on the Santa Barbara Oil Spill, see Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 101-105.

¹¹ On the importance of New Left ideas to the nascent environmental movement, see: Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC., 2005), 127-

impact on 1960s ideas and politics, only Drake's work, which emphasizes conservative figures such as 1964 presidential candidate Barry Goldwater and grassroots activists fighting against the fluoridation of drinking water, discusses in detail environmentalism's impact on conservative ideas and politics.

But as "Confronting the Environmental Crisis?" demonstrates, conservative intellectuals in the 1960s often supported environmentalism just as resolutely as any of their counterparts on the Left. But American conservatism in the 1950s and 1960s was no monolith. Rather, it was an amorphous political philosophy that carved out space under its capacious canopy for a number of surprisingly diverse strains of thought. On one side were traditionalists like Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver, who believed strongly in values like order, deference, and piety. Their work addressed themes such as humanity's place in the divinely ordained social contract between the dead, the living, and those yet unborn and the evils of a modern technological society that had lost its universal moorings. On the other side were libertarians such as Frank Meyer, Milton Friedman, and Friedrich Hayek. This group of intellectuals valued freedom of the individual above all else. For them, this freedom could only be preserved through interaction with the free market and through the preservation of private property, both of which were supported by the American system of free enterprise capitalism. These two strains of conservatism were frequently diametrically opposed to one another in the postwar period. Traditionalists often hotly denounced libertarians as atheists who cared more about pecuniary gain than they did in reversing the moral turpitude of modern society. Libertarians, on the other hand, denigrated the

134 and Andrew Kirk, "From Wilderness Prophets to Tool Freaks: Post-World War II Environmentalism," in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History* (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2010), 297-299; On the contributions of liberal intellectuals and student radicals, see Give Earth a Chance: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History*, 90 (September 2003), 525-554. For a countervailing interpretation of the Left's relationship with environmentalism, see Keith Woodhouse, "The Politics of Ecology: Environmentalism and Liberalism in the 1960s," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2 (2008): 53-84.

traditionalist emphasis on prescribed authority circumscribed the ability of the individual to live a free existence.

Then there were also “fusionist” conservatives such as William F. Buckley, Jr. and M. Stanton Evans who held allegiances to both camps and who labored tirelessly to reconcile these opposing modes of thought. And, to further complicate matters, the late 1960s also witnessed the defection of the so-called “neoconservatives”— a group of intellectuals that had once identified themselves as liberals or radicals in the 1950s and early 1960s – to the right side of the ideological spectrum. Neoconservatives like Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz were neither traditionalists nor libertarians and, although their beliefs often overlapped, they rebuked and challenged preexisting conservative beliefs. The contests for influence that existed between these intellectual polarities cannot be understated.¹²

But for all the internecine struggles and sectarian strife that marked much of the 1960s, support for environmentalism proved to be one thing conservative intellectuals could agree on, albeit for different reasons. Traditionalists supported environmentalism because the notion of passing on a clean, healthy environment to future generations dovetailed perfectly with idea of the eternal contract. Libertarians supported environmental protection, with the caveat that such protection not become instrument of state power, because free market economic principles encouraged corporations to eliminate pollution and other negative externalities. Fusionists like William F. Buckley, Jr. advocated both traditionalist and libertarian solutions to environmental problems. Future neoconservatives, most of whom identified themselves as liberals in the 1960s,

¹² The classic text detailing the ideological struggles between the various factions of American conservatives is George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

also found the rise of the environmental movement encouraging because its domestic policy aims aligned almost perfectly with their own.¹³

Of course, not all conservatives supported environmentalism during the polarizing 1960s. In particular, the libertarian conservatives associated with the University of Chicago's departments of economics and law opposed environmentalism throughout that decade. Economists like Friedman and Ronald Coase utterly rejected the notion that polluters should take responsibility for the social costs of their actions. In their mind, pollution signified a booming economy, and whatever environmental problems accompanied that boom would be more than offset by the gains experienced by the American people. But for all of their opposition to environmentalism, intellectuals like Friedman and Coase remained a minority among conservatives in the 1960s. This is important. The distinct lack of anti-environmental voices among the very figures responsible for defining what it meant to be a conservative suggests that the relationship between conservatism and environmentalism in America had not yet congealed into the rigid opposition that had so vexed James Buckley by 1973. It shows that the 1960s represented a time of possibilities for conservatives and environmentalists, a metaphorical fulcrum upon which the fate of that relationship rested. Conservatives and environmentalists *could* have found common ground based on a shared perspective on the importance of protecting nature and conserving elements of the nonhuman world, the need to conserve America's resources for future generations, to reduce pollution and clean up America, or any number of other issues. The potential for an appreciable "conservative environmentalism" *did* exist. It was not a mirage.

¹³ Few historians have examined the relationship between conservative ideas and environmentalism in the postwar period. One exception that examines the relationship between conservative ideas from 1945 until the early 1960s can be found in Marc Allen Eisner, "Environmental Policy to the Great Society," in *Conservatism and American Political Development*, eds. Brian J. Glen and Stephen M. Teles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-29. Eisner agrees that both traditionalists and libertarians supported environmental protections, although for different reasons.

Environmentalism and Conservatism Transformed

The preceding section raises an important question: if conservative intellectuals in the 1960s supported environmentalism, even to a relatively limited extent, in the 1960s then from whence came James Buckley's lament? How, in such a short amount of time, did American conservatives transform from supporters of environmentalism to the apathetic observers and unyielding opponents that Buckley described in his article? These questions are not easy to answer. This difficulty is further highlighted by the fact that many scholars have argued that the decade of the 1970s represented the apotheosis of American environmentalism, an "environmental decade" marked by a bipartisan commitment to environmental protection that built upon the foundation laid in the previous decade. And not without reason. Throughout the 1970s, environmentalism received significant support from important figures on the Right such as Congressmen John P. Saylor of Pennsylvania, EPA Administrator Russell E. Train, and, most importantly, President Richard Nixon.¹⁴ But Buckley's article and the questions it raised cannot be ignored. If the 1970s truly were a decade of environmental consensus, then how did the anti-environmental attitudes described by Buckley emerge at that time, and why? In answering these questions, "Confronting the Environmental Crisis?" argues simply that conservative intellectuals came to occupy a place at the vanguard of the environmental opposition because the wider movement in which they participated coalesced around a radically different set of values than did the environmental movement. The 1970s witnessed tectonic shifts in the transformation of the American environmental movement and the American conservative movement, and the

¹⁴ For claims about the bipartisan nature of the environmental movement in the 1970s, see Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth, 1998), 86-89; Philip Shabecoff, *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 5-6; Doug Scott, *The Enduring Wilderness: Protecting Our Heritage through the Wilderness Act* (Golden, 2004), 76-77. On the contributions to environmental and wilderness protection of John P. Saylor, see Thomas G. Smith, *Green Republican: John P. Saylor and the Preservation of America's Wilderness* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006). On the contributions of Russell E. Train and Richard Nixon, the best texts are J. Brooks Flippen, *Conservative Conservationist: Russell E. Train and the Emergence of American Environmentalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006) and *Nixon and the Environment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).

transformation of the former influenced the transformation of the latter in such a way that conservatism and environmentalism emerged from the 1970s as diametrically opposing political and intellectual worldviews.

One of the most transformative events of the 1970s came on April 22nd of 1970 with the celebration of the first Earth Day, when millions of Americans from all walks of life came together to demonstrate their commitment to environmental education and protection. Formulated by Democratic Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson and implemented with the help of a dedicated support staff, Earth Day's activities were a massive success and the day has since become a national holiday. For many participants, Earth Day's celebration represented a formative event in their life, and it convinced many of them to dedicate their lives to improving the environment. The impact of Earth Day has proven so great that it is possible to trace the emergence of America's first green generation back to the event.¹⁵

Other important developments in the 1970s had antecedents in the previous decade. In the 1960s, Congress passed a number of landmark laws seeking to regulate pollution such as the Water Quality Act (1965), the Endangered Species Protection Act (1969), the first Clean Air Act (1963), and, the Wilderness Act (1964). But the 1970s witnessed an unprecedented expansion of federal regulation of environmental matters that dwarfed anything passed in the 1960s. The first major piece of legislation was the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), passed into law in late 1969 and signed on New Year's Day of 1970 by President Nixon. NEPA transformed the federal government's relationship with the environment in several important ways, but none more so than in its stipulation that any development project receiving federal funding be required to submit an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) detailing the environmental costs of the project. President Nixon also created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 as an

¹⁵ For the best treatment of Earth Day, see Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Generation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

executive agency designed to police and, if necessary, punish the nation's polluters. Following the passage of NEPA and the creation of the EPA, a newly activist Congress, described by one historian as a group of "unlikely environmentalists," passed a torrent of legislation including a massive overhaul of the 1963 Clean Air Act in 1970, a similar revamping of the 1948 Federal Water Pollution Control Act in 1972, the "Clean Water Act"; laws regulating chemical hazards such as the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974) and Toxic Substances Control Act (1976); laws centering on resource use such as the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976) and the 1980 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA or "Superfund" Act) following the events at Love Canal in the late 1970s. By 1980, it was clear to any casual observer that the environmental management state had become a permanent fixture of American political life.¹⁶

Environmentalists' concerns about population and economic growth may have originated in the 1960s, but they achieved their apotheosis in the early-to-mid 1970s. Concern over growing population achieved national notoriety beginning in 1968 with the publication of Stanford entomologist Paul Ehrlich's hugely influential best seller *The Population Bomb* and Garret Hardin's influential essay "The Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin and Ehrlich each believed that the exponential rate at which the world's population was growing in the 1960s would lead to pollution, famine, and even a global ecological collapse in the 1970s if drastic actions were not taken to alleviate the "environmental crisis." This dire view of humanity's relationship with the environment was strengthened in 1973 with the publication of another monumental best seller, *The Limits to Growth*, a study conducted by Donella and Dennis Meadows and their research team at MIT. Using advanced computer modeling, the team concluded that population growth,

¹⁶ For the most comprehensive analysis of NEPA, see Wendy Read Wertz, *Lynton Keith Caldwell: an Environmental Visionary and the National Environmental Policy Act* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2014); On the expansion of federal environmental authority in the 1970s, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 190-200; *Ibid*, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, 79-93; Rothman, 109-134; Gottlieb, 175-185; Andrews, 227-254.

resource depletion, and pollution spelled doom for humanity's future on the earth. The dire predictions raised by these so-called "neo-Malthusians" captured the nation's attention in the 1970s and provided a significant jolt of energy to the emerging environmental movement.¹⁷

The final developments that spurred the growth of environmentalism in the 1970s were the oil and energy crises of the mid-to-late 1970s. The oil crisis began in earnest in the fall of 1973 when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) placed an embargo on all oil exports to the U.S. in retaliation for the United States' support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War with Egypt. Eventually, the fuel crisis grew to encompass the entirety of America's energy resources and became a major preoccupation of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations as the country attempted to meet energy demands in a time of scarcity. The energy crisis also proved to be a pivotal moment for environmentalists and conservatives alike. Lines around the block at the local gas station demonstrated to them the concomitant dangers of overreliance on scarce natural resources.¹⁸ Environmentalists saw in the crisis the realizations of their fears, and the crisis strengthened their determination to make the American people realize the need to curb resource consumption.

The 1970s undoubtedly were a period of radical transformation and growth for the environmental movement, but they also represented an equally important evolutionary period for American conservatism. For many conservative intellectuals, the 1970s, like the 1960s, were a time of intense intellectual self-definition. Conservative intellectuals in America in these two decades were primarily concerned with fashioning "a movement of ideas, but one with visibly

¹⁷ A host of excellent books have appeared in recent years chronicling the role that population growth and economic growth have played in galvanizing the environmental movement. See Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 152-201; Derik S. Hoff, *The State and the Stork: The Population Debate and Policy Making in US History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 165-218; Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature: the Birth of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151-178; Paul Sabin, *The Bet: Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, and Our Gamble Over Earth's Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 226.

nonacademic and political aspirations.” Conservatism was, in the words of intellectual historian George H. Nash, “an activist force” whose “objective was not simply to understand the world but to change it, restore it, preserve it.”¹⁹ But the contours of the movement, and the core ideas conservatives would emphasize, were far from settled.

In order for American conservatives to fully realize the political implications of the intellectual movement in which they participated, the ideological divide separating the disparate strains of conservative thought had to be bridged. In a narrative that has become axiomatic for historians of conservatism, a number of prominent conservative intellectuals – William F. Buckley, Jr. and Frank Meyer foremost among them – took it upon themselves to pleat together the disparate strains of conservative thought. Although he was a libertarian who vilified Kirk and other traditionalists on multiple occasions, Meyer spent the 1960s arguing that traditionalists and libertarians could find common ground through, among other things, their shared revulsion for communism, socialism, and other forms of collectivism, their mutual mistrust of government authority, and their common distaste for the American Left in all its guises. Buckley, an intellectual who exhibited both traditionalist and libertarian impulses, devoted his influential journal, *National Review*, to promoting the fusion of conservative ideas in the hope of encouraging détente. Completely eliminating the antagonism between traditionalists and libertarians proved all but impossible in the 1960s and 1970s, and the divide between the two groups exists until this day, but they were able to put aside their grievances in the name of the greater good of conservative cohesion. Aided by the defection of the neoconservatives, who were also inclined towards unification rather than division, conservative intellectuals had at last by

¹⁹ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*,

1980 fashioned a unified movement capable of influencing the national intellectual and political discourse.²⁰

An Environmental Decade for Conservative Intellectuals?

From the end of World War II until the 1960s, conservative intellectual relationships to the environment were fluid, and ideas about nature, conservation, and environmentalism permeated conservative thought in surprising ways. Traditionalists like Weaver and Kirk proved especially susceptible to the emerging currents of thought pertaining to the nonhuman world. But the emergence of environmentalism in America influenced more than just traditionalist conservatives. *The Freeman*, an influential conservative periodical published by the business oriented Foundation for Economic Education, published numerous articles in the 1950s and 1960s arguing in favor of a number of conservation and environmental issues. In the 1960s, fusionists like William F. Buckley, Jr. argued in favor of preserving America's wilderness areas by referencing Adam Smith's ideas in *The Wealth of Nations*, advocating market-based solutions to air and water pollution in his 1965 campaign to become the mayor of New York City. Future neoconservatives like Kristol and Podhoretz published a number of articles calling for action on the problems of population, pollution, and nuclear power in *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*

²⁰ The gradual fusing together of the many strains of conservatism into a coherent whole was the main theme of Nash's *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. As Kim Phillips-Fein has noted, it is impossible to underestimate the impact that Nash's *Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* has had on the field in the years since its publication. See Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: a State of the Field," *The Journal of American History* 98 (December 2011), 730. For works that reiterate Nash's opinions on conservative intellectuals, see: Melvin J. Thorne, *American Conservative Thought Since World War II* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), especially the last four chapters; Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: the Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: the University of California Press, 1990); Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: a History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996); Jonathan M. Shoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: the Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Gregory L. Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009) David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

throughout the 1960s. Intellectuals associated with every strain of conservative thought in America were swept up in the wider currents of environmental activism sweeping the nation in the 1960s, and they added their voices to the national conversation and used all the means at their disposal to help advance environmentalism's goals. Environmentalism had not yet become a partisan issue, and a positive stance on environmental matters might yet have become an important part of the conservative intellectual movement as it coalesced.

But as James Buckley noted in 1973, such a convergence between conservatism and environmentalism failed to occur on a broad level. In the 1970s, conservatives became some of the most vituperative critics at the head of the anti-environmental vanguard. What explains this sudden shift in the conservative stance on the environment? For one thing, the internal dynamics of the conservative intellectual movement conspired to drown any hopes of synergy. Well into the early 1970s, traditionalists like Kirk labored to show that their conservative philosophy inevitably led to a veneration of nature and to the support of environmental protection. But Weaver died in 1964, well before most landmark environmental legislation was passed, and, curiously, Kirk suddenly stopped producing any material related to the environment in the mid-1970s. Kirk never explained this sudden cessation of his writings on the environment, but, combined with Weaver's death, Kirk's actions left the conservative movement without strong voices willing to make a place for the nonhuman world. Kirk had quit the field, so to speak, and in so doing had ceded the terrain of environmental discourse to conservative intellectuals whose feelings towards the natural world were antithetical to his own.

Intellectual historian Jennifer Burns has argued that most historians have ascribed too much influence to the traditionalist position within American conservatism. Traditionalist ideas were important, no doubt, but the non-traditionalist factions far outstripped Kirk and his fellows

when it came to influencing the movement's broader course.²¹ This is certainly the case in terms of the movement's relationship to the environment. In the 1960s, when traditionalists began to erect the foundations of a sort of "conservative environmentalism," when William F. Buckley Jr., advocated vociferously for a cleaner, healthier, and more beautiful America, and when the intellectuals who would become the neoconservatives of the 1970s championed many forms of environmental protection, libertarian figures like Milton Friedman and Ronald Coase attacked environmentalist arguments about the social costs of pollution. For them, the well-being of the capitalist system and private enterprise proved more important than cleaning up pollution in the name of the public interest.

In the 1970s, non-traditionalist views of the environment grew, spread, and gained influence in the broader conservative intellectual movement. This reality is reflected in the discourse taking place at the national level. *National Review*, a publication that worked toward the fusion of traditionalist and libertarian goals on a number of fronts, abandoned any pretext it had toward advancing the traditionalist environmental position in favor of a markedly libertarian one. Traditionalists like Kirk, and even William F. Buckley, Jr.'s own brother, Senator James Lane Buckley, saw their environmentalist arguments diminish in importance. Neoconservative publications such as *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* abandoned their early support for the environmental movement and began to publish anti-environmental articles that echoed those advanced by libertarians and fusionists. A convergence occurred in the way that American conservative intellectuals thought about and related to the environment, and that convergence was built not around the traditionalist emphasis on respect for nature and the need for environmental protection, but on the anti-environmental beliefs of conservatives whose philosophical beliefs were not conducive to supporting environmentalism.

²¹ Jennifer Burns, "In Retrospect: George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American since 1945*," *Reviews in American History*, 32 (2004), 447-462.

And, as “Confronting the Environmental Crisis?” shows, anti-environmentalism also emerged as an issue that transcended the divisions that existed among conservative intellectuals, traditionalists notwithstanding. It acted as an adhesive that helped hold the movement together. Throughout the 1970s, issues such as abortion, birth control, and even the place of capitalism within the movement threatened to undermine the delicate consensus that leading conservatives fashioned in the 1960s as they attempted to move from the margins to the mainstream. But condemnation of the environmental movement served as one of the things on which libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives could agree. Anti-environmentalism emerged as a unifying issue for non-traditionalist conservatives who wished to end their counterproductive infighting and secure a truce.

The sheer extent of this convergence can be seen in the themes that conservative writers chose to emphasize in the 1970s. Libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives often disagreed, fiercely at times, on a number of issues, but the environment was ever-more rarely one of them. Each of these strains of thought articulated their own brand of anti-environmentalism to be sure, but they all emphasized the following points to varying degrees. First, they believed that the celebration of the first Earth Day on April 22nd, 1970, and the torrent of environmental legislation passed shortly thereafter, was the work of their enemies on the Left: radicalized students and liberal politicians in Congress. Second, even when they grudgingly admitted the necessity of environmental amenities such as clean air and clean water, they argued that the cost of implementing environmental protection would be enough to outweigh the supposed benefits. Third, they contended that the early-to mid- 1970s emphasis on stopping population and economic growth in the name of a cleaner environment was the work of doomsaying extremists who did not properly understand the science of economics. Fourth, conservative intellectuals almost unanimously believed that the demands of environmentalists caused, or at least

exacerbated, the energy crisis of the mid-to-late 1970s. Fifth, and most importantly, was the unflinching belief that environmentalists sought nothing less than the total dissolution of the American system of free enterprise capitalism. Capitalism, individual freedom, and the free market became almost sacred for many conservatives in the 1970s, and environmentalism came to be viewed as a threat to the most cherished conservative beliefs. This list of grievances demonstrates that the various transformations taking place within American environmentalism in the 1970s ultimately led many conservative intellectuals to conclude that environmentalism had transmogrified into something they no longer recognized and could no longer support. The support for environmental issues they had cultivated in the 1960s gave way to a unified opposition at the very moment environmentalism made its greatest inroads on the national stage.

This agreement was more tacit than overt. At no point did any conservative intellectual acknowledge directly the anti-environmental consensus being fashioned in the 1970s. The process did play out publicly, however, through an emerging new conservative information network. Libertarian periodicals such as *The Freeman* differed significantly in aim and scope from the fusionist *National Review*, and each in turn differed from *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, the two foremost neoconservative publications. But over the course of the decade, the perspectives on environmental matters evinced by these periodicals increasingly came to resemble one another. An article on the energy crisis, for example, taken from *National Review* in the mid-to-late 1970s would have been perfectly at home in *Commentary* and vice versa. Furthermore, throughout the 1970s, a vast network of conservative think tanks and institutions began to proliferate and exert a considerable amount of influence in the war of ideas taking shape in America. William E. Simon's Olin Foundation, the Volker Fund, the Free Market Project and the Law and Economics Movement at the University of Chicago, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Cato Institute all gained massive political traction in the 1970s and helped to

facilitate alliances and cement ties between the disparate strains of conservative thought. For these institutions, as with the intellectuals who staffed and produced materials for them, anti-environmentalism served as an important component in the adhesive that held the broader alliance together.²²

Much has been made recently about the rise of conservatism in the 1970s. *Rightward Bound*, a recent collection of essays on the subject argues that the 1970s “was not a pause in between two great periods, but itself marked an era that witnessed the emergence of trends, contests, and conflicts that have defined the public realm ever since.”²³ In his magisterial *Age of Fracture*, Daniel Rodgers echoed these sentiments when he acknowledged that “the work of the conservative idea brokers” in the 1970s “changed the landscape of publication and intellectual argument,” thus contributing to the massive cultural and ideological transformation in the last quarter of the twentieth century.²⁴ Both studies have done much to illuminate how conservatism shaped the broader historical trajectory of American ideas and politics, but both have little to say about environmental issues. “Confronting the Environmental Crisis” demonstrates that conservative anti-environmentalism was not a tangential part of the tectonic shifts occurring in the 1970s, but rather a formative one.

In addition to influencing the form and contours of the American conservative movement, the unification of conservative thought on environmental issues also helped fuel the rise of the environmental opposition in America. In his recent study of the dueling ideologies espoused radical environmentalist Paul Ehrlich and anti-environmentalist economist Julian Simon in the 1970s and 1980s, environmental historian Paul Sabin argues that environmentalism

²² On the erection of the conservative information networks in the 1970s, see Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (New York: Times Books, 1986); and Jon Weiner, “Dollars for Neocon Scholars: the Olin Money Tree” in *Professors, Politics, and Pop* (London: Verso, 1991), 99-103.

²³ Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁴ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 7.

and anti-environmentalism were mutually constitutive. According to Sabin, Ehrlich and Simon represented the furthestmost extremes on the environmental-political spectrum. Ehrlich, whose research showing the ill effects attending population growth and economic growth helped fuel the environmental movement, often made radical claims of impending doom if humanity did not repent their environmental sins immediately. Simon, on the other hand, made a career out of using economic and technological calculations to show that humanity could live forever without any demographic or economic limits. Simon's extreme anti-environmental position could not exist without Ehrlich's equally extreme position on the environment, and neither figure ever bent an inch in their beliefs or rhetoric in their well-publicized clashes. In Sabin's opinion, Ehrlich's and Simon's unwillingness to give a full hearing to the other side and to find a middle ground that would keep the best interest of the planet at heart serves as a metaphor for the extreme polarization of environmental politics that continue to this day.²⁵

Conservative intellectuals frequently touched on the same issues as Ehrlich and Simon, especially economic growth and population growth. In fact, many intellectuals of a libertarian, fusionist, and neoconservative bent anticipated many of the arguments Simon would make about environmental doomsayers and a future without limits, although with much less fanfare. Simon himself even enlisted in the conservative camp at the end of the 1970s: his work appeared in publications like *The Freeman* and he appeared as an honored guest on William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *Firing Line* television program. Sabin's work elucidates how it is possible to view some aspects of conservative anti-environmentalism as being fueled by the work of environmentalists like Ehrlich. But "Confronting the Environmental Crisis?" demonstrates such an interpretation is not precisely applicable to anti-environmental conservative thought, and casts doubt on the notion that the relationship environmentalism and anti-environmentalism was reciprocal.

²⁵ Sabin, *The Bet*, 217-219. For similar assertions, see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 218-220.

Take, for example, the celebration of the first Earth Day in April of 1970. Adam Rome has argued recently that Earth Day was a transformative event in American history, a celebration that brought the environment into the mainstream of American politics and thought and one that was scarcely opposed by anybody of consequence. If Rome is right, and Earth Day was not a radical demonstration in the mode of a 1960s protest, then from whence came the staunch opposition offered by conservative intellectuals?²⁶ The fact is that that conservative intellectuals in the 1970s appeared to have little understanding of the mainstream aspects of American environmentalism. Often times, conservatives would lash out against the “environmentalist movement” or the “environmentalist crusade” without referring to specific people or ideas, and they consistently focused on the more radical aspects of the environmental movement and almost wholly ignored the evidence suggesting that environmentalism’s rise was a phenomenon driven by the American middle class.²⁷

This opposition reveals a fundamental truth: the tone or tenor of environmentalist ideas, beliefs, actions, or rhetoric did not matter to conservative intellectuals. Sabin argues that if environmentalists had only been willing to restrain the zeal with which they fought for their cause, then Simon and his fellow conservatives might have been willing to give environmentalism a fair hearing, or at least may have tempered their own rhetoric. Conservative opposition to Earth Day and other mainstream developments in 1970s environmentalism demonstrate that this was not always the case. Conservative intellectuals consistently and viscerally attacked nearly every single aspect of 1970s environmentalism regardless of whether it was situated firmly within the mainstream or whether it resided along the radical fringe. In his examination of the role coal and electricity played in the metropolitan development of Phoenix

²⁶ Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 116-117.

²⁷ For examples of works that anchor the rise of environmentalism in the concerns of the middle class, see Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*; and Christopher Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

and the surrounding Navajo Indian reservations from the 1940s to the present, Andrew Needham demonstrates how the area's conservatives subtly altered way in which they articulated their goals and demands over time to bring the region increasingly under the control of the power industry. Using a "language of freedom," that emphasized the rights of individuals and corporations, conservatives were able to subtly introduce and implement their anti-environmental agenda.²⁸ The conservative intellectuals discussed here exhibited no such subtlety. Scarcely an environmental issue arose that was not met with scorn, derision, incredulity, condescension, or outright revulsion. Often they resorted to ad hominem attacks on environmental figures including Ehrlich, Commoner, and Ralph Nader. Such an instinctive reaction to environmentalism demonstrates how philosophically and psychologically incompatible conservatism and environmentalism had become in the 1970s. Faced with an environmental movement organized around principles that seemed increasingly antithetical to their own, conservative intellectuals chose to oppose environmentalism tooth and nail, lest their very ideology succumb to the environmentalist threat.

Famously, conservative intellectuals in the 1970s and even during the 1980s at the height of the Reagan Administration's anti-environmental efforts, failed to implement the counterrevolutionary environmental agenda.²⁹ But as Hays has noted, the anti-environmental initiatives of the 1980s have not abated in the present, and opposition to environmental measures has become a permanent feature of America's political and ideological landscape.³⁰ The conservative intellectuals of the 1970s may not have realized the political goals inherent in their

²⁸ See Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁹ Examples of works that highlight the endurance of environmentalism in the face of conservative political and intellectual opposition, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 491-526; Jeffrey K. Stine, "Natural Resources and Environmental Policy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacy*, W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Gram, eds. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Byron W. Danes and Glen Sussman, *White House Politics and the Environment* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2010), 173-188; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 186-189.

³⁰ Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, 119.

anti-environmental beliefs, but they did something almost as impressive: they created a sensibility on the American Right in which environmentalists were viewed as illegitimate participants in the political process at best and dangerous extremists at worst. Contemporary American conservatism is more variegated now than in the 1970s, but this anti-environmental sensibility remains one of the strongest bonds that continues to hold together the disparate conservative intellectual constituencies.

“Confronting the Environmental Crisis?” is divided into four chapters. Each chapter is devoted to analyzing a particular strain of conservative thought from the late 1940s through the 1980s. Chapter 1 focuses on traditionalist conservatism, in particular the ideas of Kirk and Weaver. It argues that the ideas advanced by these two intellectuals could have laid the foundation for a future in which conservatism and environmentalism found common ground based on shared principles. Though many modern environmentalists would have detested much of Weaver’s ideology, his concept of piety towards nature placed him on the same footing of Joseph Wood Krutch and other proponents of environmental thought in the forties, fifties, and sixties. Kirk’s emphasis on the eternal contract between the dead, the living, and the unborn led him to venerate nature as well, and when environmentalism exploded onto the scene in the 1960s Kirk wholeheartedly supported the environmental movement. By the end of the 1970s, Kirk’s lack of leadership on environmental matters within the broader conservative movement spelled trouble for conservatism’s relationship with environmentalism.

Chapter 2 offers an examination of the antithesis of traditionalist conservatism: libertarianism. Whereas traditionalists believed in a divinely ordained and organic moral order to which all men belonged, libertarians valued freedom of the individual above all else, and that freedom could best be secured through participation in the free enterprise capitalist system. The libertarian defense of free enterprise put them at odds not only with environmentalists who

increasingly called for regulatory intervention to halt pollution, but also with Kirk and his fellow traditionalists. For libertarians including Friedman, Coase, and Rand, as well as for influential publications like *The Freeman*, the rise of environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s represented a serious threat to the capitalist system they cherished. On issues ranging from environmental regulation to population growth and resource consumption to the energy crisis, libertarians opposed the environmental movement at every turn. Libertarian anti-environmentalism represented an alternative path for the broader conservative intellectual movement to take, one that, given the demurrals of the traditionalist, exerted considerable influence on the broader conservative intellectual movement.

Chapter 3 takes a detailed look at “fusionist conservatism,” the strain of conservative thought that sought to merge elements of traditionalism and libertarianism into a politically viable and mainstream American conservatism. In particular it examines the content published by William F. Buckley, Jr.’s *National Review*, the most influential and ecumenical conservative periodical in the postwar period and the leading source of fusionist discourse. In the 1960s, Buckley, who harbored traditionalist and libertarian sympathies, supported the nascent environmental movement in important ways. He advocated for the preservation of beauty, the protection of America’s public lands, the abatement of air and water pollution, and the curtailment of population growth. When the environmental movement exploded onto the stage in the 1970s, however, Buckley began to reverse many of his earlier positions, and *National Review*, which had remained largely silent on environmental matters in the sixties, began to produce anti-environmental articles at a breakneck pace. In part this anti-environmental turn among Buckley and the fusionists at *National Review* owed much to the transformation of the environmental movement in the 1970s, but it also reflected internal dynamics in the conservative movement. Buckley had always leaned more towards libertarianism than towards traditionalism,

and the same could be said for much of his magazine's staff. When environmentalists began pushing for more regulation, limits to population growth, and the restriction of energy development, Buckley's libertarian instincts led the magazine along the same anti-environmental path chosen by more dogmatic libertarians. Put simply, there was no intellectual "fusion" on environmental issues for conservatives. Fusionism in this regard was just libertarianism in another guise, and it helped cement anti-environmentalism as the default perspective of the conservative intellectual movement.

Chapter 4 ends the discussion of conservative anti-environmentalism with an analysis of perhaps the most complex strain of conservative thought: neoconservatism. Neoconservatives, including among their number Kristol, Podhoretz, and Glazer, were a group of intellectuals who identified themselves as liberals or radicals in the 1960s, but who then defected to the American Right in the 1970s. The excesses of the 1960s convinced many neoconservatives that the Left they knew and once supported had changed irrevocably. Their ideas found a new constituency on the Right, and their defection provided further intellectual stimulation for the transforming American conservative movement. Environmental issues played a fundamental role in the neoconservative transformation. During the 1960s, *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, the two foremost neoconservative periodicals, published a number of pro-environmental articles on subjects ranging from the dangers of nuclear power, population growth, and pollution. But, as had been the case with *National Review*, neoconservatives became increasingly wary of the environmental movement's transformation, especially the emergence of a "new class" of professionals bent on regulating all facets of the environment and economy, and they reacted similarly by attacking the very positions they had once advanced. Environmentalism thus helped in a material way to create neoconservatism, and the neoconservative revulsion for

environmentalism added another layer to the emerging tapestry of conservative anti-environmentalism in America.

Ultimately, “Confronting the Environmental Crisis?” is about ideas, principles, and values, and how they have influenced and continue to influence political rhetoric and action in contemporary America. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalists suggested that the needs of man were not superior to those of the nonhuman world, or, at least, that humanity should be mindful of its harmful impact on nature. This was the central theme emphasized by a number of otherwise disparate environmentalist thinkers including Rachel Carson, Barry Commoner, Eugene and Howard Odum, Paul Ehrlich, and James Lovelock.³¹ The conservative intellectuals that form the focus of this study lived through the rise of the “age of ecology.” The rapidity with which environmentalism burst onto the national scene in the 1960s and 1970s compelled them to interrogate how the values of this potent new force aligned with the values that formed the essence of their conservative philosophies.

This reckoning with environmentalism produced two conflicting ways of thinking about man’s relationship with nature. On the one hand, traditionalist conservatives advocated for a respectful relationship with nature that, at least for Weaver and Kirk, bordered on the reverential. Though they did not challenge the anthropocentric view of nature in the same way that some environmentalists did, they nevertheless viewed nature with a sense of awe and wonder, and they were repulsed by modern technological society’s ability to damage a fragile planet. On the other hand, for non-traditionalist conservatives, the notion that man’s desires should be subordinate, or even equal, to nature proved deeply disturbing. The very notion that environmental activists would seek to create a voice for or create an accord with nature was almost beyond their comprehension. The environmentalist respect for nature became for them a zero-sum game:

³¹ On the tumult of ecological ideas in the 1960s and 1970s, see Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: a History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 16.

Americans could enjoy the benefits of a clean, healthy environment, or they could enjoy the benefits of a robust, healthy economy. They could not have both. Poised between two alternative views of nature that existed in fundamental tension with one another, the American conservative movement ultimately chose to unify around the non-traditionalist view of nature over the traditionalist view. As Richard Weaver once wrote, “Ideas have Consequences,” and the results of the conservative ideological conflict produced far-reaching consequences for the American polity.

We now live in one of the most polarizing political and ideological periods in American history. Academic studies and periodical literature alike frequently proclaim that America is more divided now than at any time since the 1960s, and environmental issues including global warming and climate change often appear as chief among the causes of this partisan divide.³² These publications seldom agree as to when this political polarization began, but few, if any, trace it as far back as the 1970s. Yet the emergence of a dogmatic anti-environmental worldview among conservative intellectuals demonstrates that the roots of contemporary polarization on environmental issues go back at least that far. Like their counterparts on the Left, conservative intellectuals supported environmental issues in the 1960s, if tentatively, but the transformation of the environmental movement in the 1970s resulted in the creation of a clear ideological dividing line between Left and Right. Furthermore, although conservative intellectuals proved largely ineffective in implementing politically many aspects of their agenda in the 1980s and after, the contemporary political polarization on environmental issues testifies to the resilience of

³² For examples of scholarly articles detailing the political polarization of America, see Morris P. Fiorina and Samuel J. Abrams, “Political Polarization in the American Public,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 563-588; and Delia Baldassarri and Andrew Gelman, “Partisans Without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 114 (September 2008): 408-446; On the role of the environment in fostering political polarization, see Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap, “The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public’s Views of Global Warming, 2001-2010,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 52 (Spring 2011): 155-194; Pew Research Center, June, 2014, “Political Polarization in the American Public,” <http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/06/6-12-2014-Political-Polarization-Release.pdf>; and Chris Mooney, “When Did Republicans Start Hating the Environment?,” *Mother Jones*, August 12, 2014.

conservative anti-environmental ideas and their ability to influence national ideas and politics and subtle ways. This is not to say that it is impossible for conservatives in contemporary America to support environmental protection. Such possibilities exist and have, indeed, been explored in recent years.³³ But ideas *do* have consequences, and the pursuit of an intellectual justification for conservative support of environmentalism is a process that cannot begin in earnest until conservatives fully confront the consequences that have resulted from their own complicated and often antagonistic relationship to American environmentalism.

³³ See John R. E. Bliese, "Richard M. Weaver, Russell Kirk, and the Environment" *Modern Age* 38 (Winter 1996): 148; Also see Ibid, "Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature," *Modern Age* 49 (Spring 2007), 102-109; Ibid, *The Greening of Conservative America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 264-266;

Chapter One

“Nothing is More Conservative than Conservation”: Traditionalist Conservative Support for the Postwar Environmental Movement

In May of 1970, Russell Kirk took to the pages of the *Baltimore Sun* to praise the wave of environmental activism rippling through America’s young population in the wake of the first Earth Day’s celebration just two weeks earlier. As one of the foremost conservative intellectuals of his day, Kirk had little love for the student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, but the environmental dimensions of these protests indicated to him that at least “some students are affirming their beliefs in a healthy fashion.” In particular, he praised “those students who have begun to stand up for the environment, ecology, natural beauty, and architectural preservation,” and he wished “more power to them” in their efforts. Going even further, Kirk argued that student radicals and conservatives like himself could find common ground, seemingly, in the emerging concern over “conservation” issues, as he called them. “Various views about the war in Vietnam are possible,” he acknowledged, citing one source of the gulf between the two groups, “but only the unscrupulous or shortsighted can defend pollution and degradation of the countryside.” In fact, some students might be surprised to find that their environmental activism was well in line with the traditionalist conservative worldview Kirk had spent his life articulating. After all, he contended, “nothing is more conservative than conservation.”¹

In retrospect, Kirk’s use of the term “conservation” in the article was somewhat misleading. For much of the twentieth century, the term “conservation” described the practices of a constellation of scientists, business leaders, and bureaucrats who sought to curtail the

¹ Russell Kirk, “Conservation Activism is a Healthy Sign,” *Baltimore Sun*, May 4, 1970, A 17; For the best analysis of the importance Earth Day played in the history of environmentalism, see Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

growing scarcity of natural resources in America through more efficient production methods.² But Kirk's exhortation that the "student activists become active in the defense of a lovely and healthy country" demonstrated that what he referred to was not conservation, but environmentalism. Unlike the top-down approach of the conservation movement that preceded it, the American environmental movement arose as a grassroots social movement following World War II in response to concerns about pollution, human health, and ugly landscapes, and these issues of "beauty, health, and permanence" concerned Kirk.³ With this in mind, it seems that Kirk's article was really arguing that nothing is more conservative than environmentalism.

In his classic study of the American environmental movement, Samuel P. Hays noted that supporters of environmentalism could be "conservative in that they objected to the radical role of private and public developers in altering the face of the earth and disrupting more stable ways of life." He further added that "environmentalists tended to work out their values amid a sense of place that provided roots to life's meaning much in the spirit of traditional conservative ideology."⁴ But just how much of a common ground existed between traditionalist conservatives and environmentalists in America following 1945? If, as Hays suggested, environmentalists adhered at times to traditionalist principles, then did traditionalist conservatives also adhere to the guiding tenets of the environmental movement as it developed historically in the United States? Kirk's article in the *Sun* suggests an affirmative answer to this question, but the history of traditionalist conservatism's relationship to environmentalism in America argues for a more complicated answer, and one that has just as much to do with philosophical views of nature as it does concrete environmental issues.

² The classic work on the American Conservation Movement is Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

³ Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴ Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 248.

The complexity of this relationship can best be viewed through an examination of the work of the two most influential traditionalist conservative thinkers in the postwar period, Richard M. Weaver and Russell Kirk. Originally from Kentucky, Weaver enrolled at Vanderbilt in the 1930s where he studied under and became friends with many of the Nashville Agrarians, especially John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson, and by the time he took a position at the University of Chicago in 1943 he had assimilated many of the ideas of his mentors. While at Chicago, Weaver became one of the leading intellectuals of the postwar conservative movement and gave it much needed definition in its early years.⁵ By this time, Weaver's conservatism had evolved into a different, more generalized strain of ideas than the one he had learned from the authors of *I'll Take My Stand*, one that emphasized order and hierarchy rather than the agrarian principles advocated by Ransom and Davidson. But his conservatism did rest in part on a view of nature that he learned at Vanderbilt. Beginning with the publication of *Ideas Have Consequences* in 1948 and continuing throughout his career, Weaver argued that the rise of a liberally dominated mass society in the United States had conspired to make modern man impious towards nature. According to Weaver, nearly all of society's ills, especially rampant technology and industrialism, could be traced directly back to this lack of piety. Consequently, if society wished to cure these ills, it would first have to repair his damaged relationship with the natural world.

Kirk's own brand of traditionalist conservatism also made use of the tropes formulated by the Agrarians and Richard Weaver. Like his fellow conservatives, Kirk was deeply dissatisfied with the state of modern society following World War II and for many of the same reasons. The endless pursuit of progress and material betterment seemed to have sapped Americans of their

⁵ On Weaver's importance to the budding conservative movement, see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 36-43.

moral and spiritual energy and sent them on a rudderless course.⁶ As an antidote to the problems of liberal society, Kirk prescribed the ideas of Edmund Burke, the English intellectual whose writings on the French Revolution gave birth to modern conservatism.⁷ In particular, Kirk resurrected the notion that society is a divinely ordained contract between the dead, the living, and those yet unborn. This idea formed the core of Kirk's beliefs throughout the postwar period, and it infused his attitudes about the environment for most of his life. For Kirk, this meant that threats to the environment were nothing less than threats to the very fabric of sacred existence. Pollution and other environmental ills signified that contemporary Americans were squandering God's gifts to those generations who came before them and that they were supposed to hold in trust for generations that would follow after.

When Kirk made the argument that conservatives should inherently support the environmental movement in 1970, he did so because he believed that traditionalist views of nature jibed well with the values articulated by the student environmentalists described in his *Sun* article. There is much truth in this, though problems do exist. If taken literally, some elements of Kirk's ideas and many of Weaver's ideas do not align perfectly with the line of ecological thought that helped animate the environmental movement. But traditionalist conservatives like Weaver and Kirk venerated and respected nature in their work and sought to defend it from the ravages of human action. If their beliefs did not fundamentally challenge the anthropocentric view of nature in quite the same way as some later environmentalists would, then they nevertheless argued for human submission to nature as an element of divine creation. Furthermore, Weaver and Kirk drew on the tropes of certain thinkers whose ideas helped animate the environmental movement. Trying to find commonalities between Weaver's ideas

⁶ W. Wesley McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 42-55.

⁷ On Burke's significance to the postwar conservative movement, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 68-69.

and those of, say, Aldo Leopold would be difficult, but other ecologically minded thinkers sometimes engaged with the same ideas as traditionalists. In this respect, the ideas of Kirk and Weaver function as the groundwork for an appreciable “conservative environmentalism.” That is, their ideas on nature were sufficient enough to establish an ideological union between conservatism and environmentalism in the postwar period.

But the foundation erected by the traditionalists was never built upon in the long run, and it would be an error to think that Weaver and Kirk themselves played no role in this process. For as staunchly as the two men championed their view of nature, cracks in their environmental worldview manifested themselves in unmistakable ways. For one thing, near the end of their respective lives, both Kirk and Weaver seemed to recant much of their earlier views on nature and the environment in favor of an economic view that championed the rights of corporations and viewed market forces as the ultimate solution to nature’s problems. As future chapters will indicate, the defense of corporate capitalism would become both reason and means by which the broader conservative intellectual movement in America came to oppose environmentalism. Also, and most importantly, traditionalist intellectual support of the environmental movement seemed to dry up entirely at the very moment when environmentalism gained its greatest traction politically in the 1970s. This lingering divergence between traditionalism and environmentalism during the 1970s set the stage for other strains of conservative thought to fill that ideological vacuum and create a relationship distinctly antithetical to environmentalism.

Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature

Richard Weaver was born on March 3, 1910 in Ashville, North Carolina, though he spent most of his early years living in nearby Weaverville, the same community that had been home to generations of his forebears. Most biographers have pointed out that Weaver’s childhood was

relatively happy, and that Weaver himself could best be described as shy, bookish, and modest, or, in other words, as someone given to introspection, though he was also gregarious at times. He also developed a special bond with his family in his early life, especially his sister Polly and his mother, to whom he remained devoted for his entire life. As a child he also developed a close connection to the rural landscapes around his ancestral home, a connection that foreshadowed the importance of nature in his intellectual life. His great-aunt, for example, once wrote that Weaver “enjoys a bit of his heritage of loving the land, makes a garden, knows every fruit tree and grapevine by name and manages to get home at the right time to prune, spray, and gather the fruits of his labors.”⁸ His father worked at an automobile agency in Nashville, but his Uncle, Ethan Douglass Weaver, farmed in the area in his entire life and seemed to be the perfect embodiment of Jeffersonian agrarianism for of young Richard. A good student from an early age, Weaver spent his high school years at the Academy of Lincoln Memorial Prep School in Harrogate, Tennessee.⁹

As a young man, Weaver showed no devotion to the conservative principles he would spend most of his career defining and defending. In an autobiographical account he published in the conservative journal *Modern Age* in 1959 – tellingly titled “Up From Liberalism” – Weaver confessed that he had adhered to the principles of radicalism while completing his undergraduate degree at the University of Kentucky from 1927-1932. Weaver described the majority of his teachers there as “earnest souls from the Middle Western universities” who were, “with or with or without knowing it, social democrats.” Furthermore, they “read and circulated *The Nation*, the

⁸ Quoted in Goodnight, 467.

⁹ For biographical information on Richard M. Weaver, see Murphey, *The Rebuke of History*, 153-154; Ted J. Smith, III, “introduction,” in Ted J. Smith, III, ed. *In Defense of Tradition: Collected Shorter Writings of Richard M. Weaver* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), xvii, xxv; Smith, “How Ideas Have Consequences Came to be Written,” in Smith, *Steps Toward Restoration: The Consequences of Richard Weaver’s Ideas* (Wilmington, Del.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Press, 1998), 6-7; Fred Douglas Young, *Richard M. Weaver, 1910-1963: A Life of the Mind* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 1-4, 15-18; Bernard K. Duffy and Martin Jacobi, *The Politics of Rhetoric: Richard M. Weaver and the Conservative Tradition* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 2-6; Joseph Scotchie, *Barbarians in the Saddle: An Intellectual Biography of Richard M. Weaver* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 9-16.

foremost liberal journal of the time; they made sporadic efforts toward organizing liberal or progressive clubs; and of course they reflected their position in their teaching very largely.” The young and impressionable Weaver “had no defenses against their doctrine,” and already before his graduation he had “been persuaded entirely that the future was with science, liberalism, and equalitarianism.” As a result of this indoctrination, Weaver went on to join the American Socialist Party and for two years served as secretary of the local organization to which he belonged.¹⁰

It did not take long, however, for cracks to develop in Weaver’s ideological façade. The turning point came in 1933 when he enrolled as a graduate student in English at Vanderbilt. It was here that Weaver came into contact with the Southern Agrarians and their ideas. He acknowledged that the Agrarian philosophy had little appeal initially, but he nevertheless found himself making fast friends with the Agrarians themselves despite their ideological differences. He expressed indebtedness to Ransom in particular, whose ideas in *God Without Thunder: an Unorthodox History of Orthodoxy* especially influenced Weaver’s thinking. Upon reading that work, Weaver recognized that “many traditional positions in our world had suffered not so much because of inherent defect, but because of the stupidity, ineptness, and intellectual sloth of those who for one reason or another were presumed to have their defense in charge,” Ransom’s work notwithstanding. Weaver left Vanderbilt in 1936 before he had completed his Ph.D. coursework. He was not yet fully turned to the conservatism of the Agrarians – he claimed he was still “poised between two alternatives” – but admitted to feeling a “powerful pull in the direction of the Agrarian ideal of the individual in contact with the rhythms of nature.” This view of nature had a lasting impact on his life and proved to be one of the overriding influences on his ideas.¹¹

¹⁰ Richard Weaver, “Up From Liberalism,” *Modern Age* 3 (Winter 1958-1959), 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

After leaving Vanderbilt, Weaver took a teaching position at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later Auburn University) before accepting a teaching position Texas A&M University in 1937. But he soon grew too dissatisfied with the “rampant philistinism” he found there, abetted at every step “by technology, large-scale organization, and a complacent acceptance of success as the goal of life.” Weaver recalled that one day, while driving across the “monotonous prairies of Texas,” he came to the realization that he “did not *have* to go back to this job, which had become distasteful,” and that he “did not *have* to go on professing the clichés of liberalism, which had become meaningless” to him.¹² During his time in Texas, Weaver completed the ideological shift that had begun during his years at Vanderbilt. He abandoned liberalism and fully embraced the ideas of the Agrarians. Feeling emancipated from his ideological shackles, Weaver enrolled in the Ph.D. program in English at Louisiana State University in 1940. While there, Weaver decided to fully explore the history of the Southern tradition in his doctoral dissertation, completed in 1942 as “The Confederate South, 1865-1910: A Study in the Survival and of a Mind and Culture” and published posthumously in 1964 as *The Southern Tradition at Bay: a History of Postbellum Thought*.

In his dissertation, Weaver synthesized the ideas of Ransom and Davidson, the two mentors who most influenced his thinking. On the one hand, Weaver borrowed from Ransom a humanist view of Southern religion and a particular method of cultural criticism, and on the other hand he was influenced significantly by Davidson’s formulations of Southern identity. For Weaver, traditional Southern society was the complete antithesis of modern civilization. Contrary to the spirit of the times, he argued that the premodern South had a higher ethical claim to the mandate of civilization than did contemporary Northern society. Here Weaver’s ideas began to differ somewhat from the authors of *I’ll Take My Stand*, though not completely. What

¹² Ibid, 24.

set the South apart from the rest of the United States in his mind was not a superior economic system – agrarianism – but a superior system of values.¹³ Weaver believed these values flowed from the South’s feudal-like social system, one that emphasized order and hierarchy and that upheld the differences between the races and the sexes. He also stressed that the South derived its values from its profound distrust of science. Sounding very much like Ransom in *God Without Thunder*, Weaver professed his belief that “The South, alone among the sections, has persisted in regarding science as a false messiah. This by itself indicates that the Southern tradition has a center of resistance to the most powerful force of corruption in our age.”¹⁴ Modern man may have venerated science as the answer to all life’s problems, but for Weaver such worship was heretical. He argued that conservative societies like the South could see through the subterfuge and recognize the corrosive effects of science that went overlooked by too many in an age dominated by liberal ideas.

It is in the context of the Southern contempt for science that Weaver first developed his ideas concerning nature. “The precarious state of our civilization has grown with our control over nature,” Weaver stated matter-of-factly, though science had “promised an opposite result.” Science had vowed to create a utopian “civilization beyond present conception,” but instead it had produced only “crassness, moral obtuseness, degradation,” and the belief that “man’s chief task is the conquest of nature.” Science and technology, far from bringing liberation, had drained from modern civilization the very values on which it was supposed to rest. Only by restoring these values could man maintain a “sense of restraint in his behavior “both toward nature and his fellow beings.” One of the values Weaver spoke of was piety. “Piety comes to us as a warning voice that we must think as mortals,” he contended, and

¹³ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 156-158.

¹⁴ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, eds. Gorge Core and M.E. Bradford (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1968), 30-31.

That it is not for us either to know all or to control all. It is a recognition of our own limitations and a cheerful acceptance of the contingency of nature, which gives us the protective virtue of humility. The attitude of science, on the other extreme, has become impious to the fullest degree. It has encouraged a warfare between man and nature, a fanatical warfare, in which without clearly defined war aims, we seek the total overthrow of an opponent. But nature is not an opponent, as ancient systems of belief could have instructed us; it is the matrix of our being, and as such scientists we are parricides. Piety is a realization that beyond a certain point, all victories over nature are pyrrhic. The thought is implicit in the legend of Prometheus, and I have no doubt that the deep suspicion with which the medieval theologians viewed early exploration of the physical world was intuition.¹⁵

Weaver asserted that religious deference to nature should serve as the wellspring from which humanity received its values, especially those that governed their relationship with the natural world. Science was characterized by the complete absence of morality. It was literally entrancing human beings to kill something that had agency in their own creation. Inherently, it could never serve as the basis of a civilized society.

But unlike contemporary society, Weaver argued – channeling Davidson’s arguments in *I’ll Take my Stand* – the South had always heeded the religious conception of nature. Indeed, piety toward nature had been one of the principles that formed the core of the Southern tradition. The South “has suffered more afflictions than Job,” Weaver stated with no hint of hyperbole, “but has continued to call God and nature good.” “This acceptance of nature, with an awareness of the persistence of tragedy, is the first element of spirituality,” he continued, and “a first lesson for the poor bewildered modern who, amid the wreckage of systems, confesses an inability to understand the world.”¹⁶ History had taught Weaver that it was the Southerner, not the modern liberal (always a Northerner), who served as the best interlocutor of God and nature’s will. Weaver reiterated this point in his first article, derived from a portion of his dissertation and published in *Sewanee Review* in 1943. Titled “The Older Religiousness of the South,” Weaver expressed his unwavering belief that the view of nature promoted by Southern religious

¹⁵ Ibid, 32-33.

¹⁶ Ibid, 34.

orthodoxy was superior to the scientific view. The Southerner, like Aquinas, realized that the scientific conception of nature, no matter how much it purported to explain the mysteries of the world, would always be superseded in authority by the religious view. The word of God existed on a higher plain than the experiments of men, and it was not subject to their whims.¹⁷ This view of nature helped lead Weaver to the conclusion that the Old South was “*the last non-materialist civilization in the Western World*” and an exemplary society from which modern man could learn much. Only when humanity eschewed science, technology, and materialism and made peace with nature by subjecting itself to the authority of God could it begin to heal the damage it had done to itself.¹⁸

The theme of piety toward nature that Weaver developed through his dissertation would be an idea that Weaver returned to over and over again throughout his life. This is especially true of Weaver’s time as a professor of English at the University of Chicago, a position he took in 1944 shortly after completing his Ph.D. During his early years in Chicago, Weaver published his first book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, which was also his magnum opus and one of most forceful expression of conservative thought ever conceived. According to his autobiography, the impetus for the book came during and after World War II. The unchivalrous conduct of the war by the allied powers, the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the demand for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese, the Holocaust, and the spread of totalitarian ideologies all reinforced Weaver’s earlier convictions about the moral bankruptcy of modern civilization. “This is another book about the dissolution of the West,” the book’s opening line confessed, and

¹⁷ Weaver, “The Older Religiousness of the South,” *Sewanee Review* 51 (April 1943). Reprinted in George M. Curtis, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1987), 234-146; Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 98-111.

¹⁸ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 391.

Weaver sought to edify his readers as to the causes of and solutions to the problems that led to that dissolution.¹⁹

The origins of the crisis were easy enough to point out. Beginning with the work of William of Occam in the fourteenth century, “modern man made an evil decision,” one “which has become the efficient and final cause of other evil decisions.”²⁰ At the heart of this decision was Occam’s doctrine of nominalism, which denied the existence of a transcendent truth apart from and with a higher authority than man. The triumph of nominalism in the ideological debates of the medieval period was “the crucial event in the history of Western culture.”²¹ Divorced from the guiding principles of spirituality and order that had anchored his life and imbued it with meaning for thousands of years, man was free to unleash upon the world a host of destructive forces from which sprang nearly every societal ill that could be named. As George H. Nash, the foremost historian of the conservative intellectual movement in America, has noted, the considerable list of “idols” that earned Weaver’s ire included “The Whig theory of history; the doctrine of progress; ‘the fallacy of scientism’; the hubris of technology; ‘the fetish of material prosperity’; ‘the worship of comfort’; industrialism; materialism; pragmatism; empiricism; liberalism; democracy; relativism; ‘the insolence of material success’; the ‘disorganizing heresy’ of equality; ‘the foolish and destructive notion of the equality of the sexes’; and more.”²² These were the disastrous consequences alluded to in Weaver’s title.

Man’s relationship to nature played a central role in this declensionist interpretation of history. Prior to man’s decision to tread the path of ruination, Weaver argued, nature had been “regarded as imitating a transcendent model and as constituting an imperfect reality.” This was

¹⁹ Weaver, “Up from Liberalism,” 29-30. On the origins of *Ideas Have Consequences*, see Smith, “How Ideas Have Consequences Came to be Written,” in Smith, *Steps Towards Restoration*, 1-34; Scotchie, *Barbarians in the Saddle*, 41-42; and Young, *Richard M. Weaver, 1910-1964*, 104-106.

²⁰ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), 2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²² George H. Nash, *Reappraising the Right: the Past and Future of American Conservatism* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2009), 101.

the view of nature encouraged by classical civilization, as the work of Aristotle attested; of the medieval theologians; and even the Christian humanists of the early Renaissance. These thinkers saw in nature the expression of something eternal, of a power beyond total human comprehension that they must respect and to which they must subordinate themselves. But the emergence of rationalism and its most important concomitant, science, in the early modern period brought an ignoble end to this view of nature. “Henceforth,” Weaver lamented, nature “was looked upon as containing the principles of its own constitution and behavior,” which ultimately resulted in the abandonment of the doctrine of original sin. “If physical nature is the totality and if man is of nature, it is impossible to think of him as suffering from constitutional evil,” he added. Consequently, man became possessed by the notion that if his evil ways were not predetermined by the spiritual authority of nature, then they must be rectifiable through human action. From this line of thought came the dangerous idea of the perfectibility of man. The spiritual conception of nature had shown man his inherent flaws, but the scientific understanding of nature promised mankind a future of unlimited progress, and man had proven unable to resist this utopic promise.²³

In the introduction to *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver traced the successive stages by which scientific rationalism overcame moral spirituality with regard to nature, and he parceled out responsibility to the historical actors who abetted this process. He first blamed John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and other eighteenth-century rationalists who “taught that man needed only to reason correctly upon evidence of nature” in order to make conclusions about the world. The question of whether there was an authority whose existence anteceded nature became less and less important as the cataloguing of natural phenomena as a “means to dominion” increased in importance. “Materialism loomed next on the horizon,” Weaver recounted in an ominous tone,

²³ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 4-5.

and it was now Charles Darwin and his students who further warped man's relationship to his surroundings through the theory of evolution by natural selection. In the Darwinian view, the human being was "firmly ensconced in nature," and "biological necessity" became the sole explanation of his behavior. Weaver went on to list the social Darwinists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the adherents of "psychological behaviorism" as the descendants of this line of thought. The end result of this process was clear, at least to Weaver: modern man's impious relationship to nature was both cause and symptom of his cultural devolution. They could not be separated from one another. The very moment humankind made the fateful decision to reject the religious view of nature that had flourished in the Middle Ages was the very moment humankind's existential crisis began. Correspondingly, each successive scientific reinterpretation of the human place in nature exacerbated this crisis rather than alleviated it.²⁴

In many ways, the corruption of human-nature relations represents the central subject of Weaver's book, and the criticism of that corruption played a key role in the genesis of Weaver's traditionalist conservative thought. In his chapter on the importance of order and hierarchy, Weaver reiterated his belief that the "social disintegration" of the West was a "culmination of the prevailing nature philosophy" that originated in the work of the scientific materialists. From such disintegration came the seeds of the most abhorrent modern ideologies: communism, fascism, and totalitarianism. In his section on the fragmented character of modern life, he derided the scientific specialist whose actions sought to impose "dominion over nature." Uncontrollable technologies such as the atomic bomb – the "final discovery of Prometheus" – were evidence of the horrors that could come from distorted science. "In the great epochs of expression," he wrote in another chapter, "nature and art seem faithful to one another so that what art creates does not

²⁴ Ibid, 5-6.

fade.” But in Weaver’s day, art and nature were made “grotesque” by the “dangerous subjectivism” of modern thought. In one of the book’s most important sections, Weaver blamed the “Megalopolis” for what he called the “spoiled-child psychology” of the urban masses. “Having been taught for four centuries,” the chapter’s opening line stated with conviction, “that his redemption lies through the conquest of nature,” man had lost sight of the “great system not subject to [his] control” and therefore expected that redemption to be gifted to him free of charge.²⁵ Always a man out of step with the spirit of his age, Weaver confronted the prevailing view of nature celebrated by the likes of liberals, scientists, and urban dwellers and at every step endeavored to show them the errors of their ways.

But *Ideas Have Consequences* did more than offer howls of protest at man’s conduct towards his environment. In the book’s final section, Weaver discussed the resources and ideas with which virtuous men could hope to reverse the course of history and reclaim the heritage of the West that had been lost for centuries. One of the resources available was what Weaver referred to as “the last metaphysical right,” by which he meant private property. Indeed, private property was almost sacred to Weaver because its value transcended its social usefulness. But Weaver was careful to point out that the kind of property brought into being by finance capitalism had no place in his definition. His fulminations against industrialism and materialism placed him squarely at odds with libertarian conservative defenders of capitalism like Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig Von Mises, and Milton Friedman. Rather he had in mind the “ownership of small properties,” such as small farmsteads and locally owned businesses or, in other words, institutions that served as a bulwark against power of the state and the corporation. Private property offered a place of “entrenchment” from which virtuous men could try to beat back modernity’s offensive against the forces of permanence.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid, 36-37, 57, 64-65, 79, 113-115.

²⁶ Ibid, 132-133.

Weaver noted that a defensive strategy would not be enough to repel the barbarians at the gate. Offensive strategies must also be employed, and Weaver invoked the idea of nature as one of the primary weapons to accomplish this task. He devoted the most significant portion of the book's final chapter, "Piety and Justice," to the subject. As the title indicates, the concept of piety towards nature that Weaver had established in *The Southern Tradition at Bay* played a central role in his discussion. Weaver opened the chapter by recounting Plato's story of Euthyphro, an Athenian youth bent on prosecuting his father for the crime of murder. For both Plato and for Weaver, the son's actions were subversive of the cosmic order because he abandoned his sense of filial piety, the very force which brings order to existence. The father's crime is immaterial to the story. The son's decision to prosecute his father only added a second wrong to the first that did not add up to a right. "In our contemporary setting," Weaver interjected, "the young man stands for science and technology, and the father for the order of nature." It was his belief that science and technology were literally killing nature, and that man, far from lifting a hand to stop this heinous crime, was complicit in its commission.²⁷

Weaver went even further in his indictment, going so far as to call man's actions heretical. "The prevailing attitude toward nature," Weaver bemoaned,

Is that form of heresy which denies substance and, in so doing, denies the rightfulness of creation. We have said – to the point of repletion, perhaps – that man is not to take his patterns from nature; but neither is he to waste himself in seeking to change her face The true religion, it is said, is service to mankind; but this service seems to take the form of securing for him an unconditional victory over nature. Now this attitude is impious, for, as has been noted, it violates the belief that creation or nature is fundamentally good, that the ultimate reason for its laws is a mystery, and that acts of defiance as are daily celebrated by the newspapers are subversive of the cosmos. Obviously a degree of humility is required to accept this view.

But for the most part, that humility was sorely lacking in modern society due to its fundamental irreligiousness. The view of nature that Weaver denigrated was the logical and necessary end

²⁷ Ibid, 170-171.

point of the abandonment of religion that began with the work of Occam. Only by reaffirming its belief in transcendent principles and by exercising restraint toward nature could they hope to reclaim their proper place in the divine order.²⁸

It is also in this final chapter where Weaver came closest to offering a concrete definition of what he meant by nature, a notoriously difficult task for a word replete with multiple meanings. Nature, in Weaver's view, was simply "the substance of the world. It is a matter of elementary observation that nature reflects some kind of order that was here before our time and which, even after atomic fission, defies our effort at total comprehension." Admittedly, this definition is abstract, and Weaver's attempted clarification remained in the realm of the ephemeral rather than the concrete. "Our planet is falling victim to a rigorism, so that what is done in any remote corner affects – nay, menaces – the whole. Resiliency and tolerance are lost." Here Weaver seemed to veer closest to something resembling an ecological view of nature. He did not mention any specific examples of man's manipulation of the environment, but his condemnations of science, industrialism, and materialism suggest that pollution, radiation unleashed by the atomic bomb, and other environmental ills might not have been far from his mind when making these remarks about the natural world.

Weaver ended his meditation on human-nature relations by arguing that human beings must strive for balance in their relationship with nature. This balance could be found by walking the fine line between immersion and abstraction. According to Weaver, the former "leaves man sentient but unreflective," while the latter "leads philosophically to the denial of substance." Invoking the story of Ulysses and Nausicaa from classical mythology, Weaver advocated blessing nature while not falling in love with it. Humans should not desire nature but ascribe it "a place in the order of things which is entitled to respect." Ultimately, Weaver's analysis ended up

²⁸ 171-172.

in the same place that it began. In the book's final pages, he advocated a turning back of the clock to the Middle Ages. The antidote to modern man's debasement could not be found by looking to the future, but by looking to the past. The medieval code of chivalry taught men superior values, including the veneration of nature, and it could again if humanity had the courage to once again embrace its ideals.²⁹

The view of nature Weaver articulated in *Ideas Have Consequences* continued to demonstrate his refashioning of the Agrarian conception of nature that he had begun in his dissertation. According to the intellectual historian Paul V. Murphy, the main ideas and themes articulated in the book demonstrate that Weaver had arrived "at the logic of Donald Davidson's politics of rooted identity without Davidson's immersion in regionalism" "and in so doing "decisively shifted the terms of Agrarian discourse." "His thought represents a neo-Agrarian position," Murphy continues, "one more oriented to philosophy than to economics, and one that attributed the problems of modern rationalization and social atomization not to socioeconomic change but to the post-Enlightenment liberal tradition, particularly secularism, social equality, and an unrooted individualism."³⁰ In other words, agrarianism for Weaver was not about creating a society governed by a specific economic, social, and political order. Rather, it was a constellation of moral values that governed how human beings ought to relate to the world. Put differently, Weaver had transformed the radical conservatism of the Agrarians into a generalizable form of traditionalist conservatism. In terms of his view of nature, this meant that Weaver marginalized the Agrarian critique of industrialism, which had been harsher than even his own indictments, and almost wholly abandoned their emphasis on "the culture of the soil" that defined Agrarian conservatism. The Agrarians had sought to use their ideas to help preserve nature from the specific rapacious habits of industrial capitalism. Weaver did as well, but he also

²⁹ Ibid, 174-175.

³⁰ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 166.

sought to preserve nature more from liberal or radical habits of mind. But despite this unmooring from Agrarian thought, Weaver's condemnations of nature's enemies remained no less forceful or important to American conservatism.

The difference between the view of nature Weaver articulated before and after the publication of *Ideas Have Consequences* can be viewed in a number of his writings. In "Up from Liberalism", to take one example, Weaver included a section on the meaning of piety that reflected his abstract conservatism. He called "the war of the radicals against substance" a "direct repudiation" of the principle of piety. The "denial of substance" was one of the "greatest heresies" perpetuated by modern man, and "this is where much contemporary radicalism" appeared in an "essentially sinful aspect." The liberal worldview represented "an aggression by the self which outrages a deep-laid order of things." Once again Weaver seemed to talk of nature not as something concrete and identifiable, but as something intangible and divorced from the physical world, though his argument lost none of its potency. For example, Weaver censured Edmund Hillary's successful attempt to be the first person to climb Mount Everest, and he did so because his actions demonstrated the problem with the "Western mentality," namely the "metaphysic of progress through aggression."³¹ In Weaver's opinion, Hillary's impious actions served as a metaphor for humanity's larger despoilment of the natural world in which they lived, and which he had been railing against for years.

The evolution of Weaver's conservatism from that of the Agrarians is even more evident in some of his later essays about the South. In 1950's "Agrarianism in Exile," published in the *Sewanee Review*, Weaver deemphasized the Agrarian view of nature in favor of the view he had articulated in *Ideas Have Consequences*. Nature was "a creation to be respected shows the intrinsic opposition between the aesthetic view and the utilitarian view of applied science, which

³¹ Weaver, "Up From Liberalism," 26-27.

serves as a kind of heuristic for modern industrialism,” he believed. Weaver critiqued industrialism here, it is true, but he also lauded nature because its existence served as a “direct challenge to the intellectual premises of modernism.”³² In a 1957 essay titled “The South and the American Union,” Weaver reworked an argument he had first made in *The Southern Tradition at Bay*. The Southerner, he observed, possessed the belief that “basically nature is right in being as it is. Change for its own sake is not good, and many of nature’s dispositions are best left as they are. He has a degree of reverence for the natural order of things and he suspects *hubris* in a desire to change that order radically.”³³ For Weaver, it was the Southerner’s conservative attitudes and values, not his actions, that defined his relationship with nature.

The true extent to which Weaver reformulated the Agrarian view of nature into traditionalist conservative discourse can be seen in his essay “The Southern Tradition,” published in the libertarian-oriented *New Individualist Review* just before his death in 1964. In the article Weaver approached the Southern conception of nature in the same broad way as he had in his dissertation, but his prose and ideas reflect the abstract thought of *Ideas Have Consequences* and his subsequent writings. The Southerner, Weaver contended, viewed nature as “the creation of a Creator.” An important corollary to this attitude “is that man has a duty of veneration towards nature and the natural.” Weaver did acknowledge that nature “has to be used” to some extent, but he was unequivocal in stating that man should not seek “complete dominion” over nature. Rather, man should recognize that “he is not the lord of creation, with an omnipotent will, but a part of creation, with limitations, who ought to observe a decent humility in the face of the inscrutable.”³⁴ As in *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver’s nature in “The Southern

³² Weaver, “Agrarianism in Exile,” *Sewanee Review* 58 (Autumn 1950), reprinted in Curtis and Thompson, 36-37.

³³ Weaver, “The South and the American Union,” in Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and James Jackson Kilpatrick, eds. *The Lasting South: Fourteen Southerners Look at Their Home* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1957). Reprinted in Curtis and Thompson, 236.

³⁴ Weaver, “The Southern Tradition,” *The New Individualist Review* 3 (1964) in Curtis and Thompson, 221.

Tradition” was intangible. The “*modus vivendi*” of which he spoke no longer had any traces of the prescriptive economic plans laid out by his mentors in *I’ll Take My Stand*. For Weaver, thinking about the moral and philosophical dimensions of humanity’s interactions with the nonhuman world were more important to changing the prevalent view of nature than was offering a detailed plan to fight that view.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Weaver once again juxtaposed his interpretation of Southern attitudes toward nature with Northern attitudes. In this he was no more hospitable than the Agrarians had been in *I’ll Take my Stand*, but his problems sprang from different sources. In the North, unlike the South, men were possessed by the belief that they were “the center of significance” and the “masters of nature.” In this view, nature was “frequently spoken of as something to overcome” and as “an impediment to be gotten out of the way.” What was the source of this impious attitude? For Weaver, Northern impieties sprang not from their economic system, directly from an “attitude” that had “increasingly characterized the thinking of the Western world since the Enlightenment.” This was the very same argument Weaver made at length in *Ideas Have Consequences*, and it shows just how much his traditionalist conservatism differed from the conservatism of the Agrarians. Weaver’s mentors at Vanderbilt had taken pains to link the degradation of nature with the rapacious effects of industrial capitalism. Weaver never totally lost the contempt for industrialism and capitalism in his evolution from Agrarian to traditionalist conservatism, but the list of nature’s true enemies went beyond mere industrialism and materialism to include liberalism, modernism, communism, and all the other isms that flowed from the medieval rejection of transcendent truth. The liberal mind, the Northern mind, could not, by its very ideological allegiances, fulfill Weaver’s criteria for right thought towards

nature. Only the conservative mind, the Southern mind, was able to perceive nature's eternal truths.³⁵

From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that Weaver's vision of nature played a central role in the strain of traditionalist conservative thought he fashioned. But are Weaver's ideas regarding the natural world enough to fulfill the criteria listed at the outset concerning the relationship between conservatism and environmentalism? Or, to put it differently, is it possible to view Weaver's ideas about nature as part of a corpus of conservative ideas that had much in common with those that animated the first stirrings of the American environmental movement and that could have led to an amicable relationship between the two? On the superficial level, arguments can be made for answering these questions both affirmatively and negatively. On the one hand, whether in his postgraduate work on the American South or in his writings on the decline of the West, Weaver always showed a strong concern for the state of man's relationship to nature, and he was just as vocal in his defense of nature as any figure who can be said to be an intellectual progenitor of the environmental movement. In fact, such concern is prevalent enough to suggest that it formed central theme of his philosophical worldview throughout his career.

On the other hand, the answer is plainly negative. For one thing, Weaver's interpretation of nature's place within the history of the American South proves susceptible to the same criticisms leveled by environmental historian Jack Temple Kirby against the Nashville Agrarians. Like those of his mentors, Weaver's ideas were "simultaneously and unambiguously white-biased and naïve on rural life, labor, and authority and hopelessly unconnected to issues of social justice, health, landscape and much else."³⁶ In addition to the tension between Weaver's Agrarianism and his defense of consumer society, it is also problematic to view Weaver's thoughts concerning nature as "environmental" because of their abstract character. It is true that

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 244.

Weaver formed a close connection to the rural landscapes around his ancestral home in North Carolina, but little of this obvious love of nature shines through the abstruse philosophical discourse and prolix style that marked his writings. It is not a stretch to believe that potential threats to nature – landscapes, ecosystems, or “the environment” – posed by science, technology, pollution, or development lurked beyond his philosophy, but these concerns must be inferred from his philosophical ideas. Certainly his defense of nature appears at first glance to bear little resemblance to that elaborated by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac* (published in the same year as *Ideas Have Consequences*) or other figures in the genealogy of the environmental movement.³⁷

On a deeper level, however, a case can be made for Weaver’s ideas serving as the basis for an environmentalism infused with markedly conservative principles, and one that conservatives themselves could have followed in the 1970s and beyond. It is true that Weaver’s view of nature suffers from all of the problems mentioned above, but as literary critic Raymond Williams noted cogently, “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language.” Williams identified three broad meanings of the word “nature” that developed over time and for which the word has become shorthand: “the essential quality and character of something,” “the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both,” and “the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings.”³⁸ In particular, Williams associated the second definition with the emergence in the medieval period of the view of nature as a God or as an agent or minister of God and the third definition with the Enlightenment belief that nature conformed to a set of laws that could be observed and measured through the application of science and reason.

³⁷ See Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949). On the intellectual roots of the American environmental movement, see Donald Fleming, “Roots of the New Conservation Movement,” *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972), 7-91.

³⁸ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 184.

From Weaver's remarks on nature mentioned above and his hostility to science, it might be assumed that Weaver's use of the term conformed most often to the second definition of nature. It is true that Weaver imbued his vision of nature with a divine or supernatural, and Weaver certainly had no love for Enlightenment rationality. But Williams also notes that the divine conception of nature was often intimately related to the material conception insofar as the "multiplicity of things and creatures" that make up material nature were said to be related to one another because they all retained a spark of divine creation.³⁹ This particular conception of nature seems to best reflect what Weaver referred to in his agrarian writings and in *Ideas Have Consequences*. If his ideas did not touch on landscape, health, pollution and other elements that would become important to the environmental movement, his moral concern for nature nevertheless demonstrated a concern for the material environment as well. This combination of moral and material concern for nature demonstrates that perhaps it is not such a stretch to view Weaver's ideas of nature as a possible wellspring from which conservative support for the environmental movement could have arisen.

But even beyond the complex and various ways to interpret his abstract ideas about nature, Weaver's thought deserves to be considered as the wellspring of "conservative environmentalism" because it *did* have much in common with the ideas and intellectual labors of certain figures whose ideas did play an important role in ushering the age of environmentalism. In particular, Weaver bears at least some resemblance to the organic ecologists of the early-to-mid twentieth century who advocated for a more communal, harmonious, and holistic view of human-nature relations than the overly mechanistic scientific formulations of the New Ecologists which preceded them. In his landmark study of ecological ideas, Donald Worster argued that the organicists of this time period strove to reconcile their belief in transcendent moral principles

³⁹ Ibid, 85.

that should guide human action towards nature on the one hand and uncaring, mechanistic science on the other. As they worked out the contradictions between these two opposing points, it became clear that the “ought” of the moral realm came to shape the “is” of the scientific realm in the way they thought about humanity’s relationship with nature. As Worster puts it, “the appeal based on scientific evidence follows rather than precedes the conviction of rightness, and the ultimate source of moral impulse remains hidden in the human heart.”⁴⁰ For the organicists, in other words, morality proved more important or more necessary than science in creating a more interdependent relationship between humans and nature.

Weaver was not an organicist, but the moral authority of nature played no less an important role in his writing than in theirs. Like the organicists, Weaver had an idea how humanity ought to interact with nature. The organicists believed that humanity ought to strive for a more communal and more interdependent relationship with nature. Weaver believed that humanity ought to submit their wants and desires to those of nature as an act of piety. Both wanted a more respectful and healthier relationship with the nonhuman world. Where Weaver differed from the organicists, however, was in his view of science. “If mechanistic science produces an every-man-for-himself ethic,” Worster notes, “then the attempted remedy has been to reform science with [moral] organicism, not abandon it all together.”⁴¹ Throughout all of his works, Weaver never sought to reform or rehabilitate science using the moral principles he had developed. He attacked materialism, industrialism, and science at every turn as the worst evils unleashed by modern man. But even despite his unwillingness to countenance any embrace of science, Weaver’s struggle remains somewhat similar to those of the organicists.

⁴⁰ Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: a History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 336.

⁴¹ Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: a History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 336.

This point can be illustrated in part with a brief comparison between Weaver and the organic ecologist-naturalist Joseph Wood Krutch. Krutch first grappled with the thorny relationship between moral values and science in *The Modern Temper* (1929). In that work, Krutch expressed a feeling of being alienated from nature. He believed that man's desire to function as an individual rendered him wholly incompatible with nature and that modern science provided no adequate tools with which to repair this divide. Such a view was wholly compatible with the humanism he practiced in the 1920s. But Krutch's opinions of nature changed drastically over the course of his life. In 1952 he moved to the Arizona desert where he became an amateur naturalist and wrote several books about the desert environment. Drawing on Thoreau, from whom he drew much inspiration, Krutch shed the alienation he had felt earlier in life and came to a realization that humanity's proper place was not outside of nature, but rather within it, and the science of ecology's emphasis on interconnectedness showed him the way. As Worster put it, science for Krutch "led directly to a moral awakening: a new sense of biological relatedness and communalism."⁴²

Weaver did not appear to have any contact directly with Krutch, but the two did provide contributions for an edited volume published in 1958 titled *Essays on Individuality* and that featured the work of several prominent conservatives besides Weaver, including Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek.⁴³ Weaver was a great admirer of Krutch's work, and Krutch's emphasis on individuality and his rejection of communism and socialism appealed to Weaver's conservative beliefs. He also approved of Krutch's personal relationship with nature. In a laudatory review of Krutch's autobiography, *More Lives than One* (1962), published just before Weaver's death in 1964, the latter called Krutch "a very knowing naturalist." Weaver also defended Krutch's decision to leave the urban East for the desert Southwest from some of his

⁴² Ibid, 334.

⁴³ See Richard M. Weaver, "Individuality and Modernity" and Joseph Wood Krutch, "As a Man Thinketh," in Felix Morley, ed., *Essays on Individuality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1958).

“incredulous” friends, believing that Krutch felt “solace from nature, a positive satisfaction in knowing that there were around him living and growing things not of his planting or instigating.” Solace from such a “primitive environment” might have been a “self-deceptive” journey for many, but Weaver believed it to be responsible for the “improved health and renewed zest” of Krutch’s later life.”⁴⁴

But beyond his admiration for Krutch’s personal relationship with nature, Weaver commended the former’s views of science and morality. In his review, Weaver confessed that he enjoyed *The Modern Temper* because it pointed out that “modern science, along with a good many abetting philosophers, was describing an inhuman world in which it was impossible for man to feel at home. The physical world was without source of value, yet man could not live with values. There was no longer possibility of tragedy; for this man now appeared too minuscule. Meaning could not be sought in love, since all attention was now affixed to its biological role.” Weaver admitted that Krutch’s views had transformed somewhat since the book’s publication, but “not in a way to repudiate the indictment carried by *The Modern Temper*.” The “atheistic pantheism” that characterized Krutch’s later beliefs on morality and science strangely did not seem to bother Weaver, and far from serving as a “bare theology,” Weaver believed some “very significant principles” could be drawn from it.⁴⁵ For example, in his autobiography Krutch rebuked those mechanistic and social scientists who believed that “God,” or the “inner voice,” or any transcendent source of morality could provide proper direction for man’s relationship with nature. “Science can tell us how to do more and more things; it cannot tell us what ought to be done,” Krutch argued passionately. Elsewhere he asserted that “human nature does not incline us to be pure materialists. “We talk about conquering nature,” he chastised, but, he continued, “unless we know what ought to be done as well as how to do this

⁴⁴ Richard Weaver, “A Further Testament,” *Modern Age* 7 (Spring 1963): 220-221.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 220.

or that, we become merely skillful technicians without wisdom – which is precisely what we now are. We do not ride, we are ridden. The machines we have made control us.”⁴⁶ This sentiment – that science without moral piety could not and should not serve as a guide for man’s relationship with nature – appealed to Weaver and undoubtedly influenced his claim that Krutch, “whether he would care to admit it or not,” spoke as “a true conservative.”⁴⁷

Indeed, there is more to suggest that Krutch’s scientific moralism and Weaver’s traditionalist view of nature had much in common. In *More Lives Than One*, Krutch recalled how much his views had changed since writing *The Modern Temper*. One of the most fundamental transformations, to his mind, was that he no longer believed that “there is no escaping the scientific demonstration that religion, morality, and the human being’s power to make free choices are all merely fragments of the imagination.”⁴⁸ He admitted that he regretted that the opponents of mechanistic science “should have rested their case upon the existence of a ‘soul,’ but he nevertheless rejected the biological determinist belief that human life was “an improbable chemical accident.”⁴⁹ He did not fully discount Darwinian ideas, of course, but he believed that the existence of consciousness demonstrated that human beings are not bound solely by biological laws, but also by moral ones as well. In the end, Krutch accepted science, of course, but he did so on his own terms and through his own process of reconciliation.

Near the end of his life, Weaver grappled with similar issues in his writings, although the answers he arrived at were somewhat different. Nowhere is this more evident than in Weaver’s final book, *Visions of Order: the Cultural Crisis of Our Time*, published posthumously in 1964. As was the case in many of his earlier writings, the relationship between cultural values and the society which produced them formed the central theme of the book. Weaver’s argument, in brief,

⁴⁶ Joseph Wood Krutch, *More Lives than One* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1962), 342-344.

⁴⁷ Weaver, “A Further Testament,” 221.

⁴⁸ Krutch, *More Lives than One*, 319.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 323.

was that every society organizes itself around a set of agreed-upon values that that give it meaning and that must maintain their hegemony in order to survive.⁵⁰ It was not until the book's final chapter, titled "The Reconsideration of Man" that Weaver addressed the subjects of science and morality. In it, Weaver reiterated many of the beliefs evident in his earlier writings on Agrarianism and in *Ideas Have Consequences*, especially his condemnation of all forms of science. In keeping with the book's larger theme, Weaver opened the chapter by noting that "not only the character but also the degree of a culture is responsive to the prevailing image of man." Unfortunately, in Weaver's estimation as in Krutch's, modern western civilization had come to embrace a scientific understanding of mankind that threatened to wash away the very foundations upon which it had been erected. But unlike Krutch, who was inclined toward reconciliation, Weaver determined to "attack" the scientific view of man and undermine its very premises. "Saving the image of man on which our culture depends," he informed his readers, required nothing less than the complete destruction of the countervailing image.⁵¹

In particular, whereas Krutch made accommodation with Darwin's theory of the descent of man and the body of evolutionary thought that it spawned, Weaver was inclined to condemn it. "The enlarged view of the physical universe" encouraged by the evolutionists, he argued, "had the effect of reducing man proportionately in importance" by placing man "squarely in the animal kingdom." As a result, man could no longer assert his superiority to the other animals; he had "developed through the same pressures as the other animals and that the law of the survival of the biologically fittest applied to him no less than to the denizens of field and forest." For Weaver, this was an insidious and potentially dangerous line of thought because of the corrosive effects it would have on man's morality. From the theory of man's evolution, "many inferences adverse to social morality and even culture could be drawn," and he believed the most dangerous

⁵⁰ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 176,

⁵¹ Weaver, *Visions of Order: the Cultural Crisis of Our Time* (Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 134-135.

of these revolved around man's responsibility to the rest of creation. "Maybe the new enlightenment should have made him feel more responsible," Weaver stated dubiously, "but it actually made him feel less so." If man were indeed no different from the animals, then his baser instincts would trump his morality in the way he viewed and approached the world. More than anything else, this absence of moral responsibility threatened to undue the social and cultural achievements of western civilization that Weaver held so dear.⁵²

But despite these disagreements with Krutch's way of thinking, commonalities can also be found. For example, with regard to religion, Weaver argued that science's ability to dominate the discourse on man's origins and development had been to convince people "that nature is the only creative force that exists." In the scientific view, any supposition of man's divine origins were disregarded as illegitimate and unsound, a view that expressly ran counter to Weaver's own belief "that the appearance of man on earth was a destined miracle." Elsewhere, Weaver argued that the theory of the descent of man had "evidently been promulgated with a strong anterior desire to submit man to nature." Krutch may not have gone so far as to endorse Weaver's opinion of life as "a destined miracle," but he would have agreed with the ideas animating them. Like Krutch, Weaver argued for a vision of man's existence in which the scientific explanation was properly subordinated to the moral or metaphysical vision. Both believed that mankind's proper relationship with nature ought to center on reverence, respect, and piety. Krutch derived that piety from the science of ecology, but it also came from a conviction that humanity was bound to observe and act upon transcendent moral principles. And if Krutch did not quite go so far as Weaver in declaring religion or God as the ultimate source of these principles, and if Weaver never accepted science in the way the Krutch did, their attempts to grapple with questions relating to the two reveal that the two might not be so different after all.⁵³

⁵² Weaver, *Visions of Order*, 137-138.

⁵³ Weaver, *Visions of Order*, 137-138, 139, 143, 142-143, 146-149.

The point of the preceding discussion is not to claim that we should view Weaver in the same way that we view Krutch: as an important figure whose thought contributed to a corpus of ecological ideas that helped inspire the modern environmental movement. Weaver died of a heart attack in 1964 at age 54, right about the time the environmental movement first gained traction on the national stage, and therefore we cannot know what his attitude toward modern environmentalism would have been. But his particular vision of nature, with its similarities to Krutch and other organic ecologists, serves as a firm enough foundation, I think, to declare that his ideas might have served as a foundation for later conservative support of the environmental movement. As mentioned above, Weaver's body of thought contained significant elements of tension with those that helped animate the environmental movement, not least of which was his rejection of science. The science of ecology played an incalculable role in ushering in the age of environmentalism in America, and there is no evidence to suggest that Weaver accepted the science of ecology, despite his endorsement of Krutch. Still, his unyielding belief that nature was, or ought to be, a wellspring of humanity's moral values and his stern condemnation of those forces that sought to "conquer" nature demonstrate broad commonalities between his ideas and those made later by environmentalists. Weaver was not an environmentalist, and many environmentalists would no doubt have detested Weaver's conservative views of order and hierarchy, but he loved and defended nature. If American conservatives in the 1960s wished to claim for themselves a position vis a vis the environment that did not involve the embrace of liberal principles, then they could have chosen a much worse starting point than Weaver's traditionalist conservatism.

Having said that point, it should be mentioned here that near the end of his life Weaver appeared to temper some of his staunchly held traditionalist principles and embrace a set of ideas much less hospitable to the nascent environmental movement. In particular, Weaver's views of

free market capitalism appeared to have changed radically over time. It is true that Weaver's condemnations of industrial capitalism were never as forceful as those delivered by his mentors in *I'll Take my Stand*. Ransom and Davidson's ideas concerning nature influenced Weaver significantly, but in *Ideas Have Consequences* he jettisoned the radical economic program of the Agrarians in favor of grandiose philosophical denunciations of modernism, liberalism, and scientism. But he nevertheless remained hostile to capitalism, going so far as to state plainly that his views on private property had no relation to the capitalist system. Strangely, however, by the early 1960s, just as the environmentalist critique of industrial capitalism was beginning to gain momentum, Weaver appeared to accept the American system of capitalism and found much reason for its celebration.

This transformation can be seen plainly in a speech given in 1959 at the University of Wisconsin titled "Rhetorical Strategies of the Conservative Cause." Three years later, Weaver gave the same speech at the University of Chicago and sponsored by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, a major organization designed to promulgate American conservative principles.

Weaver's speech touched on a number of themes, including his belief that a vast majority of the American people supported the conservative cause and that American capitalism had proven itself vastly superior to socialism in the global ideological struggle. At one point, Weaver noted:

We have the highest popular standard of living in the world by far; that we have so much food stuffs that we are looking for ways to give them away; that we produce so much cotton fiber, tobacco, etc., that we have to contrive schemes to hold down the annual crop; that we have so many automobiles that the streets of every city, large and small, are clogged with them; that we are so prolific in appliances and gadgets that the makers are looking for new ways to get them into the hands of customers. It is hard for me to believe that in the midst of all this plenty, some people could feel called upon to apologize for our failure.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Weaver, "Rhetorical Strategies of the Conservative Cause: Address at the University of Wisconsin," 26 Apr. 1959, in Gerald Thomas Goodnight, "Rhetoric and Culture: a Critical Edition of Richard M. Weaver's Unpublished Works," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1978), 585.

Admittedly, there is little here concerning the nonhuman world or the environment. But the 1959 speech did seem to indicate that Weaver's concept of piety toward nature – one of the defining characteristics of his earlier work – had become less important to him than defending the American capitalist system from its detractors. It is telling, for example, that Weaver delivered this speech at the University of Chicago, a hotbed of libertarian conservative thought and home to many intellectuals possessed of ideas about individuality and freedom that Weaver one found objectionable.⁵⁵ And, more importantly, it creates some doubts as to Weaver's fitness to serve as a progenitor of conservative environmental thought. Of course, there is nothing inherently anti-environmental about Weaver's remarks mentioned above. But the libertarian defense of America's capitalist system that served as the crux of his speech became in the 1960s and 1970s became a central pillar of anti-environmental thought among conservative intellectuals and helped to bridge the ideological chasm that existed between their philosophies. That a staunch traditionalist like Weaver eventually embraced libertarian principles illuminates just how strong of a pull capitalist ideas had within the broader conservative intellectual movement.

Russell Kirk: Conservative Environmentalist

His apparent embrace of capitalism aside, the majority of Weaver's ideas could have served as the foundation for conservative support of environmentalism, but he was not the only traditionalist conservative to address humanity's relationship with the non-human world. Russell Kirk, who along with Weaver; Peter Viereck; and Thomas Molnar helped to define the tenets of traditionalist thought, also discussed human-nature relations prominently in his writings. In the foreword to *Visions of Order*, Kirk, a close friend of Weaver's until the latter's death, even noted

⁵⁵ On the intellectual transformations evident in Weaver's speech, see Nash, *Reappraising the Right*,

that they shared a revulsion for all things modern and preferred the landscapes of the quiet, rural communities they hailed from to the hustle and bustle of city life.⁵⁶ But Kirk also differed from Weaver in one important aspect: he lived through the apotheosis of the environmental movement in the 1970s. Like most contemporary intellectuals from all sides of the ideological spectrum, Kirk could not help being pulled into the movement's orbit, and he found himself supporting the movement's ideas and goals. Furthermore, Kirk, more than any other conservative intellectual, made the argument that the animating principles behind traditionalist conservatism were the very same principles animating environmentalism. In this respect, Kirk, much more than Weaver, best represents what a true "conservative environmentalist" looked like in the period.

Kirk was born in Plymouth, Michigan in 1918 into a family descended from New England Puritans who had moved to the area in the early 1800s. Kirk's father, a railroad engineer with a deep attachment to rural Michigan's past, struggled much of his life to avoid being "swept away by the tide of industrialism" and passed on to his son "an enduring dissatisfaction with the age of the machine." Kirk's mother, on the other hand, worked at home and instilled in her son a love of adventure stories written by Lewis Carroll, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Thomas Mallory. As a child the "bookish" Kirk had no liking for school, preferring to spend time in the company of his family or living out "the old Tom Sawyer sort of life" that "still persisted, little altered, among American boys in places like Plymouth." But from an early age, Kirk showed an inclination toward conservative sentiments, and he recalled that he "shared none of Huckleberry Finn's rebellion against things established."⁵⁷ In his autobiography, Kirk made clear that his conservative sentiments were inextricably intertwined with his love of the natural world. In Plymouth, Kirk recalled that he felt a "strong suspicion of change and a longing for continuity. To lie with my father beneath an oak on the hill above the mill-pond, or to walk with my

⁵⁶ Russell Kirk, quoted in *Visions of Order*, viii.

⁵⁷ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory: Episodes and Reflections of a Vagrant Career* (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1963), 7. On Kirk's childhood, see McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, 14-17.

grandfather in search of fossils and arrowheads on the terminal moraine four miles north of the town – in such occupations . . . I felt a deep satisfaction, having joined past and present.” For Kirk, nature, or the landscape, existed as a tangible link between the otherwise unrecoverable past and the living present, one that helped to fight the encroachment of the “assembly line civilization” that that everywhere seemed to dissolve the necessary link between the two.⁵⁸

Kirk expressed similar thoughts about the village of Mecosta, the ancestral home of his mother’s folk where he spent much of his youth and where he made his permanent residence later in life. He lamented, for example, the fate of the “stump country,” land that would have been home to northern Michigan’s dense forests if it were not for “the lumberman of the ‘seventies and ‘eighties” who had left the land “desolate behind them.” But despite the violence done to the land, Kirk remembered the area fondly. He held a special love for “its bleak ridges and its scrubby second-growth woods, its remote lakes and its sand trails, its poverty-racked farmsteads and the silent village of Mecosta itself, shrunk to a tenth of its early population.” He even went so far as to argue that the “glaciated and ravaged” landscape of Mecosta County “was like empty land that peers out of the pages of the Mabinogion,” invoking the famous collection of Medieval Welsh adventure tales. All told, Kirk’s time in Mecosta allowed him to escape the humdrum life of Henry Ford’s Michigan and escape into what he called “the world of silence,” a state of nature that facilitated contemplation and evoked images of days gone by. More importantly, his time there also reinforced the relationship between his conservative distrust for modern society and his love of the natural world that was for him its antithesis.⁵⁹

The conservative instincts Kirk cultivated as a boy only grew as he grew into a young man during the worst years of the Great Depression. After graduating high school with little concern for political matters, Kirk eventually applied for and received a scholarship from

⁵⁸ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 7.

⁵⁹ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 8-9.

Michigan State University, and it was during his time there that his politics and ideas took on the same cast as his childhood feelings about industrial society. For instance, though he had briefly supported the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency, Kirk quickly came to repudiate his ideas when he perceived that the New Deal brought a needless and potentially dangerous centralization of power to the executive branch, an idea that was only strengthened upon reading Donald Davidson's *The Attack on Leviathan* as an undergraduate.⁶⁰ After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree, Kirk received a fellowship from Duke University in North Carolina. While there, Kirk made sojourns to New Orleans and Savannah and experienced firsthand the South's unique brand of conservatism that he had only read about through the works of Davidson and a handful of other Southern writers. At Duke, Kirk wrote his doctoral dissertation about the political philosophy of John Randolph of Roanoke, the planter-orator who lived in colonial Virginia and who Kirk called "the most interesting man in American history, and the most neglected." According to Kirk, Randolph was among the first Americans to articulate a coherent conservative politics, and Kirk believed that his ideas might be the ideological beginning of a conservative counterweight to the then dominant liberal tradition in America.⁶¹ Unfortunately, Kirk proved unable to make any significant progress on his research in the years immediately following his graduation from Duke. Stymied by the necessity of making ends meet, Kirk reluctantly took a job with the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, putting a halt to the growth of his conservative ideas for the time being.

Luckily for Kirk, his time at the automobile plant did not last long. In the summer of 1942, the United States Army drafted Kirk and gave him the rank of sergeant in the Chemical Warfare Service division that was stationed deep in the Great Salt Lake Desert of Utah. Like the

⁶⁰ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 12-13; Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Press, 1993), 99.

⁶¹ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 18-19; Kirk's dissertation was eventually published as *John Randolph of Roanoke: a Study of American Politics* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1978).

Michigan landscapes of his youth, the barren terrain of the Utah desert nurtured Kirk's conservative instincts and his love of the outdoors. "While millions of men were slaughtering one another upon the Ukrainian steppes or in the Papuan jungles," Kirk remembered, he "lay enchanted, like Merlin in the oak, in a desert so long dead that it seemed nothing was allowed to die there any longer." Elsewhere he remarked that one of the region's mountains, the Camel's Back, looked like "a thing drowned and then washed up from the ocean of time, for on its sides were waves of seas that dried a million years ago." In this case the desert fulfilled the same role as the woods and lakes had in Michigan: it represented a timeless landscape in which the past and present blurred together seamlessly. To live in the desert was to have one foot anchored in the eons of past geological activity and another fastened to the fleeting human activity of the moment, a unity that could only be achieved in nature. Of course, service in the Chemical Warfare division provided a number of "diversions" from his enjoyment of the desert, such as being choked periodically by mustard gas or phosgene, but Kirk still found it beautiful enough to call it "one of the most desolate and healthful spots in all the world." In the final estimate, Kirk acknowledged that "the Great Salt Lake Desert was barren beyond belief," but not, he stated matter-of-factly, "God-forsaken."⁶²

Kirk's allusion to God in this instance marks a turning point in the genesis of his conservative beliefs, one that was decisively influenced by the nonhuman world. Despite his Puritan background, Kirk's family did not take their religious duties overly seriously, and he even referred to himself as "a perfect mechanist and atheist" for much of his early life thanks to a healthy diet of H.G. Wells and Leonard Woolf. Kirk's time in the desert, however, wholly transformed his religious and philosophical worldview. But though he loved the nature around him, he did not embrace the doctrine of pantheism, as Krutch had, "for the rattlesnake, the lizard,

⁶² Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 20-21.

the grey sagebrush, and the bitter juniper berry do not inspire Wordsworth's love of the divine handiwork." Rather, the sheer severity of the landscape sparked within his mind an awareness of a force greater than himself. "The desert knew no benevolence; it was terrible; but awe and veneration being close allied, truly the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," he admitted. Prior to his time in the desert, reason and logic had been important guiding forces in Kirk's life, but his time in Utah caused him to realize that reason and logic were merely tools of a grander creative power:

In the Great Salt Lake Desert – whether or not the awfulness of the place worked some change in me – I began to perceive that pure reason has its frontiers, and that to deny realms beyond them is puerility. Yet even within the realm of reason, once disbelief in a supernatural order is suspended, evidences of every sort begin to pour in – evidences drawn from the natural sciences, from psychology, from history, from physics – demonstrating that we are part of some grand and mysterious scheme, which works upon us through Providence. This granted, one must turn for elucidation of those mysteries to a different science, theology . . . Knowledge of this sort comes through illation; it is borne in upon the mind, in hints and fragments, not systematically; and my illative sense began to stir in the stony shadow of the Camel's Back.

The desert thus provided Kirk with something the landscapes of his childhood apparently could not: evidence of a divine order whose existence clearly manifested itself in the face of nature. Kirk thus left the desert at the end of the war convinced that not only could nature serve as a bridge between different epochs of time, but also that it represented nothing less than the hand of God at work.⁶³ These two ideas exerted a formative influence on Kirk and would eventually come to play a central role in the strain of traditionalist conservative thought that he would help fashion.

The immediate effect of Kirk's discovery of God in the desert, however, was to provide a final reinforcement of the conservative instincts he had been cultivating for most of his early life. "If I came some way toward an apprehension of Divine nature, there upon the dunes that were

⁶³ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 21-22

the beaches of a forgotten sea, I moved further toward a proper understanding of my own nature,” he mused. For him this meant an outright rejection of the Enlightenment’s emphasis on “Efficiency and Progress and Equality,” which threatened to impose “a dreary conformity upon all the world.” In fact, Kirk proudly admitted that his mind was not enlightened. Instead, he affirmed that his mind, like Weaver’s, was “a Gothic mind, medieval in its temper and structure,” one that celebrated “all those fascinating and lovable peculiarities of human nature and human society which are the products of prescription and tradition.” In short, Kirk’s time in the desert instilled in him the determination to be out of step with the spirit of the age in which he lived, to look backwards for the answers to the most pressing questions of his age, and to always mistrust the forces of modernism.

After leaving the Utah desert, Kirk took a position at Michigan State University, but found little joy in teaching the students there. “The higher learning in America is fallen upon evil days,” he wrote in his autobiography, largely because the students of the University and even the professors themselves had turned their back on the ancient task of education – the accumulation of knowledge. In the absence of that noble goal, Kirk believed that liberalism, radicalism, Marxism, and other perverse ideologies seemed to have taken root, transforming universities into indoctrination factories rather than places of learning. Kirk attempted to change the *status quo* through the publication of over a hundred articles and a book lambasting the state of higher education, but he realized the futility of his struggle and opted to move to St. Andrews, Scotland where he took a position as an honorary doctor of letters at the local university. While there, Kirk found “the metaphysical principle of continuity given reality” in the town and the surrounding landscape: “the past ever blending with the present, so that the fabric continually renews itself, like some great oak, being never either wholly old or wholly young.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory*, 24.

Inspired by the living embodiment of conservatism that he found in the Scottish countryside, Kirk began to write the most important work of his career, published in 1953 as *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana*. The book represented the logical outgrowth of his doctoral dissertation. In it, Kirk continued his work investigating the nature and history of the origins of modern conservatism, which he ultimately traced to the writings of Edmund Burke, the English statesman, author, and philosopher who staunchly opposed the radical fanaticism unleashed by the French Revolution in 1789. Kirk had encountered Burke before in his research on Randolph of Roanoke, but his plan to further investigate Burke's ideas was interrupted by the advent of World War II. In Kirk's estimation, six canons of conservatism could be found within Burke's thought, and these canons recurred in the thought of England and America's greatest conservative minds through the centuries, whether they be statesman like John Adams, John C. Calhoun, and Benjamin Disraeli or intellectuals and philosophers like Henry Adams, Paul Elmer More, Irving Babbitt, and George Santayana.

These six principles were as follows. First, and most importantly, adherents of conservatism believed "that a divine intent rules society as well as conscience, forging an eternal chain of right and duty which links great and obscure, living and dead." Second, conservatives exhibited "affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life, as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and equalitarianism and utilitarian aims of most radical systems." Third, conservatives were moved by the "conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes. The only true equality is moral equality; all other attempts at leveling lead to despair, if enforced by positive legislation." Fourth, conservatism rested upon the "persuasion that property and freedom are inseparably connected, and that economic leveling is not economic progress. Separate property from private possession, and liberty is erased." Fifth, conservatives relied upon the wisdom of the age's guidance; man's emotion will always trump his ability to reason and

therefore “tradition and sound prejudice” should “provide checks upon man’s anarchic impulse.” Sixth, conservatives recognized “that change and reform are not identical, and that innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress. Society must alter, for slow change in the means of its conservation, like the human body’s perpetual renewal; but Providence is the proper instrument for change, and the test of a statesmen is his cognizance of the real tendency of Providential social forces.” Kirk stood by his belief that all of the figures he mentioned remained committed to these six ideals, but many of the thinkers he analyzed were quite disparate in certain areas of their thought. But by placing the ideas everyone from Alexis de Tocqueville to Henry Adams into the Burkean lineage, however tenuously, Kirk provided his readers with a working genealogy of conservative ideas that had opposed the better-known liberal and radical ideas of modern times.⁶⁵

The opposition to these ideas was important to Kirk’s conservatism. A person distinguished oneself as a conservative not only by his positive belief in the six Burkean principles, but also by their rejection of what he viewed as the four major tenets of liberalism and radicalism. 1.) “The perfectibility of man and the illimitable progress of society: meliorism. Radicals believe that education, positive legislation, and alteration of the environment can produce men like gods; they deny that humanity has a natural proclivity toward violence and sin.” 2.) “Contempt for tradition. Reason, impulse, and materialistic determinism are severally preferred as guides to social welfare, trustier than the wisdom of our ancestors. Formal religion is rejected and a variety of anti-Christian systems are offered as substitutes.” 3.) Political leveling. Order and privilege are condemned; total democracy, as direct as practicable, is the professed radical ideal. Allied with this spirit, generally, is a dislike of old parliamentary arrangements and an eagerness for centralization and consolidation.” 4.) “Economic leveling. The ancient rights of

⁶⁵ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953).

property, especially property in land, are suspect to almost all radicals; and collectivistic reformers hack at the institution of private property root and branch.” In sum, the true conservative rejected all those forces opposed to the principles of order, hierarchy, property, and religious belief. Kirk deemed the likes Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin as the primary thinkers responsible for these beliefs. As much time as he spent elaborating on the philosophies espoused by modern conservatism’s greatest intellectual champions, Kirk also poured vitriol on those belief systems he found antithetical to traditionalism.⁶⁶

Kirk did not expect much from the book in terms of sales and reaction; after all, there seemed to be little interest in a book chronicling the history of an ideology contemporarily in disfavor. But in this Kirk was happily mistaken. To put it simply, the publication of *The Conservative Mind* radically transformed Kirk’s career as a public intellectual and helped provide a shot of energy to the nascent conservative intellectual movement in America. The book was a huge success, going through three printings before the year of its publication had ended. The book also earned a positive review in *The New York Times* and received substantial treatment in *Time* magazine. A who’s who of American conservative intellectuals lined up to sing the book’s praises, including *National Review* publisher William A. Rusher, Kenyon College president Gordon Kenneth Chalmers, sociologist Robert Nesbit, and a host of others.⁶⁷ Clinton Rossiter, the liberal political scientist and historian who bestowed upon American conservatism the undignified title of “the thankless persuasion,” noted that Kirk became “the favorite political theorist” of Arizona senator and future presidential candidate Barry

⁶⁶ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana*, 19.

⁶⁷ On the popular and critical reaction to *The Conservative Mind*, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 73-66 and Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 141.

Goldwater.⁶⁸ The book also caught the eye of William F. Buckley Jr., who offered Kirk his own column in *National Review*, an offer that the latter accepted gladly. Kirk even formed his own journal in 1957, the more intellectually oriented *Modern Age*, and began publishing it through the conservative Intercollegiate Studies Institute. With the publication of *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk moved from relative obscurity to one of the most important contemporary intellectuals in America.

The Conservative Mind proved even more important in making conservatism respectable in America and moving it towards the mainstream of American political and intellectual discourse. At the time of the book's publication, American conservatism had fallen on hard times. For many decades, liberal historians, political scientists, and literary critics had reigned triumphant in the world of ideas, and they had come to view America's history wholly through the lens of political and economic liberalism. The political scientist Louis Hartz, for example, argued that America had never been endowed with any real conservative tradition due to its lack of a feudal past. His influential book *The Liberal Tradition in America* wrote conservatism out of the nation's past entirely in favor of the story of liberalism's triumph through the successive stages of American history.⁶⁹ In 1950, conservatism was in such dire straits that literary critic Lionel Trilling confidently proclaimed that liberalism was "the sole intellectual tradition" in America. A conservative "impulse" existed, no doubt, but he casually remarked that it did not express itself "in ideas, but only in action or in irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas."⁷⁰ For people of ideas, conservatism had become a moribund ideology that had played no

⁶⁸ Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America: the Thankless Persuasion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 220.

⁶⁹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: an Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

⁷⁰ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951), vi-vii.

role in shaping the American past, had no influence in the present political discourse, and would perhaps die out in the future.

The Conservative Mind helped to change the stigma attached to being a conservative and remade it into a powerful ideology capable of influencing political and intellectual discourse in America. In one book, Kirk demonstrated the existence of a long and vibrant tradition of conservative intellectuals who had worked ceaselessly to combat and undermine the liberal order championed by Hartz and Trilling. Almost overnight, it seemed, the term conservative lost its pejorative connotation, and conservatives could assert with confidence that their ideology had played a larger role in shaping the nation's history and could again. Henry Regnery, the conservative magnate who published the book, believed the book gave the “amorphous, scattered opposition” to the liberal tradition in America an “identity.”⁷¹

And so it did. Prior to the publication of *The Conservative Mind*, other conservative intellectuals had written penetrating studies of the conservative tradition in Europe – most notably Peter Viereck and Erik Vogelin – but Kirk's book showed how that tradition had made its way across the Atlantic and influenced the development of the United States. And Kirk's book, unlike the others, specifically juxtaposed conservative beliefs with the animating ideas of liberalism in way that portended a significant political and ideological struggle between the two in the future. As the intellectual historian George H. Nash put it, “after the appearance of *The Conservative Mind*, the American intellectual landscape assumed a different shape. Kirk's tour de force breached the wall of liberal condescension. He made it respectable for sophisticated people to identify themselves as conservative men and women of the Right,” and, most importantly, he “stimulated the development of a self-consciously conservative intellectual

⁷¹ Henry Regnery, “A Conservative Publisher in a Liberal World,” *The Alternative* 5 (October 1971): 16.

movement in American in the early years of the Cold War.”⁷² Without the contribution of Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind*, the political successes enjoyed by conservatives in later decades might never have happened.

But amidst all of the praise lavished on the book, most readers failed to note the important role the relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds played Kirk’s work. In the book’s opening chapter, an analysis of Burke’s role as the forefather of modern conservative thought, Kirk argued that Burkean teachings exhorted humanity to treat nature with respect. In one section Kirk argued that if humanity did not follow Burke’s guidance and venerate tradition, exercise restraint, and live a moral life, then the nonhuman world would pay the price for its sins. “If men are discharged of reverence for ancient usage, they will treat this world, almost certainly, as if it were their private property, to be consumed for their sensual gratification; and thus they will destroy in their lust for enjoyment the property of future generations, of their own contemporaries, and their very own capital,” Kirk warned. Indeed, the consequences of man’s failure to heed Burke’s words seemed plain for all to see. “The modern spectacle of vanished forests and eroded lands, wasted petroleum and ruthless mining . . . is evidence of what an age without veneration does to itself and its successors,” he added with dissatisfaction.⁷³ Elsewhere, Kirk made a similar argument regarding humanity’s duty to future generations. “True conformity to the dictates of nature requires reverence for the past and solicitude for the future,” he argued, before adding that “‘nature’ is not simply the sensation of the passing moment; it is eternal, though we evanescent men experience only a fragment of it. We have not right to imperil the

⁷² Nash, *Reappraising the Right*, 77. For other discussions of Kirk’s contribution to the postwar conservative movement, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 74-76; McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology*, 21-41; Murphey, *The Rebuke of History*, 142-144; Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: a History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 42-44; Jonathan M. Shoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19-21 Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 168-171; Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the Republican Right Rose to Power in Modern America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011);

⁷³ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 51-52.

happiness of posterity by impudently tinkering with the heritage of humanity.”⁷⁴ To reject this view of nature was to embrace the treacherous ideologies of Rousseau, the radicals of the French Revolution, and their intellectual descendants, all of which led inexorably to the environmental degradation of modern times.

Burke’s conservatism seemed to dovetail nicely with the conservative feelings Kirk himself had cultivated while as a child in the Michigan woods and in the Great Salt Lake Desert. His experiences in those two environments reinforced his own conservative instincts by showing him how nature could serve as a bridge uniting the past, present, and future and by showing him that nature embodied the divine expression of Providence. Burke’s conservative principles both shaped and reinforced the principles Kirk had learned throughout his life. As it had for Burke before him, Nature became for Kirk a barometer for the state of human civilization. When humans treated nature with reverence and awe, when they viewed it with humility and respect, and when they exercised restraint for the benefit of the dead and the unborn, humanity was doing nothing short of assuring its own salvation in the eyes of God. When humanity neglected one or all of these habits of mind, as he no doubt believed was the case in his own age of liberal progressivism, it committed a great sacrilege and placed its collective soul in peril. The passages centering on humanity’s relationship with the natural world contained within *The Conservative Mind* thus seem to indicate that, for Kirk at least, the divinely ordained “eternal chain of right and duty” linked not only the dead, the living, and the unborn to one another, but also to nature itself.

Although his feelings towards the nonhuman world played only a relatively minor role in *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk reiterated his beliefs with increasing frequency in the years after the book’s publication. This is especially true 1956’s *Prospects for Conservatives*, which was

⁷⁴ Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 64.

later updated in 1962 and published under the title *A Program for Conservatives*. Kirk wrote in response to readers who wanted a clearer definition of conservative beliefs and a programmatic plan for conservative action that did more than capture the esoteric philosophies of history's conservative thinkers. Kirk framed his discussion in the book around ten different "problems" facing contemporary conservatives, ranging from "the problem of the mind" to "the problem of wants" to the "problem of tradition." He started off by addressing the problems of modern liberal civilization before moving on to provide the necessary conservative correctives. "To commence the description of a conservative program," he told his readers in the book's introduction, "we need first to analyze the wasting disease that menace the survival of order and justice and freedom among us," though he doubted his liberal critics would care for the results.⁷⁵ In more than a few places, humanity's relationship with the nonhuman world played an illustrative example in this program.

For example, in his chapter on "The Problem of the Heart," Kirk took aim at the growing literature on American abundance that had proliferated in the postwar period, especially liberal social scientist David Riesman's landmark work *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). Though primarily concerned with analyzing the relationship between modern commercial society and the emergence of the alienated "other-directed" individual, the book also discussed the transformation of the United States from a country defined by scarcity to one defined by abundance in the wake of the post-World War II economic boom. Riesman believed America's superabundance hailed the beginning of a new societal epoch. He claimed that the "scarcity psychology" that had too long defined the American character "needs to give way to an 'abundance psychology' capable of 'wasteful' luxury consumption of leisure of the surplus

⁷⁵ Kirk, *Prospects for Conservatives* (Las Angeles: Gateway Editions, Inc., 1956), 13.

product.”⁷⁶ Kirk could barely conceal his contempt for Riesman’s ideas. He called the latter’s thoughts on abundance and scarcity “myopic,” and he drew attention to America’s emerging environmental problems as evidence of what would happen if America wantonly embraced abundance. He noted, for example, that many Americans already lived beyond their means “by consuming the portion of posterity, insatiably devouring minerals and forests and the very soil, lowering the water-table, to gratify the appetites of the present tenants of the country.” Such problems would only worsen if the country heeded the advice of liberals like Riesman.⁷⁷

Kirk repeated this position in the updated version of the book, and he alluded to his home town of Mecosta and to his childhood experiences there to demonstrate the disastrous effects the consumer culture could have on the landscape. Recalling his childhood days there, he noted that it was the triumph of liberal ideas and the simultaneous “decay of the force of tradition” that swept away “the old mill-pond almost before my eyes, as I lay on the hill under my Oak.” As a “tradition-guided” boy, Kirk recognized the great sacrilege being committed, but the people responsible for the despoliation of the land felt no connection to the past. “The planners who altered the landscape . . . were Benthamites confident in the sufficiency of pure rationality,” he noted, or were other-directed individuals “who positively dreaded any identification with anything dead and gone.”⁷⁸ In this morality tale, Kirk’s home of Mecosta served as a microcosm for a larger problem plaguing America. The apparent dominance of liberalism had created an ideological climate where the drastic alteration of the landscape was viewed as a sign of progress, but the net result of this process was an impoverished environment in which people and nature were irrevocably disconnected from the close relationship they had cultivated over time.

⁷⁶ David Riesman, et. al., *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 35. Other works discussing concepts of Abundance and Scarcity in 1950s America, see David Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

⁷⁷ Kirk, *Prospects for Conservatives*, 82.

⁷⁸ Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962), 303.

Dismayed by the drastic effect the liberal ideology had on the landscape, Kirk endeavored to provide guidelines to his fellow conservatives on how to remedy the problem. In the chapter addressing the “problem of wants,” for instance, Kirk stated that the “American conservative” should “endeavor to exert some intelligent check upon material will and appetite” if he or she wished to curb the destructive practices presently in vogue. If Riesman and the other liberal prophets of American abundance were correct, then Americans ought to “employ the mechanism of industrial production for conservative, rather than revolutionary, economic ends.” If such a system were employed, the result would be an America committed to rectifying the destructive behavior that ruined places like Kirk’s own childhood home. He stated with increasing conviction:

What we ought to have in prospect is not an American covered from coast to coast with speedways, over which we roar incessantly in an endeavor to forget our lost heritage, but an America of beauty and purpose in which we do not need to run away from home. And, turning away from the furious depletion of natural resources, we ought to employ our techniques of efficiency in the interest of posterity, voluntarily conserving our land and our minerals and our forests and our water and our old towns and our countryside for the future partners in our contract of eternal society.⁷⁹

Kirk’s reference to Burke’s concept of the “eternal society” is important in this context. For Kirk, the philosophical emphasis on tradition and the respect for future generations made the conservative the ideal custodian of the American landscape. True conservatives rejected the liberal idea of efficient use of natural resources solely for the purpose of economic well-being and instead emphasized the need to protect America’s beauty because it played an integral role in sustaining the eternal contract that existed between God and man. Unfortunately for Kirk and those who adhered to traditionalist principals, liberal-progressive notions that impoverished the landscape all over America seemed ascendant despite conservative criticism.

⁷⁹ Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives*, 218-219.

Kirk's emphasis on natural beauty deserves further comment. Though Kirk spoke of employing "techniques of efficiency" for the purpose of conserving natural resources, he was not merely restating the utilitarian ideology of Gifford Pinchot and other members of the progressive conservation movement.⁸⁰ Rather, Kirk's annoyance with speedways and his emphasis on the importance of preserving the environment for future generations demonstrated that he had begun to take to heart the ethos of "beauty, health, and permanence" that came to define the environmental movement in America. For many Americans, this ethos represented a break in the way humans had related to the natural world in the past, but for Kirk it represented the logical extension of the conservative view of nature he had been developing since childhood. The extent of the movement's influence on Kirk can be viewed most clearly in the two editorial columns he produced regularly: his "From the Academy" column, which he wrote for *National Review*, and his "To the Point" column, which was syndicated from 1962-1975 in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *Detroit News*.

Admittedly, Kirk only wrote one environmentally themed column for *National Review*, but it deserves special attention. In the 1965 piece, Kirk took aim at the avarice manifested by developers, whom he derogatorily referred to as the "evangels of bulldozer 'progress,'" for their attempts to redevelop America's inner cities through the introduction of new highway systems. The new efforts at building highways through downtown Manhattan or through San Francisco's Golden Gate Park once again demonstrated how the destructive power of amoral greed that threatened to "cut vast swaths" through "organic" communities throughout America. Given Kirk's hostility to development in the past, his stance on development in the inner city hardly comes as a

⁸⁰ For Pinchot's thoughts on efficiency and natural resource use, see Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (New York: Doubleday, 1910), 3-21. For an overview of the Progressive Conservation Movement's emphasis on efficiency, see Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 1-5.

surprise, but the same cannot be said for his proposed remedy to the problem. “Few people are more reluctant than this writer to interfere with private property and free enterprise,” Kirk confessed, but this reluctance could not trump his conviction that “no man, and no corporation, has a vested right to make a town and a country ugly and monotonous, or to annihilate the past for immediate profit. The time has come when governmental powers must be employed to save what remains of our visible heritage.” In particular, the last sentence represents a stunning acquiescence on Kirk’s part, and one that was heretical to the very principles that he had laid out in *The Conservative Mind* and to the animating spirit of the wider intellectual movement to which he belonged. But it also demonstrates the extent to which Kirk’s was willing to compromise his own beliefs for the good of the environment. He refused to reject a liberally oriented program of environmental protection in the name of his conservative principles. Protecting the environment was the most important thing regardless of how that protection was secured⁸¹

Kirk’s *National Review* article was the only environmentally themed column he wrote for the conservative movement’s flagship periodical, but Kirk’s “To the Point” column consistently devoted attention to environmental issues. For example, Kirk explained his belief that governmental powers should be used to preserve America’s beauty two years earlier in a 1963 article attacking the increasing amount of commercial billboards found on American highways. Kirk even went so far as to declare that if “John F. Kennedy would swear a solemn oath to hew down every billboard” from one coast to another, then he “might almost be willing to make him President for life.”⁸² Kirk was also virtually alone among conservative intellectuals in praising Rachel Carson’s

⁸¹ Kirk, “Destroying the Past by Development,” *National Review* 17 (1965), 285. For the role that protests against urban traffic played in the environmental movement, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 83-86.

⁸² Kirk, “Billboard Question: Scenery or Signery?,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1963, pg. L7.

groundbreaking work in *Silent Spring*, and his reading of her work led him to call upon his readers to pressure local and state governments to curb the use of pesticides and other forms of industrial pollution.⁸³ In a 1973 article, he wondered aloud whether the song “America the Beautiful” would even be an apt description of the nation if its “farmlands, woodlands, and wetlands” kept retreating before “suburban sprawl, gigantic highways, ‘resort’ and tourist development, and industrial expansion.”⁸⁴ These are just a few examples, but they help show that Kirk’s own values were in step with the rising tide of environmentalism in America.

But Kirk did more than merely lend his voice to the same causes as environmentalists. As he had done in his earlier work, Kirk infused many of his columns on the environment with his conservative beliefs, especially the concept of piety towards nature. Kirk’s writings on technology serve as a case in point. Kirk hated the new forms of technology that emerged in the postwar period for their potential to completely sever man’s duties to the natural world. The drastic increase in industrial water pollution that arose from new forms of chemicals and that threatened to “kill” the Great Lakes, the new forms of strip and opencast mining that denuded landscapes throughout America, and the specter of uncontrollable nuclear waste all had made it possible for humanity to destroy not just itself, but nature as well.⁸⁵ Such forms of impiety would not go unpunished, according to Kirk. “What we call ‘piety’ includes respect for the natural balance of the world, and for the people who will follow us in time,” he noted, before warning that “an impious generation has often been roughly rebuked by mysterious forces not subject to human rationality.” It was unclear if the “mysterious forces” Kirk referred to were God,

⁸³ Kirk, “Pollution Might be Spreading Over Land,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 1962, pg. A5.

⁸⁴ Kirk, “America the Beautiful? Not Without Some Countryside,” *Detroit News*, March 22, 1973, pg. B15. Also see Kirk’s article, “The Spoilers from the Big Cities,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1962, pg. A5.

⁸⁵ Kirk, “Peril of Technology is Self-Destruction,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 10, 1965, (1) 13; Kirk, “Fears Earthly Hell is Technology’s Gain,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 16, 1970, pg. (1) 11.

or nature, or both, but his message was clear: mankind would come to an unexpected but warranted period of grief if they did not stop their sins against the order of things.

Kirk's emphasis on the need for piety in human-nature relations also shone through in the columns he wrote concerning trees. An avid defender of forests from his childhood days onward, Kirk took great pride in his successful afforestation of his Mecosta home – which even resided on a site called Piety Hill – and advised his readers that even as small a gesture as planting a tree could help heal humanity's relationship to the nonhuman world.⁸⁶ In one column decrying the destruction of historic forests in the U.S. and in Britain, Kirk declared that “to plant a tree is an act of piety,” one that signified “that the order of creation is good, and that man is here to maintain and beautify it, not to deface.”⁸⁷ Kirk even mused in one 1962 column that he might write into his will a stipulation that a yew tree be planted on his grave because he believed such an act would symbolize the “greater continuity and essence of living spirit” that attended a reverential view of nature.⁸⁸ Kirk's thoughts on piety with regards to afforestation and technology owe much to the concept of piety toward nature developed by his friend Richard Weaver. But whereas Weaver's concept of piety remained in the realm of the abstract, Kirk's piety entailed a specific attachment to the land, and he matched his actions to his traditionalist principles in a way that Weaver apparently did not.

The case of endangered species provides a final illustration of the importance of respectful human-nature relationships in Kirk's syndicated columns. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the protection of endangered species and the ecosystems which supported them became an increasingly important component of the environmental movement. The swell of public support for habitat protection led to the passage of

⁸⁶ Kirk, “Conserving Our Trees,” *Detroit News*, March 23, 1972, pg. B15.

⁸⁷ Kirk, “Destruction of Trees is a Sign of Depravity,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1964, pg. A5.

⁸⁸ Kirk, “Life and Death Find Roots in the Yew Tree,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1962, pg. A5.

important legislation in 1966, 1969, and culminated in the passage of the landmark Endangered Species Act of 1973. The act remains one of the most popular in the history of the United States, passing without a single vote of opposition in either house of Congress.⁸⁹ The opening section of the act made clear the rationale for the law and alluded to the forces that ultimately lay behind its passage. Specifically, it proclaimed a deep commitment on the part of Congress to protect endangered species from the consequences of “economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern” because they were of “esthetic, ecological, educational, historical, recreational, and scientific value to the Nation and its people.”⁹⁰ Species and their habitats deserved protection, in other words, largely for the purposes of maintaining natural beauty and for the stability of the ecological community.

Like many other environmentally minded Americans, Kirk decried the impact development and growth had on species, and he advocated on behalf of protection even before the federal government made it a priority, but he did so for different reasons than those stated in the act. In a 1965 article written for the *New Orleans Times Picayune*, Kirk lamented the fact that “rare, strange, and beautiful creatures are shrinking toward extinction in much of the world.” Efforts to save these animals should be made, he argued, but he did so based on religious rather than ecological or scientific grounds. “Preservation of the multitudinous animal species has been enjoined by religion since the dawn of human consciousness,” he asserted. After all, he elaborated, “Noah wouldn’t have had to build the ark on nearly so grand a scale if he had been concerned merely with

⁸⁹ On the Endangered Species Act, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 112-113, and Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 126-128.

⁹⁰ *Endangered Species Act*.

the deliverance of his own family.”⁹¹ Implicit in Kirk’s remarks was the notion that species should be protected because they formed an integral part of the eternal contract between God and his creations, not necessarily for their ecological and scientific value. Kirks’ view of endangered species demonstrates that his conservative principles did not always jibe with the rationale for environmental protection. The fashioners of the Endangered Species Act made no mention of this religious connotation in their rationale for passing the act. But despite the different reasons for their belief, the architects of the ESA and Kirk arrived at the same endpoint, the desirability of protection, which further demonstrates the ways Kirk’s conservatism and environmentalism were ultimately compatible.

From the preceding discussion, Kirk’s credentials as a “conservative environmentalist” seem clear. It is hard to read Kirk’s autobiographical writings about his love of nature as a boy and a young man, or his polemics against pollution and technology, or his impassioned odes to the importance of trees and deny his claim to the title “environmentalist.” But for all Kirk’s belief in the eternal contract and his writings on environmental protection, his relationship to the nonhuman world suffered some of the same tensions that affected Weaver in his final years. For much of Kirk’s life, his particular view of nature seemed to exert an incalculable influence on his conservative beliefs. As a child in Michigan and as a young man in the Great Salt Lake desert, Kirk discovered that nature formed an important link in the great chain of being which united humanity and god. This idea represented the wellspring from which all of his writings on conservatism would flow, especially his work in *The Conservative Mind*. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Kirk dedicated much of his time as a public intellectual to instructing his

⁹¹ Kirk, “Man Undoing Noah’s Preservation Program,” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, June 1, 1965, (1) 9.

readers on how to cultivate a more responsible relationship to the nonhuman world. Then, in the mid-1970s, Kirk seems to have ceased writing about the environment entirely.

Charles C. Brown, an archivist at the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal in Mecosta, Michigan, and the compiler of a complete bibliography of Kirk's work, lists no writings about environmental protection after 1975.⁹² Why would a man whose life had been marked by a deep affection for nature suddenly stop advocating on behalf of the environmental movement at the very moment it achieved its greatest success? It is difficult to say exactly what developments led to this abrupt breakdown, but it is possible to speculate reasonably as to the causes.

One possibility has to do with the fundamental transformation the environmental movement underwent in the early 1970s. Whereas in the 1960s the movement achieved much of its success through the work of protestors at the grassroots levels, in the 1970s the movement sought increasingly to use the federal government as a means of regulating private enterprise in the name of the public good.⁹³ Legislation such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act were all indicative of this new trend, as was the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency by executive order in 1970. Such a drastic expansion of federal power angered many conservatives who did not adhere to the traditionalist principles articulated by Kirk and Weaver. Kirk seemed unperturbed by this development initially and, indeed, had called explicitly for the use of government powers in his 1965 article in *National Review*. But perhaps as the decade wore on and the federal environmental regulatory apparatus began to swell even further with the passage of legislation such as the Resource Conservation and Recovery

⁹² Charles C. Brown, *Russell Kirk: a Bibliography* (Wilmington, DE.: ISI Books, 2011).

⁹³ See: Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 190-200; *Ibid*, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, 79-93; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 109-134; Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 175-185, and Richard N.L. Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: a History of American Environmental Policy*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 227-254.

Act (1976) and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Recovery Act (1980) Kirk's innate antipathy to government interference with private property led him to turn his back on the movement he once supported and join his fellow conservatives in opposition.

The articles contained within Kirk's journal, *Modern Age*, seem to support this conclusion. For example, in a 1975 article titled "Ethics, Ecology, and the Rights of Future Generations," University of San Francisco philosophy professor Robert L. Cunningham discussed the tension that existed between the desire to protect the environmental rights of future generations on the one hand and the desire to protect individual freedom and free enterprise on the other. "We do have obligations to our unborn children and their descendants," he admitted, and those obligations were moral in nature. "But," he continued, "just as it is important not to identify a pro-environmental policy with a no-growth policy, so it is important not to identify concern for future generations with socialist conservationism."⁹⁴ Cunningham no doubt had in mind here the calls of some environmentalist in the mid-1970s to impose limits on economic growth, but his allusion to "socialist conservationism" clearly implies hostility toward government-regulated environmental programs.⁹⁵ For Cunningham, the best way to protect the rights of future generations centered not on expanding the scope of federal power, but on allowing individuals to make economic choices that would ultimately benefit the environment. Admittedly, Cunningham's article was the only environmentally themed article to appear in *Modern Age* in the 1970s, a fact which tells much about the relationship between traditionalism and environmentalism in its own right. But if Cunningham's arguments were representative of Kirk's editorial policy and beliefs, then

⁹⁴ Robert L. Cunningham, "Ethics, Ecology, and the Rights of Future Generations," *Modern Age* 19 (1975): 270.

⁹⁵ On the calls to limit economic growth in the 1970s, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 207-246.

it perhaps indicates that the expansion of federal regulation led Kirk to become disenchanted with the environmental movement's ability to properly protect the environment.

Another possible reason that explains the abrupt cessation in Kirk's environmental writings in the 1970s centers on the possibility that Kirk himself joined the growing opposition to environmentalism in the mid-1970s and after. This seems hard to fathom for a man who consistently championed environmental protection throughout the first half of his life, but the little evidence available suggests that Kirk came to deny the legitimacy of environmentalist claims near the end of his life. In 1989, Kirk published an economics textbook titled *Economics: Work and Prosperity*. In one of the book's early chapters, Kirk condemned the "pollution, waste, and ugliness" that had accompanied America's drastic industrial expansion after World War II in much the same way as he had in his earlier writings.⁹⁶ In the book's final chapter, however, Kirk made clear his dissatisfaction with the environmental movement. Making use of a trope that became common to many conservative anti-environmentalists in the 1970s, Kirk derogatorily referred to environmentalists as the "prophets of doom." By this he meant that environmentalist claims about the destructiveness of the human impact on nature were greatly exaggerated. He made a list of these claims, many of which he once agreed with in his own writings, and named them false. He flatly denied that the world was exhausting its supplies of natural resources, that inadequate food production would lead to increased famine, and that energy supplies would become more scarce over time, just to name a few examples. In response to the question of whether pollution would remain a pressing problem, he declared matter-of-factly that "technology is available to reduce

⁹⁶ Kirk, *Economics Work and Prosperity* (Pensacola, Fla.: A Beka Book, 1989), 304.

every sort of pollution.” Technology and affluence would also combine to save America from unwarranted environmentalist fears of overpopulation.⁹⁷

Kirk’s stance on environmental issues in 1989 represents a stunning recantation of his “conservative environmentalism” of the 1960s and early 1970s. Whereas in that period Kirk viewed technology as the source of all man’s environmental problems, after 1975 technology seems to have become for him man’s salvation. Kirk’s remarks in *Economics* at first glance may not seem overtly anti-environmental. But by presenting an optimistic view of the future and undermining environmentalist claims, Kirk unmistakably lent his voice to a growing body of thought that painted environmentalists as complainers and troublemakers who prevented the implementation of sound environmental policy.⁹⁸ His environmental opposition was not as visceral as some other conservatives, but it existed nevertheless.

Whether or not Kirk stopped supporting environmentalism because he believed that the government had gone too far in its actions, or because he had come to renounce his former perspectives on the environment, the end result was the same. By ceasing to lend his support for the environmental movement, Kirk abdicated his position of intellectual leadership on environmental issues among conservatives. Admittedly, even among traditionalists Kirk was virtually alone in making humanity’s relationship to nature a central theme of his conservatism. But as long as he made improving that relationship a consistent theme of his writings, there remained a possibility, however remote, that conservatives and environmentalists could develop a lasting relationship that benefitted both parties. Kirk’s apparent inability to maintain his commitment to

⁹⁷ Kirk, *Economics Work and Prosperity* (Pensacola, Fla.: *A Beka Book*, 1989), 348-353.

⁹⁸ See Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1949*,

environmental protection after 1975 ensured that finding common ground would remain an incredibly difficult task.

Conclusion

What are we to make of the discussions of traditionalist conservatism mentioned above? It seems clear that the ideas articulated by Weaver and Kirk were influenced by their particular views of the nonhuman world and that they devoted a considerable amount of their writings to humanity's relationship with nature. But what is less clear is the ultimate conclusion toward which their ideas evolved over time. That is, should we view Weaver and Kirk as "conservative environmentalists," or at least as intellectuals whose ideas pointed broadly toward the same ends – a more respectful and healthier relationship with nature – as more well-known ecologists and environmentalists like Joseph Wood Krutch, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and Barry Commoner? Or should the fact that both men came to espouse beliefs near the end of their lives that existed in fundamental conflict with the earlier principles they espoused and placed them within the orbit of the environmental opposition preclude them from such recognition?

These are not easy questions to answer, and cases can be made for answering each question affirmatively. On the one hand, the preceding discussion make clear that it is not implausible to view the ideas and principles articulated by Kirk and Weaver as laying the foundation for conservative intellectual support of the environmental movement.

Humanity's need to exercise piety toward nature represented a key theme in Weaver's writings and life, and he never failed to offer rebuke those people or forces he held to be impious. He was not an ecologist, to be sure, and he had significant grievances with the biological sciences animating ecology, but the moral dimensions of his beliefs share

surprising commonalties with organic ecologists like Joseph Wood Krutch. If Weaver was not an environmentalist, his ideas nevertheless pointed towards the same ends as certain elements of environmental thought. The same can be said for Kirk. It is hard to read Kirk's autobiographical writings about his childhood home in Michigan or the Great Salt Lake Desert, or his polemics against pollution and technology, or his impassioned odes to the importance of trees and deny his claim to the title "environmentalist."

Furthermore, the cases of Kirk and Weaver demonstrate that environmentalism in the postwar period drew support from more than just the left side of the political and intellectual spectrum. It is undeniably true that New Left intellectuals like Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, and Murray Bookchin helped imbue environmentalism with a radical critique of consumer capitalism.⁹⁹ It is likewise true that liberal intellectuals like John Kenneth Galbraith and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and liberal politicians like John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson also played a formative role in making environmentalism a national priority.¹⁰⁰ But Weaver and especially Kirk demonstrate that the Left by no means monopolized the ecological or environmental discourse. Their ideas demonstrate the existence of a "conservative environmentalism" infused overtly with religious, or at least mystical, principles in which impious behavior towards the nonhuman world became tantamount to a sin against the order of the universe. Had members of the broader intellectual and political movement to which Weaver and Kirk belonged had a mind to, they could have unquestionably used the ideas provided by the traditionalists as a firm basis for supporting the newly emerging environmental movement.

⁹⁹ Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC., 2005), 127-134 and Andrew Kirk, "From Wilderness Prophets to Tool Freaks: Post-World War II Environmentalism," in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History* (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2010), 297-299.

¹⁰⁰ Adam Rome,

On the other hand, despite the foundation laid by Kirk and Weaver, traditionalism never did lead to a widespread acceptance of environmentalism on the American Right. When Ronald Reagan ascended to the presidency in 1980, there was no traditionalist resistance to counteract his well-publicized antipathy to environmentalism. Conservative anti-environmentalism did not begin in 1980, but was already endemic at that point. For some reason, the broader conservative intellectual movement had failed to embrace the environmentally oriented ideas of the traditionalists, or at least the potential influence of their thought had been neutralized or blunted. But why exactly? If truth be told, Weaver and Kirk seem to bear at least some of the responsibility for why environmentalism and conservatism never developed synergistically in a way that their traditionalist principles suggested they might. Near the end of their respective lives, both men appeared to compromise their once staunchly held traditionalist beliefs and embrace a set of principles hostile to the environmental movement.

In case of Weaver's beliefs, this hostility was more implicit than explicit. In his speeches delivered at the University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago, Weaver had clearly assimilated the libertarian defense of free market capitalism and the business community into his conservative beliefs. He had spent a lifetime arguing that crass consumerism, rampant industrialism, and immoral capitalism all lay at the root of man's impious relationship with nature. Indeed, this condemnation served as one of the core theme of *Ideas Have Consequences*. But over time, Weaver appeared to accept the necessity of the free market in the global struggle between capitalism and its enemies. Communists, socialists, and members of the Left more generally all seemed to bear capitalism ill will. Perhaps there was something good about the capitalist system, after all, something that made him "refuse to apologize" for all of the abundance the free

market created. Perhaps it is a stretch to infer anti-environmentalism, or something close to it from these remarks, but they do suggest that his idea of piety toward nature was perhaps no longer as important to him as defending capitalism. As future chapters will indicate, defenses of capitalism proved to be one of the defining arguments made by conservatives opposing the environmental movement.

Kirk's case is clearer. He spent his entire life advancing the belief that nature represented the living embodiment of the eternal contract between man and God. In the 1960s, this led him to criticize the desolation of the landscape created by technology and industry and to support a number of environmental protection measures, including the abatement of pollution and the protection of endangered species. Then, at the very height of the so-called "environmental decade," Kirk stopped writing about environmentalism all together. If the one article on environmentalism he published in *Modern Age* reveals anything at all about the state of Kirk's views on the environment at that time, it would seem that he, too, began to temper his long-held animosity toward ideas concerning capitalism and economic growth. The writings he published shortly before his death seem to confirm this transformation. In the 1990s, Kirk emerged from his environmental seclusion and began to articulate anti-environmental beliefs that by that time had become old hat for conservatives of all stripes. Environmentalists had become doomsaying fanatics who sought to use nature's perceived fragility as a means of imposing their particular economic views on the nation. But the man who had once championed Earth Day's celebration would have none of it. He reaffirmed his belief in the importance of respecting nature, but he believed environmentalists had become overzealous in their actions. Technology, far from causing environmental problems, would now be the environment's salvation.

Such transformations seem stunning in retrospect, and they cast doubt upon the notion of Kirk and Weaver as important environmentalist figures. But these transformations do not represent the sole, or even the primary reason why the traditionalist veneration of nature did not blossom into broader conservative support for environmentalism in the 1970s. In Kirk's case, for example, we cannot be certain that he had gravitated toward anti-environmentalism by the end of the decade, only that he had ceased offering his support. The anti-environmental beliefs of his later life do not serve as sufficient evidence to declare that he had become a member of the environmental opposition in the 1970s and that this opposition explains traditionalism's environmental failure. A more accurate explanation as to why conservative support for the environmental movement did not coalesce in the 1970s has to do with the internal dynamics of the conservative movement itself.

The traditionalist ideas articulated by Kirk and Weaver were by no means the sole strain of conservative thought in the postwar period. Traditionalism existed alongside and interacted with other forms of conservatism. Rarely did intellectuals associated with these various schools of thought agree with one another, and the process of creating a viable political movement proved difficult precisely because of this. Environmentalism represents a major issue of contention between traditionalists like Kirk and other members of the conservative intellectual movement. But with Weaver's death and Kirk's seeming reversal on environmental matters, the American Right no longer had any prominent intellectuals arguing on nature's behalf. They had left the proverbial door open, and through it walked these other intellectuals from different strains of conservative thought, strains whose animating principles were overtly more hostile to environmentalism. From the 1970s onward, the intellectual relationship to the

environmental movement fashioned by conservatives would be defined not by the potential commonalities, however elusive they might have been, but by acrimony, rancor, and vitriol.

Chapter Two

“The Disaster Lobby”: Libertarianism and the Ideological Origins of the Environmental Opposition

In August of 1971, *The Freeman*, the one of the foremost periodicals for libertarian conservatives in the United States, republished a speech that Thomas R. Shepard, Jr. had given to the Soap and Detergent Association earlier that year in New York City entitled “The Disaster Lobby.” In it, Shepard, the editor of *Look* magazine, recounted a story of a cab ride he had taken to JFK airport in the fall of 1970. He recalled that the driver had on the radio “one of those daytime talk shows where the participants take turns complaining about how terrible everything is. Air pollution. Water pollution. Noise pollution. Racial unrest. Campus unrest. Overpopulation. Underemployment. You name it. They agonized over it.” The driver, however, seemed strangely unperturbed by the show’s gloomy outlook on current events. ““If things are all that bad,” the driver said, turning to Shepard near the end of the ride, ““how come I feel so good?” The question got Shepard thinking, and he told his audience that he believed he had found the answer to the question. “We feel good because things aren’t that bad,” he stated bluntly, despite what the “pessimists” in the media might say. The pessimists Shepard referred to were “the people who, in the name of ecology or consumerism or some other ology or ism, are laying siege to our state and Federal governments, demanding laws to regulate industry on the premise that the United States is on the brink of catastrophe and only a brand new socio-economic system cans save us. I call these people The Disaster Lobby, and I regard them as the most dangerous men and women in America today.” The members of the Soap and Detergent Association received Shepard’s message loud and clear: the dire environmental problems publicized by the doomsayers were simply not real. Rather, they were the product of outright

fabrication by special interests whose economic and political goals were antithetical to those of American business.¹

Shepard minced no words when talking about what the Disaster Lobby hoped to accomplish: it sought nothing less than the total abolition of the American system of free enterprise capitalism with a system of regulations bordering on the totalitarian. As evidence of this “insidious” plot, he pointed to the exorbitant costs that environmentalists had imposed on the business community in recent years. To take one example, Shepard, playing to his audience, pointed out the damage that environmentalists had done to the detergent industry.² “By having the sale of detergents banned in some areas and by stirring up needless fears throughout the country, they have created the kind of chaos that may set cleanliness back two generations,” he stated only half-jokingly. More seriously, Shepard argued that environmentalists in the Disaster Lobby had inaccurately diagnosed the source of America’s environmental ills. The real threat to the environment came not from “the free enterprise Establishment that has made ours the most prosperous, most powerful, and most charitable nation on earth,” but from the Disaster Lobby itself – “those crape-hangers who, for personal gain or out of sheer ignorance, are undermining the American system and threatening the lives and fortunes of the American people.”³ He called out for libertarians to do everything in their power to oppose the Disaster Lobby; their survival depended on it, in fact. “The time for surrender and accommodation is past,” Shepard said ominously near the end of his talk. “We must let the American public know that, once free enterprise succumbs to the attacks of the consumerists and the ecologists and the rest of the Disaster Lobby, the freedom of the consumer goes with it. His freedom to live the way he wants

¹ Thomas R. Shepard, Jr., “The Disaster Lobby,” *The Freeman*, August 1, 1971, 477. Two years later, Shepard would publish a book of the same name. See

² On the relationship between detergents and concern for the environment, see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 105-110.

³ Shepard, “The Disaster Lobby,” 481-482.

and to buy the things he wants without some Big Brother in Washington telling him he can't."⁴ Shepard's main point could not have been clearer: America's most pressing environmental problem did not center on how to protect environment from the rapacious actions of big business, but rather on how to protect big business from overzealous environmentalists.

The decision of *The Freeman* to publish Shepard's remarks reveals much about the state of libertarian conservatism in the 1970s. American libertarianism had deep roots in nineteenth-century Europe, but its beginnings as a potent intellectual and political force in America came just as World War II ended. At this time, supporters of laissez faire capitalism on both sides of the Atlantic appeared to have been vanquished by the ever-expanding State in the form of the New Deal, Keynesian economic policies, and massive troop conscriptions to fight the war.⁵ Beneath the surface, however, nascent challenges to the ascendancy of state collectivism had already begun to take root. The challenges began not with American intellectuals, but with two Austrian economists, Friedrich A. Hayek and his mentor Ludwig von Mises. In 1944, Hayek's enormously influential *The Road to Serfdom* became an international best seller, and five years later Yale University Press published von Mises' magnum opus *Human Action*. Both books argued uncompromisingly that that centralized economic planning inevitably suppressed individual liberty and led directly to totalitarianism. Only through the laissez faire approach of the market could individual freedom be protected and threats like collectivism, socialism, and communism be combated.⁶

By the 1960s and 1970s, the libertarians who had once seemed like a remnant of a remnant had multiplied and become one of the most important pillars of the broader conservative

⁴ Shepard, "The Disaster Lobby," 484-486.

⁵ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-4.

⁶ Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); Ludwig Von Mises, *Human Action* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949). For similar arguments, see Hayek's, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948) and Von Mises', *Bureaucracy and Omnipotent Government*, both published by Yale University Press in 1944.

intellectual movement in America.⁷ In addition to Hayek and Mises, their number included noted journalists like Henry Hazlitt and John Chamberlain, philosophers like Ayn Rand, and a host of activist-intellectuals like Frank Chordorov, Leonard E. Read, and Frank S. Meyer. Well before 1970, a number of organizations dedicated to spreading the gospel of unfettered free market capitalism and to combating the evils of collectivism had sprung up in America and abroad, including the Foundation for Economic Education, the Mont Pèlerin Society, and the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists. In academia the Economics and Law departments at the University of Chicago became hotbeds of free market thought, and economists Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Ronald Coase helped move their profession in a markedly conservative direction. When William F. Buckley, Jr. founded *National Review* in 1955, important libertarians like Chordorov and Meyer graced the masthead as contributing editors. The libertarian discontent with the state and willingness to defend the market as the chief means through which to combat communism struck a surprising chord amongst the American people and, aided by the work of Hayek and Von Mises, became a powerful intellectual force in America.

The libertarian strain of conservative thought in postwar America was consistently at odds with the traditionalist conservatism espoused by Weaver, Kirk and others in the decades before 1970. As intellectual historian George H. Nash framed the conflict in 1976, “On one side were the traditionalists: defenders of order, consensus, morality, ‘right reason,’ religion, truth, virtue. On the other stood libertarians . . . whose ‘god terms’ (to borrow a phrase of Richard Weaver’s) were individual liberty, free enterprise, laissez-faire, private property, reason, and yet again individual liberty.”⁸ Oftentimes, the philosophical divide separating traditionalists and libertarians erupted in vituperative denunciations of the opposing viewpoint’s most sacred beliefs

⁷ On the growth and proliferation of libertarian ideas, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, especially chapter one.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 171. On the wider ideological disagreements between the two strains of thought, see chapter 6 especially.

and principles. Kirk believed, for example, that individualism and unfettered capitalism ran directly counter to the Burkean emphasis on prescribed order. On more than one occasion he voiced significant problems with the libertarian infatuation with capitalism, and labeled it an unworthy principle of conservatism. “Conservatism is more than just a solicitude for tidy incomes,” he barbed in his *Program for Conservatives* (1954).⁹ In his autobiography, Kirk expressed the opinion that big business was just as antithetical to true conservatism as statist liberalism. “One may safely cry up the virtues of big business, or may safely preach the gospel of the onmicompentant state. But neither attitude is conservative,” he remarked.¹⁰ Elsewhere he warned that “as the consolidation of economic power progresses, the realm of personal freedom will diminish, whether the masters of the economy are state servants or the servants of private corporations.”¹¹ For Kirk, individual freedom was important, undoubtedly, but it was his place in society’s immutable and providentially structured hierarchy that provided the source of that importance, not the morally bankrupt world of corporate capitalism.

For their part, many libertarians were equally contemptuous of the traditionalist emphasis on order, morality, virtue, and piety. For example, Hayek’s 1960 essay “Why I am not a Conservative,” positioned itself directly against Kirk’s traditionalist beliefs, which the author viewed as hostile to technology, innovation, and, above all, free market economic thought. But it was Meyer, a repentant former communist who embraced free enterprise capitalism in the 1950s with all of the fervor with which he had once attacked it, who most often criticized Kirk’s traditionalism in heated diatribes. In a scathing article published in *The Freeman* in July of 1955, Meyer argued that it was “almost impossible to find clear and distinct principles” in the work of Kirk or other members of the “New Conservatism.” Kirk’s belief in “the accumulated wisdom of

⁹ Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954),

¹⁰ Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory: Episodes and Reflections of a Vagrant Career* (New York: Fleet Publishing, 1963), 305.

¹¹ Kirk, “Ideology and Political Economy,” *America* 96 (January 5, 1957): 388-391.

Western civilization,” in Burke’s politics of “providential prescription,” or in the “content of High Anglican Christianity” were but mere abstractions that could never buttress the true conservative’s goal: the defeat of collectivism. For Meyer, “*all* value resided in the individual,” and it was the individual’s ability to function in a free capitalist society that would defeat the enemy. The vagueness Meyer perceived in Kirk’s thought led him to proclaim that traditionalism was merely “another guise for the collectivist spirit of the age.”¹² Nor did the conflict between the two men remain confined to the level of ideas: According to Kirk, the libertarians Meyer and Chardorov attempted to kill his journal, *Modern Age*, before it was launched by denouncing Kirk’s conservative credentials to his board of advisors. The attempt was unsuccessful, but it demonstrates just how much enmity existed between the poles of American conservative thought.¹³

The divergence between the libertarian conservatism espoused by men like Hayek and Meyer and the traditionalist conservatism of Kirk manifested itself in a number of arenas, but it can be seen clearly in the way each strain viewed and reacted to the rise of environmentalism in America. Kirk’s experiences growing up in the woods of northern Michigan and serving in the Army in the Utah desert had instilled within him the belief that natural beauty was the creation of God and the living embodiment of the eternal contract between the dead, the living, and the unborn. In the 1960s, this led Kirk to support a number of “old” conservation issues, especially those designed to keep the countryside beautiful

Libertarian conservatives approached the environment from a vastly different perspective than did traditionalists like Weaver and Kirk. Though a host of recent publications on the history of libertarian conservatism in America largely ignore environmental issues, libertarians

¹² Frank S. Meyer, “Collectivism Rebaptized,” *The Freeman* (July 1955): 560-562.

¹³ On the rivalry between Russell Kirk and Frank Meyer, see Nash, *Reappraising the Right: the Past and Future of American Conservatism* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2009), 78-81. For an insider’s view on the struggle between Kirk and Meyer, see Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2005), 41-52.

themselves did nothing of the sort in the 1970s.¹⁴ In his recent book on anti-statist conservative support for the environmental movement, environmental historian Brian Drake examined the libertarian approach to environmental protection that began in the 1970s with the advent of free-market environmentalism. According to Drake, “Fundamental to free-market environmentalism is the idea that regulatory approaches to environmental problems have been a disaster, not only by failing to protect the environment but also by wasting taxpayers’ money, alienating those subject to regulations, and unduly restricting their rights.”¹⁵ As an antidote to this bureaucratic incompetence, free-market environmentalists propose abandoning “most or all environmental regulation” and replacing it with “a combination of private property, economic incentives, markets, and tort law.”¹⁶ Drake examines the free-market approach to environmental protection in the 1970s and subsequent decades across a range of issues in order to demonstrate that libertarian approaches to environmental protection do not necessarily lead to its wholesale abandonment. Judicious in terms of his appraisals of the libertarian approach’s strengths and cognizant of its weaknesses in the face of the critiques offered by interventionist environmentalists, Drake concluded that the rise of free-market environmentalism in the 1970s demonstrates the power of the environmental movement to influence those who might otherwise be among its staunchest opponents.

Drake’s interpretation of free-market environmentalism works well for the particular libertarian thinkers he analyzes. Figures like the biologist Garret Hardin and economists like John A. Baden, Tibor Machan, Terry Anderson, and Donald Leal demonstrate well how certain intellectuals of a libertarian bent reconciled their mistrust of the state with their desire to protect

¹⁴ See Brian Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism: a Free-Wheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement* (New York, 2007); Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pelerin: the Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009); Jennifer Burns, “O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting,” *Journal of Policy History* 19 (2007): 452-471; and Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Depression* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Brian Allen Drake, *Loving Nature, Fearing the State: Environmentalism and Anti-Government Politics Before Reagan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 115.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 120.

the environment. But these figures were not in any meaningful sense a part of the wider conservative intellectual movement in America that arose after World War II. An examination of the libertarian intellectuals most closely associated with that movement reveals an altogether different interpretation of the free-market view of environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s. For most libertarian conservatives, the free market ideology they espoused was used not as a tool with which to fix a moribund and ineffective system of environmental protection but as a weapon used to defend their complete and utter devotion to corporate capitalism and to be wielded against environmentalists seeking to challenge that ideology. Shepard's remarks in front of the Soap and Detergent Association of New York City baldly admitted as much.

It is true that a small number of libertarian conservatives appeared to agree with the approach of the free-market environmentalists Drake studies. But aside from a few exceptions most libertarian intellectuals in the 1970s cared little about improving America's system of environmental protection. What they did care about was protecting America's system of free enterprise capitalism and protecting the freedom of the individual to make rational economic decisions in the marketplace. Sometimes this could lead to synergy with environmentalist goals, but far more often it entailed an attack on environmentalism as an agent of the libertarian's foremost enemies: the government and the Left. Libertarian conservatives in the 1970s perceived that their most cherished principles were under the constant thread of attack by the forces of state collectivism, and the appearance of the environmental movement on the national stage at that time signaled to them a new vehicle through which that attack would be waged. Saving capitalism and the individual and defeating environmentalism were all part of the same struggle.

The proliferation of libertarian thinkers, organization, and periodicals following the end of World War II make an exhaustive study of libertarian anti-environmentalism in the seventies difficult. The growth and development of that ideology, however, can be traced through an

examination of the law and economics movement led by economists at the University of Chicago, the foremost periodical for libertarian conservatives – *The Freeman* – and the ideas espoused by the right wing philosopher Ayn Rand. During the 1960s, when traditionalist conservatives like Kirk and even some with a noted libertarian streak like William F. Buckley, Jr. penned passionate defenses of environmental protection, many libertarians were already cementing the anti-environmental dimensions of their ideology. Some libertarians did voice support for various conservation issues, but this support did not constitute a firm enough foundation upon which to build a meaningful relationship with environmentalism. By the late 1960s, libertarian conservatives of all stripes had begun to condemn the growing environmental movement, and that condemnation only increased as the decade moved along. Their opposition arose from a number of sources. The celebration of the first Earth Day on April 22nd, 1970, the passage of landmark legislation like the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, and the energy crisis of the mid-to-late 1970s represent just some of the developments that convinced libertarian conservatives that radical environmentalists had infiltrated the government and implemented a distinctly anti-capitalist, anti-business agenda.

The genesis and development of libertarian anti-environmentalism led to important consequences for the broader conservative intellectual movement in America. For one thing, it influenced significantly the trajectory of conservatism's relationship with environmentalism. Prior to the 1970s, the conservative intellectual position on the environment was not set in stone. The possibility existed for conservatism and environmentalism to interact dynamically with one another rather than in opposition. Traditionalist conservative support of conservation and environmental issues offered by Weaver and Kirk spoke to this possibility. The emergence of libertarian anti-environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s, however, provided an alternate, antithetical path for the larger conservative movement to take in its relationship to

environmentalism. Most libertarians were atheists or secularists, and the highest principle of their conservatism was individual freedom. Freedom of the individual, in turn, could only be assured through interaction in America's system of free enterprise capitalism. For libertarians, the well-being of corporations and the economic system they supported trumped the need to protect nature from human abuse. In terms of the broader conservative intellectual movement's relationship to environmentalism, the libertarian defense of business interests and free enterprise capitalism represents the antithesis of Kirk's belief in spiritual piety. The former provided hope that conservatism and environmentalism might ultimately find common ground; the latter helped ensure that such an amalgamation of interests did not come into being.

The Problem of Environmental Cost

Libertarian anti-environmentalism in the 1970s arose from a number of sources, but its earliest manifestation can be viewed in the ideas promulgated by intellectuals closely associated with the Chicago School of Economics.¹⁷ These days, the reputation of the Chicago School precedes itself, but that has not always been the case. From the interwar period until well after World War II the economics profession was dominated by interventionists like John Maynard Keynes, Arthur Pigou, and John Kenneth Galbraith, all of whom sanctioned or encouraged the close involvement of the state in economic matters. Proponents of laissez faire were few and far between, except at the University of Chicago, where committed proponents of free enterprise like Frank Knight, Henry Simons, and Aaron Director reigned supreme. The economics department at Chicago was more heterogeneous than is often remembered – the profession's left wing was well represented by the New Dealer and interventionist apostle Paul Douglas – but the

¹⁷ For general overviews of the Chicago School, see Marc Allen Eisner, *Antitrust and the Triumph of Economics: Institutions, Expertise, and Policy Change* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Edmund W. Kitch, "The Fire of Truth: A Remembrance of Law and Economics at Chicago, 1932-1970," *Journal of Law and Economics* 26 (1983): 163-234.

supporters of laissez faire remained dominant. Following World War II, however, the position of the Chicago School relative to the rest of the economics profession changed drastically. The University became the center of a conservative revolution in economic thought. Hayek himself took a position there at the behest of Simons and Harold Lunhow, the chairman of the conservative Volker Fund, though Hayek and other members of the “Austrian School” often disagreed with the Chicagoans on the finer points of economic analysis. Over time the University hired a host of luminaries and future Nobel laureates in the economics department and in the law school, including Ronald Coase, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Richard Posner. All of these scholars’ work focused on simultaneously demonstrating the economic undesirability of government intervention and the virtues of free market efficiency. Through a long, arduous process, these defenders of the anti-Keynesian tradition helped to give political and intellectual credibility to once marginal libertarian ideas.¹⁸

Free market environmentalists of the late 1970s and after cared for the environment and opposed federal intervention on environmental matters because they believed a market-oriented system of protection would be best for nature.¹⁹ But the economists of the Chicago School exhibited no such opinions in their work. For them, ills such as pollution were often viewed not in terms of their damage to nature or the environment, but as problems to be solved through the rigorous application of economic and legal theory. A close reading of their analysis of environmental matters in the 1960s and 1970s reveals a subtle but powerful anti-environmental thread running through their arguments. Coming as it did from some of the most respected academic minds in America, the Chicago School’s environmental opposition helped play an

¹⁸ On the history of the Chicago School, see Jamie Peck, “Orientation: in Search of the Chicago School,” in Robert Van Horn, Philip Mirowski, and Thomas A. Stapleford, eds. *Building Chicago Economics: New Perspectives on the History of America’s Most Powerful Economics Program* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), xxv-xlix; Van Horn and Mirowski, “The Rise of the Chicago School of Economics and the Birth of Neoliberalism,” in *The Road from Mont Pèlerin, 139-178*; On the similarities and divergences between the “Austrian” and “Chicago” schools, see Mark Skousen, *Vienna and Chicago: Friends or Foes? A Tale of Two Schools of Free-Market Economics* (Washington, DD: Capital, 2005).

¹⁹ *Ibid*, see pages 115-122 especially.

important role in shaping and defining the broader anti-environmental worldview among conservatives

One of the earliest and most influential texts in which this opposition to environmental measures can be discerned comes from Ronald Coase's 1960 article "The Problem of Social Cost."²⁰ In the article, Coase took aim at the problems inherent within Pigouvian welfare economics. He began by giving a classic example of the tort of nuisance: a factory that discharges pollution into the air, thus creating harmful side effects for the neighbors in the vicinity of the factory. For welfare economists, this problem was easily solved. If the neighbors brought suit against the factory, then the courts could take one of three actions: it could decide to make the factory liable for the harmful effects of its discharges, place a tax on the factory equivalent to the damage created by the pollution, or remove the factory from residential districts altogether. In all three instances, the court justified punishment of the factory owner because he was to blame for the creation of the problem. Coase, on the other hand, asserted that "the suggested courses of action are inappropriate, in that they lead to results which are not necessarily, or even usually, desirable."²¹

To demonstrate the undesirability of these outcomes, Coase proposed a different way to think about nuisances like pollution. To his way of thinking, the residents of the properties neighboring the factories bore just as much responsibility for the creation of the problem as the factory did. Yes, it was true that the nuisance would not exist without the factory to produce it, but it was also true that it would not exist if the neighbors were not there to be affected by the nuisance.²² Armed with this logic, Coase argued that notions of welfare, blame, and responsibility were irrelevant to the court's decision. All that mattered was the maximization of

²⁰ For a biography of Coase, see Stephen G. Medema, *Ronald H. Coase* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1994).

²¹ Ronald Coase, "The Problem of Social Cost," *Journal of Law and Economics* 3 (October 1960), 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 13.

the economic good of society, and that equilibrium could be achieved best without the cumbersome mechanism of regulation. As long as there were no transaction costs preventing the parties from bargaining further after the court's decision, the factory would pay the neighbors what they deemed adequate recompense for the right to continue polluting or the neighbors would pay the factory to pollute less. Society would be better off by letting the market take its course. In a direct refutation of welfare economics, Coase concluded that the goal of all such trade-offs "should not be to eliminate smoke pollution but rather to secure the optimum amount of smoke pollution, this being the amount which will maximize the value of production."²³ The problem of focusing on social cost, in other words, was that it detracted from the economic well-being of industrial producers and others whose activities truly benefitted society.

The language of "the environment" or "environmentalism" had not yet come into popular usage at the time Coase posited his theorem, but his economic analysis of pollution contributed to the growth of libertarian anti-environmentalism in two important ways. The first centers on Coase's disinclination towards government regulation. Coase accused those focused on cleaning up pollution in the name of the social good of being guilty of trumpeting "the disadvantages of private enterprise" and promoting "the need for Government regulation."²⁴ But Coase argued that such regulation placed burdensome transaction costs on private enterprise and, as his application of economic theory to the problem of the factory's pollution had shown, made society worse off economically. In 1960, the government's environmental regulatory apparatus had not yet achieved the unprecedented levels of intervention that it would in the 1970s. But following the passage of NEPA, the celebration of the first Earth Day, and the creation of the EPA, libertarian conservatives would come to echo Coase's defense of the private good and the maximization of production in their attacks on environmentalists. Protecting business from the

²³ Ibid, 42.

²⁴ Ibid, 26.

actions of environmentalists became more important than defending the environment from the actions of business, which, after all, were justifiable economically.

The second anti-environmental thread running through Coase's article revolves around his view of the social good. Environmental historian Samuel Hays has argued that Americans following World War II experienced a drastic "transformation of values" in the way they viewed the environment. Americans came to view the social good as a maximization of the "quality of life beyond the efficiency in production."²⁵ Issues of beauty, health, and permanence became increasingly important to Americans during this time period, so much so that many were willing to countenance a reduction in the country's economic well-being if it meant less pollution and healthier environments. In this framework, Coase's conception of the social good went against the rising concern for the environment. For Coase, any amount of pollution and degradation of the environment could be justified theoretically as long as it maximized production. Other libertarian conservatives often used similar arguments to confront the environmental movement in more explicit terms in the 1970s, and it would become an important trope in the broader conservative intellectual movement during that decade.

But it was not just Coase among the Chicago School who deserves credit for helping to erect the framework of libertarian anti-environmentalism in the 1960s. Milton Friedman, unquestionably the most famous and most influential of the Chicago cadre, played an important part as well. Friedman did not have much to say about environmental issues in the 1960s, but certain parts of his enormously important best seller *Capitalism and Freedom* (1963) are worthy of some attention. Funded by money donated by the Volker Fund, one of the leading sources of donations for libertarians interested in promoting unfettered free enterprise, the book was part of the larger Free Market Project at the University of Chicago. Organized by Hayek, Director,

²⁵ Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

Simons, Luhow, and other members of the Mont Pèlerin Society, an organization founded by Hayek in Switzerland in 1949 to promote the defense of individualism economic freedom, the Free Market Project was, from the beginning an attempt to blend the University's academic interest in free markets with a newly oriented political philosophy that equated political and economic freedom. Indeed, *Capitalism and Freedom* "wore its own provenance on its' sleeve: it was *proud* to be the work of an intellectual for hire" and advocating for a political cause – the weakening of government and the strengthening of corporate capitalism.²⁶ According to George Nash, the book's popularity (it has never gone out of print) derived from Friedman's "daring and iconoclastic assault on conventional twentieth-century liberal wisdom" and "incisive indictment of liberal failures."²⁷ The government monopoly on the post office, social security, the minimum wage, and other issues were all areas in which Friedman believed the market alternative to government would be more politically desirable.

In certain sections of the book, Friedman touched briefly on issues germane to the environmental movement. For example, he argued for the privatization of national parks like Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon on the grounds that private corporations could do a better job than government of generating revenue from the parks.²⁸ But Friedman's most important contribution to anti-environmental thought came in the section on the social responsibility of business. Here Friedman reiterated in blunter terms the argument that Coase had made in "The Problem of Social Cost." "The view has been gaining widespread acceptance that corporate officials and labor leaders have a 'social responsibility' that goes beyond serving the interest of their stockholders or their members," Friedman said worriedly. "Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by the corporate officials of

²⁶ Van Horn and Mirowski, *The Road to Mont Pèlerin*, 168.

²⁷ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*

²⁸ Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in a Free Society," reprinted from *Capitalism and Freedom* in Marshal Goldman, ed., *Controlling Pollution: the Economics of a Cleaner America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 80.

a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible. This is a fundamentally subversive doctrine.”²⁹ As did Coase, Friedman believed that any concern for the social good outside of the maximization of economic benefits to private industry was capable of creating great harm.

Friedman did not mention the environment in his indictment of social responsibility, but his opinions clearly placed him alongside Coase in the vanguard of the environmental opposition. Other economists recognized this. In 1970, the editors of *Fortune* magazine published *The Environment: a National Mission for the Seventies*, a compilation of articles and essays designed to highlight the growing need for environmental protection in America. President Nixon and Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine even wrote special prefaces for the book. The volume’s contributors were quick to point out that blaming capitalism or technology as scapegoats for the environmental crisis was unproductive. In fact, Robert S. Diamond, a journalist with significant ties to industry, argued in one essay that business executives were genuinely concerned about the state of the environment and believed they bore at least some responsibility to repair the damage done. Businesses and the environmental impulse could indeed coexist.³⁰

Such sentiments ran directly counter to the views of Friedman and Coase. In one of the later editions of his edited volume on the power of monopolies, the economist Edwin Mansfield purposely juxtaposed Friedman’s remarks on social responsibility with Diamond’s article from *The Environment*, calling it an “interesting contrast.”³¹ This was no accident. Mansfield recognized that Friedman’s vision of an unfettered free enterprise economic system had room

²⁹ Ibid, “Monopoly and the Social Responsibility of Business and Labor,” reprinted from *Capitalism and Freedom* in Edwin Mansfield, ed., *Monopoly Power and Public Performance: the Problem of Industrial Concentration* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 113-114.

³⁰ Robert S. Diamond, “What Business Thinks About Its Environment,” in *The Environment: a National Mission for the Seventies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 55-64.

³¹ Mansfield, *Monopoly Power and Public Performance*, 126.

neither for environmentalists or businessmen who believed that protecting the environment was in the best interest of society. Not incidentally, Friedman doubled down on his anti-environmental attitudes in an article written for *The New York Times Magazine* in 1973. In the article Friedman cited the contemporary drive to force businesses to “make expenditures on reducing pollution beyond the amount that is in the best interest of the corporation or that is required by law in order to contribute to the social objective of improving the environment” as an example of the harm suffered by business in the name of social responsibility. Friedman ended by stating his admiration for those corporations that remained steadfastly opposed to such beliefs.³² Over time, the sentiments of the broader conservative movement came to align almost perfectly with Friedman’s contempt for environmentalists seeking to restrain the productivity of business.

The growing anti-environmentalism of the Chicago School can be viewed even more clearly in a discussion between the faculty members of the University of Chicago and the general public in early April of 1970 entitled “The Legal and Economic Aspects of Pollution.” Sponsored by the Center for Policy Study, the panel of experts included a who’s who of Chicago’s law and economics departments, including Coase, Friedman, Demsetz, and George Anastaplo. R. Stephen Berry, a chemistry professor, rounded out the group, and the panel was moderated by political science professor Theodore Lowi. With the celebration of Earth Day just around the corner, the discussion represented just one part of the university’s “month long series of panels and workshops dealing with the environment – which they called ‘the sick earth.’”³³ Each of the experts was given a brief time to make their remarks concerning pollution of the environment, and a question and answer session followed.

³² Friedman, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13, 1973.

³³ *The Legal and Economic Aspects of Pollution: a Discussion by University of Chicago Faculty Members* (Center for Policy Study, 1970), v.

As the most well-known faculty member, the panel accorded Friedman pride of place to address the issues at hand. Unsurprisingly, the issue of cost played a central role in his remarks. “The fact is that it costs something to have clean air, just as it costs something to have the other goods that we want,” he noted. “We have to balance the gains we get by reducing what some people call pollution against the cost imposed on ourselves and others by having pollution.”³⁴ Friedman’s colleague’s echoed his sentiments. Demsetz, for example, argued that the cost of cleaning up Lake Erie in the name of clean water would come at the direct expense of business’s ability to generate profits and provide products for consumers. It would be better off to simply let people find swimming pools and other substitutes than spend money cleaning up the lake, he concluded.³⁵ For his part, Coase demonstrated that his thinking on social costs had changed little in a decade. “I am perhaps the only person here to is going to raise the question, do we have enough [pollution]?” he asked boldly.³⁶ His reasoning, as ever, was that the social costs of pollution were outweighed by the economic gain to be gotten from it. All three faculty members used the basic economic notion of opportunity cost – the idea that something can be gained only at the expense of something lost – to cast doubt on the desirability of environmental protection if it resulted in hamstringing business.

Not all of the contributors used cost to undermine the rationale for pollution abatement, however. Berry argued cogently that the issue of cost could be looked at in a different light. “Essentially the pollution problem we now face is the consequence of buying a way of life without recognizing the secondary consequences that came with that life. We bought a technological society; we bought the good life without thinking of what came at that price,” he pointed out.³⁷ Later on in the discussion, he specifically linked this argument to the impetus he

³⁴ Ibid, 2.

³⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

³⁶ Ibid, 8.

³⁷ Ibid, 7.

believed to be behind Earth Day's celebration. In an explicit rebuttal of one of Friedman's statements, Berry pointed out that "the people who are organizing Earth Day meetings are trying to say to the people who would hopefully attend those meetings: 'you don't know what pollution is doing to you. If you were aware, you would value the air more, you would buy the control device, you would pay more for the electricity.'"³⁸ In response to the opportunity cost argument made by his peers, Berry responded by pointing out an even more axiomatic economic truth: there is no such thing as a free lunch. Halting pollution was not just about figuring social costs; it was also a matter of sound economics.

But for all Berry's protestations, the panel remained unconvinced of his arguments. The question and answer session that followed the discussion revealed the adversarial relationship between the audience, made up mostly of student organizers of the University's Earth Day celebration, and Friedman and his colleagues. One student asked a penetrating question concerning the panel's human-centered approach to the issue of costs. The cost of pollution to humans was evident, but what would the cost of failing to stop pollution be to the fish and other nonhuman members of the ecosystem? Demsetz shrugged off the question's wider ecological implications in his response. He answered that, in his opinion, most Americans would value fish less than they valued the products they consumed on a daily basis, and rightly so. The same audience member also asked the panel of experts what they thought about the need to preserve the environment for nonhumans and for future generations. "I think everybody up here certainly welcomes a country in which one is free to try and convince people to value . . . future generations," Demsetz said in a cursory reply. But, he retorted, "on the other hand, we wish to preserve competition and allow people to convince other people to value fish isn't worth a one can of condensed milk."³⁹ Demsetz's remark illustrates plainly the disjuncture between the

³⁸ Ibid, 13-14.

³⁹ "The Legal and Economic Aspects of Pollution," 18.

traditionalist conception of nature and the libertarian view of the environment. For traditionalists such as Kirk, protecting the environment for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations formed the core of his conservative beliefs. To do otherwise was to commit a grave sin. Libertarian intellectuals like those on the panel dismissed these ideas as ludicrous. Their message was clear: future generations had no legitimate claim, economic, moral or environmental, on those living in the present. Preserving the capitalist system, not the environment, was paramount.

At another point in the conversation, a student asked what would happen if the environment were allowed to deteriorate to the point where humanity died out as a result. Friedman had had enough of such hyperbolic language. In his opening remarks, he had lamented the “emotionalism” prevalent in discussions about the environment, and the tendency to view the debate solely in terms of “good or evil.”⁴⁰ He responded to the question by pointing out that he believed the “fad of everybody saying catastrophe is around the corner” would “not be present five years from now.” Pollution problems would be solved through economic analysis, he stated confidently. “If any such exist,” he added belatedly.⁴¹ Friedman’s remarks make it clear that he believed the grievances raised by the students to be wholly illegitimate. His doubt as to whether pollution truly posed a problem to the American people indicates that he and his fellow faculty members viewed these grievances as a fabrication by interest groups fueled by emotion and hatred of business rather than by facts.

The conference on the legal and economic aspects of pollution only further reinforced the Chicago School’s preexisting anti-environmental opinions. Although Coase and Friedman often tried to root their discussions of the environmental impulse in elaborate theorems attempting to balance social costs with the necessity of industrial production, they could not conceal entirely their fundamental aversion to it. In their minds, the rise of the environmental movement in the

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2.

⁴¹ Ibid, 22.

1960s served only to hamper business and reduce the economic efficiency of the nation through needless government intervention. Indeed, on numerous occasions both economists candidly dismissed any pretense as to the desirability of environmental protection. Coase, Friedman, and other members of the Chicago School wrote less and less about the environment as the 1970s wore on, but when they did discuss the environment they did so in almost the exact same terms that Coase had used in 1960.⁴² For the members of the Chicago School, opposition to environmentalism was a fixed belief that appeared to resist all contradictory positions.

But just because the Chicago School seemed to pay less attention to environmental issues as the 1970s wore on does not mean their ideas had no impact during the so-called “environmental decade.” In his magisterial treatment of the fracturing of intellectual thought in the late twentieth century, Daniel T. Rodgers demonstrates how Coase’s theorem in “The Problem of Social Cost” became the foundational text for the Law and Economics movement in the 1970s. As Rodgers explains it, “Coase’s essay took off in the 1970s as a conceptual formula by which large parts of law’s most contested terrain could be reimagined not as questions of harm and restitution but as questions of market efficiency.” Richard Posner, a University of Chicago law professor and Coase’s colleague, used Coase’s conception of social cost as the basis for his *Economic Analysis of the Law*, the decade’s leading law text book. The ideas espoused by conservative law theorists like Coase and Posner would eventually become dominant in the ideological battle between Right and Left over control of the law. Furthermore, the Law and Economics Movement received significant funding from William E. Simon and the Olin Foundation, an influential conservative think tank named after St. Louis billionaire John Merrell Olin. The Foundation underwrote or subsidized much of the Law and Economics Movement’s free market revolution within the legal profession. It also provided money for the holding of

⁴² See, for example, Ronald N. McKean’s essay “Property Rights, Pollution, and Power” and Demsetz’s discussion of the article in Richard T. Selden, ed., *Capitalism and Freedom: Problems and Prospects, Proceedings of a Conference in Honor of Milton Friedman* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 92-12.

summer camps run by Mont Pèlerin society members “to which scores of judges, congressional aides, and law professors came to retrain themselves in . . . economic analysis. Copies of Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* served as graduation prizes.”⁴³ Through this infiltration of the legal profession and through the efforts of conservative interests interested in using their money to promote free-enterprise, Coase and the Chicago School were able to extend their anti-environmental arguments beyond the narrow confines of the University.

Friedman’s impact proved no less important. In 1976, Nash identified Friedman as one of the most important figures in the broader conservative intellectual movement in America. Unlike Hayek, von Mises, and earlier libertarian conservatives of the “Austrian School,” who emphasized grandiose philosophical theories of human action, Friedman and the Chicago School tended to be more pragmatic in their approach to economics and, more importantly, politics. According to Nash, William F. Buckley Jr., the foremost architect of the conservative intellectual movement, probably had Friedman in mind when he expressed optimism about the state of conservatism in 1968. And why not? Friedman had just finished a term as president of the American Economic Association and was virtually unsurpassed in terms of academic reputation and the ability to articulate “conservative viewpoints with a felicitous combination of learning and wit.” More importantly, Friedman and his colleagues worked tirelessly to spread the influence of the Chicago School’s ideas through growing networks of communication in the 1960s. As Nash put it, “Conservative scholarship was proliferating; networks of influence in economics departments and elsewhere were being established; a presence was being felt. These individuals were contributing to one of the significant intellectual currents of the 1960s: disillusionment with government and the remarkable revival of ‘neoclassical’ economics.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 58-59.

⁴⁴ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (288-289).

Friedman's influence would only expand among conservatives and the general public in the 1970s, and his anti-environmentalism would play a key role in that expansion.

The Freeman and Libertarian Views of the Environment in the 1960s

If the Chicago School of Economics helped lay the groundwork for libertarian anti-environmentalism in the 1960s, then *The Freeman* built significantly on that foundation in the 1970s. Founded in the 1920s by the anarcho-capitalist Albert Jay Nock, *The Freeman* enjoyed a turbulent history before eventually becoming the most important periodical for conservatives proselytizing the benefits of the free market. In the 1920s and early 1930s the journal followed the lead of its founder and published articles that inveighed heavily against the state. Nock's own book, *Our Enemy, the State* (1935), encapsulated the view of the magazine at that time.⁴⁵ By the late 1930s, editorship of the journal had passed to Nock's leading disciple, Frank Chordarov, but Nock's anti-statist conservatism lived on through the work of Chordarov and a host of other influential conservative intellectuals, including William F. Buckley, Jr., whose family was personally acquainted with Nock and who was exposed to Nock's ideas at an early age.⁴⁶ Chordarov's anarchism and reluctance to muzzle his extreme opinions eventually caused him to be fired from the magazine, though he continued to influence the American Right in important ways. After a brief hiatus, the magazine was revived again in 1950 by John Chamberlain, Henry Hazlitt, and Suzanne La Follette. Though the magazine's circulation list only included about 12,000 people, its importance was far greater. In Nash's words the journal provided "a regular forum for hitherto dispersed writers" and became the leading periodical of the conservative cause, rivaling *The Nation* in terms of its ideological impact.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Albert Jay Nock, *Our Enemy, the State* (New York: 1935).

⁴⁶ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 14-16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

By 1955, however, the journal had accrued so many financial difficulties that it was forced to seek aid from outside the intellectual community. This aid came in the form of Leonard E. Read and the Foundation for Economic Equality (FEE). By the time he helped found the FEE, Read had been preaching the gospel of capitalism for many years as the head of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. The connections he made in that capacity served him well and made him a natural matchmaker for the newly emerging libertarian conservative network. Mises, for example, enlisted with the FEE almost from the outset, and Hayek remained one of its most generous supporters throughout his life.⁴⁸ The FEE also developed close ties with many members of the ultra-libertarian Mont Pèlerin Society. With the financial support of the FEE and the Mont Pèlerin Society, *The Freeman* began to focus almost exclusively on economic issues pertaining to the defense of business and free enterprise.⁴⁹ In fact, it was this economic drift in *The Freeman's* ideological orientation that helped convince William F. Buckley, Jr. to found *National Review* as a more well-rounded conservative publication.⁵⁰

Prior to 1970, the newly galvanized *The Freeman* had relatively little to say about issues pertaining to conservation or environmentalism. The journal did not begin to use the term “environment” until 1970. In the 1960s, the journal focused mostly on issues related to the “old conservation movement” or the “progressive conservation movement.”⁵¹ In fact, *The Freeman's* views on conservation were very similar to those of earlier figures like Gifford Pinchot's in that they valued the efficient use of natural resources above all else. But unlike Pinchot, the contributors to *The Freeman* exhibited an antipathy toward any union between private enterprise

⁴⁸ On Read and the FEE, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 24-25; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: the Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009) 27-29; Mary Sennholz, “Leonard Read: the Founder and Builder,” *The Freeman*, May 1, 1996, 352-353 and *Leonard Read: Philosopher of Freedom* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1993), 1-65.

⁴⁹ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 28.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵¹ Donald Fleming, “Roots of the New Conservation Movement,” *Reviews in American History* 6 (1972): 7-9152-63; Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959);

and scientific expertise on the one hand and government on the other. Libertarian conservatives could and did support privately financed and organized efforts at conservation, but they blanched at the very idea of government intervention in the exploitation of natural resources.⁵² For example, the journal published a small amount of articles eviscerating the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). For environmental historians, TVA's transformation of the valley's ecology through its dam-building efforts represents an important moment of transition between conservation and environmentalism. Although initially TVA's planning efforts included little attention to ecological matters, the efforts of Aldo Leopold and Bob Marshall helped bring about an ecological turn in federal planning initiatives that fed directly into postwar environmentalist concerns.⁵³ The contributors to *The Freeman* cared little about TVA's ecological impact. For them, TVA symbolized the New Deal's "warpath against big, private business" and "fierce dislike of private power companies."⁵⁴

The Freeman did occasionally address conservation issues in more "environmental" terms, especially those that dealt with the use of public lands. On this subject, the journal exhibited a mixed bag of opinions. Some of the journal's contributors, like the economics professor Ruth Shallcross Maynard, genuinely believed a free market approach to resource use encouraged more conservation than did heavy-handed government policies. "The real waste in resources comes from government policies," she argued. Private industry, on the other hand, encouraged better use of land because the free market demanded it, such as when private utility interests in Wisconsin partnered with farmers to institute the "Trees for Tomorrow" program.⁵⁵

⁵² For a statement of general principles, see Leonard E. Read's essay "A Conservationist Looks at Freedom," *The Freeman*, November 1, 1970, 667-673,

⁵³ See Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 199-200

⁵⁴ Richard D. Obenshain, "Public Power and the TVA," *The Freeman*, September 1, 1959, 52-53; Also see Hans Sennholz, "TVA Reports," *The Freeman*, May 1, 1965, 56-59; and Leonard E. Read, "A Cliché of Socialism: Under Public Ownership, We the People Own it!," *The Freeman*, November 1, 1965, 50-52.

⁵⁵ Ruth Shallcross Maynard, "Who Conserves Our Resources?," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1962, 41-42; for a similar argument, see Frederick Nymeyer, "The Motivation to Conserve," *The Freeman*, March 1, 1960, 37-38.

Maynard's article indicted the system of progressive conservation that the federal government had followed since the turn of the century, and her criticisms would not have been out of line with the free-market environmentalists Drake analyzed.

On the other hand, John C. Sparks, a manufacturing executive from Ohio and one of the journal's leading voices on resource use, argued in 1964 that federal policies pertaining to wilderness areas and national parks prevented them from being developed properly. He offered no "quarrel with the goal to preserve our magnificent mountains, canyons, and other splendors of nature, including plants and wildlife," but that did not stop him from arguing that large corporations like Disney could do a better job of managing the recreational goals of the parks and should be allowed to do so. He even went so far as to posit that a monorail built in the Grand Canyon would vastly improve the experience for the park's visitors.⁵⁶ Sparks' mistrust of the government's ability to run the Park Service in the 1960s was not unique. The Park Service at this time had alienated old school supporters of its recreational functions and the newly emerging environmental constituency that wanted to preserve the ecological integrity of the parks.⁵⁷ But Sparks' proposed corporatization of the Grand Canyon and other national parks demonstrated that his feelings toward the park system derived more from a desire to further the interests of business than genuinely improve or protect the public lands.

The analysis of the federal government's urban renewal programs in the 1960s serves as a third example of *The Freeman's* antipathy toward government conservation programs. Urban renewal was not new, of course, but the 1960s witnessed feverish activity as many cities sought to revitalize or redesign parts of America's cities by making them expressly more modern. This process had no shortage of critics on the right. The most well-known of these was Jane Jacobs, the author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1962) and founder of the New

⁵⁶ John C. Sparks, "Exploring the National Parks," *The Freeman*, December 1, 1964, 47-49.

⁵⁷ Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 58-62.

Urbanism. In her book, Jacobs excoriated the urban renewal for its tendency to destroy the living heritage of cities and for its implementers to misunderstand “the relationship of cities – and indeed of men – with the rest of nature.”⁵⁸ Jacobs’ work also dovetailed nicely with the philosophy of Edmund Burke and had much in common with Kirk’s own condemnations of urban renewal, which centered on renewal’s unconcern for beauty and for its tendency to destroy humanity’s relationship with the past.⁵⁹ Like Jacobs, Kirk viewed urban renewal as a disastrous enterprise that only furthered the divide for man and nature. For the economists, businessmen, and activists at *The Freeman*, urban renewal’s chief problem arose not from its failure to take man’s relationship with nature into account, but rather from its misuse of centralized authority.⁶⁰ Urban renewal, in short, was nothing more than an example of bad economics that could be cured through a dose of the free market.

In some cases, *The Freeman* seemed to serve as a mouthpiece for the interests of business on conservation issues. In one 1967 article, the journal published an article sponsored by the National Forest Products Association denigrating the “preservationist” tendency to restrict businesses from using America’s natural resources. “If the forest industries are to be continually restricted, continually hampered, and put out of business, how will people fulfill their most basic human needs?” it asked.⁶¹ The Association’s feelings dovetailed nicely with the orthodox view of conservation already in place at *The Freeman*: government regulation placed needless restrictions on businesses that prevented them from doing their job successfully. If only

⁵⁸ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1961), .

⁵⁹ Jonathan Zasloff, “Jane Jacobs, Edmund Burke, and the New Urbanism,” *Legal Planet* (Berkeley Law/UCLA Law), November 17, 2011. <http://legal-planet.org/2011/11/17/jane-jacobs-edmund-burke-and-the-new-urbanism/>. For Kirk’s view of urban renewal, see Kirk, “Urban Renewal or Urban Devastation,” *The Spartanburg Herald*, July 10, 1964, 4; “Urban Renewal, No Bulldozers,” *The Spartanburg Herald*, August 29, 1965, C5; “Urban Renewal Can Create Desert,” *The Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, August 2, 1966, 6.

⁶⁰ John C. Sparks, “The Urban Renewal Fallacy,” *The Freeman*, October 1, 1965, 17-24; *ibid*, “Zoned or Owned,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1964; Martin Anderson, “The Fiasco of Urban Renewal,” *The Freeman*, March 1, 1966, 46-59; *ibid*, “The Federal Bulldozer,” *The Freeman*, October 1, 1967, 614-626; Gary North, “Urban Renewal and the Doctrine of Sunk Costs,” *The Freeman*, May 1, 1965, 263-269.

⁶¹ “Beauty and Common Sense,” *The Freeman*, September 1, 1967, 529.

government were to be eliminated, then businesses like those served by the Association would be able to efficiently exploit America's resources in the best way for the consumer. The article also serves as evidence of the journal's close ties to businesses whose economic interests were antithetical to the newly emerging environmental movement and in many ways foreshadowed the magazine's more overt anti-environmentalism in the 1970s.

That foreshadowing can also be viewed in the journal's analysis of population issues in the 1960s. Throughout the 1960s, environmentalists, scientists, and policy makers all expressed worry over the toll that population growth would take on the global environment. Population growth, for example, represented a major issue for the Sierra Club throughout the 1960s, and they passed a resolution in 1965 calling for more education on the matter. In particular the growth of India's population represented cause for concern. For no one was this more true than for Paul Ehrlich. Ehrlich, an entomologist by training who spent most of his career at Stanford University, became increasingly interested in the relationship between population dynamics and environmental deterioration, eventually becoming one of the world's foremost experts on the subject. In 1965, Ehrlich gave a speech on "The Biological Revolution" in which he warned how India's population growth threatened world environmental stability in a matter of decades. Three years later, Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* more famously brought forth a host of predictions concerning population, including that drought, famine, and pestilence would tear the world apart in the 1970s. For Ehrlich and other so-called neo-Malthusians like Lester Brown and Garrett Hardin, drastic measures, including population control, were necessary in order to ensure that population growth would not lead the world into ruin.⁶²

⁶² On the Sierra Club's views on the population problem in the 1960s, see Thomas Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment: Global Population Growth and the Birth of American Environmentalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 119-125; On Paul Ehrlich's views on population in the 1960s, see Paul Sabin, *The Bet: Paul Sabin, Julian Simon, and Our Gamble Over the Earth's Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 2. Also see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 136-151. For a general overview of

Many conservatives in the 1960s, including William F. Buckley, Jr., equaled the Left in their worries about the effects overpopulation would have on the environment in the near future, but the libertarians at *The Freeman* exhibited no such concerns.⁶³ Karl Brandt, an economist and former member of President Dwight Eisenhower's Council of Economic Advisors, flatly denied that population growth could outstrip the world's food supply. New technologies in energy production, agriculture, and land use could help produce an "unlimited" amount of food for the world, but only if governments stepped aside and let the free market work.⁶⁴ W.M. Curtiss, the Executive Secretary of the FEE and one of Read's earliest hires, argued that the population problem would be solved if the American government and others forced families to shoulder the social and economic responsibilities of overpopulation rather than enabling them through interventionist policies.⁶⁵ In the 1970s, the economic argument against the supposed environmental effects of population growth would prove to be one of the single most important anti-environmental threads uniting conservatives of all stripes. That this critique first gained traction amongst libertarian conservatives in the 1960s, when even their fellow travelers on the Right acknowledged the dangers of unchecked population growth, reveals much about the influence libertarian ideas and arguments came to have in the broader conservative intellectual movement.

This is not to say that no evidence of free-market environmentalism could be found within the journal's pages in the 1960s. In some areas, *The Freeman* veered a little closer to addressing some of the concerns of the nascent environmental movement. Physician Gordon B. Leitch, for instance, contributed an article addressing health concerns over the presence of

population policy in the 1960s, see Derek S. Hoff, *The State and the Stork: The Population Debate and Policy Making in U.S. History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), especially Chapter 5.

⁶³ See William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Birth Rate," *National Review*, March 23, 1965, 231; and the special edition of *National Review* on population published in 1965: *National Review*, "The Population Explosion," July 27, 1965.

⁶⁴ Karl Brandt, "Can Food Supply Keep Pace With Population Growth?," *The Freeman*, January 1, 1967, 18-21.

⁶⁵ W.M. Curtiss, "The Population Problem," *The Freeman*, May 1, 1967.

fluoride in drinking water in 1956. In high enough concentrations, sodium fluoride is highly toxic, and the federal government's decision to put trace amounts in drinking water in an effort to boost dental hygiene created an intense, environmentally informed opposition to this practice amongst libertarians. According to Drake, anti-statist conservatives believed that "the federal government, via the U.S. Public Health Service and in league with scientific experts and corporate villains, insisted on forcing Americans to drink poison in the name of the public good."⁶⁶ Leitch's article raised similar concerns about the validity of scientific expertise and its relationship to government initiatives, and he left no doubt as to what stance his fellow libertarians should take on the matter. "Those opposing water fluoridation and other believers in the libertarian way of life might reasonably ask if there is any logical end to such public health measures As long as any semblance of voluntarism remains with respect to the care or abuse anyone may lavish upon one's own person, it would seem reasonable to propose that the use of fluoridated water to combat tooth decay also be left to the will and judgment of each individual. That means keeping fluorides out of the community water supply."⁶⁷ Opinions like Leitch's demonstrate that libertarian conservatives could and did care just as much about issues of human health as did more well-known environmentalists like Rachel Carson. But for them government was the problem, not the solution. Government mandates could never substitute for freedom of choice when addressing the needs of individuals.

It is noteworthy that *The Freeman* had almost nothing to say about air and water pollution in the 1960s, but what little it did say presaged the rise of free-market environmentalism in the late 1970s and beyond. For example, the journal published an article by Howard Callaway, a graduate student at Penn State, on the "Unknown Costs of Pollution" in 1969. "Air and water pollution do not raise basic philosophical or theoretical questions but

⁶⁶ Drake, *Loving Nature, Fearing the State*, 55.

⁶⁷ Gordon B. Leitch, M.D., "Fluoridated Water," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1956,

nevertheless puzzle many libertarians,” he noted. “Can it be that there is no answer within a framework of voluntary agreement and that necessity requires regulation by government?” Callaway answered in the negative, and his proposed alternative focused on making the polluters pay for the costs of negative externalities. If courts, for instance, would award damages against those victimized by polluting corporations, then Callaway’s idea was that these costs would soon force those corporations to become more environmentally responsible. “The longer this day of reckoning is put off, the larger will be the cost of eliminating such unknown costs are now being paid by the innocent,” he stated bluntly before lambasting the “untold distortions” introduced into society by “the free ride which the pollution producers had enjoyed at the expense of everyone else.”⁶⁸

Meyer, a frequent contributor to *The Freeman* in the 1950s and 1960s, voiced similar opinions to those of Callaway in “The Conservative Answer to Pollution,” a pamphlet he wrote for the American Conservative Union with his son John shortly before his death in 1972. It is impossible to overstate the importance of Meyer to the American conservative movement.⁶⁹ As the next chapter will discuss, it was Meyer who, more than any other figure, worked to bridge the chasm between the libertarian and traditionalist elements of the broader conservative intellectual movement, despite his well-publicized ideological disagreements with Russell Kirk. But as much as Meyer disagreed with Kirk, both men could agree that conservatives should support some form of environmental protection, even though their rationales for and approaches to that protection differed significantly.

Meyer’s answer to pollution was a dose of free-market environmentalism in the first degree. Like later free-market environmentalists, Meyer railed against the notion that the free

⁶⁸ Howard Callaway, “Unknown Costs of Pollution,” *The Freeman*, November 1, 1969, 679, 682.

⁶⁹ For an insider’s perspective on Frank Meyer’s influence on the American conservative movement, see Kevin J. Smant, *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002).

market encouraged pollution and he pointed out that the federal government itself was one of America's largest polluters. Using basic economic analysis, Meyer proposed that government regulation be replaced by "a system of pollution taxes, coupled with a 'pollution tax credit' for those investing in pollution control. Such a tax system would harness the machinery of the free market by internalizing the diseconomies of pollution within the activity or enterprise concerned." Like Callaway, Meyer would make the polluter pay. Unlike Coase and Friedman who created elaborate economic theories designed to relieve industry of the burden of their pollution-generating activities, Meyer used the simple economic concept of internalizing externalities to demonstrate the economic sense of making business clean up its mess and invest in pollution reducing technology. Furthermore, Meyer believed this principle was generalizable across all such externalities, including air pollution, water pollution, and the generation of solid waste. He even called the automobile "the largest single cause of air pollution today."⁷⁰ Such remarks placed Meyer in the same camp as *Fortune's* 1970 volume on the environment and *Daedalus's* volume on *America's Changing Environment*, published in that same year.⁷¹ When compared to other libertarian figures like Friedman, Coase, and Rand, Meyer's support for free market mechanisms designed to lead to a cleaner, healthier, and safer environment seems striking.

The justifications made by Callaway and Meyer for restricting the polluting activities of corporations sounds similar to the justifications used to help pass landmark environmental legislation like the Clean Air Act. Given that they were written at a time when the nation's environmental awareness was at an all-time high, this is perhaps not surprising. What is surprising, however, is that both men believed environmental protection could be achieved

⁷⁰ Frank S. Meyer and John C. Meyer, "The Conservative Answer to Pollution," *American Conservative Union Pamphlet* (1971) reprinted in David Brudnoy, ed., *Viewpoints: the Conservative Alternative* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973), 132.

⁷¹ Editors of *Fortune, The Environment*, 57; Roger Revelle and Hans L. Landsberg, eds., *America's Changing Environment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), xi.

without the use of government force. Unfortunately for libertarian conservatives within *The Freeman*'s orbit, the nation overwhelmingly supported federal intervention as a solution to the environmental crisis, and this form of intervention would lead to enmity between libertarian conservatives and environmentalists as the 1970s wore on. But in the 1960s, the journal's position on environmental protection revealed neither overt support for the newly emerging environmentalism nor strident condemnation. The journal's orthodox stance on that subject had not yet been determined; room remained for synergy between libertarianism and environmentalism so long as government intervention remained relatively slight.

***The Freeman* and the 1970s Anti-Environmental Transformation**

If in the 1960s *The Freeman* articulated a mix of feelings about conservation and environmentalism, then the same could not be said about the journal in the 1970s. Beginning in 1970, the journal's minor emphasis on the environment gave way to a host of articles concentrating on pollution, overpopulation, energy use, and other important environmental issues. A brief examination of the journal's contents reveals a shift in the amount of attention given to the environment. From the time of the journal's reorientation towards economic matters in 1954 until 1969, *The Freeman* published just twenty articles on subjects that, broadly conceived, could be referred to as "environmental." Many of these, like the journal's articles on urban renewal, did not touch on humanity's relationship with the environment in any real sense. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, however, the journal published over fifty articles concentrating on issues revolving around the environmental movement. This noticeable uptick in attention can be attributed to the transformation of environmentalism in the 1970s. Congress, the President, and a host of governmental organizations made the environment a top priority beginning in 1970. The Nixon Administration in particular took drastic action to curb pollution.

The events of the 1970s confirmed that environmental protection had become a priority for the American people and that government action would be the primary means through which this goal would be accomplished.⁷²

Given their aversion to any form of government intervention in social or economic matters, it is perhaps not surprising that the libertarian conservatives at *The Freeman* were alarmed by the rise of the environmental-regulatory state in the 1970s. But alarmed they were, and the articles contained within *The Freeman*'s pages reveal that the journal's contributors, like the economists of the Chicago School, believed that the emergence of environmentalism spelled disaster for America's system of free enterprise capitalism. But corporate capitalism served as the great bulwark against the evils of communism and socialism, and market mechanisms remained the only true way to protect individual freedom from government encroachment. The demands of environmentalists and the political mechanisms through which they would achieved their goals, however, made it seem to libertarians that their most cherished beliefs had come under a vicious assault that needed to be combated. By the end of the decade it had become clear that this opposition not just to government sponsored environmental protection, but to the actions and ideas of environmentalists, had become an endemic feature of the libertarian ideology they were forging.

One way in which *The Freeman*'s contributors expressed this opposition to environmental regulation was by focusing on the issue of cost. The implementation of government mandated regulations would be expensive, they proclaimed. One article addressing so-called pollution "paranoia" argued that environmentalists interested in politicizing their hysterical views on pollution failed to understand one of the "fundamental laws of reality: you can get what you want if you pay the necessary cost – but you will pay that cost, like it or not,

⁷² For an overview of environmental policy in the 1970s, see Richard N.L. Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: a History of American Environmental Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), especially chapter 12.

willy-nilly if you try to take what you want. And the cost may bankrupt you.”⁷³ Economics Professor E.C. Pasour made similar arguments later in the decade in an article deriding the economic naiveté of environmentalists. “We are told that clean water (or clean air) is ‘priceless’ but we are not told what the costs will be of obtaining the clean water (or clean air).” In particular he believed that the cost of implementing the Clean Water Act’s goal to make the nation’s waters “fishable and swimmable” by 1985 would be “astronomical.”⁷⁴ Such criticisms contained more than a grain of truth. To this day, for example, the nation’s waters have not met the standards imposed by the Clean Water Act despite the best efforts of the states and the EPA. But for Pasour and other contributors to *The Freeman*, bringing up the issue of cost was more about forcing environmentalists to capitulate to the notion that their desired reforms may cost more than they were willing to give up than about implementing a more reasoned form of environmental protection.

Oftentimes, the journal’s anti-environmental perspective revealed itself through a transparent defense of business interests against the onslaught of environmental regulation. One article accused “ecologists” of “business baiting” and of jumping “to the conclusion that the profit motive is the enemy of nature.”⁷⁵ Another article poked fun at environmentalists and their misguided attempts to protect the environment by “police action” that would “set the private, profit-seeking, polluting entrepreneur back on his heels.”⁷⁶ “The plight of the businessman may very well derive from outside attack,” former Bethany College President Perry E. Gresham acknowledged, and “radical environmentalists in search of villains” who “have lashed out at the business community with more anger than understanding” were among the most vitriolic voices

⁷³ John W. Campbell, “Pollution Paranoia,” *The Freeman*, July 1, 1971, 408. For another article emphasizing the trade-off between environmental protection and economic well-being, see Francis Aspinwall, “Who Pays for Clean Air and Water?,” *The Freeman*, August 1, 1971, 487-489.

⁷⁴ E.C. Pasour, “The Free Lunch Myth,” *The Freeman*, May 1, 1978, 260.

⁷⁵ Merrylye Stanley Rukeyser, “Business Baiting – 1972 Style,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1972, 369. F

⁷⁶ Oscar W. Cooley, “Pollution and Property,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1972, 338-339.

calling for punishment.⁷⁷ As evidence of this anti-business attitude, the journal published a selection of articles arguing that environmental regulations had nearly laid waste to power companies, the auto industry, and materialist civilization itself.⁷⁸ One article even blamed Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* for disseminating lies and misinformation that had created untold headaches for agribusiness and consumers alike.⁷⁹

Other contributors to *The Freeman* made clear what they believed to be the source of these environmentalist beliefs. Hans Sennholz, an economics professor and frequent contributor to the journal, lauded the "growing awareness of environmental problems" in 1971, but, he argued, "the explanations given by 'experts' today are taken straight from the armory of political and economic radicalism. The private property order is summarily condemned, and government is hailed as the only savior of our self-destruction."⁸⁰ In particular he pointed to the work of Ezra J. Mishan and John Kenneth Galbraith, two of the more liberal members of the economics profession at the time, as evidence of this blend of economic and ecological radicalism. Sennholz was willing to go even further in his statement of the problem just two years later. "Man or environment, that is the choice," he stated ominously. "As one is not compatible with the other, we are told, the radical ecologists choose the environment. They prefer grass and tree, ant and beast or forest over man."⁸¹ This was a caricatured picture of environmentalists, and even the most radical among them would not have framed the issue in such stark terms, let alone economists like Galbraith and Mishan.

But that did not stop other libertarians from echoing Sennholz. "The environmental movement has been seized by those who would destroy capitalism in the United States, and

⁷⁷ Perry E. Gresham, "The Beleaguered Businessmen," *The Freeman*, September 1, 1974, 537.

⁷⁸ Earl McMunn, "Another Layer of Protection?," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1975, 412-415; Charles R. Ladow, "Mother Nature: Friend or Foe?," *The Freeman*, April 1, 1976, 202-205.

⁷⁹ Samuel R. Aldrich, "Man and His Environment," *The Freeman*, November 1, 1971, 661-666.

⁸⁰ Hans Sennholz, "Radical Economics, Old and New," *The Freeman*, March 1, 1971, 153. For similar criticisms, see Dwight R. Lee and Robert McNown, "The Problems of Halting Economic Growth," *The Freeman*, April 1, 1976, 234-241.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, "Controlling Pollution," *The Freeman*, February 1, 1973, 77.

establish some form of socialism in its place,” wrote Charles B. Batten in 1979. Only by abolishing capitalism could the environmentalists realize their goal of “purifying the environment.”⁸² Remarks such as Sennholz’s and Batten’s demonstrate the growing hostility towards the environmental movement that emerged at *The Freeman* during the 1970s. This hostility was not so much centered on the issue of environmental protection, per se – many contributors supported a free market approach – but rather on environmentalists themselves. The torrent of environmental legislation passed by the federal government in the 1970s communicated to libertarian conservatives that the very fate of individual freedom and free-enterprise capitalism was at stake in the battle with environmental extremists. Any gains made by the latter would come inevitably at the expense of the former.

Another battlefield upon which libertarian conservatives carried out their skirmishes was the debate concerning overpopulation. As mentioned above, national and even international concern over global population growth had accelerated in the 1960s, but it reached its apotheosis in the early 1970s before dying down and then reviving around 1980. The population scare, at least in the early part of the decade, arose in large part thanks to the efforts of neo-Malthusians who believed that overpopulation, combined with pollution and resource depletion, would bring about an ecological demographic catastrophe in the near future. Ehrlich’s *Population Bomb* (1969) and Hardin’s essay “The Tragedy of the Commons” (1968) represent the best example of neo-Malthusian thinking during this period, and their work helped publicize the notion of a coming environmental crisis of epic proportions.

But it was not just scientists like Ehrlich and Hardin sounding the alarm over population and pollution. For example, Zero Population Growth (ZPG), an organization founded by Ehrlich in 1968 to combat the environmental threats of overpopulation, drew massive support from

⁸² Charles B. Batten, “Conservation or Confiscation,” April 1, 1979, 208-209.

young people on college campuses and received a massive influx of members following the celebration of the first Earth Day. Even Richard Nixon, for a time at least, believed population growth to be an issue of national concern that helped lead to the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act. Concerns about overpopulation played an important role in spotlighting the growing importance of environmental issues to the American people.⁸³

The libertarian conservatives at *The Freeman* shared few of these concerns. It is true that at least one contributor agreed with Hardin's solutions to the problem of the degradation of the commons. Common lands, Hardin believed, encouraged people to act selfishly in terms of their land use practices, and could be cured only through "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon."⁸⁴ But Hardin, in many ways a libertarian himself, also argued that privatization of the commons could help stop degradation, and this solution naturally appealed to certain libertarian conservatives, though they remained uneasy about certain other of Hardin's conclusions. But by and large such intersections between environmentalist thinkers like Hardin and libertarian conservatives remained few and far between.⁸⁵

Far more common were responses like the one offered by Henry Hazlitt in July of 1971 on the many errors inherent to Malthusian thinking on the population problem. The veteran *New York Times* journalist warned that "in spite of the serious errors in Malthus, we have witnessed in the last decade an outburst of "'Neo-Malthusianism,' a new widespread fear, sometimes verging on hysteria, about a world 'population explosion.'"⁸⁶ Ehrlich and other ecologically minded scientist were the chief culprits behind this campaign of misinformation. Another article published the following year echoed Hazlitt in blaming the "seemingly endless outpouring of

⁸³ On the influence of *The Population Bomb* in the early 1970s, see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, especially Chapter 6. Also see Sabin, *The Bet*, especially Chapter 1. On Garrett Harden, see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 153-154. On The Nixon Administration's population concerns and the actions of Zero Population Growth, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 213-214 and Robertson, especially Chapter 7

⁸⁴ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 13 (1968): 1247.

⁸⁵ Charles R. Batten, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *The Freeman*, October 1, 1970, 608-609;

⁸⁶ Henry Hazlitt, "Poverty and Population," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1971, 419.

population-control propaganda and other ‘popullution’ pap” on environmentalists bent on spreading falsehoods that threatened to be transformed into government policy.⁸⁷ Of course, libertarian conservatives were hardly the only ones criticizing the link between population growth and the environmental crises of the 1960s and 1970s. The biologist Barry Commoner, author of *The Closing Circle* and perhaps the most prominent spokesperson for the environmental movement, criticized Ehrlich as roundly as any author in the pages of *The Freeman*.⁸⁸ But Commoner was also a socialist who argued that disparities of wealth and capitalist technologies were to blame for the crises, and the contributors to *The Freeman* would have recoiled from his redistributionist aims. Several articles, in fact, claimed forcefully that the solution to the ecological-population crisis – if the crisis actually existed – could only be carried out through the growth of technology nurtured by the free enterprise system.⁸⁹ Socialism, not capitalism, went hand in hand with environmental degradation, they argued. The environmentalist tendency to equate capitalism and destruction of nature was misplaced, according to *The Freeman*, but environmentalists would just not listen to sense on the matter.

The journal’s book review section in the 1970s further demonstrates the link between environmentalist concerns over population, resource depletion, and pollution and the growth of libertarian anti-environmentalism. Two books in particular, both reviewed by *The Freeman*’s venerable editor, John Chamberlain, are worth noting: John Maddox’s *The Doomsday Syndrome* (1973) and Wilfred Beckerman’s *Two Cheers for the Affluent Society* (1975).⁹⁰ Maddox, a physicist and the editor of *Nature*, and Beckerman, an economist associated with the London

⁸⁷ James A. Weber “The Population Question: Limited Government or Limited People,” *The Freeman*, October 1, 1972, 579.

⁸⁸ Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: 1971). On Commoner’s disagreements with Ehrlich, see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 181-184.

⁸⁹ Rousas J. Rushdoony, “What is Overpopulation,” *The Freeman*, February 1, 1970, 98-105; Edward P. Coleson, “Free Enterprise, Peace and Plenty,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1970, 342-353; David King, “Freedom in the Global Village,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1970, 337-341; Cooley, “Pollution and Property,” 336-340;

⁹⁰ John Maddox, *The Doomsday Syndrome* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Wilfred Beckerman, *Two Cheers for the Affluent Society: a Spirited Defense of Economic Growth* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1975).

School of Economics, were among the most prominent opponents of environmentalism in the 1970s, and they helped spearhead the rightward drift in the economics profession. According to Maddox and Beckerman, environmentalists were uneducated “doomsayers” wrongly bent on crying wolf over the supposedly detrimental impacts of industrial and economic growth.⁹¹ Libertarian conservatives at the *Freeman* latched on to their critiques as a means of undermining environmentalist goals. “When a bona fide environmentalist tells us that we can continue to have industrial growth and a rise in the standard of living without adding to poisons and litter and overcrowding, it is good news indeed,” Chamberlain said of Maddox’s book.⁹² After reading Beckerman’s defense of economic growth, Chamberlain proclaimed that “one becomes a little less inclined to make a fetish of the so-called ecosystem,” as environmentalists and populationists were wont to do.⁹³ Conservative academics and professionals like Maddox and Beckerman reinforced among libertarians the notion that environmentalists were nothing more than political power seekers bent on destroying capitalism in the name of the natural world. It also lent an intellectual heft to the emerging conservative critique of environmentalism and gave that critique legitimacy in the minds of lay-readers.

A final development of the 1970s that brought the conservative intellectuals at *The Freeman* into the anti-environmental fold came in the mid-1970s with the genesis of the Oil and Energy Crises. Blaming environmentalists for the effects of the energy crisis became standard editorial policy at *The Freeman* in the 1970s, even before the crisis reached its climax between the years 1973-1975.⁹⁴ Many of these criticisms made use of the same tropes as the journal’s articles on population: environmentalists were false prophets of doom whose belief in the need to curb energy consumption was primarily responsible for America’s inability to meet and defeat

⁹¹ On the impact of Maddox’s work see Layzer, *Open For Business*, 64-65; on the impact of Beckerman’s work, see Hoff, *The State and the Stork*, 226-227.

⁹² John Chamberlain, “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *The Freeman*, March, 1973, 186.

⁹³ Ibid, “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *The Freeman*, July 1, 1975. 448.

⁹⁴ James Wei, “Energy: the Ultimate Raw Material,” *The Freeman*, August 1, 1972, 490.

the crisis.⁹⁵ John B. Kizer, the owner of a consulting firm specializing in economic and scientific matters, framed the issue in unambiguous terms in a speech given to the Ohio Chapter of the American Institute of Real Estate Appraisers in 1974. “Most experts agree that one of the proximate causes of the energy crisis is the environmental movement,” he told his audience.⁹⁶ Enjoying the American way of life required the use of a lot of energy, he acknowledged, but environmentalists seemed determined to prevent such enjoyment. Bernard Seigan, one of the magazine’s most prominent anti-environmental voices, was even blunter in his condemnation of environmentalists. “This country has been on an environmental binge in recent years that is now raising havoc with the environment of the average American,” he grumbled. “For the average person, the only meaningful environment is that experienced daily, in the home, on the road, and at work, and we are learning the hard way that each requires a maximum supply of energy.”⁹⁷ If only environmentalists would go away, American corporations would be free to meet energy demand, he seemed to say. Unfortunately, such a prospect seemed unlikely. For conservatives like Kizer and Seigan, the environmentalist attempt to inhibit America from meeting its energy demands only further demonstrated their desire to enact “a massive transformation in our commercial and industrial society.”⁹⁸

It was not just regular contributors like Seigan or representatives of business interests like Kizer that made associations between environmentalism and America’s unfulfilled energy needs in *The Freeman*. The journal also harnessed powerful political and economic voices to further spread the notion that environmentalists were responsible for the crisis. In March of 1974, it reprinted a speech given by Edgar Speer, the Chairman of U.S. Steel, to the National Meeting of

⁹⁵ See for example FEE staff member Robert Anderson’s article “The Energy Crisis,” *The Freeman*, August 1, 1973, 460; also see Warren T. Brooks, “Is Our Economic Future Limited?,” *The Freeman*, November 1, 1976, 671-679.

⁹⁶ John B. Kizer, “The Energy Crisis: Alternative Futures,” *The Freeman*, August 1, 1974, 495.

⁹⁷ Bernard Seigan, “Environmentalism and Energy Problems,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1975, 365.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 366.

the Society of Industrial Engineers in which he noted that “you can pick up almost any issue of the news and trade magazines and read about the importance of our use of oil, gas, and other resources, because of the widening of the gap between consumption and domestic supply.” He attributed this desire to conserve to “the turmoil being created in the name of a cleaner environment by many groups, most of them sincerely concerned, but not always fully informed.”⁹⁹ The journal even reprinted, with permission, an article written in 1974 for *The American Farmer* written by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz in which he framed the environment-energy problem as a zero-sum game. “Are we going to have completely clean air and not enough energy? Are we going to disrupt a narrow strip of tundra and disturb some wildlife in remote parts of Alaska, while tapping the rich oil supplies there, or are we going to have gas rationing?” the Secretary asked forcefully.¹⁰⁰ The anti-environmental remarks made by Speer and Butz helped give political credence to *The Freeman*’s criticisms of environmentalists in much the same way that Maddox and Beckerman helped give them intellectual credibility.

The allusion to Alaska in Butz’s article mentioned above was no accident. The discovery of oil on Alaska’s North Coast in the late 1960s led many petroleum companies to clamor for immediate exploitation of available supplies, and the Nixon Administration made the development of a trans-Alaskan pipeline a top priority. Many environmental groups, including the Wilderness Society, Friends of the Earth, and the Environmental Defense Fund, despaired at the proposed project and sought to prevent construction of the pipeline under the legal statutes of NEPA. If the pipeline were built, they argued, then the region’s wildlife ecology would be almost certainly doomed. Many environmentalists preferred the development of an alternative route through the McKenzie Valley of Canada directly to the Midwest. Though the proposed alternative route was never taken seriously by the Department of Interior, the fight over Alaskan

⁹⁹ Edgar Speer, “Capital Conservation,” *The Freeman*, March 1, 1974, 143.

¹⁰⁰ Earl Butz, “There’s No Such Thing As A Free Lunch,” July 1, 1974, 435.

oil development proved to be a major conflict between environmentalists and their opponents that was given extra weight by the emergence of the energy crisis.¹⁰¹

The Freeman sided with business interests and the extractive industries in excoriating environmentalists for their refusal to see that Alaskan oil represented the perfect cure for American's energy ills. Bettina Bien Grievés, a senior staff member at the FEE, captured accurately the general opinion of the journal in a 1978 article addressing the causes of and solutions to the energy crisis. Beginning with the English economist William Stanley Jevons, who in the mid-nineteenth century declared that the earth's coal reserves would someday be depleted at contemporary usage rates, Grievés censured all those who "have prophesized doom in the past" and their "modern counterparts" for counseling restraint in the realm of energy use.¹⁰² Grievés reserved a special amount of scorn for the environmental groups mentioned above, whom she blamed for NEPA, the CEQ, and the EPA for their role in the creation and implementation of Environmental Impact Statements, which she viewed as a major hindrance to business's ability to develop energy resources. Environmentalists, she argued, had simultaneously laid the foundations for the energy crisis and prevented any solution to the crisis from being found. Eventually, against the continued objections of environmental groups, construction on the pipeline began in 1974 and was completed three years later. But in the minds of the libertarians at *The Freeman*, too much damage had already been done.

A final way in which the *Freeman's* anti-environmentalism can be viewed in the 1970s concerns the journal's synergy with other strains of conservative anti-environmentalism. In the late 1970s in particular the magazine published a number of articles lauding neoconservative attacks on the environmental movement. The Neoconservatives – the subject of chapter 4 – were

¹⁰¹ Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness*, 108-11.

¹⁰² Bettina Bien Grievés, "Energy in a Changing World," *The Freeman*, September 1, 1978, 532; For similar arguments, see Gary North, "How Not to Cure an Energy Crisis," *The Freeman*, February 1, 1974; Eugene Guccione, "The Government's Energy Crisis," *The Freeman*, September 1, 1975, 541-549; and Paul L. Poirot, "A Mineral Alert," *The Freeman*, February 1, 1976, 78-80.

a group of intellectuals who had professed to liberal or Left opinions from the 1940s through the 1960s but who gravitated rightward in the 1970s. The actions of the environmental movement played an important role in this shift. Like the libertarians at *The Freeman*, neoconservative intellectuals came to blame environmentalists for the hysteria and apocalyptic thinking on issues of population growth and energy production, but it was a uniquely neoconservative idea that drew the approval of libertarians: the New Class. Stated briefly, the New Class was a term used by neoconservatives to describe a newly emerging class of young, educated professionals who sought to hinder business interests through their infiltration of the government and the knowledge industry. For neoconservatives, the new environmental regulations of the 1970s served as the ultimate example of how the New Class sought to dismantle American capitalism.

The anti-environmental dimensions of the New Class idea serves as evidence of common cause between neoconservatives and libertarians. On more than one occasion, *The Freeman's* contributors' praised Irving Kristol, perhaps the foremost of neoconservative intellectual, for his ability to deconstruct the creeping interventionism inherent in the ideology and politics of the New Class.¹⁰³ Allan C. Brownfield, a lawyer and future policy adviser in the Reagan Administration, gave a glowing review to the neoconservative B. Bruce-Briggs' book *The War Against the Automobile*. Brownfield agreed with Bruce-Briggs argument that "environmentalists" and "ecologists" sought to cripple the American economy, and he called the book an "invaluable" tool that would allow conservatives to "understand the motivation of the enemies of economic growth and the free market" and to "better counter their political

¹⁰³ Melvin D. Burger, "Freedom to Choose," *The Freeman*, February 1, 1977, 107-108; also see John Chamberlain's review of Kristol's *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, "A Reviewer's Notebook," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1978, 445-448.

crusades.”¹⁰⁴ John Chamberlain similarly gave a spirited “amen” to the most overtly anti-environmental contributions to Bruce-Briggs’ edited volume on the New Class in 1979.¹⁰⁵

The Freeman’s approval of the New Class doctrine illuminates just how much anti-environmentalism had become a defining feature of the broader conservative intellectual movement in America. Libertarians and neoconservatives often engaged in heated disagreements about the form the movement should take and the function it should serve. Neoconservatives supported free enterprise capitalism, but they believed it needed to be restrained by a democratically oriented sense of morality, a limiting factor few libertarians would have sanctioned. Bridging the ideological divide that existed between the two groups proved no easy task, but the similarities that existed in their condemnation of the environmental movement demonstrate that anti-environmentalism helped play a crucial role in uniting the disparate strains of conservative thought. Disagree as they might on other issues, they could agree that the special interests propelling the environmental movement sought to create a political climate hostile to business interests. Neither libertarians nor neoconservatives could countenance such a development, and they agreed that their mutual interest in opposing such measures.

The synergy that developed between neoconservative opposition to the environmental movement and the brand of libertarian anti-environmentalism espoused at *The Freeman* demonstrate just how much the journal had evolved in a decade. During the 1960s, the journal had published a smattering of articles blasting that segment of the environmental movement associated with population growth and demography. But these articles were few and far between, and they were balanced by a number of articles supporting a number of issues important to conservationists and nascent environmentalists. The above examination of the articles published by the journal in the 1960s seems to indicate that no explicit editorial policy on these matters

¹⁰⁴ Allan C. Brownfield, “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1971, 384.

¹⁰⁵ John Chamberlain, “A Reviewer’s Notebook,” *The Freeman*, December 1, 1980, 759.

existed at that time. As the preceding discussion makes clear, however, just such an orthodox policy emerged in the 1970s. Attacks on business, the population controversy, and the energy crisis all indicated to the libertarians at *The Freeman* that environmentalists sought nothing less than the dissolution of capitalism itself, and they worked diligently to oppose the environmental impulse, often enlisting key intellectuals, economists, business leaders, and politicians to do so.

It needs to be noted, however, that despite the climate of environmental opposition that came to exist at the journal in the 1970s, many of its contributors still cared for the environment. Chamberlain favorably reviewed Barry Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Majority* in 1970, calling him one of America's "most articulate conservationists" and lauding him someone who "believes in free enterprise" and "the right of people to live in a clean environment."¹⁰⁶ Others foreshadowed the arguments of the free-market environmentalists and argued that the government itself, not private industry, was the major polluter in the United States.¹⁰⁷ Clearly *The Freeman* was not entirely devoid of an environmental impulse in the 1970s.

But even these contributions are not enough to obscure the anti-environmental trajectory of the journal's intellectual evolution on environmental matters in the 1970s. In that decade, the intellectuals associated with *The Freeman* seemed to care about protecting the environment, but they could not reconcile their desire for environmental protection against their revulsion with the goals and aspirations of environmentalists. At nearly every turn, environmentalists, aided occasionally by intellectuals like Ehrlich and Mishan, seemed to be pushing the federal government to create a massive regulatory state designed to hamstring business interests, limit economic growth, and restrict individual freedom. This led the journal's libertarian conservatives to view their relationship with environmentalism as a zero-sum game. Any gains made by the environmental movement inevitably would have to come at the expense of the free market

¹⁰⁶ John Chamberlain, "A Reviewer's Notebook," *The Freeman*, December 1, 1970, 757.

¹⁰⁷ Sennholz, "Radical Economics: Old and New," 149-153; Ibid, "Controlling Pollution," 74-77

ideology they prized so dearly. They fought back by arguing that environmental regulations would result in disastrous costs that the American public was not prepared to pay and by portraying business and ordinary Americans as the helpless victims of environmentalist fanatics. In doing so, the contributors to *The Freeman* played an important part in crafting an alternative, anti-regulatory interpretation of the “environmental decade,” one that influenced wider debates over environmental policy and significantly influenced the broader conservative intellectual movement’s relationship with environmentalism.¹⁰⁸

From Ayn Rand to the Cato Institute

The economists of the Chicago School of Economics and the business conservatives associated with the FEE and *The Freeman* contributed to the growth of anti-environmentalism among libertarians in the 1970s through professional and intellectual defenses of the capitalist system that rebutted the claims of environmentalists. Economists including Coase and Friedman, who were associated with one of America’s most prestigious universities, and intellectuals like Chamberlain, working for a powerful organization in the FEE, helped give much needed substance to the environmental opposition. Another source of that opposition originated from a more philosophical perspective in the 1970s: the writings of the iconoclastic right-wing philosopher-artist Ayn Rand. Beginning with her 1970 essay condemning the environmental movement as an “anti-industrial revolution,” Rand contributed to the growth of conservative anti-environmentalism in important ways. The growth of the Libertarian Party in the 1970s, for example, owed much to Rand’s ideas. The Randian intellectuals associated with the party struck a balance among Rand’s fulminations against environmentalism and the economic approach of the Chicago School and officially made anti-environmentalism orthodoxy within the party. The

¹⁰⁸ Layzer, for example, makes the case that conservative ideas concerning government regulation and free enterprise – ideas very much like those articulated in the pages of *The Freeman* – played an important role in shaping the revising of the Clean Air Act in 1978, in shaping the renewal of the Endangered Species Act in that same year, and in shaping energy policy during the Carter Administration. See *Open For Business*, 68-76.

founding of the Cato Institute in the late 1970s by the Koch brothers, Libertarian Party members and ardent supporters of Rand's philosophy, further demonstrates the anti-environmental influence of Rand's ideas on the Right. As a think tank dedicated to influencing mainstream politics and policy, Cato did much to make anti-environmentalism an important part of the policymaking process at the time of Reagan's election in 1980.

In some respects, it seems strange to include Rand in a discussion of the origins of conservative anti-environmentalism. To be sure, the author of *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) had much in common with conservatives and libertarians in the postwar period. Her experiences during the Russian Revolution before immigrating to America instilled in her a fierce opposition to communism and collectivism that rivaled and surpassed the likes of Kirk, Hayek, and von Mises. Over the course of her life, she grew into perhaps the most strident defender of American free enterprise capitalism that ever existed. And, above all, she was an unyielding foe of the American Left in all of its many guises. But for all of the general overlap in sentiment and ideas between Rand and American conservatives, she detested their beliefs almost as much as she detested the Left, and conservatives returned the favor many times over.

More than anything else, Rand was an atheist and an individualist, and she inveighed against religion with an unmatched fervor. The objectivist philosophy she crafted through her artwork valued unbridled self-interest and unfettered free enterprise over something as useless as religion. This dismissive attitude earned her the disapprobation of traditionalist conservatives like Russell Kirk. "Ayn Rand literally would put the dollar sign in place of the cross," he complained in his autobiography. For Kirk, life was "not worth living without love, sacrifice, and charity," three concepts Rand abhorred.¹⁰⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., a conservative respectful of tradition and a Roman Catholic, grew to dislike Rand intensely despite some early friendliness.

¹⁰⁹ Russell Kirk, *Confessions of a Bohemian Tory: Episodes and Reflections of a Vagrant Career* (New York: Fleet Publishing Corporation, 1963), 181.

Upon the publication of *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957, he assigned the review of the book to his mentor Whittaker Chambers, a former communist turned conservative with strong religious convictions, and Chambers delivered a scathing indictment of the book. For Buckley and Chambers, Rand's atheistic capitalism seemed almost as bad an ideology as godless communism. For her part, Rand was equally contemptuous of the meek conservatism of Buckley and Chambers, and Buckley excommunicated her from the conservative movement as a result of the controversy.¹¹⁰

Rand fared better with libertarian conservatives, many of whom were atheists themselves. Von Mises, a friend of Rand's, praised the *Atlas Shrugged's* willingness to acknowledge the harsh truths of how society works. John Chamberlain lauded Rand's book in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Freeman*, where Rand herself published occasionally. But even the libertarians and business conservatives associated with the FEE eventually earned Rand's ire as well. Although she was initially a great supporter of the FEE and its founder, Leonard Read, she quickly grew disillusioned with the organization's limited focus on education. Additionally, the FEE, which approached economics from a Misesian/Austrian style, published in the 1960s a pamphlet written by George Stigler and Milton Friedman which sanctioned government action on the issue of rent control in some circumstances. Rand was never a fan of Friedman or any of the Chicago School economists, and the pamphlet only confirmed to Rand that its authors and publisher lacked the true zeal needed to defend capitalism from its enemies. For Rand, even staunch supporters of the market like Read, Friedman, and Stigler could not meet the rigid standard of ideological purity she set for herself.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ On the strife between Rand and the mainstream elements of the American conservative movement, see Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174-176.

¹¹¹ On Rand's relationship with libertarian conservatives, see Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 176-178; and Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 189-195.

But if Rand was contemptuous of many libertarian figures within the conservative movement, she still shared their contempt for environmentalism, although her anti-environmentalism arose from a different source. In particular, it was Rand's association of environmentalism with the New Left and the counterculture that fueled her anti-environmentalism. In broad terms, the New Left consisted of young people who had been significantly influenced by their work in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. In the 1960s, many of these students participated in the organization Students for a Democratic Society and became increasingly radicalized as a response to America's military involvement in the Vietnam War abroad and to increased racial tensions on the home front. Unlike the intellectuals of the Old Left, who had derived much of their values from the labor movement and from Cold War liberalism, the campus radicals at Berkeley and other universities sought the immediate and drastic transformation of society through active rebellion rather than carefully planned incremental change.¹¹² Initially, the New Left paid little attention to environmental matters. Indeed, the New Left greeted the rise of the environmental movement with suspicion initially because they believed its emphasis on crossing political and ideological boundaries might detract from their own objectives.¹¹³ But events like the Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969 and the celebration of Earth Day in 1970 led many student radicals to incorporate elements of environmentalism into their generational rebellion.¹¹⁴

For Rand, the New Left's crusade to radically transform society represented a threat to her personal values and to the American capitalist system itself. In 1971, she published a

¹¹² For general histories of the New Left, see Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: the Sixties Era from Evils to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Also see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially chapter 9; Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: the Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), especially chapter 5; and John McMillian and Paul Buhle, eds., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

¹¹³ On the New Left's reluctance to embrace environmentalism, see Keith Woodhouse, "The Politics of Ecology: Environmentalism and Liberalism in the 1960s," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2 (2008): 53-84

¹¹⁴ See Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*

collection of anti-New Left essays under the title *The New Left: the Anti-Industrial Revolution*. The New Left's embrace of environmentalism played no small role in Rand's uneasiness. The book's subtitle received its name from a lecture Rand had given in 1970 detailing the insidious threat the environmental movement posed to America. The contributors to *The Freeman* often demonstrated a visceral opposition to environmentalism, but their reaction paled in comparison to Rand's fiery denunciations. According to Corey Robin, Rand's work often "tended toward the cartoonish and the grandiose," and her use of hyperbolic language and penchant for seeing the world in black and white terms often alienated her from her would-be fellow travelers on the Right.¹¹⁵ All of these elements of Rand's style were evident in her attack on environmentalism.

Rand began her lecture by telling her readers, in vivid detail, what the world of the future would look like should the New Left environmentalists have their way. All waste-generating technology has been restricted or eliminated in the name of controlling pollution, but the cure in this case seems worse than the disease. With no automobiles or coffee makers, the man of the house is forced to trudge through miles of cold and snow to government-operated mass transit systems that transport him to an exhausting job at a paper manufacturer that may go out of business at any moment due to environmental regulations. The man's wife has it worse. With no technology around, she must take care of the family and clean the house all through her own labor. She must walk to the grocery store and break her back transporting the groceries back to the house. Makeup has been deemed bad for the environment, so her harried look helps contribute to a joyless marriage in which neither partner is happy. "As you fall asleep," went the last line of Rand's story, "the air is pure above the roof of your house, pure as the arctic snow – only you wonder how much longer you will care to breathe it."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 81.

¹¹⁶ Ayn Rand, *The New Left: the Anti-Industrial Revolution* (New York: New American Library, 1971), 127-131, quotation on pages 130-131.

Rand made several arguments as to how and why “the attack on technology” that led to this bleak future was being “put over” on the American people by the New Left through “a package deal tied together by strings called ‘ecology.’”¹¹⁷ Rand’s overarching argument, and the one that gave the lecture its title, centered on the notion that the New Left and the environmental movement actively sought to propel the world backwards in time to a point before the Industrial Revolution had unleashed technology, pollution, and the other perceived ills of modern society. For Rand, modern day environmentalists were the intellectual descendants of “the mystics, the man-haters and life haters, the seekers of the unearned and the unreal” who had been fighting “human progress for centuries, by every means available.”¹¹⁸ Almost every dimension of environmentalist’s concern – overpopulation, pollution, energy use, wilderness – provided evidence of the environmentalist desire to banish technology and reinstitute the Dark Ages.

The finer points of Rand’s arguments would have resonated with many libertarian conservatives, although she framed them in more sensationalistic terms than they did. For instance, she believed that the immediate goal of environmentalism was obvious: “the destruction of the remnants of capitalism in today’s mixed economy, and the establishment of a global dictatorship.”¹¹⁹ Certainly Milton Friedman and *The Freeman* would have agreed in spirit with at least the first part of this statement. Rand exhibited some clever thinking in making this argument. She posited that the New Left’s attack on capitalism was a symptom of their realization that collectivism could not produce the utopian society the Left dreamed of. In the “New Left switch of the collectivists’ line,” they abandoned their belief that capitalism produced poverty while collectivism produced abundance and instituted in its place a belief that capitalism was evil “for creating abundance.”¹²⁰ The appearance of environmentalism, in other words,

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 132.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 145.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 140.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 141.

enabled the broader foes of American capitalism to sustain their assault on free enterprise under a different guise by transforming the nature of their critique. Such arguments made it seem as if environmentalists were hypocrites who would contort their rhetoric in any way necessary to ensure capitalism's demise.

But it was not just Rand's defense of capitalism that made her anti-environmentalism similar to others on the Right. Like many conservatives, she was skeptical about the depth of the environmental peril, calling it an "artificial, PR-manufactured issue, blown up by the bankrupt left."¹²¹ To her, the predictions of "universal doom" were the product of overblown environmentalist fears based on faulty science and a rigid ideological unwillingness to place their faith in technology's ability to solve all mankind's problems.¹²² She even parroted many of the arguments made by her avowed enemies at the Chicago School when she asserted that the abatement of pollution could be accomplished if only government would enforce laws defining property rights that it had passed in the nineteenth century.¹²³ For all her disagreements with libertarians and conservatives, Rand's attacks on environmentalism made use of the very tropes that they themselves had disseminated.

In typical Randian fashion, however, her most serious objections to environmentalism were on an intellectual and philosophical level, though these were no less bombastic than some of her other statements. Rand defended industry from environmentalist attacks and from the ever-growing welfare state, noting that "the collectivists have found – in ecology – a new excuse for the creation of more controls, more corruption, more favor-peddling, more harassment of industry."¹²⁴ But she was also harshly critical of industry as well, but not because of their pollution-spewing factories. Rather it was the "pollution of this country's intellectual life" that

¹²¹ Ibid, 142.

¹²² Ibid, 135.

¹²³ Ibid, 142.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 143

distressed her. “The deeper significance of the ecological crusade lies in the fact that it does expose a profound threat to mankind – though not in the sense its leader allege,” she continued. “It exposes the ultimate motive of the collectivists – the naked essence of *hatred* for achievement, which means: hatred for reason, for man, for life.”¹²⁵ Business leaders failed to recognize the seriousness of this threat posed by environmentalism, and this failure would ultimately lead to the future she described at the lecture’s outset. She ended her lecture by reminding her audience that the future of which she spoke was precisely the point of the environmental movement in the first place.

Rand clearly disliked environmentalism, and the consequences of her beliefs will be explored shortly, but it should be mentioned that some environmentalists found Rand’s objectivist philosophy intriguing. According to historian Andrew Kirk, an entire strain of countercultural environmentalism developed in the 1970s around the idea that free markets and capitalism were anything but antithetical to environmentalism. Kirk positions these environmentalists as the intellectual progenitors of modern day “natural capitalists” like Paul Hawken and Amory Lovins and of the business embrace of “green consumption.” For these environmentalists, the Randian emphasis on free markets and unrestrained reason provided a means of creating a true harmony between man, nature, capitalism, and technology.¹²⁶ Intellectual historian Jennifer Burns, in the latest and best biography of Rand and her relationship to the American Right, notes that Rand’s ideas made a noticeable impact on Stewart Brand, the author of the best-selling *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a “hippy-techno-geek bible” with a survivalist mindset.¹²⁷ The countercultural strain of environmentalism espoused by Brand shows that

¹²⁵ Ibid, 144.

¹²⁶ Andrew Kirk, *Counterculture Green: the Whole Earth Catalogue and American Environmentalism* (University Press of Kansas, 2007), 206-209.

¹²⁷ Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 262-263.

Randian ideas and libertarianism in general do not lead inevitably to an anti-environmental perspective. Libertarianism and environmentalism could coexist.

But for all of her ability to inspire figures like Brand, it is Rand's anti-environmentalism that most significantly influenced American conservatism. This influence can be traced by looking at the American Libertarian Party, which achieved its apotheosis in the 1970s. Heavily influenced by Rand in its early days, the party spent much of the decade wavering on the best course of action to promote libertarian ideas. Some in the party abhorred any direct involvement in politics while other factions believed direct political action was the only way to make their ideas effective. The party ran candidates for national office in 1976 and 1980, but with little success. By the end of the decade, the party had been riven from the inside as various factions fought for control.¹²⁸ At the head of one of those factions was Rand acolyte Murray Rothbard, an anarcho-capitalist and economist with much influence within libertarian circles. Rothbard's *Libertarian Forum* served as an unofficial party publication throughout the 1970s and reveals much about the party members' views on environmentalism.

In general, the anti-environmental views expressed by the contributors represent a mix of Randian beliefs, Chicago-style economic arguments, and *Freeman*-esque defenses of business and industry. In some ways, Rand's influence seems clear. One of the newsletter's chief contributors in its early days was Jerome Tuccille, a committed libertarian who ran for governor of New York in 1974 and who titled his semi-autobiographical account of his libertarian activism *It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand* (1971). In the early 1970s, Tuccille contributed several anti-environmental articles to the *Forum* that bore the stamp of Rand's *Anti-Industrial Revolution*. Tuccille's December 1971 article on "The Population Hysteria," for example, lambasted Paul Ehrlich and other neo-Malthusian "Doomsday Prophets" who refused to accept technology's

¹²⁸ For a concise view of the Libertarian Party's activities in the 1970s, see Burns, "O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?", *Journal of Policy History* 19 (2007), 452-470.

ability to mitigate the environmental crisis.¹²⁹ In an excerpt from his book *Paradise Found: a Nonfiction Romance*, Tuccille repeated Rand's argument that environmentalists sought a return to the "idyllic" past of the "pre-industrial economy," which they conveniently forgot was the home of "feudalism, poverty, disease, and hunger."¹³⁰ Tuccille eventually abandoned his hardcore libertarianism in favor of the more mainstream conservatism promoted by *National Review*, where he took a position in 1977, but he never escaped entirely the Randian influence on his beliefs.¹³¹

Rand's influence can be seen more indirectly in the libertarian controversy over nuclear power in 1979. In 1979, Martin Mueller and Roy Childs, two prominent libertarians associated with the Students for a Libertarian Society and its organ, *Libertarian Review*, came out in favor of shutting down the nuclear power industry. The *Forum* accused the two men of abandoning the "proper libertarian position on the issue" and promptly excommunicated them from the Party.¹³² What was this "proper position" of which the *Forum* spoke? In answer the newsletter pointed to Childs' review of Shepard's *The Disaster Lobby* in 1974. "If I were to name the single most important book on current affairs that I have read within the last two years, *The Disaster Lobby* would be that book, and there would be no close competitors," Childs had proclaimed. He further hailed the book as an in depth "journalistic study of the decade stretching from the early 1960's to the early 1970's, which the author calls 'The Age of Unreason,' and the movement that Ayn Rand has called 'The Anti-Industrial Revolution.'¹³³ According to the *Forum*, Childs and Mueller had been co-opted by the very environmentalists they had railed against just a few years earlier. For the contributors to the newsletter, this behavior represented a heresy against what

¹²⁹ Jerome Tuccille, "The Population Hysteria," *Libertarian Forum*, December 1971, 4.

¹³⁰ Tuccille, "Technology Forever," *Libertarian Forum*, October 1973, 7.

¹³¹ "The Tuccille Defection," *Libertarian Forum*, April 1977, 4.

¹³² "Nuclear Power Crisis," *Libertarian Forum*, July-August, 1979, 1.

¹³³ Roy Childs, "Review of the Disaster Lobby," reprinted in *Libertarian Forum*, July-August, 1979, 5.

they identified as the correct libertarian perspective on environmentalism: condemnation based on the necessity of defending free enterprise from its avowed enemies.

The newsletter's anti-environmentalism was not limited to Randian ideas, however. One author in 1972 echoed then California Governor Ronald Reagan's famous statement on Redwood trees – "If you've seen one, you've seen them all" – and blamed environmentalists for their impulse to "save every last tree, plant, and repulsive reptile from extinction, no matter the cost."¹³⁴ Walter Block, an economist and friend of Rothbard's, wrote an article in which he cast the modern strip miner as a heroic, progressive figure and belittled "liberal" environmentalist concerns about pollution and degradation of natural beauty.¹³⁵ Articles blaming "environmentalist crazies" for imposing "their particular esthetics on the rest of us by government coercion" during the height of the energy crisis and calling the OSHA "despotic" and "totalitarian" for the way it "terrorized small businesses" would have been perfectly at home in *The Freeman*.¹³⁶ In Rothbard's *Forum*, all forms of environmental opposition were given a fair hearing.

Rand and the Rothbardians at *The Forum* assimilated an anti-environmental perspective into their libertarianism during the 1970s, but what was the impact of their ideas? If we are to judge Rand's ideas or those of the libertarian party by their political success, then the impact would be miniscule. Even at the height of its influence in 1980, the Libertarian Party's attempts to influence national politics were stunted at best.¹³⁷ But that does not mean that libertarianism failed to influence national policymaking in important ways. In 1977, David and Charles Koch, Kansas billionaires with an active interest in funding libertarian causes, used their money to found the Cato Institute, a Washington, DC, think tank designed to promote libertarian ideas.

¹³⁴ Gerald P. O'Driscoll, Jr., "The Conservation Question," *The Libertarian Forum*, April 1972, 6.

¹³⁵ Walter Block, "The Strip Miner as Hero," *The Libertarian Forum*, November 1972, 4

¹³⁶ "Why no Oil Refineries," *The Libertarian Forum*, March, 1974, 6; "One Man Against OSHA," *The Libertarian Forum*, February 1977, 5.

¹³⁷ Burns, "O Libertarian, Where is Thy Sting?," 461.

According to Burns, the founding of Cato had a “transformative effect on the libertarian movement” by providing a “model for how to be a serious, accessible, and engaged libertarian” looking toward the mainstream of American conservatism.¹³⁸ In so doing, they joined other conservative think tanks like the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute and the New Right-oriented Heritage Foundation in providing a conservative counterweight to the Brookings Institution and other think tanks of the liberal establishment. More importantly, as Layzer notes, conservative think tanks helped give rise to “the conservative policy expert, whose function it was to reveal the biases of mainstream experts and generate policy analyses and prescriptions that would buttress efforts to promote new policy images” and alternative storylines.¹³⁹ In terms of environmental policy, Cato’s emphasis on respectable, expertly generated analysis meant turning away from the bombast of Randian anti-environmentalism and more towards the seemingly neutral anti-regulatory language employed by the Chicago School and, to a lesser extent, *The Freeman*.

One of the experts Cato employed during its early years was Yale Brozen, a professor of business economics at the University of Chicago and member of the FEE’s board of trustees best known for his critical views on government intervention in antitrust lawsuits.¹⁴⁰ In Cato’s early years, Brozen contributed an article to Cato’s *Policy Report* that exemplified the think tank’s approach to environmental matters. Brozen started off by informing his readers that “regulation, particularly in health, safety, and environment, accounts for almost half of the decline in productivity growth and for about one percentage point of rising costs.”¹⁴¹ In other words, environmental regulations were wreaking havoc with the American economy and responsible for

¹³⁸ Ibid, 460; also see, Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 310-413; and Burns, *Goddess of the Market*, 275-276.

¹³⁹ Layzer, *Open for Business*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ For an overview of Brozen’s life and career, see David R. Henderson, “In Memoriam: Yale Brozen,” *The Freeman*, June 1, 1998, 324-325.

¹⁴¹ Yale Brozen, “The High Cost of Government Regulation,” *Cato Policy Report* Vol. 1 No. 5 (May 1979), 1.

the economic malaise the country was experiencing under the Carter Administration. In true Chicago School fashion, Brozen assured his readers that the goals of legislation were laudable, but he cautioned that it was possible to “get more of a good thing than it is worth having.”¹⁴² Like many of the contributors to *The Freeman*, Brozen focused on the costs of environmental protection as a means of undermining environmentalists goals. For Brozen, automobile regulation, OSHA, the Coal Mine Safety Act, and the FDA all had good intentions, but the economic cost of those benefits far outweighed the social benefits. He ended his article by calling for the depowering of the EPA and FDA and the abolishment of OSHA as a means to redress this imbalance. Respected academics like Brozen made libertarian anti-environmentalism respectable in the late 1970s by replacing the vituperative language of Rand and the *Forum* with a more reasoned economic critique.

The Cato Institute also commissioned policy analyses by the likes of NYU economics professor Gerald P. O’Driscoll, Jr., who had railed against environmental regulation in the *Forum*, and Alan Reynolds, the President of the First National Bank in Chicago, who had served as one of *National Review*’s leading anti-environmental voices throughout the 1970s.¹⁴³ John A. Baden, the director of the Center for Political Economy and Natural Resources at Montana State University and a leading free-market environmentalist, contributed an article lambasting the federal government’s management of public lands and called for privatization in the name of efficiency.¹⁴⁴ Reynolds’ position at Cato is worthy of note in particular. His opposition to environmentalism in the pages of the fusionist-oriented *National Review* and at the libertarian oriented Cato Institute illuminates how anti-environmentalism transcended the boundaries dividing separating the strands of intellectual conservatism in America. That transcendence also

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ O’Driscoll, Jr., “Inflation , Stagflation, and Politics,” *Cato Policy Report* (July 1979); Alan Reynolds, “Energy Backwards,” *Cato Policy Report* Vol. 2 No. 1 (July 1979).

¹⁴⁴ John A. Baden, “The Environmental Impact of Government Policies,” *Cato Policy Report* (February 1982).

revealed itself during the early years of the Reagan Administration, the *Cato Journal* published entire volumes devoted to the question of pollution and to land use and resource development.¹⁴⁵ Many of the contributors to these volumes had close ties to the Chicago School and argued axiomatically against government regulation of air and water pollution and of natural resources on the grounds that it infringed on private property. Featuring the work of scholars like University of Chicago law professor Richard A. Epstein, these policy analyses jibed well with the deregulatory initiatives of the Reagan Administration and, indeed, their ideas helped influence federal policymaking in the 1980s.¹⁴⁶

The creation of the Cato Institute demonstrates just how far the Randian strain of libertarian anti-environmentalism had come in the 1970s. At the decade's outset, Ayn Rand's bombastic denunciations of "the anti-Industrial Revolution" conveyed a visceral reaction to the environmental movement that bordered on outright hatred. Throughout the decade the influence of Rand's thinking could be seen in publications associated with the Libertarian Party, especially Rothbard's *Forum*. But by the end of the decade, the Libertarian Party and some of its most important members, most notably the Koch brothers, had moved away from this instinctual dislike of environmentalism. They had come to the realization that such bald faced attacks on environmentalism would never be capable of generating real change in the realm of politics and policy. To be sure many libertarians held and still hold the belief that all environmentalists are radical Leftists out to destroy the free enterprise system itself. But with the founding of Cato in 1977, libertarians were able to bury or at least mask this animosity by cloaking it in the emerging language policy expertise. Libertarian opposition to environmentalism gained the veneer of professionalism that it had been lacking and which it needed to gain mainstream acceptance. But

¹⁴⁵ See "Cato Symposium on Pollution," *Cato Journal*, (Spring 1982); and "Land Use and Resource Development," *Cato Journal* (Winter 1983).

¹⁴⁶ See Layzer, *Open for Business*, 125-127; and Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Green Backlash: the History and Politics of Environmental Opposition in the U.S.* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Reinner Publishers, 1997), 256-257.

it was a veneer only. Despite Cato's appearance of professionalism, its views on environmental matters were still fundamentally Randian: environmentalists remained members of the radical Left who fabricated an "ecological crisis" as a means of subtly eroding and eventually destroying the American system of capitalism. Most other intellectuals in the broader conservative movement harshly criticized Rand, and Rand returned the favor tenfold, but her views on environmentalism, and the views of those who carried on her legacy, had much in common with the anti-environmentalism of the Chicago School and *The Freeman*. Rand's hyperbolic statements and ideological rigidity often put her at odds with other conservatives, but her ideas nevertheless contributed to the anti-environmental convergence in libertarian thought taking place in the 1970s.

Conclusion

If Thomas Shepard had surveyed the landscape of libertarian ideas on the environment in 1980 as he had done in 1971, he would have found that his attitudes towards "the Disaster Lobby" had almost become orthodoxy. Even at the time of his original article, important libertarian figures, especially those associated with the Chicago School, had already begun to question the values animating the nascent environmental movement. Shepard had apparently not read much of Friedman's or Coase's remarks on the problems of social responsibility. But by decade's end, it would have been almost impossible for any observer to fail to note the proliferation of libertarian thought denouncing the environmental movement. Libertarian conservative intellectuals had spent the entirety of the 1970s attacking and undermining the environmental movement as often as they could. It had begun with the work of economists like Coase and Friedman, but the business conservatives associated with the FEE and *The Freeman* were no less vociferous in their condemnations. Ayn Rand, the Libertarian Party, and the Cato

Institute also played a key role in denouncing environmentalists for their role in disrupting the free market. All of these intellectuals and the organizations to which they belonged seemed to agree with Shepard's interpretation of the environmental movement. For them, as for Shepard, the environmental movement had little to do with its stated aims of making air safer to breathe and water safer to drink, of protecting the beauty of America's countryside, and of eliminating toxic substances to improve human health. Rather, they saw environmentalism as a potent threat to America's system of free enterprise capitalism.

But libertarians seemed to view even the mainstream and well-meaning actions of environmentalists as a threat to the core values they had spent a lifetime defining and articulating. When Earth Day's celebrants attended teach-ins at the local university, they were not trying to learn how to forge a more equitable relationship between humanity and nature; they were becoming indoctrinated with the ideology of the anti-capitalist New Left. When an activist Congress, supported by a broad swathe of the American public, passed laws like the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and NEPA, they were not trying to improve the quality of life for Americans; they were implementing a power grab that would replace capitalism with state collectivism. For libertarians, the "transformation in values" generated by the environmental impulse had little to do with the concepts of beauty, health, and permanence, and had much to do with the desire to regulate industry and eliminate capitalism altogether. The vast majority of libertarian conservatives saw environmentalism as a persistent disruptor of market freedom.

And leading libertarians were in a position to influence the wider intellectual and political discourse over environmental policy. Coase and Friedman were among the most influential and respected members of the economics profession and served as faculty members at one of America's most prestigious universities. Coase's ideas proved to be the intellectual basis for the Law and Economics Movement that revolutionized the legal profession, and Friedman worked

tirelessly to forge relationships among conservative scholars and institutions and to communicate his beliefs to the wider public. The objectivist philosophy of Ayn Rand, helped give rise to the Libertarian Party and ensure that many libertarians, such as the Koch brothers, would eventually call the American Right their political and intellectual home. Libertarians created and disseminated their work in the 1970s through a network of think tanks financed by conservative money interested in promoting the virtues of free enterprise. The FEE, the Mont Pèlerin Society, the Free Market Project, the Volker Fund, the Olin Foundation, and the Cato Institute; these were institutions and organizations capable of exerting influence on political matters, despite the relatively small number of donors and intellectuals who financed and staffed them. These networks contributed in one way or another to the dissemination of libertarian anti-environmental ideas and, in doing so, help fuel the conservative alternative to the environmentalist storyline in the 1970s. The influence on policy was not direct, but it was effective in eroding the underlying rationale of environmental protection and in draining the massive public support for environmental protection that characterized much of the 1970s.¹⁴⁷

The synergy between libertarian anti-environmentalism and other forms of conservative anti-environmentalism is similarly striking, especially during the latter half of the decade. At this time, neoconservative intellectuals like Kristol and Bruce-Briggs were condemning environmentalists as member of the New Class, a new breed of young professionals radicalized by their experiences in the 1960s and who sought to institutionalize an anti-capitalist worldview through their work in government. This was music to the ears of libertarians like John Chamberlain, and he lauded their attacks on environmentalism. But it was not just neoconservatives who also drew applause from the supporters of free enterprise. One 1979 article in *The Freeman* cited approvingly an article written for *Harper's* by the journalist and

¹⁴⁷ Layzer,

environmental skeptic William Tucker that blamed environmentalists and government regulations for needless restrictions on biological insecticides.¹⁴⁸ Tucker was not a member of the conservative intellectual movement, but his writings resonated with libertarians, and they did not hesitate to use them in their attacks on environmentalism. James Jackson Kilpatrick – conservative firebrand, friend of William F. Buckley, Jr., and frequent contributor to *National Review* – also contributed an anti-environmental article to *The Freeman* in 1975 arguing that the environmentalist crusade for regulation of business had gone too far.¹⁴⁹ The anti-environmental arguments made by Alan Reynolds effortlessly flowed between the ideological barriers separating *National Review* from the publications of the libertarian Cato Institute. None of the figures listed above were avowed libertarians, but the inclusion of their ideas within libertarian circles demonstrates the unifying power of anti-environmentalism within the American conservative movement.

Even Meyer, whose “Conservative Answer to Pollution,” advocated many sound environmental policy prescriptions, proved susceptible to the anti-environmental currents rife within American libertarian thought. He expressed uneasiness, for example, with the “more radical environmentalists” associated with Garret De Bell’s *Environmental Handbook*, prepared for Earth Day’s celebration on April 22nd, 1970, especially their desire to “return to a simpler, less technological economy as the only sane solution” to pollution.¹⁵⁰ Echoing many libertarian attacks on Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, he argued that “the violent attack by environmental activists on DDT” had “considerably overshot the mark” and done more harm than good. Meyer also attacked the many “scare theories” of imminent apocalyptic doom advanced by environmentalists used to justify the assault on free-enterprise. “If we turn the war on pollution

¹⁴⁸ David Kelly, “The Bases of Economic Planning,” *The Freeman*, March 1, 1979, 160-170.

¹⁴⁹ James J. Kilpatrick, “The New National Nightmare,” *The Freeman*, December 1, 1975, 712-716.

¹⁵⁰ Meyer and Meyer, “The Conservative Answer to Pollution,” 130; also see Garret De Bell, *The Environmental Handbook: Prepared for the First National Environmental Teach-In* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970).

into a war on capitalism and technology,” he argued worriedly, then the “ant-heap of communism” was not far off.¹⁵¹ Meyer’s discomfort with some aspects of environmentalism reveals an important truth: even when libertarian conservatives demonstrated a belief in the goal of environmental protection, they could not escape entirely the nagging feeling that insurmountable ideological divides would prohibit them from finding true common ground.

The anti-environmental beliefs of libertarians can be further placed into relief by relating them to the beliefs of traditionalist conservatives like Meyer’s nemesis Kirk. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, Kirk supported a number of environmental issues because he believed that the environment, or whatever one wished to call nonhuman nature, formed a key link in the great chain of being. Taking his cue from Edmund Burke, Kirk believed that the dead, the living, and those yet unborn were forever linked by a divinely oriented eternal contract. Given these beliefs, Kirk argued that present despoilment of the environment was tantamount to a crime against the divine order because it prevented future generations from enjoying the “heritage of humanity.”

¹⁵² Such beliefs led Kirk to support unequivocally the environmental movement in the 1960s and the early-to-mid 1970s. Protecting the environment in the present for the benefit of those in the future was the sacred duty of all right-minded conservatives. He even went so far as to support student radicals working on Earth Day and to argue specifically for government intervention in order to protect the environment from the unscrupulous behavior of corporations.

As individualists interested in freedom, most libertarians had little or no use for Kirk’s Burkean ideas. Meyer might have been willing to support a free market approach to environmental regulation in 1972, but most Americans agreed with Kirk: only government power could ensure proper protection of the environment. But Meyer also had significant grievances with the environmental fanatics who denounced capitalism, and the general thrust of

¹⁵¹ Meyer and Meyer, “The Conservative Answer to Pollution,” 136-137.

¹⁵² Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (New York, Avon Books, 1973), 64.

libertarian thought over the course of the 1970s demonstrates that most libertarian conservatives agreed with his condemnations of environmentalism rather than his free market environmentalism. For libertarians, to restrain an individual's or corporation's right to exploit the environment the present in the name of some distant future was a heretical belief.

The contrast between the views of traditionalist conservatives like Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver in the previous chapter and the views of the libertarian conservatives considered in this chapter are important. The 1960s and 1970s were a time of intense intellectual self-definition for American conservatives. Long dismissed by American liberal intellectuals like Lionel Trilling and Louis Hartz as irrelevant malcontents incapable of influencing American history or politics, conservatives in those decades engaged in an organized attempt to interject an intellectually charged, politically viable form of American conservatism to the mainstream of American public life.¹⁵³ But what form that conservatism would take was still very much a matter of debate. Would mainstream conservatism bear more resemblance to the traditionalist strain of conservatism, or would it be cast more in the image of the libertarians? The answer to this question would have enormous consequences for the conservative intellectual movement's relationship with environmentalism.

¹⁵³ See Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1951); and Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: an Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

Chapter Three

“Do We Want Environment?”: William F. Buckley, Jr., *National Review*, and the Conservative Anti-Environmental Synthesis

Just over a year after the celebration of the First Earth Day, M. Stanton Evans, conservative editor of the *Indianapolis News* and the leading intellectual disciple of Frank Meyer, took to the pages of *National Review Bulletin* to censure the wave of environmental activism that gripped the nation since April 22nd, 1970. “Speaking sanely on pollution is not easy,” Evans opined, because “the ground rules for discussing it have little or nothing to do with rational debate.” The article asserted that realists like Evans, who dared to speak truth to environmentalist power, could scarcely interject their voices into the national conversation on pollution because the “rules stipulate that in addressing the question, one does not resort to so vulgar a procedure as citing evidence, comparing present conditions to those which preceded them, or seeking a balance of social objectives. Panic laced with a dull Luddite hostility to technological advance is the demanded attitude.”¹ Despite the uptick in environmental activism following Earth Day, Evans remained soured by the fact, as he perceived it, that the national conversation on the environmental crisis had been dominated by extremist voices whose understanding of the crisis was not grounded in reality.

But all was not lost. “One by one the voices of sanity are making themselves heard on the much-belabored issue of pollution,” he informed his audience with a growing optimism. One voice Evans pointed to was none other than Thomas R. Shepard, Jr., the editor of *Look* magazine who had coined the term “disaster lobby” in reference to the environmental movement earlier that year. Other voices included Milton Friedman, Harold Demsetz, and the other University of Chicago faculty members who contributed to *The Legal and Economic Aspects of Pollution*. And

¹ M. Stanton Evans, “At Home,” *National Review Bulletin*, April 27, 1971, B62.

finally, he pointed to his mentor and his mentor's son – Frank S. and John C. Meyer – as further bastions of sanity for their article “The Conservative Response to Pollution.” Given Evans status as Meyer's protégé, it is perhaps not surprising that he lauded the approach to environmental problems of libertarian conservatives like those mentioned above. But Evans's remarks reveal more than they let on at first. As the preceding chapter demonstrated, all of the publications to which Evans referred advanced noticeably anti-environmental arguments. It is true that the Chicago School economists and the Meyers did propose free market solutions to environmental problems, but their chief purpose ultimately revolved around protecting the American capitalist system from federal regulation and the excesses of radical environmentalists. By positioning these authors as “voices of sanity” in the environmental debate, Evans rationalized the emergence of conservative anti-environmentalism as a necessary and proper antidote to the environmentalists who had hijacked the national conversation.

What is even more interesting than his justification for opposition to environmentalism is that nowhere in his article did Evans refer to Russell Kirk or any other traditionalist conservative. Kirk had been supporting environmentalism for years prior to the publication of Evans' article, and, as Chapter One noted, his conservative credentials could hardly be questioned. This raises several important questions. Was Evans unaware of Kirk's stance on environmental issues? Given that Evans was an important conservative in his own right and intimately familiar with Kirks' brand of conservatism, this seems unlikely.² But if that was not the case, then why omit Kirk from the discussion? Is it possible that Evans' viewed Kirk's views on environmentalism as contributive to the poisoned discourse on the environment? It is impossible to know for certain, but the fact that Evans celebrated the anti-environmental viewpoints of libertarian conservatives while overlooking the likes of Kirk reveals much about the relationship between American

²See George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 185-185.

conservative intellectuals and environmentalism in the 1970s. The fact that he expressed these opinions in the *Bulletin*, a periodical offshoot designed to give readers important updates in between editions of *National Review* proper, reveals even more.

It is impossible to understate the importance of *National Review* to the growth and development of the American conservatism after World War II. The magazine was founded by young conservative William F. Buckley Jr. in 1955. Buckley had become a national sensation four years earlier when he published *God and Man at Yale: the Superstitions of "Academic Freedom,"* an excoriation of the atheism and relativism taught by Yale University, his alma mater.³ The book's publication signaled Buckley's arrival as one of America's foremost conservative thinkers, and *National Review* quickly became the single most important periodical in the American conservative movement.⁴ George H. Nash, the foremost historian of the conservative intellectual movement in America, went so far as to argue in 1976 that "to a very considerable degree, the history of reflective conservatism in America after 1955 is the history of individuals who collaborated in – or were discovered by – the magazine William F. Buckley founded."⁵ Put simply, the history of mainstream American conservatism can be viewed in large part by looking through the pages of *National Review*.

But the conservatism espoused by Buckley and the conservative ideas he disseminated through his position as editor of *National Review* differed slightly from both the traditionalism espoused by the likes of Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver and from the libertarianism espoused by Milton Friedman, Leonard E. Read, and Ayn Rand. Buckley had two major goals in mind for his new magazine. The first centered on combating the liberal intellectual and political agenda, which Buckley and his fellow conservatives believed to be the dominant ideology in America at

³ William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale: the Superstitions of Academic Freedom* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951).

⁴ On the Founding of *National Review*, see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York, Basic Books, 1976), 148-153.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

that time. The second goal revolved around defining which principles should serve as the foundation of American conservatism. According to Jeffrey Hart, a stalwart conservative who served as *National Review*'s senior editor for much of the magazine's existence "the history of *National Review* represents a Quest Narrative: the quest for a politically viable and thoughtful American conservatism."⁶ But as the previous two chapters demonstrate, conservatism in America has never been a monolith. In the years after World War II, traditionalists and libertarians often disagreed fiercely with one another over which form of conservatism would most forcefully shape the ideological contours of the broader conservative intellectual movement in America

Eventually, however, conservatives from all parts of the spectrum were able to find common cause, and *National Review* played no small role in facilitating the disparate strands of intellectual conservatism into a blend of traditionalism and libertarianism known as fusionism. The project of knitting together the traditionalist and libertarian strands into a cohesive intellectual whole was undertaken primarily by Frank Meyer, Evans' mentor, Kirk's longtime intellectual antagonist, and a frequent contributor to *National Review*. In his enormously influential essay, "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism," (1960) Meyer contended that whatever differences lay between the two modes of thought, common ideological principles did exist, and these commonalities could bridge the chasm and make conservatism a potent intellectual and political force. Although an implacable opposition to communism represented the most important area of convergence between the two positions, Meyer also lauded the way "the traditionalist . . . fights alongside the libertarian against the collectivist Leviathan state of the twentieth century."⁷ Four years later, Meyer published *What Is Conservatism?*, an edited collection of essays by intellectuals across the conservative spectrum, including Kirk, William F.

⁶ Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2005), xi.

⁷ Frank S. Meyer, "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism," *Modern Age* 4 (Fall 1960): 360.

Buckley, and Hayek. From the content of the essays, it is clear that internecine struggles still existed in the conservative movement, but Meyer's closing chapter reaffirmed the notion that the two strands could find common ground in opposing the liberal interventionist state created by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s:

Whether the concentration of conservatives is on the importance of the free-enterprise economic system and the strict limitation of the state as a guarantee of the freedom of persons from the plans of the social engineer, or on the living multiplicity of the community arising from the rich tradition of a civilization, the libertarian and the traditionalist emphases within conservatism alike reject the centralized power and direction necessary to the 'planning' of society.⁸

Anti-communism and opposition to liberal state planning, in Meyer's opinion, could function as the glue holding together the differences between the two ideological endpoints.

Historians have for the most part agreed that Meyer succeeded, though not without considerable turmoil, in his program of fusing together the opposing strands of conservatism. Significant internal divisions remained between traditionalism and libertarianism, and putting a complete end to these tensions proved all but impossible. But despite the tenuous nature of the union between the two sides, they managed to reach a tentative compromise in the hope that a unified partnership would be enough to move from the ideological margins of American politics and society to the mainstream. In Meyer's opinion, William F. Buckley represented the perfect fusionist conservative: an intellectual with traditionalist and libertarian sympathies who could operate comfortably with a foot in each conservative camp. The articles Buckley published in the pages of *National Review* further demonstrated to Meyer that conservatives of all stripes could comfortably coexist. Meyer and Buckley hoped that fusionism would allow conservatives to use

⁸ Ibid, "Consensus and Divergence," in *What Is Conservatism?*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), 231.

their energy to influence the most important political issues of the day rather than waste it on sectarian struggles.⁹

But what role did the rise of environmentalism play in the generation of fusionist conservatism? The preceding chapters make it clear that traditionalists and libertarians were diametrically opposed in their views on nature and on the environment. Traditionalists believed that nature served as the living embodiment of divine creation and that humans should remain pious in light of that fact. Libertarians of all stripes frequently made clear that they had no use for traditionalist ideas about nature or the environment. It was neither religion nor morality that dictated their relationship to the environment, but free enterprise capitalism and the well-being of America's corporate class. They viewed the growth and development of environmentalism in the U.S. as directly antithetical to the well-being of both and staunchly opposed environmentalism at nearly every turn. How would William F. Buckley, Jr. and *National Review* negotiate the thorny environmental terrain staked out by the two opposing strains of conservative thought? What, exactly, would the fusionist perspective of environmentalism look like, and what does the answer tell us about intellectual conservatism in America more generally?

It is only in the light of the fusionist program of the 1960s that *National Review's* hostility to the environmental movement after 1970s can be adequately understood. The 1960s were an important decade for the growth and development of the environmental movement, and William F. Buckley, Jr. and many conservatives associated with *National Review* took note of this growth and lent their intellectual energies toward supporting some of the movement's most

⁹ See: Nash, 186; Godfrey Hodgson *The World Turned Right Side Up: a History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 88-90; Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming, *The Conservative Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 18-19; Gregory L. Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 58-60; Jerome Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), 56-57; Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the Republican Right Rose to Power in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 22-25; Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 179-180.

popular goals. Libertarian-leaning conservatives, including William F. Buckley himself, often argued for solutions to environmental problems that favored private enterprise rather than government intervention. Traditionalist conservatives such as Russell Kirk contributed editorials calling for the protection of natural beauty from the hands of developers and even went so far as to demand government action. In this sense, the environment represented a perfect case in which libertarians and conservatives could bridge their ideological divide in the 1960s. Good friends like Buckley and Kirk could disagree on the form that environmental protection might take, but they both believed that such protection was a top priority for America. Similar to *The Freeman* during the same time periods, *National Review* in the 1960s frequently communicated its support for conservationist and environmentalist aims.

All of that changed beginning in 1970. Whereas in the 1960s many conservatives associated with the magazine had voiced support for environmental protection, in the 1970s *National Review* unleashed a torrent of articles concerning all aspects of the environmental movement. This is perhaps surprising, considering environmentalism's popularity in the 1970s, a time when environmental protection became an issue of overriding importance to Americans of all stripes. But *National Review* did not move in sync with national attitudes in this regard. In fact, while more and more Americans became vocal supporters of the movement, the magazine's contributors emerged as active opponents. During these pivotal years, the environmental advocacy of traditionalists like Kirk disappeared almost entirely from *National Review's* pages. Libertarians stopped arguing in favor of environmental protection through private means and instead offered blistering condemnations of the movement. Traditionalist conservatives still found a warm welcome for their ideas in the magazine's pages – Kirk would write for the magazine for many decades after 1970 and James Buckley published the occasional article – but their opinions on environmental matters no longer were produced in print. Almost overnight a

coherent and recognizable anti-environmental ideology had become standard editorial policy at *National Review*.

There are many explanations for this transformation, and many of these explanations center on the same developments that led the libertarians featured in the previous chapter to oppose environmentalism. First, environmentalism's association with the radicalism and counterculture of the 1960s rendered the goals and aspirations of the environmental movement illegitimate in the eyes of many fusionist conservatives. The celebration of the first Earth Day and other important events in the 1970s helped introduce Americans from all walks of life to the importance of taking action to protect the environment, but the writers of *National Review* interpreted it to be a new "fad" or "crusade" associated with the student, anti-war, and feminist movements. Second, many of the magazine's contributors viewed environmentalists as sensationalist dreamers with no sense of how damaging the implementation of their goals would be to the national economy. Third, some conservatives perceived a distinctive strain of anti-capitalist ideology within the environmental movement. For fusionists, the call for environmental protection seemed like the political realization of the anti-capitalist goals promoted by their political antagonists: the American Left. Relatedly, the increased regulation of environmental protection by the federal government in the early 1970s also alarmed many fusionists. Government intervention on environmental matters ran counter to two of the most deeply held conservative principles: mistrust of the state and advocacy of the free market. For conservatives, legislation such as the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970 and the Clean Water Act of 1972 seemed to signify the triumph of the liberal collectivist state, something they had been fighting against for decades. Fourth, the apocalyptic mentality of certain environmentalist thinkers, especially those focused on population growth and resource depletion, established within the mind of the magazine's editors the idea that environmentalist were fanatical doomsayers wrongly

convinced of humanity's immanent doom. And lastly, many conservatives came to blame environmentalists for the drastic effects of the oil and energy crises that wracked the American economy during the middle and later years of the decade.

But changes to the very core of what it meant to be a conservative were responsible as well. The goal of fusionist project of the 1960s was to unite conservatives and libertarians into a "conservative mainstream," as Frank Meyer called it in 1969, through the bonds of anticommunism, anti-statism, and a defense of capitalism.¹⁰ In the 1960s, the environment qualified as another issue on which the two found common ground, but this ceased to be the case in the 1970s; traditionalist defenses of the environment waned over time in the pages of *National Review* while libertarian-style attacks waxed. Evans' article exemplifies this trend. As Meyer's protégé, Evans was one of the most important advocates of intellectual fusion within the broader conservative movement, but his article's anti-environmental remarks and his seeming contempt for traditionalist support for environmentalism demonstrates that no real fusion of principles occurred in conservative intellectual discourse about the environment. Fusionism came to resemble libertarian anti-environmentalism in remarkable ways, and this resemblance owed much to the overt eschewing of traditionalist environmental principles. In other words, as intellectual historian Jennifer Burns has noted, the mainstream of American conservatism united around libertarian principles rather than traditionalist ones.¹¹ Traditionalism certainly did not fade, but their ideas, which had once been so influential within the broader conservative movement, exerted less and less influence. Libertarianism had become, for all intents and purposes, the dominant strain of conservative thought, and this trend would have significant impacts on conservative politics for decades into the future.

¹⁰ Frank S. Meyer, *The Conservative Mainstream* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969).

¹¹ See Jennifer Burns, "In Retrospect: George Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American since 1945*," *Reviews in American History*, 32 (2004), 447-462.

William F. Buckley Jr., *National Review*, and 1960s Environmentalism

If the *National Review* of the early 1970s failed to give a fair shake to the concerns of environmentalists as James Buckley argued, then the same could not be said of the magazine in the 1960s, and nor could it be said of the magazine's founder, William F. Buckley, Jr. To be sure, environmental issues rarely received extensive treatment on the pages of the magazine during the tumult of the 1960s. *National Review* and its contributors remained focused on the war in Vietnam, the quest for African American civil rights, the unrest on America's college campuses, and the global ideological struggle between America and the Soviet Union. But both Buckley occasionally carved out a space in which he or certain of the magazine's contributors could talk about issues pertaining to the preservation of natural beauty, pollution, and the so-called "population explosion." In most cases, the conservatives at *National Review* seemed to agree with environmentalists on the causes of environmental problems and the need for a response, even if their proposed solutions did not always resemble those proposed by environmentalists. But the fact remains: almost none of the anti-environmental beliefs that characterized *National Review* after 1970s were evident in the pages of the magazine during the previous decade.

Throughout the 1960s, *National Review*'s opinions on the environment echoed those held by William F. Buckley, Jr. Like his friend Kirk, Buckley's experiences early in his life seemed to imbue him with a concern for the natural world. In a 1966 speech on "The Politics of Beauty," he remarked on his childhood experiences in the 1930s in Sharon, a small town in northwestern Connecticut that his father moved to because of its "extraordinary beauty." In Sharon, Buckley's family lived "among many acres of green, on a property called Great Elm, after a tree of noble girth and stature which was reputed to be the largest elm in Connecticut." When Buckley was a young boy, Dutch elm disease struck Sharon and decimated the area's elm population, including

the Great Elm, which afflicted his father with a “preternatural silence” as he mourned the tree’s unjust fate. According to Buckley, he and his ten brothers and sisters embraced their father’s love of the natural world and continued to “care very deeply about the elms and the shrubs and the flowers, and the stillness, and the town” long after the elder Buckley’s death. In particular, the siblings seemed to “come by that repose of the soul, about which we here more and more, as related to one’s surroundings.”¹² Buckley’s retreat into what Kirk called the “world of silence” did not imbue Buckley with the same spiritual reverence for nature that it did for Kirk himself, but it shaped the former’s vision of nature in similar ways.

One childhood incident especially seemed to impress upon the young Buckley the need to preserve beauty against those who would soil it. In 1939, the owner of the local soda fountain and cigar store hoisted a “spectacular Coca-Cola sign” above his building, an “unnecessary piece of exhibitionism” in Buckley’s eyes as “there was only one other place in all of Sharon to go if you wanted Coca-Cola at the fountain.” Both of Buckley’s parents opposed the ugliness that billboards created on the natural and man-made landscape long before the more famous anti-billboard campaigns of the 1960s. His mother especially objected to the billboard’s because she was an active member of the Garden Study Club of Dutchess County, whose “principle effort was to guard the Hudson River against the irruptions of billboarders who had designs on its banks for the large and garish announcements of their magical contributions to modern commerce.” Though his father forbade it, Buckley and his siblings undertook a “venture in beautification” one night and rendered the sign unreadable with the aid of a bucket of white paint. Undeterred, the store owner merely erected another billboard some days later. Crestfallen, Buckley realized that, “like Hercules, we were not equipped to cut off Hydra’s head.” Buckley acknowledged the role the incident played in inculcating a love of natural beauty and the need to

¹² William F. Buckley, Jr., “The Politics of Beauty,” Reprinted in *The Jeweler’s Eye: a Book of Irresistible Political Reflections* (Putnam, 1968), 262-263.

protect that beauty. “I am, then, myself committed to the notion that attractive external surroundings can mean a great deal, and to the corollary that something ought to be done” about their protection, he affirmed.¹³

Buckley’s commitment to the beauty of nature can be viewed most clearly in his writings on the federal public lands during the 1960s. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the governance of those lands, especially in the West, became an important issue as wilderness advocates, Congress, cabinet-level administrators, and agencies including the National Park Service worked together to shape a policy that would allow the public to enjoy America’s natural heritage and protect it from external threats. One of the leading figures in fashioning the policies governing the public lands was Stewart L. Udall of Arizona, who served as Secretary of the Interior from 1961-1969 under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. Udall was not unsympathetic to the efforts of certain federal agencies to open national parks and other public lands to dam building and other forms of development.¹⁴ But over time he grew to embrace a new system of governance, distinctly liberal and Democratic in nature, which prioritized environmental protection as a public good that should readily be available to all Americans.¹⁵ For example, in 1963’s *The Quiet Crisis*, Udall stated his belief that America’s character had been steadily weakening as it increasingly became “a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished daily by pollution and noise and blight.”¹⁶ Sentiments such as these were shared by many Americans during the 1960s,

¹³ William F. Buckley, Jr., “The Politics of Beauty,” 264-265.

¹⁴ Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 75-76; Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967), 228-229.

¹⁵ On the essential liberalism of Udall’s approach, see Adam Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance’: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *The Journal of American History*, 90 (September 2003), 532. For Udall’s positive contributions to environmentalism, also see: James Morton Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 26-28 and Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 57.

¹⁶ Stewart L. Udall, *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Reinhardt, and Winston, 1963), viii.

and they demonstrate the important role that public lands preservation played in generating the nascent environmental movement in the United States.

Surprisingly, Buckley's opinion on the public lands debate proved remarkably similar to that of the liberal-Democrat Udall when it came to protecting America's natural beauty in the 1960s. "As regards the maintenance of the natural beauty of great parts of the nation, the weight of the argument is, once again, on the side of the public," Buckley observed, and Udall was as "aggressive a champion of the necessity to maintain oases of natural beauty as anyone who ever held high federal office." To be sure, certain of Udall's beliefs and policy prescriptions rankled the conservative Buckley. "Sometimes," Buckley grouched in his "Politics of Beauty" speech, Udall gave the impression "that he resents any private dwelling at all, on the ground that it is liable to get in the way of a meandering buffalo." Such remarks prefigured some of the more irreparable disagreements Buckley would have with environmentalists in the 1970s. But, good natured japes aside, Buckley found that Udall's "occasional excesses, unlike those of some of his own coadjutors, are tolerable in an age that very much needs to be reminded of the factor of beauty, natural and man-made."¹⁷

In fact, Buckley went so far as to repudiate certain of his fellows on the Right who lamented the role the federal government had assumed with regard to environmental protection. It was unlike Buckley to break ranks in such a way, but he freely admitted his willingness to "depart from the company of those conservatives who are always resenting the acreage owned by the government, always provided said government does not go hog-wild, and that the great reservations continue . . . to be dedicated to the enjoyment of the public." Buckley's love of beauty, learned from his parents at an early age, seemed to instill in him a desire to protect the beauty of the natural world that was, if not directly in line with Udall and other, more well-

¹⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Politics of Beauty," 271-272.

known figures whose beliefs and actions helped usher in the age of environmentalism, then one that was very close to it. In this way, it was not just liberals, but also leading conservatives who provided an important boost to the environmental movement of the 1960s.¹⁸

Nor was Buckley alone among conservatives who wished to protect natural beauty. During the 1960s, *National Review* published a small number of articles in which other conservatives defended the environment from the ravages of commercialism, development, and other outside threats. For example, Kirk made an impassioned plea for the protection of architectural and natural beauty in American cities from the hand of unscrupulous developers. “Few corners of the world are exempt from a raging destruction of historical and beautiful buildings,” the sage of Mecosta fumed in 1965. Responsibility for such reprehensible attitudes was easy enough to point out. “The principle cause of this devastation is greed,” Kirk noted: “The avarice of ‘developers, contractors, architects, land speculators, political contactmen, faceless mercantile corporations, and their hangers-on.’” The quest for an architecturally sound and beautiful form of urban renewal represented one of the most important issues facing the environmental movement of the 1960s, and Kirk was more than willing to take sides. In fact, Kirk’s remarks were not all that dissimilar from those made by Jane Jacobs in her landmark study of urban environments in *The Death and Life of American Cities* (1961).¹⁹

In another *National Review* article in 1966, J.B. Jackson, the editor and publisher of *Landscape* and perhaps the foremost academic authority on America’s cultural landscape, lauded the efforts of Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson to beautify America’s highways. “Campaigns of this sort are part of a valuable American tradition,” Jackson argued, because they represented a “periodic housecleaning on a community scale.” Without an “occasional reminder of how our

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kirk, “Destroying the Past by Development,” *National Review* 17 (1965), 285; On the importance of Jane Jacobs to the environmental movement, see Andrew Kirk, “From Wilderness Prophets to Tool Freaks: Post-World War II Environmentalism,” in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History* (Blackwell Publishing, LTD, 2010), 286-287.

surroundings can be improved, without public outcries against neglect and abuse of the landscape,” the American people were likely to find themselves “living in the midst of accumulated squalor.” Jackson’s thoughts with regard to keeping America beautiful jibed well with the two titans of conservative thought, and the article’s inclusion in *National Review* seemed a tacit endorsement of that point of view.²⁰

But even more surprising than the fact that conservatives in the 1960s supported the protection and preservation of natural beauty are the methods they advocated for doing so. Environmentalists in the 1960s sought to harness the power of the federal government to ensure that America’s national parks and wildlands remained free from development. This notion seems antithetical to core precepts of conservative thought, especially notions of private property and free enterprise, but during the 1960s some conservatives including Buckley and Kirk believed that government intervention necessary and desirable to keep America beautiful. Buckley argued that “the role of our various governments, local, state, and federal, ought to remain primarily negative. Governments are as a rule are better at reeling off prohibitions than fancying themselves as creative artists.” But despite this thinly veiled shot at the Great Society, Buckley asserted that the government’s ability to set aside land aligned neatly with conservative principles. “The withholding of land, to be retained in its supernal beauty, is a legitimate function of government, as Adam Smith was among the first to point out,” he noted.²¹

Kirk proved even more unequivocal in his call for government protection. “Few people are more reluctant than this writer to interfere with private property and free enterprise,” Kirk admitted candidly, but “no man, and no corporation, has a vested right to make a town and a country ugly and monotonous, or to annihilate the past for immediate profit. The time has come

²⁰ J.B. Jackson, “Abolish the Highways!”, *National Review* (November 29, 1966), 1213; On the role that roadside beautification played in the environmental movement of the sixties, see: Rome, “Give Earth a Chance,” 534, 537; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation*, 96-98; Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 53.

²¹ Buckley, “The Politics of Beauty,” 269;272.

when governmental powers must be employed to save what remains of our visual heritage.” These are astounding remarks coming from intellectuals who, in any other arena, would have excoriated the government’s hands-on approach to policy making. The opinions of Kirk and Buckley, however, demonstrate just how much of a unifying issue the environment was in the 1960s. Liberals John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Stewart Udall advanced ideas that were not all that dissimilar from those advocated by their fiercest critics. The existence of commonalities between intellectuals with wildly disparate political views would not last forever, but the fact that it existed at all is important.²²

Of course, not all conservatives within the orbit of *National Review* supported the government’s efforts at protecting America’s natural beauty. Robert M. Hyatt, one of those conservatives with whom William F. Buckley disagreed with on environmental protection, contributed an article in 1965 titled “Let’s Halt the Federal Land Grab.” “In case you haven’t heard, the federal government is on a land buying spree,” the article opened. “The Federal Government now owns more than one-third of the land in the fifty states It paid for this land with the taxpayer’s money, yours and mine, removing it from the tax rolls of the states, where it is needed for schools, roads, and other functions of local government.” On the surface, Hyatt presented a legitimate critique of the federal government’s use of its powers. If its activities were unjustly impoverishing local communities, then perhaps their actions should be stopped. But in the end, Hyatt revealed that his critique had less to do with protecting local communities than in protecting free enterprise. “Much of the land proposed for acquisition is productive forest land that will be needed as the population grows. And certainly most of it is needed on local tax rolls to enable these units to retain their independence of the Federal Government and to ease the tax burden on land remaining in private hands. Before any more land is acquired by government,

²² Kirk, “Destroying the Past by Development,” 285.

private entrepreneurs, especially farmers, should be given the opportunity to make their maximum contributions to the nation's recreational pattern." Hyatt's message was clear: land should be concentrated in private hands, and its primary use should be for economic gain rather than for protection. In the 1970s, economic arguments like these would become more common at *National Review*, but in the 1960s it remained an outlier.²³

The focus on protecting America's natural beauty represents only one instance in which Buckley and the conservatives at *National Review* were concerned about issues facing the environment. The so-called "population explosion" represented another area of concern. As was the case with regard to the protection of America's open spaces, *National Review* and its founder walked in lock step with the environmentalist Ehrlich. In 1965, Buckley devoted one of his regular "On the Right" columns to the issue of the world's birthrate. Despite the Reverend Thomas Malthus's original "dour" predictions concerning population, the world had seen fit to ignore him, assuming that "the procreative energies of the world could not possibly overtake our productive ingenuity." Such thinking had been wrong, however, Buckley insisted, and the world's miscalculation could prove dire. "That old dog Malthus turned out to be very substantially correct in his dire predictions, and there seems to be no point in waiting until the United States is like India before moving in on the problem," he warned.²⁴ In that same year, *National Review* produced a special edition devoted to "The Population Explosion." With titles like "The Avalanche," "What Exit for Asia?" and "How Births Can Be Controlled," it is not surprising that the apocalyptic predictions of the conservative contributors easily equaled anything ever written by any of the neo-Malthusians. In this respect, fusionist conservatives differed substantially from libertarian conservatives in the 1960s. The business conservatives at *The Freeman* viewed the association between population growth and environmental degradation

²³ Robert M. Hyatt, "Let's Halt the Federal Land Grab," *National Review* (November 2, 1965), 984-985.

²⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Birth Rate," *National Review*, March 23, 1965, 231.

as dubious from the start because they believed such concerns served as a disguise for an attack on the capitalist system. Fusionists would eventually come to agree with libertarians on this point in the 1970s, but in the 1960s they seemed to fear the consequences of overpopulation every bit as much as environmentalists.²⁵

Buckley even devoted an entire episode of his weekly television show, *Firing Line*, to the population crisis in 1969, the year after Ehrlich published his best seller. Buckley's guests on the program were Dr. Alan Sweezy, a professor of population studies at Caltech and a future national chairman of Planned Parenthood, and Dr. Colin Clarke, an economist famous for formulating the Gross National Product as the basis for studying national economies. As was often the case on *Firing Line*, Buckley moderated a conversation between two experts holding diametrically opposed views. On the one hand, Sweezy believed the population explosion imperiled the environment greatly whereas on the other hand Clarke seemed unconcerned about the problem and believed that technology and economic planning would render it moot. In the following years, Buckley and *National Review* would eventually adopt Clarke's views on population as tacit editorial policy (Clarke continued to write for *National Review* in the 1970s), but Buckley conducted his interview evenhandedly. "Both men are brilliantly trained," he told his audience in his introductory remarks. Though obviously no fan of certain among Sweezy's opinions, Buckley also pressed Clarke on his reluctance to endorse state sanctioned birth control measures, which Buckley, a staunch Roman Catholic, surprisingly endorsed. This episode of *Firing Line*, much like Buckley's editorials in *National Review* and the special issue on "The Population Explosion," demonstrate the propensity of environmentalism in the 1960s to create

²⁵ See editorial note accompanying Theodore Sturgeon's article "The Avalanche" in *National Review*, "The Population Explosion," July 27, 1965.

strange bedfellows among intellectuals from different sides of the political and ideological spectrum.²⁶

Two final issues that should be considered in terms of the conservative commitment to environmental protection in the 1960s revolve around air and water pollution. The 1960s witnessed an acute spike in the concern over the nation's air and water quality as a number of events made clear that pollution threatened not just the environment, but also human health. Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring* warned Americans about the dire consequences the synthetic chemical DDT posed to humanity and the animal kingdom alike.²⁷ Later, two separate events in 1969, the Cuyahoga River fire in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Santa Barbara oil spill in California, demonstrated to the public that the ethic of progress so characteristic of the American character after World War II, often came at the expense of the environment.²⁸ Important legislation such as the original 1963 Clean Air Act was also passed during the tumult of the 1960s.

It is true that *National Review* carried no articles worthy of distinction on pollution in the 1960s. The magazine did not publish a review of *Silent Spring*, or articles on the Cuyahoga River fire or the Santa Barbara oil spill. Air and water pollution, however, were of great concern to William F. Buckley. This is most evident in his failed mayoral campaign of 1965 in which he ran as New York City's Conservative Party alternative to the Liberal Republican John Lindsay. Buckley put up a valiant fight as the champion of conservative ideas and a fierce opponent of the Great Society, but in the end he could not overcome New York City's liberal leanings and Lindsay took the election. During his campaign, Buckley emphasized the threat that pollution posed to the health and environmental well-being of the city, and the need to act quickly to solve the problem. One of his campaign press releases noted that "at a time when a large portion of

²⁶ William F. Buckley, Jr., "The Population Explosion," *Firing Line* 156, June 23, 1969. P. 1. Transcript courtesy of the Hoover Institution: <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/firingline/programView2.php?programID=177>.

²⁷ On the importance of *Silent Spring* to American Environmentalism, see Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 85-90. Also see Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance,'" 536-537.

²⁸ On the Cuyahoga River fire and the Santa Barbara Oil Spill, see Rothman, 99-105.

mankind is apparently prepared to have government assume control over the social and economic affairs of individuals, there is little inclination to use government to solve a problem generally outside the competence of the private citizen: the contamination of the natural elements by the malevolent waste products of industry and technology. Here, indeed, is a legitimate function of government.”²⁹ The call for government action in the press release deserves special attention. It shows Buckley’s willingness to advocate actions otherwise antithetical to his conservative instincts in order to protect the environment. For Buckley, pollution control, akin to the protection of natural beauty, was one activity where government intervention should not be opposed.

Of course, Buckley did not abandon his conservative instincts completely. “The pollution problem,” he clarified, “is one that eminently qualifies for local solutions, devised and implemented by the by the communities directly affected. The federal government has no legitimate concern with the purification of New York City’s air and water.” Buckley’s statement is reminiscent of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s remarks nearly a decade earlier when he vetoed a national water pollution control bill on the grounds that “water pollution is a uniquely local blight.”³⁰ His anti-statist instincts aside, Buckley clearly desired to improve New York’s pollution problem, especially when it came to the dumping of sewage in the water supply and the noxious fumes produced by New York’s factories. In fact, his proposed solutions may have been ahead of their time. In cases where industry created pollution, Buckley proposed making the polluters pay by levying higher taxes on corporations that damaged the environment. He also proposed tax breaks for companies that implemented pollution control measures without government provocation. These solutions to the problems of air and water pollution bear more than a passing resemblance to the underlying ideas of the free market environmentalists of the

²⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Pollution Control: Where is the Government Hiding,” Position paper issued for release on October 21, 1965, 1.

³⁰ See Rome, “Give Earth a Chance,” 534.

1980s and beyond. Unfortunately for Buckley, the rising environmentalist tide favored drastic government intervention rather than market measures, and this divergence would create tension between the conservative Buckley and the environmental movement in the 1970s. In the 1960s, however, Buckley's environmental beliefs remained not all that dissimilar to those of leading environmentalists.³¹ Like the traditionalist conservatism of Weaver and Kirk, the fusionist perspective of William F. Buckley, Jr. and *National Review* demonstrated the possibility that conservatives and environmentalists might have forged a lasting relationship based on shared principles in the 1970s. But this was not to be.

The Emergence of Anti-Environmentalism at *National Review*

Throughout the 1960s, *National Review* and its founder weighed in on behalf of a number of important environmental issues. From the desire to protect America's open spaces to the concern over the ill effects of population growth, conservatives including Kirk and Buckley sounded strangely similar to liberal Democrats such as Udall and environmental scientists like Paul Ehrlich. Throughout the whole decade, the magazine published one article – Hyatt's rebuke of the government "land grab" – that could be construed as advancing an anti-environmental position. But this all begs several important questions: if, under Buckley's auspices, *National Review* exhibited a concern for the environment and a desire to protect it, then from whence came Senator's James Buckley's lament in the July 1973 edition of *National Review Bulletin* concerning conservative opposition to environmentalism?³² Why did *National Review*-style conservatism not build on the commonalities it shared with environmentalism in the 1960s and use them as the basis for a "conservative environmentalism" in the 1970s? How did the "outright bias" emerge in a magazine that had previously demonstrated few such tendencies? And why,

³¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Pollution Control: Where is the Government Hiding," Position paper issued for release on October 21, 1965, 3-6.

³² James L. Buckley, "Washington," *National Review Bulletin* (July 27, 1973), B110.

exactly, did the alleged anti-environmental orthodoxy emerge as editorial policy at *National Review*? These are not easy questions to answer, but the evidence suggests several likelihoods.

It seems logical to begin any inquiry into conservative anti-environmentalism in the year 1970. 1970 remains a landmark year in America's environmental history for a number of reasons. First, April 22nd witnessed the celebration of the first Earth Day. Organized by Gaylord Nelson (D-WI), Earth Day was a nation-wide event in which Americans from all walks of life attended teach-ins, speeches, concerts, and other activities as a demonstration of their commitment to environmental protection. From New York City to California, from Detroit to Birmingham, hippies and members of the counter culture rubbed shoulders with middle class men and women, civil rights activists, and scientific experts in a united effort to combat pollution and other environmental ills. The event succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of its organizers and made a lasting impact on many who partook in the celebrations.³³ The other reason 1970 remains significant has to do with the political reaction to the environmental crisis. Congress, the President, and a host of organizations made the environment a top priority beginning in 1970. The Nixon Administration in particular took drastic action to curb pollution. Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act into law on New Year's Day, 1970, and this legislation among other provisions, required the use of Environmental Impact Statements for any project receiving federal funds. That same year also witnessed the passage of the landmark amendments to the Clean Air Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. The events of 1970 confirmed that environmental protection had become a priority for the American people and for the highest levels of government.³⁴

³³ For the most comprehensive treatment of Earth Day, see Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

³⁴ On the Nixon Administration's environmental actions, see Rothman, *The Greening of A Nation?*, especially Chapter 5. Also See J. Brooks Flippen, *Nixon and the Environment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), especially Chapters 2 and 3; on Congressional support for environmental issues, see Paul

Despite the burgeoning popularity of environmentalism throughout the nation, the conservatives at *National Review* grew more skeptical as to the true impact of the environmental impulse in the wake of Earth Day's celebration. Frequently, the headlines found *National Review* and the supplemental *National Review Bulletin* demonstrated a mocking tone that reflected their feelings of doubt. "Who is the Cleanest of Them All?," "Will the Real Ed Muskie Please Shut Up," and "To Air is Human; to Neglect Benign" represent just a few examples of the titles accompanying articles or anonymous short pieces in 1970. The most common opinions advanced in these arguments revolved around the notion that concern for the environment was a "fad" that had captured the public's interest momentarily, but that would fade over time as the political catering to environmental interest inevitably waned.

"We've just got to find a new Cause every six months or so to keep the old adrenalin flowing," one article opined facetiously. "Fallout, civil rights, Vietnam, ghettos, hunger, poverty – they've lost their kicks and something fresh must be added. Anti-pollution has got everything it takes. The Sir Galahad devotion to purity. The St. Francis dedication to the well-being of all living things. The St. George assault on dragon Big Business." Another article poked fun at Nixon's articulation of this commitment to the environment in his 1970 State of the Union speech, noting that "the President not only jumped right on the anti-pollution bandwagon but pushed right into the driver's seat." In another piece, one anonymous writer asked "Can we really blame a politician for exploiting an issue that at the moment burns bright in the public bosom?" in reference to Senator Edmund Muskie's (D-ME) pollution control efforts.³⁵ On the surface, the glibness of these articles seems harmless. Indeed, such reactions were not

Charles Milazzo, *Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

³⁵ "Who is the Cleanest of Them All?," *National Review Bulletin*, January 20, 1970, B1; "Who Pays for Anti-Pollution?," *National Review*, February 10, 1970, 125; "Will the Real Ed Muskie Please Shut Up?" *National Review*, 1970, 240; "To Air is Human; to Neglect, Benign," *National Review*, March 24, 1970, 295; "All Unquiet on the Economic Front," *National Review Bulletin*, February 3, 1970, B9.

incompatible with some of the mainstream responses to the events of 1970.³⁶ But the tone of these articles and the increased frequency with which they appeared in *National Review* demonstrate a subtle but noticeable shift in William F. Buckley's editorial policy that portended more forceful critiques of the environmental movement.

To take one example, as the events of 1970 unfolded, the conservatives at *National Review* wasted little time in portraying the growing concern over the state of the environment as a political tactic of liberals and the radical Left. One article in *National Review Bulletin* observed drolly that "liberal journalists" and "liberal politicians" like Muskie and Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington were "panting with anticipation" at the prospect of creating even more federal environmental agencies "than there are redwoods left in California."³⁷ John R. Coyne Jr., a regular contributor to *National Review* and future speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan and the Amoco Corporation, delivered a more serious critique of environmentalism in January of 1970. Citing a newsletter produced at the University of California, Coyne warned his readers that the rise of ecological concerns could give the flagging forces of the Left a boost as the war in Vietnam wound down and the issue of race became increasingly divisive.³⁸

In particular, Coyne focused his attention on the "whole pesticide flap," which he viewed as "central to the current cliché about 'poisoning our environment.'" The struggle between agricultural workers and agribusiness in California represented a clear case of the new environmental logic of the Left. "The new villains are the civilian members of the military-industrial complex. Growers take the place of the Green Berets, migrant workers become the peasants, and DDT replaces napalm. Chemical warfare on the home front. And the atrocity victims are crop pickers, nursing mothers and the little birdies. And chief among the gallant

³⁶ See for example the response to Earth Day's celebration in Adam Rome, "The Genius of Earth Day," *Environmental History* 15 (April 2010): 195-196.

³⁷ "Who is the Cleanest of Them All?", B1.

³⁸ John R. Coyne, Jr., "Doctored Grapes," *National Review*, January 20, 1970.

domestic leaders in Caesar Chavez, hero of the California grape strike.”³⁹ Articles like Coyne’s set an important precedent at *National Review*. They demonstrate the growing partisan divide separating Left and Right on environmental issues. In the 1960s, Buckley had more or less agreed with his foe Udall on how to handle the protection of the federal public lands. But after 1970, the articles Buckley accepted for publication at *National Review* advanced increasingly the idea that environmentalism had become a tool of the Left’s most radical elements and could no longer be countenanced. Potential commonalities between the Left and the Right had been replaced by ideological and political polarization.⁴⁰

This opposition can also be seen in James Burnham’s December 1970 article on “Peace and Pollution.” Much like some other contributors to *National Review*, Burnham had once been a man of the Left. Throughout the 1930s, he had been a committed Trotskyite and defender of the Soviet Union, though he never fully committed to Marxism. After the publication of *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), a book detailing the emergence of a new class structure in twentieth-century America dominated by managerial professionals, Burnham became increasingly disillusioned with the Left and gradually moved to the Right. His polemics against the Left quickly drew the attention of William F. Buckley, Jr., with whom he became fast friends. In 1955 his name graced the masthead of the first edition of *National Review*, and his regular columns on the “Third World War” (the Cold War) and “The Protracted Conflict” (domestic affairs) made him perhaps the magazine’s most influential contributor.⁴¹

“Peace and Pollution” carried the same tone and advanced arguments similar to Coyne’s. “I’m beginning to wonder,” Burnham contemplated, “whether this Antipollution Movement

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ On the political polarization between Right and Left in the 1970s, see Turner, *The Promise of Wilderness*, 227-232.

⁴¹ On Burnham’s intellectual journey from Left to Right, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 91-97. On Burnham’s influence at *National Review*, see Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, especially Chapter 2.

(Campaign, Crusade) may not turn out to be the Peace Movement of the Seventies.” By late 1970, the movement for peace was fading, and Burnham believed that the supporters of peace hoped to use environmental issues to stimulate their fading influence on the political process. Echoing Coyne, Burnham argued that “As the Antipollution Movement shaped up and got going, the target, the villain, the Enemy, emerged from the mists, and, lo and behold, it was none other than our old familiar, the Military-Industrial complex. That is, Antipollution turned out to have exactly the same target as Peace.” But, in Burnham’s estimation, the opinions of the “marching morons” who supported the environmental cause remained hopelessly misguided. “It is tiresome to note . . . that anything that has been, is being, or will be done in a major way about pollution, was, is, and will be done, not by the public-interest lawyers, the clergymen, birdwatchers, politicians or publicists, but by the military-industrial complex.” Earth Day’s ties to the student movement of the 1960s and 1970s seemed to indicate to Burnham that his political enemies seemed greatly in favor of environmental protection. As a conservative sworn to oppose liberalism in all its forms, it is not surprising that Burnham and others at *National Review* embraced anti-environmentalism as a way of challenging the liberal political platform.⁴²

On some level, the association between the Left and environmentalism made by Coyne and Burnham seems curious and not a little misinformed. Despite these claims, many factions on the Left were opposed initially to the rise of environmentalism as a political issue because they believed it wrongfully drew attention away from anti-war protest and the struggle for racial equality.⁴³ In August of 1970, *Time Magazine* published an article on “The Rise of Anti-Ecology,” but described how the opposition in this case arose not only from conservatives, but also from disgruntled SDS members and black radicals angry that environmentalists seemed to

⁴² James Burnham, “Peace and Pollution,” *National Review*, December 29, 1970, 1392.

⁴³ See for example, Keith Woodhouse, “The Politics of Ecology: Environmentalism and Liberalism in the 1960s,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2 (2008): 53-84.

have stolen their thunder.⁴⁴ “A few months ago, when all the world, as it were on the same day, discovered ecology, I ventured privately to predict that the enthusiasm for the environment was in for some trouble,” William F. Buckley, Jr. wrote shortly before the First Earth Day.⁴⁵ That trouble, however, would come not from the Right, but from student radicals concerned that environmental policy was crowding out more pressing issues of social policy. The future neoconservative Richard John Neuhaus devoted nearly three hundred pages of text to critiquing the environmental movement from a New Leftist perspective in his book *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism*.⁴⁶

Clearly in 1970, conservatives were not the only constituents that made up the environmental opposition. But it is also true that many members of the Left also supported environmentalism enthusiastically, and, as James Burnham pointed out, support for environmental issues was already skewing left by the end of 1970. Coyne’s and Burnham’s articles were symptomatic of the larger forces at play in *National Review* and the larger conservative intellectual movement in America. Whether perception or reality, conservatives had come to view environmentalism as a creature of the Left in the wake of Earth Day, and as such, their outlook on environmental issues became one of suspicion and opposition rather than support.

Environmentalism’s association with the Left represented one source of the emerging conservative opposition to environmentalism in 1970, but another wellspring for that opposition proved to be the analysis exorbitant costs of implementing environmental protection and the strain these costs would place on the economy. Here *National Review* raised many of the same concerns voiced in the previous decade by Milton Friedman and other economists at the

⁴⁴ “The Rise of Anti-Ecology,” *Time Magazine*, August 3, 1970, 42.

⁴⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Bulletin from the Ecological War,” *National Review*, April 7, 1970.

⁴⁶ Richard John Neuhaus, *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

University of Chicago, a fact that spoke to the growing linkages between libertarian conservatism and *National Review* style fusionism. In some ways, this mode of anti-environmentalism was even more formidable than those mentioned above. Its goals centered on the notion that environmentalists would have to face up to hard economic truths if their goals and aspirations were to be translated into public policy. One exemplary article, tellingly titled “The Anti-Pollution Squeeze,” criticized the Senate’s passage of the National Air Quality Standards Act of 1970. The article acknowledged that no sane person wanted pollution per se, but that was not the point. “The issue might be put this way,” the article corrected: “*How* clean do we want our air, water and earth to be, and *at what price?*”⁴⁷

The article left no doubt as to what the answer would be if Senator Ed Muskie and the environmentalists had their way. It would mean an inevitable “economic squeeze within which it will be exceedingly difficult to sustain production of other things – food, shelter, transport, recreation, trifles – at the escalating level to which we have grown accustomed.” In effect, the article posited that environmental protection existed on one side of a balance scale with the economic well-being of the American people on the other. Place too much weight on the environmental side of the scale, and the other side would suffer correspondingly. The article’s emphasis on the costs of environmental protection became a familiar tactic for the fusionist conservatives writing for *National Review*.⁴⁸

Burnham, for instance, focused heavily on the issue of cost in his appearance on an episode of *Firing Line* centering on ecological issues in early 1971. The episode featured a conversation between Burnham and Rene Dubos moderated, as always, by William F. Buckley, Jr. Dubos, the Pulitzer Prize winning microbiologist and a member of President Nixon’s Advisory Council on Environmental Quality, provided a number of thoughtful remarks about

⁴⁷ “The Anti-Pollution Squeeze,” *National Review*, November 3, 1970, 1150-1151;

⁴⁸ Ibid; “The Polluticians,” *National Review*, February 24, 1970, 190-191; “Who Pays for Anti-Pollution?,” 125; “Will the Real Ed Muskie Please Shut Up?,” 240.

how humans could cope psychologically with the threat to the environment posed by pollution. Burnham, who, according to Buckley, was “one of the two or three men in America who have warned against the ideologization of ecology,” used the forum to reiterate his doubts about environmentalism. “I prefer clean water to polluted water and cleaner air to smog-bound air,” he assured the audience. But, he continued, “on the other hand it really always is a question of *how* clean and how clean in relation to what social energy and money and resources are going to be used for. For instance, to get it perfectly clean but alas you can’t get it perfectly clean, but to go from 99.2% clean to 99.7% clean I understand from books I’ve read on these matters costs more than to bring it up to 99.2%; well now, is that worth it or not? I don’t know.”⁴⁹ Burnham’s ignorance in this case was feigned. His remarks on the program and his earlier article made clear his disbelief in the worthiness of the environmental cause. The issue of cost, for him as for other conservatives within the orbit of *National Review*, merely provided the means by which environmentalism could and should be undermined.

Other articles emphasized increasingly that the environmental movement represented a growing and dangerous threat to the American system of free enterprise capitalism. “It is already becoming apparent how the current enthusiasm for conservation of natural environments can be fashioned into a nasty weapon for those who dislike business on general principles,” *National Review* editor William F. Rickenbacker complained early in 1970.⁵⁰ The *Bulletin*’s negative response to the celebration of Earth Day made similar arguments. Earth Day’s celebration “tended to miss the point,” it argued, namely that there is more to the ‘quality of life’ than clean air and water, and if the environment is to be cleaned up, choices will have to be made and costs (not merely financial ones) counted.” Furthermore, the Earth Day participants, especially those on college campuses, tended to “equate pollution and capitalism,” and certain of the “dangerous

⁴⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Ecology,” *Firing Line* 233, January 7, 1971, 14. Transcript courtesy of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University: <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/firingline/programView2.php?programID=254>

⁵⁰ William F. Rusher, “Conservation and the Environment,” *National Review*, 1970, 242.

and powerful elements” behind Earth Day’s celebration sought nothing less than “the dismantling of technological civilization.” Such impulses, Rickenbacker argued, were not only dangerous, but also misguided. Near the end, he stated emphatically that “only big business has the know-how, the resources, and the flexibility of response to deal with the problem.”⁵¹ The message here could not be clearer: environmentalists did not care about the strain that their agitations would put on business and the American people. It was possible to translate the desires of environmentalists into policy, *National Review* was willing to concede, but doing so would mean that Americans would have to cease living the good life that capitalism afforded them. Neither the contributors to nor the readers of the magazine found the notion appealing.

Nor did these appeals cease any time soon. *National Review* continued to hammer away at the notion that environmental protection remained undesirable due to cost of implementation or because their staunch support of capitalism so dictated. Richard B. Carroll, a meteorological scientist and one of *National Review*’s leading anti-environmental voices,” published an article in 1971 on “Air Pollution Myths” in which his perfunctory obeisance to the desirability of cleaner air clearly lost out to the need to protect business. “It’s like establishing a ten-mile an hour (sic) speed limit on the Kansas Turnpike,” he griped. “Although we obviously want to keep the birds singing, we have to keep the economy humming too.”⁵² Chemical engineer Arthur Gerunda reached similar conclusions a year later when he argued that the effort to remove lead from gasoline would unfairly almost destroy the auto industry.⁵³ One anonymous blurb in the midst of the energy crisis in 1977 lampooned environmentalists who had “rediscovered the free lunch” simply by ignoring the costs of their actions.⁵⁴ A critique of the perceived anti-business,

⁵¹ “After Earth Day,” *National Review Bulletin*, May 12, 1970, B68-B69.

⁵² Richard B. Carroll, “Some Air Pollution Myths,” *National Review*, November 5, 1971, 1233-1234; For similar views, see “The Week,” *National Review*, 1972, 988; “Clean Air, Hot Air,” *National Review*, October 1976, 1105-1106.

⁵³ Arthur Gerunda, “Why Get the Lead Out?,” *National Review*, July 21, 1972, 795-796.

⁵⁴ “Environmental Economics,” *National Review*, March 4, 1977, 252-253.

anti-capitalist proved to be favorable one for *National Review* throughout the environmental decade.

Even William F. Buckley, Jr., who, as much as any conservative, was sympathetic on the issue of the environment, seemed to enlist at least partially in the anti-environmental camp as the decade wore on. For example, Buckley appeared to support the ideals contained in the Powell Memorandum of August 1971. Lewis Powell, a corporate lawyer and future Supreme Court justice, expressed anger that the American free enterprise system actively participated in its own destruction. It did so because it refused to meet the “broad, shotgun attack” on capitalism waged by environmentally minded intellectuals like Yale professor Charles Reich and consumer advocate Ralph Nader. In this memorandum circulated among influential conservative intellectuals and politicians, Powell urged businessmen and their allies to take whatever measures necessary to combat environmentalists and other enemies so that “the strength and prosperity of America and the freedom of its people” were not jeopardized.⁵⁵

In a series of letters with John Merrill Olin, the head of the influential Olin Foundation, one of *National Review*'s largest donors, and a businessman who had made his fortune in agrochemicals, Buckley appeared to share Powell's disdain for environmentalists. “I would like to enlist your interest, association and, help in seeing what can be done to implement the Powell Memorandum, a copy of which is attached hitherto,” Olin wrote Buckley in 1973.⁵⁶ Buckley, however, replied that had already seen the “excellent memorandum” and was making efforts at promoting its ideas already through his editorship of *National Review*.⁵⁷ In the years following the publication of the memorandum, the Olin Foundation would contribute an enormous sum of

⁵⁵ For the complete memo, see http://reclaimdemocracy.org/powell_memo_lewis/. On the impact the memo had on the American conservative movement, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: the Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009), 156-165.

⁵⁶ John Merrill Olin to William F. Buckley, Jr., March 12, 1973, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, DDDDD.

⁵⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr. to John Merrill Olin, March 20, 1973, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, DDDDD.

money to a number of neoconservative and libertarian think tanks and help disseminate conservative ideas like those associated with the University of Chicago's law and economics movement that would be influential in making anti-environmentalism as core tenet of American conservatism in the 1970s. Buckley's endorsement of the Powell Memorandum shows that even environmentally minded conservatives could be swayed to the anti-environmental position when the defense of free enterprise was perceived to be at stake.⁵⁸

As much as the events of 1970s convinced a great number of Americans of the need to act swiftly to protect the environment, they also convinced many conservatives of the need to remain either suitably distrustful of that impulse or to oppose it outright. But it would be an error to assume that all conservatives associated with *National Review* harbored such opinions. James Buckley, for one, continued to push for stringent pollution control measures to clean up the environment in his capacity as senator from New York. Journalist Nicholas King contributed a measured article in 1970 that examined even handedly many of the issues most important to environmentalist, including recreation, wilderness, and pollution. In February of 1970, *National Review* published Eric B. Outwater's piece on the need to clean up New York City's water supply that echoed many of the points made by William F Buckley, Jr. in his 1965 mayoral campaign. Buckley himself took to the pages of *National Review* shortly before Earth Day and three years before acknowledging his support of the Powell Memorandum by advocating for a "conservative solution" to environmental problems through the use of the "market mechanism" to make polluters pay for their environmental wrongdoings.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ On the influence the Powell Memorandum had on Olin and others in the conservative business community, see Alice O'Connor, "Financing the Counterrevolution," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 158-162.

⁵⁹ Nicholas King, "Do We Want Environment?," *National Review*, June 2, 1970, 557-559; Eric B. Outwater, "Our Effluent Society," *National Review*, February 24, 1970, 203-204; William F. Buckley, Jr., "Bulletin from the Ecological War."

But what is most notable, however, about these conservative declarations in favor of environmental protection is how out of place they quickly became in relation to the orthodoxy that was being established at *National Review* during the crucial developments of the 1970s. In the 1960s, readers of *National Review* would have had to work hard to find an article voicing opposition to the burgeoning environmental movement. By the end of 1970, the magazine had reversed its course and become a crucial vehicle in the conservative attempt to undermine the movement. Whatever the reasons behind that opposition, whether it was environmentalism's associations with the Left or its perceived hostility towards free enterprise, fusionists had come to view the aspirations and interests of environmentalists as antithetical to everything they stood for. The Buckley brothers and a smattering of other conservatives had briefly attempted to stake a conservative claim to the issue of the environment in the 1960s, but their support for environmental initiatives was drowned in the tumult of anti-environmental beliefs that was rapidly becoming endemic to the Right. In the years following 1970, James Buckley remained a staunch supporter of American environmentalism, but William F. Buckley, Jr., who increasingly learned toward the libertarian side of his fusionist conservatism, helped transform *National Review* into a bastion of the environmental opposition.

Ralph Nader and Environmental Regulation

If *National Review* opposed environmentalism on the grounds that it threatened the capitalist system, then another related development that helped catalyze that opposition even further was the expansion of what environmental historian Adam Rome has termed the environmental management state. The Great Society made important inroads during the 1960s by expanding the authority of the federal government by creating new administrative apparatuses such as the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration and National Air Pollution Control

Administration and by introducing torrent of legislation designed to address air and water pollution, wilderness preservation, endangered species.⁶⁰ But the 1970s witnessed an even more unprecedented growth in regulatory expansion. Driving this transformation was an important change in the tactics of the environmental movement as it sought to take advantage of a sympathetic Chief Executive and a more activist Congress willing to regulate private enterprise in the name of the public good. Legislation such as the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970, the Clean Water Act of 1972, and the executive order creating the Environmental Protection Agency were all indicative of this new drive toward regulation. In the 1960s, some traditionalists and libertarians supported environmental protection, albeit to varying degrees and for different reasons. Yet the massive government expansion of the early 1970s proved too much to bear for most conservatives. Beginning in 1970, the fusionist perspective on the environment began to change. Increasingly throughout the decade, traditionalist and libertarian voices favoring environmental protection were gradually eclipsed by those of libertarians who opposed all environmental regulations at any cost. Fusionism and anti-environmentalism had become one and the same.

William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *Debater's Handbook* exemplified the new unfriendliness toward federal environmental regulations among fusionist conservatives. Compiled in 1970, though never published, the *Handbook* had much in common with Buckley's *Firing Line* program. Each chapter in the manuscript consisted of an important issue facing the United States such as abortion, poverty, or communism. Buckley divided each chapter into two parts, one giving the liberal perspective and one giving the conservative perspective, and culled the mainstream and alternative media for articles supporting each position. The book was meant to

⁶⁰ Rome, "Give Earth a Chance," 534.

let readers decide for themselves which position was correct based on the available articles, but Buckley, unsurprisingly, interspersed his own opinions on the issues.⁶¹

In the chapter on the environment, Buckley admitted candidly that “many conservatives (all?) argue that should we institute a crash program of government aid, government restraint, and government research, then we would create another massive federal bureaucracy to administer the programs. They add that this is to be avoided because of the propensity found in bureaucracies to seek only their limited interests, promote arbitrariness, and ensure waste – as they work against the best interest of the democratic public.” Buckley also noted that many conservatives believed that “governmental regulative action aimed at making industry alone stop pollution would destroy the economic fabric of the nation and, hence, the nature of the society which we have evolved and which provides services we have come to expect. Obviously this is to be avoided on any large scale.” Buckley’s hopes in this regard proved short lived. The Nixon Administration’s response to the environmental crisis of the early 1970s demonstrated a clear commitment to the policy of federal intervention. For Buckley and the conservatives for whom he presumed to speak, this represented the worst possible solution to the problem, one in which the outcomes – massive government expansion and the restricting of individual liberty – might be worse than the causes.⁶²

Buckley was not the only conservative who harbored such opinions. *National Review* Senior Editor William A. Rusher wondered sarcastically in 1970 “how much, after the bureaucracies have taken their share, will actually be left for the chipmunks?”⁶³ One *National Review Bulletin* article in 1973 accused EPA administrator William Ruckelshaus of “environmental brinksmanship” in his attempt to impose new emission standards on the auto industry. Should the industry be shut down, as Ruckelshaus seemed to desire, then it would

⁶¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “The Debater’s Handbook” (Unpublished manuscript, 1970).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 79, 101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 80.

“make 1930 look like a boom.”⁶⁴ “The Clean Air Act . . . had ordained clean air, unemployment, and, even, bankruptcy – for those first that cannot meet the standards set without rejiggering their production facilities at a cost that would make them uncompetitive,” another article stated unhappily about the results of government overregulation.⁶⁵ An 1976 article in *National Review* argued that the Food and Drug Administration’s attempts to regulate certain medical products were wrongly stifling technological development in the name of protecting human health.⁶⁶

The most prominent target of this anti-regulatory fervor among conservatives was consumer and environmental safety advocate Ralph Nader. Nader originally rose to prominence in the 1960s through his well-publicized battle with the auto industry. In 1965, Nader published his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, in which he pushed the industry to implement more stringent safety standards such as the mandatory implementation of seatbelts. In that same year, he won an invasion-of-privacy suit against General Motors, which transformed Nader into “a symbol of anti-corporate resistance.” In the 1970s, Nader and the advocacy groups he helped form became an important part of the emerging environmental movement, especially that segment which emphasized public health and safety. The materials his organizations conducted proved instrumental in pushing Congress to pass more stringent versions of the Clean Air Act of 1970 and Clean Water Act of 1972 than otherwise might have been implemented, and he worked with organized labor to help pass the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1970. For Nader, strict government regulation represented the only way to combat the power of big business.⁶⁷

Nader’s willingness to push the federal government to regulate the business community made him a running target at *National Review* throughout the 1970s. Among other things, the

⁶⁴ “Cleaning the Air,” *National Review Bulletin*, May 4, 1973, B61.

⁶⁵ “Clean Air, Hot Air,” 1105-1106.

⁶⁶ “Lethal Laws,” *National Review*, October 15, 1976, 1107.

⁶⁷ On Nader’s fights against the auto industry, see Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 228. On Nader’s contributions to the environmental movement, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 304, 460-461 and Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves*, 210.

magazine's contributors blamed Nader for stirring up baseless fears about the amount of radiation in medical x-rays and for creating a political witch hunt in his efforts to single out the "Terrible Ten" corporations most responsible for making America's food unhealthy.⁶⁸ Invoking the words of conservative historian Forrest McDonald, *National Review* editor Alan Reynolds pointed out the "subtle threat of the Naderite crusades" in 1975: "As a society we have a powerful urge for self-destruction, and the most common form that urge takes is to spread our bountifulness beyond its limits The consumerists and the environmentalists cater to this weakness in our national character. If we follow their lead, we will only hasten the loss of what is left."⁶⁹ In a 1980 episode of *Firing Line*, William F. Buckley, Jr. criticized attorney Mark Green, whom he called "the right hand of Ralph Nader," for his tendency to view regulation of business as the ultimate solution to environmental and consumer problems.⁷⁰ Even *National Review*'s resident poet, W.H. Von Dreele, took aim at Nader in his 1979 poem "Grit, Crud, and Smog":

*Mine the coal and cook the shale.
Put the Tar Sands up for Sale.
Spew the smoke across the sky.
Pick the cinders from your eye.
Send Ralph Nader up the creek.
Stick it, slowly, to a sheik.
In a decade, we could be
Wallowing in Energy⁷¹*

Von Dreele's poem seemed to argue, unabashedly, that the destruction of the environment might not be such a bad thing if it took the wind out of Nader's sails. And if the United States could gain energy independence from such destruction, it would be all the better.

⁶⁸ Theodore R. Bledsoe, M.D., "Radiation Phobia," *National Review*, April 7, 1970, 361; Thomas Jukes, "Ralph Nader and the Terrible Ten," *National Review*, September 12, 1975, 991, 1007.

⁶⁹ Alan Reynolds, "What Does Ralph Nader Really Want," *National Review*, February 28, 1975, 219-223.

⁷⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Is Big Business out of Hand," *Firing Line* 413, April 22, 1980, 1. Transcript courtesy of the Hoover Institution: <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/firingline/programView2.php?programID=841>.

⁷¹ W.H. Von Dreele, "Grit, Crud, and Smog," *National Review*, August 3, 1979, 953.

But if one article in particular could be said to encapsulate *National Review*'s general feeling towards government regulation, it was surely Ralph de Toledano's 1975 screed on "The Excesses of Professional Environmentalists." Like many conservatives, de Toledano had once been a man of the left, not quite a communist but someone who supported liberal and left-wing causes in the 1930s. Disillusioned by the actions of the Soviet leadership in the 1940s and 1950s, de Toledano migrated rightward. During the trial of suspected spy Alger Hiss in 1948, he covered the proceedings for *Newsweek* from an overtly anti-communist conservative perspective. Eventually, de Toledano would become lifelong friends with Whittaker Chambers, the prosecution's star witness in the Hiss case, and he eventually coauthored a best seller on the trial, *Seeds of Treason*, and wrote the forward to Chambers' own enormously popular *Witness*. De Toledano's staunch anti-communism drew the attention of William F. Buckley, Jr. The two became fast friends, corresponding regularly, and de Toledano became a valued contributor to *National Review*.⁷²

By 1975, de Toledano had turned much of his attention toward the environmental movement in general and Ralph Nader in particular.⁷³ The article provided readers with a blistering critique of EPA's actions in the early 1970s as well as the "volunteer eco-freaks" and "enthusiastic reporters" who had bullied Congress into creating the expansive regulatory apparatus. The opening lines prophesied a rough hearing for EPA. According to de Toledano, "It was once part of Washington's unwritten code that federal regulatory agencies could lie, but never cheat. Both involved deceit, but one was passive and the other active Today, a new code of ethics has been unwritten, and it should not come as a surprise that the new code for federal regulatory agencies should find its apotheosis in the Environmental Protection Agency."

⁷² On de Toledano's early life and his role in the Alger Hiss case, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 101-103.

⁷³ For de Toledano's views on Nader, see his book *Hit and Run: the Rise – and Fall? – of Ralph Nader* (New York: Arlington House, 1975).

De Toledano's grievances against EPA were many. He charged the agency with such "machinations" as falsification of evidence, with prevarication in its statements on the dangers of air pollution, and with unnecessarily interfering with the well-being of the business community. To take one prominent example, de Toledano accused the EPA of using faulty scientific evidence to increase its regulatory scope, as in the case of the Safe Water Drinking Act (SDWA) of 1974, passed by Congress after studies linked potentially carcinogenic chemicals in the city of New Orleans's drinking water with increased rates of cancer among the city's population. The moral of de Toledano's tale was clear: the EPA was more interested in fear-mongering and generating trumped up charges against business than it was in genuinely trying to clean up the environment.⁷⁴

De Toledano's sources for his critique of EPA included an issue of *Ecology* that questioned the extent of EPA's findings with regards to the toxicity of New Orleans' water supply and a November issue of *Clean Air News* that questioned EPA's predictions as to the effects of future air pollution. And, certainly, EPA was not an infallible agency incapable of making mistakes in its policy directives. But de Toledano's article ignored the fact that the major problem with EPA in the 1970s (and subsequent decades) was not that it was too effective in using scientific evidence to regulate the discharge of toxic substances by polluters, but rather that it was not effective enough. In some ways, the EPA created its own headache. In its attempts to meet the criteria of the SDWA, EPA opted to take a substance-by-substance approach in which they were required to test toxic chemicals on an individual basis and prosecute violators accordingly. To make matters worse, accurate scientific information on certain chemical substances proved hard to come by, and EPA often had to rely on industry studies for its

⁷⁴ Ralph de Toledano, "The Excesses of Professional Environmentalists," *National Review*, August 15, 1975, 877-878.

information. All of this made it incredibly difficult for the EPA to do its job, and its attempts at regulation were often lost in a multitude of court disputes.⁷⁵

De Toledano acknowledged none of this, however, and it was not by accident. Instead of using the presence of scientific uncertainty to argue for caution in the use of toxic substances, de Toledano used it to paint environmentalists and the EPA as regulatory fanatics with an axe to grind against business. Tactics such as this had important consequences. “The appearance of such extensive regulatory powers” in the 1970s, policy historian Richard N.L. Andrews has argued, provided “a new opportunity for opponents to shift public attention from ‘big business’ polluters to ‘big government’ regulators, and to redefine the political agenda from environmental protection to ‘overregulation.’”⁷⁶ Such tactics are usually associated with the conservative anti-environmental revolution that supposedly began with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. But even a cursory examination of the articles in *National Review* throughout the 1970s demonstrates that this process began a decade earlier in conservative intellectual circles. The fusionist conservatives within the magazine’s orbit might not have had the same influence on policy in the 1970s as Interior Secretary James Watt or EPA Administrator Ann Gorsuch did in the 1980s, but their position in the conservative movement’s flagship periodical helped make anti-environmentalism a core value for the Right in the 1970s.

The Population Explosion and *Limits to Growth*

In addition to opposing the environmental movement because they perceived it as openly hostile to free enterprise and because of its reliance on federal regulations, conservatives

⁷⁵ On the difficulty of translating scientific evidence into effective environmental policy in the 1970s, see Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves*, 242-245; With regards to the Safe Drinking Water Act and Toxic Substances control act in particular, see Charles M. Benbrook, *Pesticides at the Crossroads* (Yonkers, NY: Consumer’s Union, 1996), 94; and John Wargo, *Our Children’s Toxic Legacy: How Science and Law Fail to Protect Us from Pesticides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996). For an overview of the regulation of toxic substances in the 1970s, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, especially chapter 6, and *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945*, 54-58.

⁷⁶ Andrews, *Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves*, 245.

associated with *National Review* also opposed it because of the doomsday fears and apocalyptic rhetoric they associated with that segment of the environmental movement concerned with the consequences of unchecked population growth and economic growth. Given that William F. Buckley, Jr. and *National Review* had done as much as any of their foes on the Left to sound the warning bell of overpopulation in the 1960s, it might be expected that their support continued during the height of the population crisis. But as policy historian Derek Hoff points out, conservative intellectuals in the early 1970s were among the first to turn on neo-Malthusian ideas, and nowhere was the shift more evident than at *National Review*. Initially, the backlash began with the work of libertarian economists who had enlisted in the conservative cause. Colin Clarke, for example, reiterated many of the points he had made on Buckley's *Firing Line* in a 1969 *National Review* article that argued for the desirability of population growth on the grounds that it would spur social and technological development and thereby ensure America's global power. Chicago School economist Milton Friedman echoed these points and also argued that population growth could reduce the size of the government – something that appealed to conservatives of all stripes – by increasing the amount of competition in the marketplace. For libertarians, all of the doomsday rhetoric associated with the overpopulation scare was plainly false and withered in the face of reasoned economic analysis.⁷⁷

But it was not just economically minded conservatives who showed a distaste for the “prophets of doom,” as William F. Buckley had come to describe Ehrlich, Hardin, and other scientists concerned about the population-environment relationship.⁷⁸ Leading fusionist M. Stanton Evans blasted the fear-mongering rhetoric associated with the movement to restrict population growth in an article published in the *National Review Bulletin*. “The current uproar about pollution has turned itself into a resurrected version of the population scare that exercised

⁷⁷ Hoff, *The State and the Stork*, 211.

⁷⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., “The Debater's Handbook” (Unpublished manuscript, 1970), 33.

the liberal journals a decade past and had since been dropped, quite properly, into the memory-hole of forgotten crises,” he argued. But he also believed the fact that population restriction “should pop up as a specific answer to the problems of ecology as if people existed for the sake of the environment, rather than the other way around, [was] testimony of a grimmer sort.”⁷⁹ For Evans, those scientists and environmentalists who called for population restriction had much more sinister motives in mind. Despite the evidence presented by Clarke and other economists, Evans believed the “forces of the Left” would still use apocalyptic fears of overpopulation as a “pretext for abortion-on-demand, sterilization and increasing government control of the individual and family.” In making these statements, Evans had forgotten his history. In the 1960s the Right, led by *National Review* itself, had made the same arguments Evans now excoriated as Leftist sensationalism. His forgetfulness aside, however, Evans’ fulminations against Ehrlich and company only further demonstrated the totality with which the conservatives at *National Review* had come to oppose the environmental movement in the early 1970s, a point of which he was well aware. “Conservatives should dig in and combat the populationist frenzy with every means at their disposal,” Evans stated bluntly.⁸⁰

In the end, the archetypal statement made by conservatives against the population scare came from Robert Moses, the urban planner and apostle of federal expansion who helped modernize New York City in the decades following World War II. For much of that time, Moses’ inclination to use federal funds to develop America’s transportation system would have placed him squarely in the liberal camp. But by the early 1970s, Moses’ increased weariness with the New Left and Great Society social planners led him to defect to the Right, where he struck up a lively correspondence with William F. Buckley, Jr. Turning to the Right as he did at

⁷⁹ M. Stanton Evans, “At Home,” *National Review Bulletin*, May 12, 1970.

⁸⁰ M. Stanton Evans, “At Home,” *National Review Bulletin*, March 16, 1971, B38.

the height of the environmental movement's popularity in the 1970s, it is perhaps not surprising that a developer like Moses came to view environmentalism as a dubious cause.

Throughout the 1970s, Moses made clear his opposition in a number of instances. For example, he was enlisted by Walt Disney World Company in 1970 to help rebut the wrongheaded opinions of emotional "ecology types" who sought to curb developmental activities on Mineral King Mountain in California. Those efforts proved unsuccessful, and the Sierra Club's victory over Disney in the landmark Supreme Court case *Sierra Club v. Morton* became a monumental victory for environmentalists.⁸¹ Later in the decade Moses clashed with the Buckley brothers over a proposed traffic way running over Long Island Sound. Both James and William Buckley opposed the sound crossing in part because of a threat to wetlands areas, which Moses called "phony." The crossing, like the proposed ski resort on Mineral King, was never built.⁸²

Moses' contribution to the conservative opposition to population issues came in the form of a *National Review* article in September of 1970 titled "Bomb Shelters, Arks, and Ecology." In July of that year, Moses sent a letter to Buckley with a draft of the article attached in the hope that Buckley would publish it.⁸³ In the article, Moses compared the crisis mentality that in his mind characterized Americans views toward the environment in the early 1970 with the one that existed during the "bomb scare" of the 1950s. The moral of the story was that the fears of apocalypse and catastrophe associated with present environmental ills would turn out to be an unjustified exercise in panic in much the same way as fears of nuclear annihilation were in the

⁸¹ Walt Disney World C. to Robert Moses, July 10, 1970, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, DDDDD. On the importance of *Sierra Club v. Morton* to the environmentalist cause, see Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 484.

⁸² Robert Moses to Hon. James L. Buckley, April 18, 1973, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 135D; Robert Moses to William F. Buckley, Jr., April 27, 1973, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 340C; William F. Buckley, Jr. to Robert Moses, May 16, 1973, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 230D

⁸³ Robert Moses to William F. Buckley, Jr., July 20, 1970, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 300

fifties. Buckley, who had become increasingly skeptical of environmentalism over the years, gladly published the article.⁸⁴

In a rather mocking tone, Moses informed his readers of the wrongheadedness of environmentalists on a number of issues, including population. Invoking the specter of government intervention and the influence of the counterculture, he pointed out that “the planners already predict drastic regulation of the population by law to insure a future stable, comfortable, balanced society, and economy. This consummation will be arrived at on the basis of scientific, impartial, unbiased study of long-haired, bewhiskered, sideburned experts who will of course be completely divorced from politics.” According to these experts – Ehrlich, presumably, chief among them – the fate of the world was already sealed. “At the beginning we heard fire, smoke, and commandments, but now hear bearded muezzins mournfully calling in the few remaining hours before the end of the world.” Luckily, he contended, such clarion calls for environmental action were unnecessary, and Moses assured his readers that the prophets of environmental catastrophe, like those who had come before them, would wind up on the wrong side of history. Only when environmental sensationalists were prepared to offer “facts without fanaticism” would the public be ready to take environmentalism seriously. Moses doubted this would ever be the case.⁸⁵

It was not just the question of overpopulation that elicited conservative attacks on the doomsday mentality of environmentalists. The growing call in the 1970s to limit economic growth also brought about charges of sensationalism from the Right. Ideas about the potential limits to economic growth were not new to the 1970s, but the fusionist conservatives at *National Review* did not become interested in the matter until the publication of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972. The book catalogued the results of a far ranging study conducted primarily by Donella and

⁸⁴ Robert Moses, “Bomb Shelters, Arks, and Ecology,” *National Review*, September 8, 1970, 939,

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 942.

Dennis Meadows of MIT and financed by an international organization of scientists, philanthropists, and technocrats known as the Club of Rome. The research team used an advanced “World 3” computer model developed by their colleague Jay W. Forrester to calculate how quickly the world would run into physical limitations in the realms of population growth, resource consumption, pollution, food supply, and resource depletion. The results of the model predicted dire consequences if the world did not immediately halt, or possibly reverse, trends of exponential economic growth. The implication was that overpopulation, rampant pollution, and famine were inevitable unless humanity took immediate and direct action to remedy the problem. The authors did not publish their copious amounts of data charts and graphs alongside the book, but it sold over twenty million copies and helped bring the threat of environmental catastrophe to the forefront of American and world consciousness.⁸⁶

Despite its popularity, the *LTG* study came under fire from academics, economists, and other concerned parties from across the political and intellectual spectrum. None of these attacks, however, were more vituperative than those offered by a newly emerging cadre of libertarian economists who in the 1970s became an increasingly central part of the American conservative movement.⁸⁷ Interestingly, while most of these responses centered on advancing pro-growth arguments to counter the anti-growth philosophy of the *LTG* study, most economists seemed even more annoyed by the catastrophic images it evoked. *National Review* seized on this theme as a means of opposing the concerns of environmentalists throughout the 1970s.

For instance, at the height of the controversy surrounding the *LTG* study, the magazine republished a scathing review of the book delivered by Wilfred Beckerman, an economics professor at the University of London and a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Originally given as a speech to a group of economists, the article made no bones about

⁸⁶ Donella Meadows et. al., *The Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

⁸⁷ On the reaction to the LTG study, see Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 180-181; Hoff, *The State and the Stork*, 221-227; Sabin, *The Bet*, 80-95; and Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 222.

Beckerman's and, by extension, *National Review's* feelings toward the study. "A computer merely works out the implications of the assumptions and instructions that are fed into it. And the assumptions in this case are generally absurd and have no factual basis," Beckerman argued. In other words, Beckerman continued, paraphrasing his colleague on the Royal Commission Sir Eric Ashby, "if you feed doom-laden assumptions into computers it is not surprising that they predict doom." *National Review* added a few touches of its own to help drive the point home to its readers. The short introduction to the article, published at the top of the page above the article's title, proclaimed that "it was Orson Welles' invasion from Mars all over again when the Club of Rome Report appeared. Mr. Beckerman does a masterly job of debunking the environmental doomsayers." Accompanying the article were two images. On the first page of the article, one image depicted a computer dressed as the Grim Reaper carrying a scythe. On the inside pages of the article, a man is shown blowing up an inflatable globe in one image before it bursts in another, leading to a stream of tears from the man. The images reinforced the central message of the article: environmentalist fears over the consequences of economic growth, like those about overpopulation, were baseless and easily corrected by levelheaded analysis.⁸⁸

In the years following the *LTG* controversy, *National Review* doubled down on Beckerman's belief that the drive to limit economic growth was the work of environmentalist fanatics. One anonymous article from January of 1973 portrayed the *LTG* study, "which created impressive predictions of catastrophe by filling a computer with catastrophic projections," alongside earlier environmental hoaxes such as the population crisis of the late 1960s and the pesticide controversy ignited by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962.⁸⁹ In that same year Carroll, who by that time had established himself firmly as the magazine's resident anti-environmentalist, contributed an article which reaffirmed Beckerman's negative

⁸⁸ Wilfred Beckerman, "The Myth of Environmental Catastrophe," *National Review*, November 24, 1972, 1293.

⁸⁹ "Epitaph for Ecologues," *National Review*, January 19, 1973, 77.

opinions of environmentalists.⁹⁰ During the energy crisis of the mid-1970s, another article speculated that “neo-Malthusians” adhering to the LTG philosophy would wrongfully conclude that “the world is doomed to run out of oil and natural gas within a generation or so.”⁹¹ “Anyone in our society whose eyesight and hearing are not totally impaired is likely to believe that we are on a collision course with Doomsday,” wrote First National City Corporation chairman Walter B. Wriston, and he warned specifically of “latter day Malthusians” who would use the impending catastrophe to justify federal environmental regulation.⁹² Malachi B. Martin, *National Review*’s religion columnist, even went so far as to label the LTG inspired philosophy of no economic growth a secular religion with elements similar to doomsday cults of the past.⁹³

Perhaps nothing reveals the extent to which fusionist conservatives including those at *National Review* had come to oppose neo-Malthusian environmentalism than a 1981 episode of *Firing Line* featuring Julian Simon. Simon, an economist at the University of Illinois interested in issues of demography, did more than any other figure in the late 1970s to fuse the gap between conservative intellectuals and the new “market knows best” philosophy of libertarian economic thinkers. Throughout the 1970s, Simon traded verbal jabs with many celebrity environmentalists over the issues of population, economic growth, and the environment. In 1980, Simon famously bet his foremost antagonist, Paul Ehrlich, that the prices of five rare metals would fall rather than rise by 1990, a bet which he won to Ehrlich’s vexation. Simon’s willingness to confront figures like Ehrlich earned him a reputation as a “doomslayer” and made him a favorite intellectual of the Right.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Richard B. Carroll, “Leaping Before Looking,” *National Review*, May 25, 1973, 577-578.

⁹¹ “What’s Ahead,” *National Review Bulletin*, April 5, 1974, B45.

⁹² Walter B. Wriston, “Whale Oil, Baby Chicks, and Energy,” *National Review*, June 7, 1974, 643.

⁹³ Malachi B. Martin, “Nature’s Law and Nature’s God,” *National Review*, February 2, 1979, 171-172.

⁹⁴ On Simon’s impact on environmentalism in the 1970s, see Sabin, *The Bet*, especially Chapter 2; Hoff, *The State and the Stork*, 227-230; Robertson, *The Malthusian Moment*, 215-217.

On a 1981 *Firing Line* program, William F. Buckley, Jr. made it a point to foreground Simon's ability to anger environmentalists in his opening remarks. "Professor Julian Simon may be the happiest thing that has happened to this planet since the discovery of the wheel, but he is death to the doomsayers, though, come to think of it, that is a happy figure of speech because doomsayers more or less look forward to death," Buckley noted with his famously wry delivery. Buckley went on to praise Simon's book, *The Ultimate Resource*, which argued the "anti-Malthusian case" and correctly demonstrated that human ingenuity could stave off a future marked by "asphyxiation, strangulation, death by overpopulation or by the dissipation of resources." Mark Green, a lawyer and associate of Ralph Nader, was brought on the program at roughly the midway point to argue the environmentalist cause. Green prodded Buckley and Simon on the misguidedness of their environmental views, and while the latter maintained his longtime support for the cause, the economist and the host doubled down on the notion that technology would solve most environmental ills and that environmental protection should be sacrificed in times of economic turbulence. Buckley even praised the Reagan Administration's early handling of environmental affairs.⁹⁵

The discussion between Buckley, Simon, and Green demonstrates an important point. In the 1960s, Buckley had presided over a good bit of "doomsaying" in *National Review*, but by 1981 he had reversed course completely. The *National Review* editor and *Firing Line* host to neo-Malthusian environmentalism, on a broad level, had come to resemble closely the opinions advanced by the libertarians and business conservatives at *The Freeman* and, yes, even his sworn enemy Ayn Rand. In the late 1950s Buckley had expelled Rand from the conservative mainstream, but the contents of *National Review* in the 1970s reveal that Buckley had come to

⁹⁵ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Is There an Answer to Malthus," *Firing Line* 482, October 15, 1981, 1. Transcript courtesy of the Hoover Institution: <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/firingline/programView2.php?programID=177>.

share the same fundamental mistrust of Rand's "anti-industrial revolution." In this regard, Buckley served as a microcosm for *National Review* and fusionist conservatism as a whole. It is true that Buckley himself no longer wrote much about the environment by the end of the 1970s, but as *National Review*'s editor in chief, he still had the final authority to choose which articles appeared in the magazine and which did not. If he no longer added his own voice to the conversation, then he was still uniquely positioned to shape significantly the magazine's anti-environmental thrust on matters concerning population and economic growth and technology.⁹⁶

The Oil and Energy Crises

A final development that brought many fusionist conservatives into the anti-environmental fold came in the mid-1970s the Oil and Energy Crises. Much like the libertarians at *The Freeman*, the conservatives at *National Review* blamed environmentalists for the ill effects the energy crisis had on the American people even more than they blamed OPEC. "For several years now our national policies on energy use have been influenced, on an unsystematic basis, by environmentalists and consumer groups," one 1973 article warned. It was the environmentalists who were behind the energy crisis, it continued, because of their opposition to "refinery construction and strip-mining of low-sulfur coal because of the disturbance to scenery, offshore drilling and oceanic transport of oil because of the danger of spillage . . . nuclear plants because of radiation dangers," and other sensible measures that could alleviate the crisis.⁹⁷ Another article expressed similar sentiments when it stated matter-of-factly that "the Audubon Society, Izaak Walton League, and their brethren" were guilty of jeopardizing the "economic health of the nation" and exposing "the country to higher living costs, bloated trade deficits, and

⁹⁶ Two biographies that emphasize Buckley's continued interest in the editorial process at *National Review* in the 1970s are Lee Edwards, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: The Maker of a Movement* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010); and Linda Bridges and John R. Coyne, Jr., *Strictly Right: William F. Buckley, Jr. and the American Conservative Movement* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2007).

⁹⁷ "Energy," *National Review*, April 27, 1973, 451.

unemployment.”⁹⁸ One article even went so far to blame the energy crisis on “influential ecologists who have been advocating zero output growth and massive shrinking of the auto industry” in vague reference to the LTG study and Ralph Nader. “Considering the precarious state of the economy,” the article concluded, “imposed austerity in a major resource looks a little like curing anemia by bleeding.”⁹⁹ Throughout the 1970s, the conservatives at *National Review* never seemed to miss an opportunity to inform its readers that the pain at the pump they experienced at their local gas station could be attributed one way or another to the efforts of environmentalists.¹⁰⁰

Conservatives were similarly critical of environmentalists in their discussion of alternative energy resources. During the height of the crisis, many contributors to *National Review* argued that the energy crisis could be mastered by opening up America’s pool of natural resources to development. For example, one article strongly advocated for the acceleration of strip mining coal operations as an alternative source of energy for the United States.¹⁰¹ Other articles advocated for increases in offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, the exploitation of domestic oil production in Alaska, or the development of more nuclear power plants, but, they admitted bitterly, none of these justifiable solutions were likely to be implemented thanks to the wrongheadedness of environmentalists.¹⁰² Von Dreele’s poem about President Nixon’s failed “Project Independence” energy program best encapsulated these feelings:

*Project Independence flopped.
No One’s cooking all that shale.
Offshore drilling’s nearly stopped.*

⁹⁸ Roger B. Ward, “Our Orphaned Super Ships,” *National Review*, March 1, 1974, 261.

⁹⁹ “The Energy Package,” *National Review*, 1974.

¹⁰⁰ “Let There Be Darkness,” *National Review*, May 18, 1971, 521; Stephen A. Kallis, Jr., “A First Hurrah for Technology,” *National Review*, December 21, 1973, 1402-1404, 1423; Alan Reynolds, “Ten Answers that Are Obviously False,” *National Review*, April 26, 1974, 478-479; Richard B. Carroll, “Caught in the Act,” *National Review*, November 8, 1974, 1293, 1313; “Hot Air vs. Heated Homes,” *National Review*, 1977.

¹⁰¹ Richard P. Runyon and Lawrence Rocks, “The Energy Crisis in the Cold War,” *National Review*, March 2, 1973, 255-258.

¹⁰² “A Man-Made Energy Crunch,” *National Review*, June 3, 1977, 620; “Environmentalists Aren’t,” *National Review*, April 11, 1975, 385; “Socioeconomics of Coal,” *National Review*, 1978.

*Solar heat's a sci-fi tale.
Fusion makes progressives squirm.
Coal lies fallow in the ground.
I'd suggest we turn to sperm
If we'd left some whales around.*¹⁰³

Conservative opposition to environmentalism was not just about placing blame on environmentalists, however. For many conservatives, the energy crisis was an important step in a larger project. According to historian Meg Jacobs, conservatives came to view the energy crisis as a unique situation in which they could shed doubt on the benefits of government regulation while simultaneously transferring power to the free market as a means of meeting energy demands.¹⁰⁴ For conservatives, then, the crisis represented a test of the efficacy of their beliefs and as an opportunity to confront the environmentalist worldview and prove it wanting in the face of a national crisis.

Walter Wriston's article "Whale Oil, Baby Chicks, and Energy" exemplified *National Review's* willingness to participate in this process. In a straightforward take down of federal regulation, Wriston argued that "shortages become a crisis when government intervenes to frustrate the ability of the free market to function." Energy regulations provided Wriston with a perfect example of this principle in action. "Federal stop-go policies on mining coal, drilling for oil, and the construction and licensing of nuclear energy plants not only have curbed incentive, but also have created a climate of doubt and dilemma." For Wriston, as for most conservatives, only by unleashing a free market in energy could the United States hope to beat the crisis and regain its rightful prosperity. An accompanying set of somewhat disturbing drawings left no doubts as to what would happen if environmentalists continued to have their way. In the first drawing, a friendly dog unwittingly heeds the call of a malicious man with an iron collar, obviously intending to shackle it. In the second drawing, the despondent dog has been collared,

¹⁰³ W.H. Von Dreele, "One Year Later," *National Review*, 1975.

¹⁰⁴ Meg Jacobs, "The Conservative Struggle and the Energy Crisis," in *Rightward Bound*, 193-194.

muzzled, and chained in iron. In the final drawing, the iron shackles rest on the skeleton of the dog, long dead. Conservatives needed no help in interpreting story's significance: if the United States continued to implement environmental regulations that were inimical to the free market, then it would literally starve itself to death due to lack of energy.¹⁰⁵

Jeffery Hart referenced this new conservative strategy in an opinion piece he sent to William F. Buckley, Jr. in July 1978. In what appeared to be a hastily handwritten note, Hart asked, "Should NR begin to sound this note? I think it should." Hart left no doubts as to what note he referred. "Conservatives in the United States now face a glittering historic opportunity, but they do not yet quite see its nature," he opened. This opportunity came at the expense of American liberalism, which had once been "open, buoyant, and confident," but which had now embarked upon a "great refusal." In the past, liberalism had spoken "of economic expansion, of technology and science, of progress and of American power in the world," but it had "opted out of the American tradition" in the present. "The liberal stance on energy" was "as good a symbol as any," in Hart's opinion, to exploit this decay. Instead of embracing nuclear energy and Super Sonic Transport as their ideological ancestors might have done, the liberals of the 1970s were "talking the language of scarcity" and had opted for "almost entirely a negative program of conservation" in the realm of energy policy.¹⁰⁶

Implicit in Hart's analysis was that liberals like Jimmy Carter had let too much of their policy be determined by the ideas of environmentalists unconcerned with the economic benefits of the free market. It was precisely the "profound negativism of today's liberal" that provided the context for Hart's "conservative opportunity." In essence, Hart called upon American conservatives, led by *National Review*, to provide solutions to the energy crisis that the liberal environmentalists were afraid to implement, solutions that called for the use of nuclear power

¹⁰⁵ Wriston, "Whale Oil, Baby Chicks, and Energy," 643-646. Quotation on page 644.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffery Hart to William F. Buckley Jr., July 28, 1977, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 230.

and the thermodynamics of the earth itself. “Conservatives should split the Democratic party on all of these issues,” he stated emphatically, and if they managed to do so, then “the future was theirs – and it was certainly the future of the world.” In the year’s following Hart’s memo, *National Review* seemed to take Hart’s message to heart, and, politically, the Reagan Administration would make many of these themes a central part of its anti-environmental platform a mere three years later. Unfortunately for Hart, conservatives could not, even with the power of the federal government at their disposal, vanquish the liberal-environmental alliance. But even so, Hart’s remarks during the energy crisis demonstrate just how much conservatives remained committed to fighting the good fight.¹⁰⁷

The effort to open up domestic sources of oil in Alaska provides a concrete example that demonstrates the conservative commitment to undermining the goals of the environmental movement. The proposed Alaskan pipeline proved to be a great concern for the Buckley brothers. In a 1972 letter to his brother, William F. Buckley, Jr. reported that William Randolph Hearst, the son of the famous media mogul, had “telephoned [him] agitatedly” about the pipeline. James Buckley’s opposition to the pipeline on ecological grounds apparently had ruffled the feathers of Hearst’s “friends in Alaska,” who feared that the Senator had “misunderstood the ecological implications of the proposed pipeline.” According to Bill Buckley, Hearst’s associates “respected the integrity of [James Buckley’s] commitment to mother nature,” but they believed the concerns of the environmental lobby had blown the potential problems out of proportion. They invited the Senator on a personal tour of the proposed operations so that he might see his fears assuaged first hand. “Do me the favor, whether or not you accept this invitation, of dropping a note to . . . Hearst,” a seemingly harried Bill Buckley advised his brother. Bill Buckley never stated whether or not he was in favor of the pipeline, but

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the fact that Hearst personally contacted the editor of *National Review* to perhaps help change his reticent brother's mind reveals much about how much his commitment to environmental protection had waned over the years.¹⁰⁸

For his part, James Buckley was in no mood to be dissuaded from his commitment to do what he believed best for the environment. "My brother Bill has conveyed to me the concern of your Alaskan friends as to my position on the proposed pipeline," he wrote Hearst in a somewhat stiff letter in late July of 1972. "I want to assure them," he continued, that "I have taken no final position on the matter. I have concluded, however, that additional hearings on possible adverse environmental effects are in order because of the significant new information which has been developed since the initial hearings on the subject. I have also urged that greater study be given as to the desirability of the alternate route through the McKenzie valley of Canada because of economic and security considerations in addition to the environmental ones." He ended the letter by informing Hearst of his inability to accept the proposed invitation.¹⁰⁹

James Buckley was largely alone amongst the conservatives with ties to *National Review*, however, to take such a critical stance on the Alaska pipeline. One of the magazine's main energy correspondents acknowledged the potential ecological costs of building the pipeline, but he preferred the pipeline to the alternative route because they believed the latter would cede too much economic power to Canada and give them more of a say in U.S. energy policy than a nation of its stature warranted.¹¹⁰ One short opinion piece summed up the general feelings of the magazine in 1973. In order to free itself from the shackles of the energy crisis, it argued, the U.S. must find alternative sources of energy. Only one viable source existed, however, the "low-sulfur

¹⁰⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr. to James L. Buckley, July 21, 1972, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 323d.

¹⁰⁹ James L. Buckley to William Randolph Hearst, July 31, 1972, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, Box 323d.

¹¹⁰ Donald Cox, "The Great Pipeline Flap," *National Review*, June 29, 1971, 703, 720; Ibid, "Will Canada Shut Off Our Fuel Supply," *National Review*, March 30, 1973.

oil beneath Alaska's North Slope." But to get at it, "we need the Trans-Alaskan Pipeline, which remains unbuilt because environmental groups object to a four-foot diameter pipe taking up 45 square miles of Alaska's scarce (586,000 square miles) scenic land."¹¹¹ This was a familiar refrain. America could reduce its dependence on foreign sources of energy and secure its economic future if only environmentalists would quit harrasing business. Fortunately for conservatives, the environmentalists would not win the day this time. The energy crisis made the development of the pipeline too great an opportunity to pass up. Against the continued objections of environmental groups, construction on the pipeline began in 1974 and was completed three years later.

At that time, it should be noted, *National Review* did publish another article on the pipeline's completion written by journalist Nicholas King. King demonstrated a deft hand when dealing with environmental issues. Where most of his colleagues consistently mocked or rejected environmentalist beliefs, King always appeared willing to give a fair hearing. In the "Battle for the Last Frontier," as he named it, King astutely pointed out the nature of the conflict: "One the one side of the conflict are the environmentalists, who with great sincerity want to preserve almost everything of natural value for future generations of scientists, tourists, and the general public. On the other is what might be called the Alaska establishment of business developers and their representatives, who are not against natural value but who want to make sure the untapped and largely unknown resources of this vast region remain open to standard exploitation." King, in a rare move by a *NR* contributor, refused to take sides. He appeared a bit uneasy at the spiritual overtones with which some environmentalists viewed the natural world, and he admitted that "it is very hard for environmentalists to be temperate," but he also delivered a soft rebuke to

¹¹¹ "A Man Made Energy Crunch," 620.

industry as well. Alaska was “too big and too rich to be treated only as a development ‘challenge’ or to be wrapped up in a metaphysic of determinism”, he argued.

In the end, King staked out a middle ground, acknowledging that “use of its resources and protection of its environment are necessary, and a solution which combines them in reasonable measure will no doubt be found eventually by Congress, which is more adept at such things than most citizens give it credit for.”¹¹² King’s article is worth highlighting precisely because its spirit ran counter to the beliefs of the fusionists at *National Review*. King was no environmentalist, but he did call for moderation and careful thought on one of the most polarizing issues of the day. Rather than exercise temperance, the majority fell back upon the reflexive defense of capitalism and the market and the notion that environmentalists were ideologically motivated to destroy them both. Once again, *National Review*’s fusionist conservatism proved strikingly libertarian. Three years prior to the publication of King’s article, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz had framed the Alaskan conflict as a zero-sum game between environmentalists on the one hand and the economic well-being of the nation on the other. Despite the tenor of King’s article, it seems that the fusionists at *National Review* were inclined to agree with Butz’s assessment of the conflict.

This reflexivity became most evident when the conflict between environmentalists and business interests revived itself in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the former proposed expanding the Arctic National Wildlife Range (ANWR), an 8.9 million acre region set aside by the Eisenhower Administration in 1960 that served as a habitat for countless numbers of animal species. ANWR also contained a copious supply of oil, and its proximity to the northern end of the Trans-Alaska pipeline made it a target for developers. In response to these developments, *National Review* took a partisan approach rather than a moderate one. Coyne, one of *NR*’s most

¹¹² Nicholas King, “The Battle for the Last Frontier,” *National Review*, 1977, 724.

long serving anti-environmentalists and an Alaskan native, lambasted the environmentalist stance on ANWR in an article that gave expression to many of the ideas rapidly becoming a part of the environmental opposition of the soon-to-be-elected Reagan Administration.

Most notably, Coyne called for the complete repeal of the Wilderness Act and for a return to the older doctrine of multiple-use development, which would have allowed industry to develop ANWR's oil and reduce energy dependence. But the environmental lobby and their allies in Washington would never let that happen, much to Coyne's exasperation. "Has the neo-environmentalist movement, like the Naderite movement, crested? Perhaps. But if it has, much of the human flotsam from that movement has found secure handholds in Washington, where the survivors are busy making policy which simply refuses to take current energy problems into account. Energy development and land use are equated with the detested pave-it-over syndrome which they have spent years battling, and their only response to our energy problems is contained in the old war cry of their movement: Conserve!"¹¹³ Coyne's remarks on the situation in Alaska perfectly crystallized *National Review's* decade-long grievance against environmentalists over energy policy in the 1970s, and, in many ways, sums up the attitude that conservatives have had towards environmentalist ever since.

The Absence of Tradition at *National Review* in the 1970s

The preceding discussions focusing on the first Earth Day, environmental regulation, population growth, and the energy crisis reveal the extent to which *National Review's* fusionist conservatism integrated the libertarian stance on environmental issues into its pages. But what of the traditionalist conservatism of Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver? Where in the 1970s were the articles advocating piety towards nature and the notion that the environment should be

¹¹³ Coyne, "Locking Up the Last Frontier," *National Review*, May 30, 1980, 661.

protected for the benefit of future generations? If the essence of the fusionist program involved reconciling disparate ideologies on opposite sides of the conservative intellectual spectrum, then does it not stand to reason that *National Review* and its editor, William F. Buckley, Jr., should have published just as many articles on environmental matters written from a Kirkian or Weaverian perspective? If *National Review* were undertaking a true fusion of conservative ideas, then why does it seem that the magazine overtly privileged libertarian perspectives? These are not easy questions to answer.

On the one hand, it is not as if *NR* or the *Bulletin* published *no* articles from a traditionalist perspective. In 1973 the *Bulletin* published James Buckley's impassioned arguments for why conservative intellectuals should support the proposed amendments to the Clean Air Act. He argued that their "instincts ought to have propelled them into the forefront of the environmental movement" because they understood "the dangers that can accrue from thoughtless destruction of systems or institutions that have successfully served man's needs" and because they the existence of natural laws that man in his own highest interest is bound to observe; they acknowledge a moral obligation to conserve the inheritance received from generations past for the benefit of those to come."¹¹⁴ Here and elsewhere in the article Buckley directly appealed to the Burkean notion of the eternal contract, and the influence of Kirk's thinking could not be more evident in Buckley's words. But Buckley also expressed his vexation with the fact that most conservative intellectuals at *National Review* not only failed to support environmentalism, but actively opposed it. Buckley attributed this opposition to a number of "intellectual blinders," most of which focused on conservative unease with radical environmentalism. But perhaps the opposition had more to do with the fact that the

¹¹⁴ James L. Buckley, "Washington," *National Review Bulletin* (July 27, 1973), B110.

overwhelming majority of the writers, editors, and staff at *National Review* did not share Buckley's allegiance to Kirk's brand of traditionalist environmentalism.

The case of the Tellico Dam controversy helps demonstrate this point. Set to be constructed on the Little Tennessee River in the mid-1970s, the Tellico Dam drew national headlines when a researcher at the University of Tennessee discovered a rare species of fish, the snail darter, whose entire habitat consisted of an area that was set to be flooded. Environmentalists pursued legal action to prevent the dam's construction under the terms of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. After a two-year legal battle featuring much acrimony, President Jimmy Carter signed, "with regret," the public works bill that exempted it from many important pieces of environmental legislation. Unsatisfied, environmentalists took the Tennessee Valley Authority to court. In the case of *Hill v. TVA*, the courts sided with the environmentalists, though the dam was eventually exempted from the ESA and opened in 1979. Ultimately, the Tellico Dam controversy serves as an example of the limits of 1970s environmentalism.¹¹⁵ But it also serves as an example of the limits of conservative support for environmental issues.

In 1979, just before the dam opened, James Buckley took to the pages of *National Review* to celebrate the snail darter and the Endangered Species Act which it had come to symbolize. In typical fashion, the former Senator from New York delivered an impassioned plea for the cessation of the dam project on ecological grounds:

Extinction is one of the few processes that man cannot reverse. In the course of time the dams in question will have silted up and outlived their usefulness; but it will be too late then to decide that we would like to have the snail darter and the furbish lousewort back. If man cannot restore a species, though, he is fully capable of destroying it; which he is now doing at an astonishing rate The Endangered Species Act was passed in order to slow down this accelerating rate of man-caused extinctions. Its purpose is not only to help save species that might prove of direct value to man, but to help preserve the biological diversity that, in America and on the rest of our planet, provides the fundamental support system for man and other living things.

¹¹⁵ Rothman, *The Greening of A Nation?* 126-128.

Buckley's perspective on the snail darter was certainly not eco-centric by any means, but he believed that conservatives, based on the very philosophical principles which imbued their beliefs, had a sacred duty to protect the wealth of nature from human hands. "Edmund Burke reminds us that the men and women of any generation are but 'temporary possessors and life renters' who 'should not think it among their rights to cut off the entail, or commit waste on the inheritance,' lest they 'leave to those who come after them a ruin instead of a habitation,'" he state eloquently. "That, in sum is the purpose of the Endangered Species Act."¹¹⁶

Buckley's reference to Burke here is critical. In referencing the founding father of modern conservatism in an article on the Endangered Species Act, Buckley was echoing many of the arguments made by traditionalist conservatives like Weaver and Kirk. For these intellectuals, like Burke before them, nature was nothing less than the creation of God and therefore worthy of piety, veneration, and respect. Nature served as the vital link in the great chain of being that united the dead, the living, and those yet unborn. For traditionalists like James Buckley and Kirk, the core principles of conservatism and environmentalism were one in the same: the environmentalist impulse to leave future generations with a safe, healthy, and clean environment was just another way of stating the conservative philosophy of preserving the "heritage of humanity," in Kirk's words, for the unborn. According to the traditionalists, the phrase "conservative anti-environmentalism" was a contradiction that could, almost by rule, never come into being. It was ultimately this belief that motivated Buckley to castigate conservatives for their opposition to environmentalism.¹¹⁷

Unfortunately for James Buckley, almost none of the conservatives at *National Review* shared his opinions on the subject. The magazine had ignored his chastising remarks in 1973,

¹¹⁶ James L. Buckley, "Three Cheers for the Snail Darter," *National Review*, September 14, 1979, 1144-1145.

¹¹⁷ Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 64.

and his defense of the snail darter six years later fared little better. In his intellectual biography of the magazine, Hart noted that Buckley's article "made no impact at *National Review* during the Carter years," but the former editor believed it was "important for the fact that it made no impact."¹¹⁸ One of the magazine's readers who cherished "the jibes at loony environmentalists which enliven 'The Week' section of *National Review*, admitted to being persuaded by Buckley that perhaps environmentalism was not all bad, but this response was uncommon.¹¹⁹ Another reader wrote the magazine stating how much he enjoyed Buckley's article from *National Review Bulletin* and his piece on the snail darter, but he also assumed "that the editors do not entirely share" the perspectives he offered.¹²⁰ Other letters from readers censured Buckley's opinions on the Tellico Dam on the grounds that the economic value of the dam was worth the cost and because Congress had made a commitment to build it.¹²¹ One letter to the editor overtly touched on the reticence of conservatives to adopt Buckley's position. "The conservative critique of fundamentalist environmentalism has always been a matter of degree – an insistence that in the rush to save endangered species, the welfare of the human species must not be scanted," it proclaimed.¹²²

For his part, Buckley also seemed to share at least some of the sentiments of the anonymous reader of his article. In a 1979 speech given at Hillsdale College, a small liberal arts college that actively promotes conservative values, Buckley spoke to his audience about the importance of balancing environmental protection on the one hand and the need to limit federal expansion and keep costs down on the other.¹²³ Buckley did not deny that protecting the welfare

¹¹⁸ Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 257.

¹¹⁹ George Claremont, "All God's Creatures," letter to the editor, *National Review*, 1979.

¹²⁰ Arthur B. McComb, "Three Cheers for Conservation," letter to the editor, *National Review*, October 12, 1979, 1264.

¹²¹ J.B. Jett, "Power to the People," letter to the editor, *National Review*, 1979; Herold Eggers, "Bad Checks," letter to the editor, *National Review*, November 9, 1979, 1396.

¹²² "Dammed Snail Darters," *National Review*, September 28, 1979, 1200.

¹²³ On Hillsdale College's role in the American conservative movement, see Nash, *Reappraising the Right*, 123-126.

of humanity was important, as the reader had charged, but he did argue for true reconciliation between man and nature. “The challenge facing mankind, then, is not one of having to make a choice between economic welfare and ecological preservation, because our economic well-being ultimately depends on the health of our environment,” he acknowledged before stating the importance of “bringing man’s economic activities into equilibrium with the natural world of which he is an inescapable part.”¹²⁴ Despite these remarks, however, Buckley was obviously rankled by what he perceived as the increasingly arbitrary environmental standards established by the EPA. In particular, he argued that a cost-benefit analysis of certain of the EPA’s air quality standards revealed a mind-boggling adherence to unrealistic or outmoded ways to measure air pollution.

Instead, Buckley proposed that America should “move, where possible, from a reliance on regulation towards a strategy of economic incentives. The fact is that no mechanism has yet been discovered that is as effective in harnessing human energy and ingenuity.”¹²⁵ These remarks seem to indicate that even Buckley’s stance on the environment had begun to skew in the direction of the libertarians mentioned in the last chapter. The League of Conservation Voters certainly seemed to think so. According to their national environmental scorecard, Buckley’s support for environmental measures declined precipitously between 1973 and his failed bid for reelection in 1976.¹²⁶ But Buckley nevertheless ended his talk by once again invoking Burke’s eternal contract, stating that humanity had a duty to respect nature and preserve it for future generations. James Buckley, then, appears to have been the ultimate fusionist conservative on the environment, someone capable of taking the best elements of libertarian free-market environmentalism and infusing them with the moral impulse of the traditionalist. But as the

¹²⁴ James L Buckley, *Freedom at Risk: Reflections on Politics, Liberty, and the State* (New York: Encounter Books, 2010), 125.

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¹²⁶ The League of Conservation Voters, “National Environmental Scorecard: James L. Buckley,” <http://scorecard.lcv.org/moc/james-lane-buckley>.

response to Buckley's article on the snail darter indicates, he was virtually alone in articulating this position among the intellectuals within the orbit of *National Review*. Buckley remained virtually the only conservative at the magazine to even think about the environment in traditionalist terms in the 1970s.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1970s, the fusionist conservatives at *National Review* occupied a very different place vis-à-vis the environmental movement than they did at the end of the previous decade. Under the leadership of William F. Buckley, Jr., and with the support of important intellectuals during the 1960s, *National Review* had actively sought to integrate environmental protection and concern for the ecological well-being of the country into the magazine's corpus of important issues. It is true that Buckley advocated conservative solutions to the problem of pollution, solutions that differed from many being offered by environmentalists. But despite the different ways they approached environmental problems, environmentalists and the founder of *NR* could agree that the problems existed and that something should be done about them. The issue of the population explosion, for instance, sent the magazine into an intellectual paroxysm that equaled or surpassed anything on the Left.

In the 1970s, however, the concern for the environment among fusionist intellectuals dried up almost entirely, and it did not do so gradually. Almost overnight between the end of 1969 and the beginning of 1970, the editors of *National Review* went from acknowledging the dire state of the environment and advocating action to calling environmentalism a "fad" that would quickly pass and upbraiding environmentalists for blowing the threat out of all rational proportion. Most of the reasons for this shift are clear. The events of the early 1970s, especially the celebration of the first Earth Day and the passage of landmark legislation including the Clean

Air Act Amendments and Clean Water Act, precipitated the hardening of conservative opposition. For environmentalists, these events signaled that environmental protection had become an issue of national importance supported by a broad swath of the American people. For the conservatives at *National Review*, these developments revealed that the hand of the Left ultimately guided the environmentalist worldview. Conservatives perceived that the Left had long desired to cripple big business and abolish capitalism, and during the early 1970s environmentalism had manifested itself as the perfect weapon to accomplish this goal. Congress' decision to implement environmental reforms from the top down also sparked conservative antipathy. The creation of the EPA and the passage of NEPA and a host of other laws, combined with the activities of the Naderites, appeared to conservatives as another exercise in the expansion of the federal leviathan that they had committed to fight. The controversies over the population explosion and the LTG study and the energy crisis only served to further entrench in the minds of conservatives that the interests of environmentalists were antithetical to their own. By the time of Ronald Reagan's election, *National Review* had already spent a decade laying the intellectual groundwork for the anti-environmental worldview that would define the Right in the 1980s.

On one level, the growth of fusionist anti-environmentalism seemed to be caused by a fundamental inability of conservative intellectuals and environmentalists to agree on the basic parameters of the environmental crisis in the 1970s. For example, in 1973 biologist and prominent spokesperson for the environmental movement Barry Commoner appeared on an episode of *Firing Line* titled "Is there an Ecological Crisis?" to discuss the issues he had first broached in his landmark book *The Closing Circle* (1971). At one point during the interview, Buckley stated his belief that "nature does provide opportunity for a certain amount of waste, that you can understand that there is an enormous garbage disposal vat that is available to any

society. It's when it spills over that you've got problems." An aghast Commoner could hardly believe his ears. "Where? Oh, no, no. Did you read my book?" the biologist asked. "I read enough," Buckley retorted. But it seems clear that Buckley in fact had not read *The Closing Circle*, or at least not very carefully. If he had, he would have recognized that the "vat" of which he spoke ran directly counter to the first, second, and probably fourth laws of ecology that Commoner laid out. Buckley's apparent ignorance did not prevent him from doggedly questioning Commoner as to the veracity of his conclusions at multiple points throughout the remainder of the interview. After a nearly identical exchange in which Commoner again denied Buckley's premise of the ecological vat, the latter finally accused the former of acting not as a scientist, but as "an ecological moralist" and "not really as somebody who is looking at the present situation." Commoner, of course, rejected this critique and the two never found common ground on the subject.¹²⁷

It is in this ideological disconnect that the interview's importance lies. It demonstrates that conservatives like Buckley often found it difficult to fully accept some of the premises of ecological science and the political movement that it inspired. The biologist and the intellectual could agree that protecting the environment was important, but Buckley insisted any attempt to find common ground should be done under his terms, not Commoner's. In the 1970s, this reluctance helped contribute to the divide between environmentalists on the one hand and the intellectuals at *National Review* on the other. Buckley's unwillingness to reach an accommodation with environmentalism and his growing suspicion of its beliefs led to a situation in which the magazine's stance on the environment was articulated primarily by intellectuals like Coyne, Carroll, and de Toledano. Buckley's environmental activism, so evident in his political

¹²⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., "Is there an Ecological Crisis?" *Firing Line* 99, May 1, 1973, 4,9. Transcript courtesy of the Hoover Institution: <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/firingline/programView2.php?programID=177>. For Barry Commoner's four laws of ecology, see *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 33-48.

campaigns in the 1960s, faded away conspicuously by the end of the 1970s. Indeed, Buckley played a hands-on role in the publishing of numerous anti-environmental articles in the 1970s. Under their auspices, *National Review* steadfastly opposed – and continues to oppose – the environmental movement at nearly every turn.

But it was not just the actions or beliefs of environmentalists that led the conservatives associated with *National Review* to oppose environmentalism in the 1970s. In many ways, transformations within the fusionist program itself also seem to have led to a suspicion of the latter by the former. The fact that James Buckley's pleas went largely ignored at *National Review*, a publication that was supposed to reconcile the diametrically opposed worldviews of traditionalists and libertarians, reveals something fundamentally important to the relationship between fusionist conservatism and environmentalism in the 1970s. In the broader scope of the conservative intellectual movement in America since 1945, the fusionist project of the 1960s and 1970s was conceived by conservatives who wished to adumbrate the ideological divisions that existed between traditionalists and libertarians. By acknowledging a shared hatred for the interventionist state, conservative intellectuals could present a united front that would allow their belief system to become politically viable in the United States. Tensions remained, certainly, and in the 1980s the group would engage in numerous episodes of almost irrevocable sectarian strife, but on most issues in the 1960s and 1970s the two groups were able to fuse their ideas into a coherent attack on American liberalism. William F. Buckley, Jr. and the rest of the editorial staff of the *National Review* proved almost indispensable in helping to knit together these disparate strains of conservative thought.

Except when it came to the environmental movement. In the 1960s, environmental protection was an issue that had united conservatives and libertarians, but that consensus did not extend into the 1970s. After surveying the environmental literature published in *National Review*

in the 1970s, only one conclusion is possible: there was no “fusion” when it came to environmental issues. Rather, the majority of the magazine’s editors and contributors roundly rejected the traditionalist perspective, and, with the exception of James Buckley and a smattering of other writers, wrote traditionalist environmentalism off of its pages altogether. Some of the magazine’s articles even explicitly rejected traditionalist conservative arguments. For instance, Edwin Dolan, a colleague of Hart’s at Dartmouth and a “right-wing economist” interested in the economics of the environment, rejected the notion that the government should preserve America’s wild lands for the enjoyment of future generations.¹²⁸ According to Dolan, some environmentalists made the argument that “the wilderness we have now . . . is all we will ever have, so we must pass it on to our children. One generation cannot bind another. We do not have the moral right to deprive our descendants of that which the earth has in a strictly limited supply.” Dolan found this argument lacking, however. Instead of making bogus arguments to secure federal largesse for the protection of wilderness areas, the areas should be privatized and environmentalists made to put their money where their mouth was. Some of the points made by Dolan presage the arguments made by the free-market environmentalists of the 1980s, but Dolan was not so much advocating a conservative solution to the problem of wilderness as he was providing a means of undermining the beliefs of environmentalists and federal land use policy.¹²⁹

The eschewing of traditionalist arguments by Dolan, an economist and champion of the free market, was no accident. For just as *National Review* marginalized or outright jettisoned traditionalist concerns for the environment in the 1970s, it simultaneously embraced libertarian conservatives’ view that environmentalists sought nothing less than the total regulation of all aspects of the American economy to a point where free enterprise capitalism as they knew it would cease to exist. The magazine’s opinions on Earth Day, on the Left, on regulation, on

¹²⁸ Jeffrey Hart to William F. Buckley Jr., February 15, 1971, William F. Buckley, Jr. Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, DDDDD.

¹²⁹ Edwin Dolan, “Why not Sell the National Parks?”, *National Review*, April 6, 1971, 364.

population and economic growth, and on the energy crisis all echoed the broad arguments of or reached the same conclusions as the economists of the Chicago School, the business conservatives at *The Freeman*, and even the extreme libertarian fringe associated with Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard. As the flagship periodical of the American conservative movement, *National Review* could have helped create a “conservative environmentalism” in 1970s by building on the foundation laid by traditionalists like Kirk and William F. Buckley, Jr. himself, and in doing so could perhaps have shaped the course of conservatism’s relationship with environmentalism in a much different way than it ultimately did. But instead of making it a priority to transmit the ideas of Kirk and James Buckley, William F. Buckley, Jr. and the members of his editorial staff who helped him determine *National Review*’s stance on environmental matters opted to promote the anti-environmental perspective of Carroll, Coyne, Milton Friedman, and Julian Simon. Despite what James Buckley believed, the real “intellectual blinders” preventing conservatives from fully supporting environmentalism originated not just from the actions of environmentalists, but from the actions of the broader intellectual movement to which he belonged.

Chapter Four

“The Environmentalist Crusade”: Environmentalism and the Birth of Neoconservative Ideas

In June of 1970, longtime *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz began publishing a new monthly column devoted to analyzing a wide-ranging set of topics and events shaping contemporary America. As the subject of this inaugural column, he chose the celebration of the first Earth Day in which millions of Americans from across the country demonstrated their commitment to environmental awareness. Podhoretz proved less enthusiastic about what Earth Day and its celebration portended. “Earth Day signified the acquiescence of most Americans in the idea that a crisis of dire proportions is upon us and that time is running out on our ability to do something about it,” he informed his readers in a confiding tone, although he made it clear that he remained unconvinced as to the “apocalyptic dimension” of the crisis. For Podhoretz, the celebration of Earth Day had less to do with ordinary citizens learning about the environmental ills that affected their communities than it did with creating a false climate of panic designed to stimulate Americans’ awareness of pollution as an issue of national importance.¹

Podhoretz minced no words when it came time to parcel out guilt for those responsible for poisoning the atmosphere, as it were. First and foremost, he directed his scorn at the “idiot young and those of their elders who, seeing their own idiocy so handsomely reflected in these healthy and supple bodies, narcissistically praise it as wisdom and idealism, [and] think that in pollution we have an issue at last transcending politics.” But even beyond the misguided Earth Day participants themselves, the editor saved his greatest disdain for the sinister forces he held responsible for manipulating events behind the scenes. In particular he pointed to a disgruntled

¹ Norman Podhoretz, “Reflections on Earth Day,” *Commentary* 49 (June 1970), 26. For the best scholarly treatment of Earth Day’s significance, see Adam Rome, “The Genius of Earth Day,” *Environmental History* 15 (April 2010):194-205 and *The Genius of Earth Day* (New York: Hill and Wang, forthcoming 2013).

“class” of Americans – elite, Eastern, and Anglo-Saxon in makeup and existing on the fringes of American politics for much of the 20th century – who hoped to use the issue of the environment as a means of securing their own political power. Ending his reflections by warning that Gaylord Nelson, “the Democratic Senator who invented Earth Day, will possibly never know for whose political benefit he was laboring all the time,” Podhoretz suggested that Nelson had been co-opted naively by cynical interests.”²

Given the provocative nature of Podhoretz’ article, the publishers of *Commentary* – the American Jewish Committee – placed a disclaimer above the title stating that his opinions were his own and not to be taken as editorial policy. But even if the magazine’s publishers did not agree with Podhoretz’ excoriation of Earth Day, his first column nevertheless proved groundbreaking precisely because it represented to the letter the position of an emerging group of like-minded intellectuals whose ideas would come to transform the very fabric of American conservative thought and politics by the end of the 1970s. At the time of the publication of Podhoretz article, this group already counted an impressive number of well-known people of ideas amongst its ranks, including Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. By 1973, contemporary critics had dubbed the constellation of ideas associated with these thinkers “the New Conservatism” or “Neoconservatism.” Most of these intellectuals rejected the label at first, but the ideas being espoused by Podhoretz and his cohort were identifiably conservative despite the fact that they arrived at their ideological principles from a much different background than did William F. Buckley, Jr., Ayn Rand, and other members of the American Right.³

² Ibid, 28.

³ For early analysis of the growth and development of Neoconservatism as an intellectual movement, see Lewis A. Coser and Irving Howe, eds. *The New Conservatives: a Critique From the Left* (New York: New American Library, 1977).

The principle difference that separated neoconservatives from other conservatives considered in the preceding chapters is simply that until the late 1960s, many (but not all) neoconservatives defined themselves overtly as members of the Old Left in either its liberal anti-Stalinist or socialist iterations. What was noteworthy is that these intellectuals had once identified themselves as liberals or Leftists prior to the late 1960s and had supported Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the early civil rights movement, and, most importantly for the purposes of this essay, the nascent environmental movement. But beginning in the late 1960s, neoconservatives abandoned their position within the liberal establishment and embarked on a journey that, by the end of the 1970s, saw them enlisted firmly in the ranks of the American Right. Neoconservatives, in other words, were liberal intellectuals whose disenchantment with the countercultural distortion of traditional Left-liberal politics in the 1960s caused them to repudiate their former political allegiances and led them to identify with a more conservative intellectual worldview in the 1970s. Joseph Epstein, an English professor at Northwestern University and self-professed member of the Democratic Left at the time of this transformation, accurately described the cultural forces lurking behind the neoconservative exodus in a 1973 article for *Dissent* magazine. "It took a Tom Hayden, an Eldridge Cleaver, an Abbie Hoffman, it took Weathermen and Panthers and an evening at the apartment of the Leonard Bernsteins to reveal the unmistakable premonition that, should these various people have their way, society as we know it . . . would be replaced by a desert inhabited by the nihilistic and the bored rich," he argued.⁴ For many neoconservatives, it was simply no longer worth pledging loyalty to a Left that seemed on an inexorable march further and further into the arms of the counterculture.⁵

⁴ Joseph Epstein, "The New Conservatives: Intellectuals in Retreat," *Dissent* (Spring 1973). Reprinted in Coser and Howe, 10.

⁵ On the origins and historical development of Neoconservatism since its origins in the mid-1960s, see Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: the Men who are Changing America's Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977); Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians Debate* ed. and trans. S.W. Nicholson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Garry Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture,*

But dissatisfaction with the Left's increasing association with "The Movement" – their term for almost anything associated with the constellation of countercultural protest movements that sprouted throughout the 1960s – did not represent the only underlying cause behind the genesis of neoconservatism. For other intellectuals, the politics that underlay President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society also led them to flee the tumultuous shores of the Left and, eventually, to find a haven on the Right. Michael Harrington, the CUNY political science professor, president of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and longtime stalwart of the Old Left, captured cogently the growing neoconservative anger with the welfare state in 1973. For Harrington, three specific features "of the welfare state in the sixties served as [the] stimulus for, and rationale of, the rise of neoconservative thought in the seventies: the government intervened too much in the private affairs of individuals, the policies implemented by the government through the Great Society misguidedly attempted to impose an artificial equality on the public, and the consequences of these government actions often were unintended and did more harm than good."⁶ It was one thing for the cultural Left to drift further toward radicalism, but when the Great Society attempted to address some of the Left's concerns through its policies, many erstwhile members decided that the political affiliations they had once embraced were no longer tenable.

Leftist critics like Epstein and Harrington were hardly the only ones to remark upon the conversion experience of neoconservative intellectuals in the last years of the 1960s and first years of the 1970s. Many neoconservatives professed the very same sentiments. Podhoretz asserted that neoconservative ideas by their very nature were formulated as an antidote to the

and the War of Ideology (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1996); Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jacob Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right: the Rise of the Neocons* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: the Biography of a Movement*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶ Michael Harrington, "The Welfare State and Its Neoconservative Critics," *Dissent* 20 (September 1973): 435.

excesses that “by the late 60s had virtually become the religion of the radical movement in which we ourselves had actively participated in the earlier years of the decade.” Podhoretz’ good friend Irving Kristol, the so-called “godfather” of neoconservatism in America, also touched on the theme of conversion in his definition of this political philosophy. “Neoconservatism is a current of thought emerging out of the academic-intellectual world and provoked by disillusionment with contemporary liberalism,” he wrote in his *Reflections of a Neoconservative* (1982). But though the Kristols and Harringtons of the world could seemingly agree on the various forces giving rise to neoconservatism, their place on the opposite side of the political and ideological spectrum eventually led to lasting sectarian strife amongst individuals who had once allied themselves closely with one another.⁷

The neoconservative revolt against the excesses of 1960s radicalism altered the contours of the conservative intellectual movement in America in the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, when they still pledged allegiance to the Old Left in the 1950s and early 1960s, and when some of them momentarily embraced radicalism in the mid-to-late 1960s, neoconservatives harshly criticized the growing American conservative movement. But in the 1970s, when it was clear that their ideas belonged more to the Right than the Left, neoconservatives found a warm welcome among erstwhile conservatives. Glazer, for example, recalled that neoconservatives were being treated “with a much higher level of intellectual honesty” in *National Review* than in the liberal journals with which they had once been allied with. In part this friendly reception can be attributed to the fact that neoconservatism often directed itself towards issues germane to both traditionalists and libertarians. Kristol, for example, often railed against material selfishness in terms similar to Kirk, and though he challenged many libertarian assumptions, spent much of his time analyzing

⁷ Podhoretz, “New Vistas for Neoconservatives,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 1988, sec. A; Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 75-76.

corporate capitalism in America.⁸ As Robert Bartley, an important figure at *The Wall Street Journal* who helped mastermind that periodical's conservative shift and who was a leading interlocutor of neoconservative thought, put it in 1972, "The neoconservative themes *are* the central themes of our time. The collapse of values. The place of tradition in a time of change. The need not only for outward material progress but for inner satisfaction of living in what seems to be a proper society."⁹ Neoconservatism certainly differed slightly from the traditionalist, libertarian, and fusionist strains of conservative thought that it eventually came to comingle with, but it also had much in common as well.

One thing that neoconservatism quickly came to have in common with libertarianism and *National Review Style* fusionism in the 1970s was a profound opposition to the emergence of American environmentalism. It was no mere accident that Podhoretz dedicated his first column as a repentant radical to pouring vitriol on those men and women who came out in celebration of Earth Day. Nor was he alone in his condemnation of the environmental movement. Far from an isolated opinion piece, Podhoretz' column represented just the tip of the iceberg – the opening salvo in what would in what would become an acrimonious neoconservative fight against environmentalists and their values. In the years following its publication, as the environmental movement gained national traction, many neoconservative intellectuals took up Podhoretz' call to arms and devoted an increasing amount of attention to refuting, undermining, and attacking it with a determination once reserved for the Movement's other sects.

The antagonistic relationship that developed between environmentalism and neoconservatism differed slightly from its relationship with other contemporary strains of conservative thought. But the gradual emergence and consolidation of neoconservative anti-

⁸ For Kristol's remarks on greed and selfishness, see *On the Democratic Ideal in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 27; on Kristol's preoccupation with corporate capitalism, see Part Two of *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

⁹ Robert Bartley, "Irving Kristol and the Public Interest Crowd," *The Alternative* 5 (June-September 1972): 5-6.

environmentalism bears a striking resemblance to the processes by which other strains of American conservatism came to oppose environmentalism. In the 1960s, *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* – the two journals that would become the organs of neoconservative thought in the 1970s – devoted significant attention to environmental issues in the 1960s. Far from evincing hostility, these publications embraced a good many goals of the environmental movement, enthusiastically in the case of the former and guardedly in the case of the latter. In large part, this willingness to argue on behalf of the quest for “anti-pollution” measures stemmed from the fact that a not insignificant number of contributors to these publications, including some future neoconservatives, hailed from the Left at that time. Future neoconservatives were hardly alone at this time: traditionalists like Russell Kirk, fusionists like William F. Buckley, Jr., and certain conservation-minded conservatives at *The Freeman* all supported various environmentalist goals to a certain extent in the 1960s. This support of environmentalism could have translated into further conservative support for environmentalism in the environmental decade of the 1970s. Had neoconservatives maintained the support they cultivated for environmental issues while member of the liberal Left during their conservative transformation, perhaps they, too, could have helped shape a conservative vision of environmentalism.

But it was the environmental movement’s association with the radical Left that played a significant role in the neoconservatives’ ideological conversion. As the previous two chapters indicated, not all members of the radical Left supported environmental measures. In the 1960s, certain intellectuals among the New Left such as Herbert Marcuse, Murray Bookchin, and Paul Goodman did contribute greatly to the emerging environmental impulse, and certain faction among the student movement at Berkeley also gave a boost to environmentalism, but other factions remained just as disturbed as Podhoretz about the supposed ability of environmentalism

to transcend class boundaries.¹⁰ By the time Earth Day had come and gone, neoconservatives could read the writing on the wall: environmentalism stood for everything they had come to loathe about American thought and society. Not coincidentally, most neoconservatives became implacable ideological enemies of the movement, and they spent the remainder of the 1970s marshaling their considerable intellectual and political resources to stymie it at every turn. By the time Ronald Reagan won the presidency in 1980, neoconservative ideas had gained widespread currency within the GOP and the wider world of ideas, and many of its most ardent spokespersons parlayed their influence into positions in the administration while others became prominent advisors. Reagan, of course, appointed no neoconservative intellectuals to any positions that held direct authority over environmental policy. But many did gain access to the mechanisms of environmental politics through their work in the American Enterprise Institute and other “think tanks” that used their money and influence to induce the administration into accepting their neoconservative ideas. In the end, like the Reagan Administration itself, neoconservative intellectuals proved unable to undo the pervasive influence of the environmental movement on American politics. Even so, the themes that were present in neoconservative ideas during the 1970s remain an integral part of the environmental opposition in America that has hitherto been ignored, and we should not lose sight of their origins.

Neoconservatives repeatedly touched on four themes in their critique of environmentalism: its role in transforming the American Left into a radicalized caricature of its

¹⁰ On the environmental activism of student radicals, liberal intellectuals, and middle class women, see: Adam Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance’: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *The Journal of American History*, 90 (September 2003), 527-534. On the importance of New Left ideas to the nascent environmental movement, see: Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC., 2005), 127-134 and Andrew Kirk, “From Wilderness Prophets to Tool Freaks: Post-World War II Environmentalism,” in Douglas Cazaux Sackman, ed., *A Companion to American Environmental History* (Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2010), 297-299; On countercultural environmentalism, see Kirk, *Counterculture Green: the Whole Earth Catalogue and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009) and Frank Zelko, *Make it a Green Peace: the Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); On the anti-environmental elements of the New Left, see Keith Woodhouse, “The Politics of Ecology: Environmentalism and Liberalism in the 1960s,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2 (2008): 53-84.

former self, its role in transforming class and power dynamics, its role in promoting apocalyptic thinking in the debate over population growth and economic growth, and its role in challenging the fundamental tenets of the American capitalist system. Taken together, these themes formed the bedrock upon which neoconservatives erected a coherent and recognizable anti-environmental ideology that remains almost wholly unchanged into the present. Furthermore, in emphasizing these three themes, neoconservatives demonstrated a surprising intellectual convergence with the other strains of conservative thought in the 1970s. Neoconservative opposition to environmentalism became almost indistinguishable from libertarian and fusionist opposition, and this overt anti-environmentalism would serve as the glue that helped bind the broader conservative intellectual movement together. By the end of the 1970s, any and all trace of traditionalist support for the environmental movement had been virtually erased, and the neoconservatives could claim an indirect but important role in that process.

Environmental Issues in *Commentary*

Out of necessity, any account of those origins must begin with the history of *Commentary*, the journal that eventually became the preeminent vehicle of neoconservative ideas. Founded in 1945 by the American Jewish Committee, *Commentary* quickly developed into the finest periodical dealing with Jewish-American cultural and intellectual issues under its first editor, Elliot Cohen. Under Cohen, the journal earned a political reputation for advancing the values of Cold War liberalism, especially a visceral hatred of Stalinism which later mushroomed into a militant anti-communism in the 1950s. Many future neoconservatives like Kristol, Podhoretz, and Glazer cut their teeth during the journal's earlier years pouring their souls into

articles that simultaneously denounced communism abroad and questioned the rise of *National Review* and its brand of conservatism at home.¹¹

During its liberal phase under Cohen, *Commentary*'s editorial emphasis on the evils of Stalinism and communism, the trials and tribulations of Jewish life, and the superiority of American culture meant that the magazine had little time for environmentally themed issues, but it did not ignore them completely. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, the magazine featured a brief series of articles discussing issues related to the developing field of human ecology.¹² The human ecologists of this time period eschewed notions of environmental determinism, questioned the supposed benefits of progressive technology, and were among the first to view the human relationship to the natural world on a planetary level.¹³ Spurred on by the publication of two important books in 1948 – Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet* and William Vogt's *Road to Survival* – the *Commentary* articles endorsed the principles and values of human ecology, especially those that exhorted humans to exercise physical and moral restraint in their relationship with the environment, lest disaster occur.¹⁴

Within the pages of *Commentary*, the most prominent voice to address concerns initially raised by the human ecologists was James Rorty. An independent intellectual and scholar, Rorty's interest in ecological issues stemmed directly from his time as a student working under the famous American economist Thorstein Veblen at the New School for Social Research in the 1930s. Veblen's work, including his path breaking book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899),

¹¹ For an excellent recent history of the life and times of *Commentary* from its founding to the present, see Benjamin Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine That Transformed the Jewish Left Into the Neoconservative Right* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

¹² James Rorty, "Food or Famine: Ecology and Politics," *Commentary* (March 1949): 284-291; Ibid, "Hunger is Obsolete If – the Unused Weapon to Win the Cold War," *Commentary* (February 1950): 122-128; Milton Clurman, "Will Births Outstrip Mankind's Resources: a Challenge to Human Ingenuity," *Commentary* (March 1952): 282-290.

¹³ See Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: a History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 351-353.

¹⁴ See Fairfield Osborn, *Our Plundered Planet* (Boston, 1948); William Vogt, *Road to Survival* (New York, 1948).

critiqued the capitalist system's tendency to create inefficiency and waste when it came to exploitation of natural resources and derided the unnecessary wastefulness that often followed in the wake of the titular class's conspicuous consumption. Rorty did not entirely share his mentor's assessment of the environmental consequences of technological progress and capitalist economics. Rather, Rorty formulated a form of social ecology that recognized the damage technology and capitalism were capable of but that also tried to bring them into harmony with the planet's natural ecology. This attempt at reconciliation created a noticeable tension within Rorty's work. At certain times he succeeded in anticipating the arguments of later environmentalists who would advocate a more ethical human-nature relationship while at other times his faith in technology's ability to solve environmental problems seemed overly optimistic. Despite this tension, however, Rorty's opinions, especially with regard to the nascent organic foods movement, jibed well with the human ecologists Vogt and Osborn.¹⁵

In particular, the major theme of Rorty's *Commentary* articles – the seemingly inexorable depletion of the world's natural resources and simultaneous rise in the world's population – demonstrate this point. Echoing not just Osborn and Vogt, but Thomas Malthus and Charles Darwin as well, Rorty warned his readers that the rate at which humanity was increasing was vastly outstripping available natural resources, thereby creating the potential for an ecological and demographic catastrophe. He believed that a solution to the problem was readily available, but that it lay not just in the physical or technological realms, but in the moral realm as well. Solving “the survival problem is no longer or even primarily a matter of either resources or of techniques,” he argued, but rather a matter of creating a system of “human values that will

¹⁵ For an assessment of Rorty's importance to ecological and environmental ideas, see John Michael Boles, “James Rorty's Social Ecology: Technology, Culture, and the Economic Base of an Environmentally Sustainable Society,” *Organization and Environment* 11 (June 1998): 155-179; and Inger Stole, *Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 34-35. On Rorty's role in the organic food movement of the 1960s, see Thomas Jundt, *Greening the Red, White, and Blue: The Bomb, Big Business, and Consumer Resistance in Postwar America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 56-61.

provide . . . a balanced human ecology within the perceived and protected matrix of the natural environment.” Like the more prominent human ecologists of the time, Rorty sought to impress upon his readers the urgent need to reform humanity’s relationship to the natural world in a way that integrated technology, ecology, and morality. If such reformation was not imminent, an ecological disaster of planetary proportions awaited. In this sense, Rorty’s ideas, like those of Vogt and Osborn, helped contribute to the intellectual framework upon which much of the modern environmental movement was erected.¹⁶

Beyond the necessity of creating a more ethical relationship with the nonhuman world, Rorty surmised that changes in the political system would also be necessary to ensure human survival, although whether the necessary changes would be for good or ill remained up for debate. “Politics may be either a limiting or liberating factor with respect to the biological carrying capacity of a given geographical unit,” he asserted, and “more and more, statesmen will be forced to become ecologists and cut the cloth of political policies and programs to fit the ecological measure of the natural and human resources at their disposal.”¹⁷ Rorty would have to wait until the end of his life nearly two decades later to witness the sweeping political changes he envisioned, and even then he was likely disappointed with the politicians who embraced the ecological principles of which he spoke. Still, the articles written by Rorty and others injected into the pages of *Commentary* an ecological awareness that, while not as widely recognized as his contemporaries, nevertheless contributed to the intellectual milieu that helped pave the way for the later environmental movement.

The ecological focus of Rorty’s late 1940s and early 1950s articles was an isolated incident during *Commentary*’s liberal phase. It was only after Norman Podhoretz took over

¹⁶ Rorty, “Food or Famine?,” 290. It is interesting to note that despite the suspicion of technology evident within his *Commentary* articles, Rorty’s ideas evolved later in his career to the extent that he believed that technology could and should play a role in mediating a beneficial relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds. See Boles, 171-175.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 291.

editorship from Cohen in 1960 (a position he would hold until 1995) that the journal began to devote consistent attention to issues that fell under the broad umbrella of environmentalism. Like most of the early contributors to *Commentary*, Podhoretz could hardly be described as even a proto-environmentalist, but his own intellectual journey helped pave the way for the later inclusion of environmental ideas within its pages.¹⁸ By the time he assumed editorship of the magazine, Podhoretz had begun to move away from the liberal anti-communism that he had learned from his friends, mentors, and fellow New York Intellectuals Irving Kristol and Lionel Trilling, and toward an ostensibly more radical form of liberalism that embraced the tectonic social and cultural shifts occurring in the early 1960s. Some intellectual historians of neoconservatism dispute whether Podhoretz' professed radicalism arose out of a genuine conversion to the politics of utopianism or out of a desire to boost the magazine's profile through the publication of deliberately provocative articles. But whether his conversion experience was genuine or not, for much of the 1960s Podhoretz unmistakably opened up the pages of *Commentary* to authors with anarchist, progressive, socialist, and New Left views on issues ranging from the Vietnam War and America's growing power abroad to the plight of America's poor and black populations on the home front.¹⁹

Commentary's leftward turn also ushered in a host of environmentally oriented articles written by prominent liberal and radical intellectuals. Under Podhoretz' editorship, the magazine published a short story written by Polish-American author Sydor Rey about a farmer and Holocaust survivor whose experiences in the Nazi extermination camps instilled in him a belief that "the earth was alive, that all strength came from the earth, [and] that the earth was our mother." Robert Heilbroner, the socialist economist and self-described "worldly philosopher," supplied long articles on capitalism and socialism in America in which he critiqued both

¹⁸ See Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 147-149.

¹⁹ For the best treatment of Podhoretz' radical turn, see Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 135-155; Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision*, 77-81; Balint, *Running Commentary*, 79-96

socioeconomic systems for their co-optation of modern scientific and technological knowledge, a process that had “begun to pose a new problem for all mankind – the problem of maintaining the ecological balance, the very viability of the earth itself.” Around the same time that William F. Buckley, Jr. began to incorporate concern over global population trends into the pages of *National Review*, NYU Professor of Sociology Dennis H. Wrong took advantage of Podhoretz’ new editorial munificence and revived the magazine’s concerns with Malthusian population-resource dynamics. In particular, warned Wrong, increased population growth threatened America’s quality of life, describing how modern policies ensured that “outdoor recreation areas are destroyed; air and water pollution spreads; traffic jams and urban congestion become more common; and the need for centralized administrative controls” becomes more necessary.²⁰

The radicalized *Commentary* of the 1960s did more than simply provide a forum in which intellectuals on the Left could list the environmental dimensions of their broader social, economic, and cultural grievances. As Wrong’s allusion to “quality of life” issues indicates, the magazine’s editorial focus also endorsed many of the values and aspirations of the nascent environmental movement in America and, in the realm of politics, enthusiastically supported the expansion of what environmental historian Adam Rome has termed the “environmental management state.”²¹ The late 1950s and 1960s marked an important turning point in the evolutionary process by which older American concern for conservationist issues transformed into the modern concern for environmental issues. The conservation movement in the decades before World War II concerned itself overwhelmingly with finding ways to use dwindling natural resources more efficiently. It was primarily driven by politicians, scientists, and planners, and was diffused through society from the top to the bottom. The environmental movement that

²⁰ Sydor Rey, “Earth – A Story,” *Commentary* (March 1962): 226-236; Dennis H. Wrong, “Population Myths,” *Commentary* 38 (November 1964): 64; Robert L. Heilbroner, “The Future of Capitalism,” *Commentary* 41 (April 1966): 23-35; Ibid, “Socialism and the Future,” *Commentary* 48 (December 1969): 41.

²¹ Adam Rome, “What Really Matters in History: Environmental Perspectives on Modern America,” *Environmental History* 7 (2002): 303-318.

emerged following World War II, on the other hand, was driven by a broader base of the American polity, and its influence spread from the middle classes to the rest of society, a process that eventually reached into Congress and the White House itself. Environmentalists cared little for the goals that animated the earlier conservation movement, and instead focused much of their attention on “quality of experience issues” that included securing better access to non-polluted air and water, to more recreational facilities, and to cleaner and more healthful living spaces, especially in cities.²²

The environmentally conscious intellectuals who contributed articles to *Commentary* in the late 1960s took particular note of this transformation. To take one example, Kennedy advisor John Kenneth Galbraith penned a long article addressed to this very issue in 1966. Support for conservation and environmentalist goals was nothing new for the iconoclastic Harvard economist. In 1958, Galbraith, along with Paul Sears, Sigurd F. Olson, and a host of other environmentally minded scholars, contributed to a forum hosted by Resources for the Future on the state of America’s natural resources. In his speech to the forum, Galbraith criticized America’s wasteful consumption practices that overtaxed America’s natural resources and made ugly the physical environment, arguing that the United States should curb consumption practices by improving “health services, sanitary services, good parks and playgrounds, and a clean countryside.” In the same year, Galbraith’s hugely popular bestseller *The Affluent Society* made similar arguments by pointing out that environmental degradation in the form of pollution represented an undesirable concomitant of America’s increased wealth and prosperity.²³

²² On the history of the Progressive Conservation Movement, see Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: the Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). On the transition from conservation to environment, see *Ibid*, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially Chapter 1.

²³ John Kenneth Galbraith, “How Much Should a Country Consume?” in *Perspectives on Conservation: Essays on America’s Natural Resources*, ed. Henry Jarrett (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), 89-99; *Ibid*, *The Affluent Society*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958). For the best treatment of Galbraith’s influence

In Galbraith's 1966 article for *Commentary* – tellingly titled “An Agenda for American Liberals” – he built on his earlier work by calling on the liberal Left to appropriate the goals of the earlier conservation movement and transform them into something new. According to Galbraith, “the first liberal task” that needed to be undertaken in this regard centered on creating new public services designed to address the public environmental good in the city as well as the countryside. “The problem of environment, and especially that of urban environment,” he asserted,

Must be the focus of liberal effort The problems of environment – of air and water pollution; of roadside commerce and billboards; of land development and urban sprawl – have seemed commonplace and sectarian. They involve new and disagreeable controls – we desperately need, for example, effective controls on urban and adjacent land use. Space is now our scarcest resource. An aesthetically tolerable development must be within a general framework of control. But these things involve rows; there are few vested interests so powerful as that in anarchic land use and development. Better save one's energy for the big picture. Questions of beauty and aesthetics can be left to the middle-class conservationist. The soul of the liberal, after all, belongs to the proletariat. These attitudes can no longer be afforded.²⁴

In effect, Galbraith was saying that the revitalization of American liberalism he envisioned could not be accomplished unless liberals themselves broadened their constituency to include the middle class in addition to the working class. Importantly, this task could not be carried out, in Galbraith's opinion, unless liberals increasingly fought on behalf of a cleaner environment. In so doing, American liberalism on the one hand and the nascent environmental movement on the other mutually reinforced and sustained one another.

Radical CUNY economics professor Robert Lekachman made similar arguments in a special 1965 edition of *Commentary* dedicated to assessing the first years of Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. Specifically, it was Lekachman's job to evaluate the positives and negatives of Johnson's domestic policies, especially those that formed the core of the Great

on the environmental movement, see Adam Rome, “Give Earth a Chance: the Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *The Journal of American History* 90 (September 2003): 525-554.

²⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, “An Agenda for American Liberals,” *Commentary* 41 (June 1966): 30.

Society. Issues such as poverty, drugs, and crime took center stage, but environmental issues could not be ignored either. Initially, Lekachman applauded Johnson's attempts to "regulate billboards and disperse junkyards, construct additional parks, improve wilderness trails, [and] beautify commercial districts." While these efforts were all well and good in the author's eyes, they still fit into "the familiar pattern" of established conservation initiatives.²⁵

But, Lekachman asked of Johnson, "what of the critical conservation problems – those involving the sort of water and air pollution which affects the costs and the profits of the manufactures who dump industrial wastes into flowing streams, the public utilities which deface sites noted for their beauty, farmers whose promiscuous use of insecticides menaces fish and people, landlords whose chimney's [*sic*] belch black smoke, and auto manufactures whose proud products emit clouds of pollutants into the air?" On these issues, Lekachman argued, the President was silent. Implicit in this indictment of Johnson's environmental record was an important message: the president should use his authority and prestige to expand the welfare state into the realm of the environment in order to properly address these new problems. Like Galbraith and other *Commentary* contributors, Lekachman was not a self-professed environmentalist. But his views on American liberalism clearly jibed well with the environmental movement's goals and aspirations – especially his advocacy for the expansion of the environmental management state – and lent significant intellectual heft to a growing environmental vision.²⁶

Liberal intellectuals like Galbraith and Lekachman helped bring a semblance of environmental awareness to the pages of *Commentary* in the late 1960s, but the magazine also featured articles written by environmentalists that made no mention of a liberal or leftist political agenda. Sheldon Novick, for instance, published a scathing indictment of nuclear energy in his 1969 article "The Menace of the Peaceful Atom." At the time of the article's publication Novick

²⁵ Robert Lekachman, "Johnson So Far: 1: The Great Society," *Commentary* 39 (June 1965): 41-42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

had been working as a research assistant under noted biologist and environmental activist Barry Commoner at Washington University in St. Louis, and the protégé very much adapted the attitudes of the mentor. In particular, Novick wished to communicate to his readers “the serious problems involving the public health and safety” that arose from the proliferation of nuclear power plants following World War II, “problems which have scarcely attracted any notice.” Channeling Commoner’s own critique from his pioneering work in *Science and Survival* (1966), Novick inveighed against the Atomic Energy Commission and other regulatory agencies whose supposedly “safe” standards for the use of nuclear energy could still cause disastrous biological and ecological harm.²⁷

Many of the specific problems Novick pointed out were important impetuses in the formation of the environmental movement. As a case in point, Novick compared the effects of nuclear air and water pollution to the effects of DDT that Rachel Carson mentioned prominently in *Silent Spring* (1962). He argued that just as “nearly every bite of food each of us in this country takes adds another dose of pesticides to our bodies,” so too did nuclear waste eventually pass “into the complex world of living things” where it would concentrate, magnify, and ultimately poison humans and animals alike. Novick ended the article with a clarion call to stop nuclear pollution before it reached a tipping point. “In other forms of air and water pollution, we had to reach the point of real disaster before beginning to think of control. This must not be allowed to happen with radioactive wastes; once they are released into the atmosphere, there is no conceivable way of retrieving radioactive gasses; once entered on their winding course through the environment, radioactive isotopes are out of reach of man’s control.” The publishers of *Commentary* may have done their best to distance themselves from the content of the articles they published, but this venture could hardly be successful under the editorship of Podhoretz the

²⁷ Sheldon Novick, “The Menace of the Peaceful Atom,” *Commentary* 46 (December 1968): 33. Novick would later go on to write a book about the disastrous environmental and biological side effects of nuclear energy. See *Ibid*, *The Careless Atom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969).

radical-liberal. Perhaps more than any other article, Novick's visceral takedown of nuclear pollution demonstrated that prior to 1970 that those responsible for the magazine's content endorsed the goals and aspirations of environmentalism.

Environmental Issues in *The Public Interest*

But if *Commentary* in the 1960s made itself into a vehicle for the advancement of environmentalist ideas, the same could not be said precisely of the other major neoconservative periodical, *The Public Interest*. Founded in 1965 by New York Intellectuals Bell and Kristol, the main aim of the journal, according to its founding statement, was to "help all of us when we discuss issues of public policy, to know a little better what we are talking about – and preferably in time to make such knowledge effective." This goal, "at one modest and presumptuous," would be accomplished primarily through the rejection of ideological prefabrications that "do not simply prescribe ends, but also insistently propose prefabricated interpretations of existing social realities – interpretations that bitterly resist all sensible revision."²⁸ Of course, as with all such statements, the authors often found it easier to pay lip service to the notion of non-ideology than to implement it in practice.

In the final issue of *The Public Interest*, published in the Spring of 2005, first generation neoconservative and frequent contributor Nathan Glazer reflected candidly on his astonishment at how quickly the journal's non-ideological articles diminished in number while those with "themes that were shortly to be dubbed 'neoconservative' emerged."²⁹ What exactly were these neoconservative themes? Some of the more prominent included the importance of the traditional family to the fabric of society, the problems posed by the New Left and counterculture, the dire need for urban renewal, and the plight of America's black population. But if the neoconservative ideology espoused by *The Public Interest* in its early years could be captured in one overarching

²⁸ Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol, "What is The Public Interest?," *The Public Interest* 1 (Fall 1965): 3-4.

²⁹ Nathan Glazer, "Neoconservative From the Start," *The Public Interest* 159 (Spring 2005): 13.

theme, it would have been that of the unintended consequences that often accompanied the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s, especially those programs of the Great Society (the War on Poverty, affirmative action, etc.) that ushered in government mandated “social engineering.”³⁰ Neoconservatism, unlike the libertarian and fusionist strains of conservative thought, could and did make room for the welfare state within its ideological framework. Frank Meyer and William F. Buckley, Jr. wanted to repeal the New Deal; neoconservatives merely wanted to repeal the Great Society.

Glazer did not mention environmental issues specifically in his reflections, but this seems curious at best, because almost from its inception *The Public Interest* analyzed a host of issues that at the time were slowly being incorporated into the environmental movement. Many of these issues differed from those featured in *Commentary*; unlike the latter, the former periodical did not advocate enthusiastically on behalf of its goals. With that said, in its early years *The Public Interest* did not evince the overt hostility toward the environmental movement that would become standard editorial policy in the years following Earth Day. In fact, not a few contributors during the journal’s first five years seemingly accepted, albeit grudgingly at times, the necessity of the environmental management state while at the same time excoriating the other components of the 1960s bureaucratic expansion.

Few future neoconservatives, for example, managed to inveigh against the expansion of the welfare state and criticize its unintended results while simultaneously seeming to support its environmental dimensions than Harvard government professor James Q. Wilson. In a slew of articles during *The Public Interest*’s formative years, Wilson catalogued the problems of liberal-interventionist government, especially as it pertained to the major issues facing American cities:

³⁰ Ibid, 14-15.

crime, poverty, and race relations.³¹ He saved his greatest censure for President Johnson's urban renewal programs, especially the Demonstration Cities Program, which was designed to revitalize major urban areas that had been suffering from economic and social stagnation for a number of decades. In 1963's "The War on Cities," he stated the problem with urban policy: "the fundamental problem afflicting federal policy in this area . . . is that *we do not know what we are trying to accomplish*. We have neither concrete goals nor clear priorities; as a result, not only are federal programs productive of dilemmas, the dilemmas are each year becoming more expensive and more obvious." To make matters worse, the goals of the Great Society's urban policy often seemed to contradict one another. It was practically impossible, he noted in one example, to "revitalize" a downtown business district while at the same time eliminating traffic congestion and thereby improving aesthetics: a booming downtown necessarily meant more people and more automobiles cluttering the area.³²

But amidst this drubbing of bureaucratic incompetence, Wilson found time to offer a suggestion of how the federal government could improve its bureaucratic relationship to cities, and an effective environmental management strategy lay at the heart of this improvement. Wilson recognized the propensity of people in cities to create all types of pollution. "We pollute the air with soft coal soot and with hydrocarbons from automobile exhausts; we pollute rivers and lakes with industrial and residential sewage; we congest city streets with cars, and sidewalks with pedestrians," he acknowledged. He also admitted candidly that the most pressing problems "are also in part the result of consuming natural resources – e.g., open space and park land – and making future generations bear the cost of this consumption." These problems were grave

³¹ James Q. Wilson, "The Bureaucracy Problem," *The Public Interest* 6 (Winter 1967): 3-9; Ibid, "The Crime Commission Reports," *The Public Interest* 9 (Fall 1967): 64-82; Ibid, "The Urban Unease: Community VS. City," *The Public Interest* 12 (Summer 1968): 25-39; Ibid, "The Mayors VS. The Cities," *The Public Interest* 16 (Summer 1969): 25-37.

³² Ibid, "The War on Cities," *The Public Interest* 3 (Spring 1966): 28-29.

indeed, but for Wilson there was no reason why these problems could not be alleviated easily by sensible government policy.

“The crucial task,” at least to his mind, centered not on finding new technologies to stop pollution, but rather on devising “an appropriate combination of legal sanctions, tax policies, and incentives that will make these techniques effective. Open space and other unique natural resources can be conserved by public purchase, by easements, and by tax policies. Those persons who are determined to produce ugliness in parts of the city where ugliness is out of place . . . can be restrained by fines, taxes, and laws from carrying on those activities.”³³ With all this talk of reducing pollution and improving the quality of life, one could be forgiven for drawing similarities between Wilson and liberal intellectuals like Galbraith or Lekachman. But Wilson’s trenchant critique of the Great Society made unmistakable his nascent conservative leanings; leanings no one writing in the contemporary, *Commentary* would have shared. But those differences notwithstanding, Wilson’s article illustrates that emergent neoconservatives in the 1960s did look somewhat favorably on federal environmental intervention.

Nor was he alone in that opinion. Roger Starr and James Carlson made similar arguments in a 1968 article on water pollution in America. Written at a time when the nation’s polluted waters and poverty stricken cities had become increasingly visible and problematic, the authors could not understand why the Great Society chose to address these issues separately rather than connectedly. In particular, they worried that the total cost and commitment needed to accomplish the alleviation of water pollution, including the abatement of agricultural and chemical runoff, the cessation of industrial dumping, and the building of new plants and sewage systems to treat waste, would result in a federal boondoggle at best and be impossible to implement at worst. Rather, they argued, the Great Society’s programs should consciously combine anti-pollution

³³ Ibid, 33-34.

efforts with poverty reduction efforts in order to create an efficient government program that would make cities healthier and cleaner while at the same lightening the burden of the poor.³⁴

In order to bring about this strategy of “cross-commitment,” the authors proposed that job creation policies be geared toward putting the urban poor to work building new sewer systems designed to dilute pollution and send it to treatment plants. Unfortunately for the authors, Congress at the time appeared “slow to recognize that the War on Poverty [could] provide strong support for a special attack on water pollution.” Starr and Carlson partially blamed Congress’ sluggishness on the division of committees and sub-committees which by their very nature made cross-commitment difficult. Senator Ed Muskie of Maine had proved his “devotion, intelligence, and perseverance” in the fight against water pollution, but was he as well informed and passionate about the War on Poverty? “Under these circumstances,” they concluded, “the Administration must take the lead in examining the strategy of cross-commitment, in pushing for water-pollution legislation that will significantly affect urban poverty, and in exploring other government investment programs that might produce similar precious, incidental benefits.”³⁵ When it came to environmental issues, nascent neoconservatives like Starr, Carlson, and Wilson could seemingly find more common ground with the more liberal contributors to *The Public Interest* than they could on some of the other major issues of the period.

This is especially true of the periodical’s coeditor, Daniel Bell, who to the end of his life retained a more liberal outlook than any of his fellow neoconservatives. For instance, Bell touched on many of the same points in his “Notes on the Postindustrial Society” which served as a sounding board for the ideas that would eventually permeate one of his most influential books.³⁶ What most interested Bell about the titular society, whose first stirrings could already be

³⁴ Roger Starr and James Carlson, “Pollution and Poverty: the Strategy of Cross-Commitment,” *The Public Interest* 10 (Winter 1968): 114-124, 130.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 130-131.

³⁶ See Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: a Venture in Social Forecasting* (

observed in the 1960s, were the vast social, economic, and political transformations taking place: the transition of an economy based on manufacture and production to one based on service, the increasing importance of information, knowledge, and intellect to industry, and the rise of an ever more technocratic government.³⁷ Bell's grievances with the expansion of technocratic planning and the welfare state were not as great as those of other neoconservatives, but like his fellows he viewed the potential environmental dimensions of that expansion favorably. As an example, he argued in favor of the elimination of air and water pollution on the basis of social cost: the idea that the potential economic gains of pollution-generating industries did not outweigh the social benefits of clean water and clean air to the general public. "In the 'Great Society' more and more goods necessarily have to be purchased communally," he informed his audience, and "the maintenance of open spaces and the extension of recreational areas, the elimination of air pollution, and the cleaning up of rivers . . . are now necessarily the concern of 'public institutions.'"³⁸ Bell believed that in the America of the near future, the necessity of the environmental management state would and must become a fact of life for most Americans, a prospect he seemed to favor.

It was not only budding neoconservatives like Bell and Wilson who argued in favor of environmental improvements in the pages of *The Public Interest* prior to Earth Day. Before the journal's shift to the neoconservative right had cemented itself, non-conservative intellectuals also contributed articles addressing environmental issues. To give one example, the maverick economist and social scientist Kenneth Boulding offered a radical ecological challenge to the pervading economic "theology" of the time. In particular Boulding challenged the view of neoclassical economists who believed that infinite economic growth would lead to new technologies that would banish scarcity and solve all economic and environmental ills. In a

³⁷ Ibid, "Notes on the Post Industrial Society (I)," *The Public Interest* 6 (Winter 1967): 24-35.

³⁸ Ibid, "Notes on the Post Industrial Society (II)," *The Public Interest* 7 (Spring 1967): 103.

theme he would develop throughout his career, he argued incisively that such ideas belonged to the “‘cowboy economy’ of exploitation and pollution” of the past, which was insufficiently equipped to deal with the challenges of a finite planet. What was needed instead was a “space-ship economy” based on the notion of “space ship earth.”³⁹

According to Boulding, “in a space ship, clearly there are no mines and sewers. Everything has to be recycled; and man has to find a place in the middle of this cycle. The ‘space ship earth’ simply repeats this on a larger scale.” He further criticized American society for failing to instill the necessary values and virtues needed for a proper “space ship economy,” but he left no doubt that the coming of an ecologically aware society would have to be accomplished at least in part by government mandated programs. Unlike the other contributors to *The Public Interest* mentioned above, Boulding had no neoconservative leanings. But although his awareness of ecological issues certainly surpassed the likes of Bell and Wilson, his general ideas seemed fairly in line with the journal’s other articles dealing with environmental issues in the 1960s.⁴⁰

By this point, the environmental attitudes of the major publications that would, after 1970 at least, become the major standard bearers for neoconservative ideas should be clear. On the one hand, *Commentary* under Podhoretz’ leadership in the late 1960s had become one of the most popular vessels for the dissemination of liberal ideas, including those that jibed well with the sentiments of the burgeoning environmental movement. On the other hand, the early years of *The Public Interest* published articles by a number of future neoconservatives that, while they did not support the environmental movement to such an extent as those found in *Commentary*, nevertheless seemed to approve of the Great Society’s environmental dimensions even as they lambasted its interventionism in other areas. But all of this begs the following questions: If the

³⁹ Kenneth Boulding, “Is Scarcity Dead?” *The Public Interest* 5 (Fall 1966): 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

people and publications that would in the 1970s become synonymous with neoconservatism supported environmentalism in the 1960s, why did Podhoretz, in many ways the archetypal neoconservative, choose to excoriate Earth Day in his revitalized editorial column in 1970? Why did a person who had just spent nearly a decade publishing a host of environmentally informed articles suddenly reverse positions and fulminate against environmentalism at its most seminal moment? And, most importantly, why did other neoconservatives almost universally follow suit? These are not easy questions to answer, but the answers reveal much about the role environmentalism played in the genesis of neoconservatism and in turn the role that neoconservatives played in the origins of anti-environmentalism in America.

The New Left, Environmentalism, and Neoconservatism

The major reason many neoconservatives turned against the rising environmentalist tide had to do with environmentalism's association with 1960s radicalism. Unlike the conservatives writing for Buckley's *National Review*, who had always been distrustful of the Left, neoconservative revulsion with the "excess of democracy" unleashed in the 1960s resulted primarily from the fact that many neoconservatives themselves had participated in or supported "The Movement." Already by the early 1970s when Michael Harrington and his fellows at *Dissent* began to coin the term, many neoconservatives had begun to repent the sins they committed in the name of radicalism. Neoconservatives delivered especially blistering critiques on two related targets: the New Left and the various grassroots social movements of the time.⁴¹

⁴¹ For the most seminal articles appearing in *Commentary*, see Tom Kahn, "The Problem of the New Left," *Commentary* 42, no. 1 (July 1966); Bayard Rustin, "'Black Power' and Coalition Politics," *Commentary* 42, no. 3 (September 1966); Nathan Glazer, "The New Left and Its Limits," *Commentary* 46, no. 1 (July 1968); Diana Trilling, "On the Steps of Low Library: Liberalism and the Revolution of the Young," *Commentary* 46, no. 5 (November 1968); Kahn, "Why the Poor Peoples' Campaign Failed," *Commentary* 46, no. 3 (September 1968). For articles from *The Public Interest*, see Irving Kristol, "New Left, New Right" *Commentary* 4 (Summer 1966): 3-7; Robert Nisbet, "Crisis in the University?," *The Public Interest* 10 (Winter 1968): 55-64; Aaron Wildavsky, "The Empty-Head Blues: Black Rebellion and White Reaction," *The Public Interest* (Spring 1968): 3-16; "Special Issue:

In broad terms, the New Left consisted of a number of radical intellectuals who sought to replace the values of the Old Left, derived primarily from the labor movement and Cold War liberalism, with a new constellation of values derived from the counterculture, especially, the student movement, the movement for racial equality, and the feminist movement. The New Left and the counterculture were far from interchangeable, but neoconservatives often lumped them together in their condemnations of the Left more broadly. The emergence of groups like Students for a Democratic Society, the increasing radicalization of America's black population, and, above all, the anti-American sentiment that increasingly seemed to pervade the opposition to the Vietnam War, signaled to neoconservatives that the Left to which they had once pledged allegiance was dead. For neoconservatives, it was the Left that had changed, not them, and it had changed decidedly for the worse.

For many erstwhile neoconservatives, the environmental movement's association with New Left intellectuals and student radicals led in part to an acrimonious break up with their former colleagues on the Left and to an inexorable shift rightward in their thought and politics. *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, which had once endorsed the environmental movement, now began to revile it. As early as 1966, Kristol took to the pages of *The Public Interest* to criticize the New Left for the "apocalyptic" tone with which they called for improvements in "the quality of American Life."⁴² Kristol did not mention the environmental movement overtly, and he criticized the Left and Right in equal amounts, but his criticisms the New Left prefigured attacks on the environmental movement he would make later with greater frequency while his criticism of the Right would dwindle over time. Two years later, Kristol's friend Nathan Glazer denounced the role of environmental values in buttressing the student movement. Glazer, a professor of sociology at Berkeley who witnessed firsthand the growth and development of the

The Universities," *The Public Interest* 13 (Fall 1968); Nisbet, "The Twilight of Authority," *The Public Interest* 15 (Spring 1969): 3-9;

⁴² Kristol, "New Left, New Right," 4-5.

New Left and countercultural movements, complained that student anxiety over “urban . . . decay” and “environmental degradation” in addition to the “the crises of race” and the Vietnam War were directly responsible for weakening the university’s ability to carry out its time-honored function of transmitting knowledge and traditional values to its students.⁴³

Glazer further elaborated his opinion on this issue in an enormously influential essay in *Commentary* published in October 1970. “On Being Deradicalized” represents perhaps the most succinct analysis of the forces that gave rise to neoconservatism. “How does a radical – a mild radical, it is true, but still someone who felt closer to radical than liberal writers and politicians in the late 1950s – end up by early 1970 as a conservative, a mild conservative, but still closer to those who now call themselves conservative than those who call themselves liberal?” he asked his readers at the outset. In answer, Glazer pointed to a number of factors, and as he checked each off of his list, it became clear that he attributed his rightward shift to the defects of 1960s society and culture: the New Left’s infatuation with “the People,” the increasing “radicalization” of America’s black population, and the student movement’s appetite for the “destruction of authority.” But near the end of the article, Glazer also expressed how his conviction that “we are entering a world in which various forms of new social control will become necessary” also influenced his transformation.⁴⁴

It was in the context of this last grievance that Glazer touched on issues directly related to environmentalism. According to Glazer, the student radicals and their intellectual allies’ quest to create a perfect world – one in which all people of all races, classes, and creeds had access to high standards of living, quality health care, and higher education – could not come to fruition without restraining individual freedom. They had not thought this paradox through, however, and

⁴³ Glazer, “Student Power at Berkely,” *The Public Interest* 13 (Fall 1968): 15.

⁴⁴ Glazer, “On Being Deradicalized,” *Commentary* 50, no. 4 (October 1970): 75-76.

Glazer seized upon this by providing an environmentally themed example of their ideal society's logical consequences.

Young people, wishing to divest themselves of a corrupt civilization, take to what they conceive to be the wilderness, to live with freedom and without restraint. But if they litter the wilderness, pollute the streams, and abandon cars in the forest, their freedom to seek what they consider the good life will have to be restrained so that some aspect of the good life can be retained for others. Some day we may have to get tickets to visit Yosemite – one visit to a lifetime, and perhaps they will be sold and bought on the stock market – just as licenses to bear and raise one's quota of children may be bought and sold on the stock market.

Putting the issue in starker terms, he added that “the incapacity of the earth, as nature and god left it to us . . . will inevitably mean that a society of freedom, plenty, equality, and loose or no organization cannot come into being, whatever the passionate convictions of the young radicals.”⁴⁵

The preceding statement almost makes it appear as if Glazer were critiquing the Left from an environmental perspective. After all, he was correct insofar as the utopic vision of which he spoke would have been impossible given the earth's limitations or without ceding control to a highly centralized political authority. But Glazer was not advocating for strict environmental measures that would restrict access to wilderness areas or limit the population for the good of nature itself. He was simply pointing out the contradictions in the worldview of those people who made him just as uneasy with the direction the United States seemed to be going as his opponents would be if they bothered to follow their position to its logical conclusion. Glazer came to identify himself as a conservative precisely because more and more of these efforts at social control seemed in the offing. Furthermore, Glazer's references to “social controls” in this context further demonstrate the growing dimensions of his conservative thought. Glazer was no libertarian, and like all neoconservatives he had certain reservations with the libertarian

⁴⁵ Glazer, “On Being Deradicalized,” *Commentary* 50, no. 4 (October 1970): 75.

philosophy, but the remarks above reveal that he, too, had a distaste for government regulation not dissimilar to some of the libertarian intellectuals catalogued in Chapter 2.

But it was not just Glazer. Podhoretz, too, admitted that the beginnings of his own transformation from radical to conservative could in part be traced to the association between environmentalism and radicalism. In 1979's *Breaking Ranks*, a sort of autobiographical account of the process whereby he abandoned the radical beliefs he helped disseminate in the 1960s through his editorship of *Commentary*, he recalled reading an article by James Q. Wilson in 1972 which discussed a number of subjects that the New Left and its supporting forces had sought to eliminate from public discussion. The subjects that most preoccupied Wilson were the war in Vietnam, urban renewal, and American corporations' overseas activities, but, Podhoretz noted, "within another year, several new items were added to the list – Richard Nixon, ecology, the condition of women, and the moral and medical character of homosexuality."⁴⁶ Ecology's inclusion with the other subjects on this list had much to do with the environmentalism's increased popularity following Earth Day, but Podhoretz no doubt also brought it up because in his mind it had assumed a place alongside the other radical movements he had come to abhor. Podhoretz made no mention of his 1970 *Commentary* article excoriating Earth Day in this context, but given his reflections it is not hard to imagine its genesis.

It is worth noting that not all neoconservatives initially associated the environmental movement with the excesses of 1960s radicalism. Roger Starr, who had once advocated on behalf of anti-pollution measures in *The Public Interest*, went so far as to deny any connection at all between environmentalism and the Left, with which he still identified at the time. The major sticking point in this case proved to be Starr's assessment of the environmental movement's major goals, which he viewed as antithetical to the American Left's longstanding commitment to

⁴⁶ Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks: a Political Memoir* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 328.

material equality among all people. In particular, he argued that it should be “impossible for anyone who calls himself a person of the Left to accept the idea that the way to save the natural environment is by cutting consumption on the part of those who already consume the least.” “Even while the environmental movement walks and talks like a new and more advanced incarnation of the Left,” he further punctuated, “its unconcern and even contempt for” the material wellbeing of individuals “makes it look more like an Old Right than a New Left.”⁴⁷

As the preceding paragraphs make clear, Starr’s views on the environmental movement’s associations with the New Left were almost wholly isolated among newly minted neoconservatives. Try as he might, his attempt draw a dividing line between the economic and political tenets of the Old Left and the goals of emerging environmentalists seemed to fall on deaf ears in the charged atmosphere of the early 1970s. But what is even more interesting is that Starr himself was coming around to the neoconservative way of thinking more so than he would have allowed at the time, at least when it came to environmental matters. For instance, he exhibited nothing but derision toward that “wing of the environmental movement” which wrongly believed that “man alone of all the creatures on the earth is vile and he alone has illegitimate needs and wants”⁴⁸ Even the most reluctant of the newly emerging neoconservatives like Starr evidenced a suspicion of environmentalism even while denying its connection the New Left.

By the early 1970s, the neoconservatives disavowed any connection to the Left with which they had once identified. The emergence of the New Left and, to a lesser extent, the counterculture had forced them to reexamine their place on the intellectual spectrum between left and Right. Like Glazer and Podhoretz, many former liberals and radicals found that their political and philosophical beliefs placed them firmly on the Right side of the political spectrum.

⁴⁷ Roger Starr, “What’s Left?,” *Commentary* 52 (August 1971): 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Perhaps they had not yet become conservative in the sense that William F. Buckley, Jr., John Chamberlian, Frank Meyer, or M. Stanton Evans were, but a number of signs seemed to indicate that neoconservative thought was becoming more and more like the other stains of American conservatism. Beginning with Podhoretz' Earth Day column in 1970, *Commentary* grew increasingly to resemble *National Review* in terms of its content and in terms of its polemical style and willingness to expose what it viewed to be the shibboleths of the Left.⁴⁹ In June of 1972, *The Alternative* magazine published a number of articles paying tribute to Irving Kristol. Neoconservatives such as Glazer and Bartley were featured prominently, but William F. Buckley, Jr. also lauded Kristol, with whom he was becoming fast friends, noting that the latter was "writing more sense in *The Public Interest* these days than anybody I can think of."⁵⁰ As the 1970s unfolded, it became clear that Buckley might well have been referring to Kristol's views on environmentalism, which increasingly grew to have much in common with those published in *National Review*.

The Environmental Movement and the "New Class"

If the environmental movement's association with the New Left helped nudge many neoconservatives on their journey away from the Left and towards the Right, its association with a related phenomenon sped up that journey and produced a distinctly neoconservative anti-environmental ideology that worked hard to undermine the movement's goals and aspirations: the phenomenon of the New Class. Strictly speaking, the idea of the New Class was not new at all. The concept had been disseminated in various Marxist intellectual circles since at least the 1940s, particularly through the work of James Burnham and Milovan Djilas. The writings of Joseph Schumpeter and Friedrich A. Hayek on communism and socialism also contributed to the

⁴⁹ Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 165.

⁵⁰ William F. Buckley, Jr. "Re Irving Kristol," *The Alternative* 5 (June-September 1972): 7-8.

growth of New Class theory.⁵¹ But the cluster of ideas that most preoccupied the first generation of neoconservative intellectuals came into being in the late 1960s through the work of David T. Bazelon, a former New York Intellectual and liberal stalwart working out of the radical Institute for Policy Studies, and Michael Harrington, the standard bearer of the Old Left and onetime ally of many neoconservatives.

The rise of the New Class in the 1960s owed much to the increasing dominance of corporations in American life. As Bazelon defined it in the pages of *Commentary* during its radical iteration and in his book *Power in America*, the New Class consisted of “non-property-holding individuals” whose “life conditions are determined by their position within, or relation to, the corporate order They are job-holders, not capitalists.” “The propertyless New Class,” he further elaborated, also contained “that group of people who gain status and income through organizational position,” and “with some exceptions, they arrive at their positions by virtue of academic qualification.”⁵² In other words, the enormous growth of corporate power and influence after World War II had given rise to a technocratic class of individuals completely outside of original Marxian class categories that neither owned property nor sought to own it – teachers, administrators, journalists, scientists, lawyers, doctors, and government bureaucrats. What the New Class did own, and what helped make its growth such a transformative event, was their education. Combined with their position in the corporate order, the skilled and educated New Class positioned itself to influence American society in significant ways. But to what end?

Bazelon and Harrington believed respectively that the rise of the New Class was inextricably intertwined with the strength of American liberalism and that the New Class could

⁵¹ See James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World Today* (New York: John Day, 1941); Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1967); Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942; reprint, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950); F.A. Hayek, “The Intellectuals and Socialism,” *University of Chicago Law Review*, Spring 1949. For the best treatment of the New Class’ origins, see Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 13-18.

⁵² David T. Bazelon, “The New Class,” *Commentary* (August 1966): 50; *Ibid*, *Power in America: the New Class* (New York: New American Library, 1967): 308.

serve as the basis for an even more progressive liberal order. According to Bazelon, the whole of American liberalism in the 1960s, including the expansion of the welfare state through the Great Society, the sweeping movements for political reform in California and New York, and the massive financial investment in American universities all could be viewed as the realization of New Class interests.⁵³ Harrington addressed the issue in franker terms. In particular he expressed hopefulness in the prospect of the New Class moving beyond its narrow corporate interests to “bite the hand that feeds them” by allying themselves with the poor, the working class, and especially the new generation of student activists to create a “new majority party” based on the ideals epitomized by the interventionist state.⁵⁴ Both authors agreed that the numbers of the New Class hardly surpassed those of other classes in America, but they also agreed that its relationship to the corporate order and, increasingly, the government made the potential for a new liberally dominated society and politics in the United States a distinct possibility.

Given the nature and constitution of the New Class and the fact that known radicals like Bazelon and Harrington welcomed its arrival, it was perhaps inevitable that neoconservative intellectuals would align themselves against these interests. But the sheer amount of material they devoted to the New Class and its conceptualization is nevertheless surprising. After all, as the intellectual historian Daniel T. Rodgers has noted recently, New Class Theory’s “sudden, eager embrace by thinkers and publicists on the political right . . . for whom denial of structural class divisions of any sort had long been an axiom of social thought” proved to be a wholly unexpected development.⁵⁵ Beginning in the early 1970s and with increasing fervor as the decade advanced, neoconservatives critiqued the liberalized version of the New Class concept and marshaled their considerable intellectual resources in an effort to undermine its interests.

⁵³ Ibid, *Power in America*, Chapters 11 and 12.

⁵⁴ Harrington, *Toward a Democratic Left: a Radical Program for a New Majority* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968), 283-291.

⁵⁵ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 82-83.

In the early years of the 1970s when neoconservatives first grappled with the concept, SUNY professor of philosophy and religion Michael Novak lambasted the overly moralistic political beliefs of the New Class. The 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns, the civil rights and anti-war movements, the expansion of government planning and the welfare state all had New Class moralism at their root. Nixon advisor and future Republican Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan blamed New Class interests for the drastic and potentially harmful increase in spending on public education. Later on in the decade, Rutgers sociology professor and associate editor of *Worldview* Peter Berger echoed Novak's earlier critique when he questioned the ethical values of the New Class, especially its preference for "liberated lifestyles." In 1978, the Institute for Policy Research's B. Bruce-Briggs organized a book-length forum on the New Class featuring blistering critiques offered by several prominent neoconservative intellectuals.⁵⁶

But if one intellectual can be said to have delivered the defining neoconservative interpretation of the New Class in the 1970s, it was Irving Kristol. In the pages of *The Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and the op-ed page of *The Wall Street Journal*, which he helped transform into one of the most overtly conservative in the country, Kristol catalogued the efforts of the New Class to transform the very fabric of American society and dispensed free advice to those who wished to counteract its machinations. His 1975 article "Business and the New Class" best encapsulated his views on the subject. In the article, Kristol sought to understand "why so many intelligent people manage to entertain so many absurd ideas about economics in general and business in particular." Kristol did not equivocate in his answer to the question. "The more attentively one studies the problem," he informed his readers with self-assurance, "the clearer it becomes that what is commonly called a 'bias' or 'animus' against business is really a by-

⁵⁶ Michael Novak, *Politics: Realism and Imagination* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971): 60-61; Ibid, "Needing Niebuhr Again," *Commentary* 54 (September 1972): 60-61; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Equalizing Education: In Whose Benefit?," *The Public Interest* (Fall 1972): 83-85; Peter L. Berger, "Ethics and Present Class Struggle," *Worldview* 21 (April 1978): 7; B. Bruce-Briggs, ed. *The New Class?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1978).

product of a larger purposiveness. There are people ‘out there’ who find it convenient to believe the worst about business because they have certain adverse intentions toward the business community to begin with In other words, they are members of what we have called “‘the new class.’” A conspiracy against business had been erected, and the members of the New Class were its authors.

What reason did the New Class have for this vendetta against the big business? Once again, Kristol addressed the subject with a minimal amount of obfuscation. “Well one should understand that the members of this class are “idealistic,” in the 1960s sense of that term, i.e., they are not much interested in money but are keenly interested in power,” he asserted before adding that “‘the new class’” wants to see much of this power redistributed to the government, where *they* will then have a major say in how it is exorcised.” But he did not stop there. Kristol also asserted that the New Class “wishes to see its ‘ideals’ more effectual than the market is likely to permit them to be,” which in turn leads it to try to “supersede economics by politics – an activity in which *it* is most competent – since it has the talents and the implicit authority to shape public opinion on all larger issues.” For Kristol, then, the New Class represented the institutionalization of the spirit of the 1960s. The technocrats, intellectuals, and professionals who made up the core of the New Class had fully embraced the radicalism of that decade and sought to use their new positions of power to impose their left-liberal agenda on America writ-large. The principle casualty of such a transformation, Kristol lamented, would be nothing less than the entirety of America’s capitalist system.⁵⁷

But what did all of these neoconservative fulminations against the New Class have to do with the environmental movement? Quite a bit, as it turns out. Nearly every neoconservative who

⁵⁷ Kristol, “Business and The New Class,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 1970; For further elaborations of Kristol’s dissatisfaction with New Class, see Ibid, “About Equality,” *Commentary* 54 (November 1972); “On Corporate Philanthropy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 1977; “On Economic Education,” *The Wall Street Journal*. All articles are reprinted in Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic books, 1978).

touched on the New Class in the 1970s linked the growth and development of the environmental movement with the New Class. More than anything else, it was this connection that led to mistrust of and, occasionally, outright revulsion towards the environmental movement among neoconservative intellectuals. This connection between the two would have lasting consequences. For just as neoconservatives sought to beat back the expansion of the New Class and its allies, so too did they work fervently to undermine the environmental movement with which they associated it. In so doing, neoconservatives contributed significantly to the constellation of anti-environmental ideas that were rapidly becoming a hallmark of the American Right.

Unsurprisingly, Kristol took the lead in exposing the New Class dimensions of the environmental movement. He blamed implicitly the combined forces of the two for conspiring together in a bid to secure their dominion over American politics. “Under the guise of coping with nasty ‘externalities’ – air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, traffic pollution, health pollution, or what have you – more and more of the basic economic decisions are being removed from the marketplace and transferred to the ‘public – i.e., political – sector, where the ‘new class,’ by virtue of its expertise and skills, is so well represented,” he informed his readers. Even more alarming for Kristol were the “socialist and neo-socialist” themes that emerged from New Class rhetoric concerning the environment, and the prevalence of these themes signified that “the structure of American society is being radically, if discreetly altered.”⁵⁸ Kristol’s message to his audience in this instance was unambiguous: the rising concern over the damaging side effects of pollution in the United States was not a “real” issue, but rather one fabricated by the New Class as a means of vanquishing the old economic and political order while simultaneously realizing their own.

⁵⁸ Irving Kristol, “On Corporate Capitalism in America,” *The Public Interest* 41 (Fall 1975): 135.

Kristol also made this argument of in one of his most influential articles written for *The Public Interest* – 1973’s “Capitalism, Socialism, Nihilism.” If taken literally, he allowed, then “the [anti-pollution] thrust of environmentalism is not particularly subversive.” Unfortunately, as it turned out, “zealous” environmentalists’ interest in cleaner air and cleaner water masked a much more sinister purpose. In fact:

They are not really interested in clean air or clean water at all. What *does* interest them is modern industrial society and modern technological civilization, toward which they have profoundly hostile sentiments. When they protest against “the quality of life” in this society and this civilization, they are protesting nothing so trivial as air or water pollution. Rather they are at bottom rejecting a liberal civilization which is given shape through the interaction of a countless sum of individual preferences. Since they do not like the shape of that civilization, they are moved to challenge – however indirectly or slyly – the process that produces this shape. What environmentalists really want is very simple: they want the authority, the power to create an “environment” which pleases them; and this “environment” will be a society here the rulers will not want to “think economically” and the ruled will not be permitted to do so.

Kristol even lumped the Ralph Nader-led consumer protection movement in with the environmental movement on the grounds that it sought to abolish rather than protect consumer sovereignty. While he did not mention the New Class specifically in the article, the allusions to the efforts of environmentalists to reshape the country in their image bear too much resemblance to his other diatribes to be anything else. But voiced or unvoiced, Kristol’s major point remained unchanged: environmentalists’ complaints about pollution and public health in America remained illegitimate. The environmental movement, despite all outward appearances, did not care about issues pertaining to “beauty, health, and permanence,” to use historian Samuel P. Hays’ words, so much as they cared about transforming the animating principles of American civilization.⁵⁹

Nor was Kristol alone in harboring these opinions. Throughout the 1970s other intellectuals writing in *The Public Interest* seemed to reach similar conclusions, thus contributing

⁵⁹ Irving Kristol, “Capitalism, Socialism, Nihilism,” *The Public Interest* 31 (Spring 1973): 8-9; Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 1.

to the intellectual milieu in which the environmentalists and the New Class became synonymous with one another. For example, UC San Diego professor of economics Larry E. Ruff offered a thinly disguised attack on the New Class when he argued that the “ardent foes of pollution” were profoundly antidemocratic and therefore sought to use bureaucratic methods to impose their values over what they perceived as the “inferior” values of the people. The environmental movement and the New Class came in for an even more severe drubbing in *Fortune* editor Paul H. Weaver’s “Regulation, Social Policy, and Class Conflict.” In the article, Weaver spoke of the process whereby the “New Regulation,” epitomized by government entities such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), increasingly came to bear a higher regulatory burden than older regulatory agencies like the Interstate Commerce Commission. Unfortunately, the New Regulation was rife for exploitation by the New Class. “The announced objective of the New Regulation is to promote health, safety, a cleaner environment, and a more open political process,” he argued, which was a sham at best because “the members of the new class seem less interested in maximizing the overall health and safety of American society than in” attacking “the values served by corporate capitalism.”⁶⁰

The animus against the perceived environmentalism of the New Class was not solely confined to those intellectuals within the orbit of *The Public Interest*. Hardly a neoconservative contributor to B. Bruce Briggs’ edited volume on the subject failed to address it without a seemingly requisite amount of scorn or disdain. Podhoretz explained that he could not understand why the New Class sought to protect the environment from the ravages of corporations when so many of its members owed their success to American business culture. President Reagan’s future ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick viewed the

⁶⁰ Larry E. Ruff, “The Economic Common Sense of Pollution,” *The Public Interest* 19 (Spring 1970): 82; Paul H. Weaver, “Regulation, Social Policy, and Class Conflict,” *The Public Interest* 50 (Winter 1978): 59-60.

environmental movement's "assault on technology" as part of the New Class program to introduce "cultural conflict into American politics." Robert Bartley, could muster nothing but disparagement with regard to the EPA and OSHA for their role in "a concentrated attack on business that looks suspiciously like the work of the New Class." Of all the contributors, only Michael Harrington's dissenting piece argued for a more complex view of the environmental movement and chastised the tendency of neoconservatives to make simplistic connections between it and the New Class.⁶¹

Peter Berger, who came to his animus against the New Class as an opponent of "The Movement" in the 1960s and early 1970s, argued in 1978 that "the environmental movement has been a New Class issue phenomenon *par excellence*." Although he allowed that "cultural affinities" played a role in animating the movement, he nevertheless argued that class issues remained preeminent, where they were not obscured by the "effects of New Class propaganda." The ultimate goal of the New Class' association with the environmental movement centered on extending the federal regulatory apparatus through the EPA and other agencies in a seemingly never ending cycle that would provide its members with jobs and political power. In the end, it was perhaps Berger who made the (most honest) neoconservative argument regarding New Class environmentalism. "Put crudely, if industry makes a profit from polluting the atmosphere, the New Class makes a profit from policing the atmosphere," he reasoned, and "consequently, as industry has a vested interest in alleging that the atmosphere is clean, so the New Class has a vested interest in alleging it is dirty. These propositions hold *regardless* of whether, in any particular case, industry is or is not polluting the atmosphere." Here at last was an explicit admission of what most neoconservatives argued tacitly: those interested in preventing pollution, improving public health, and ensuring safer working conditions did not do so because air and

⁶¹ Norman Podhoretz, "The Adversary Culture and the New Class," 30; Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Politics and the New Class," 45; Robert L. Bartley, "Business and the New Class," 58; Harrington, "The New Class and the Left," All essays contained in Bruce-Briggs, *The New Class?*

water really were polluted, because environmental conditions really were adversely affecting people's health, or because working conditions really were dangerous. Rather, as the need suited them, environmentalists manufactured these non-issues solely because it provided the best means of providing them with the ability to influence politics.⁶²

The emergence of New Class theory in the 1970s represented the neoconservatives' singular contribution to the conservative intellectual movement of which they were rapidly becoming an important part. And, as chapter 2 indicated, the neoconservative dissatisfaction with the New Class helped neoconservatives forge alliances with their new friends on the Right. In particular, John Chamberlain, the veteran *New York Times* journalist and editor in charge of *The Freeman's* book review section, applauded the willingness of Kristol and other neoconservatives to expose the various machinations of the New Class.⁶³ And why not? Though Kristol had no love for the way libertarians seemed to worship the free market, his ideas concerning the New Class struck many chords that resonated with libertarian conservatives. In Kristol's eyes, the New Class obsession with environmental issues disguised their true motives: the replacement of capitalism and democracy with a new system of government-oriented controls that would remove the ability to ordinary Americans to make decisions concerning their own lives. New Class mewling about pollution and other "quality of life" issues only served to obscure the real issues at stake. Here was an idea that libertarians could endorse. Indeed, part of the reason New Class theory resonated in libertarian intellectual circles is because it provided a concrete and intellectually robust definition of the phenomenon they themselves had been reacting against. Neoconservatives and libertarians would not always see eye to eye on political matters, but they marched in lock step in their opposition to environmentalism.

⁶² Berger, *Worldview*, 8; For Berger's early reactions against the forces of the New Class, see Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Movement and Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 11-82.

⁶³ John Chamberlain, "A Reviewer's Notebook," *The Freeman*, March, 1973, 186; Ibid, "A Reviewer's Notebook," *The Freeman*, July 1, 1975. 448.

Apocalyptic Thinking

Associating environmentalists with the radicalism of the New Class represented just one theme in neoconservative efforts to undermine the environmental movement in America in the 1970s, but it was not the only theme. Neoconservative intellectuals spent just as much time opposing environmentalist opinions on population growth and natural resource use, opinions that seemed to be imbued with a nearly religious fervor. For neoconservatives, religion in this case could have one of two meanings. In the first, less prevalent meaning, certain neoconservatives argued that environmentalism itself had itself become a religion similar to Christianity or Judaism complete with its own spiritual beliefs and practices. In the second, far more prevalent meaning, the environmental movement was accused of having appropriated religious tropes for its essentially secular purposes, the most prominent being crisis, apocalypse, and moral regeneration.⁶⁴ Neoconservatives viewed these developments with no more favor than they had viewed the New Class, and their sharp critique of this particular wing of the environmental movement only further strengthened the anti-environmental impulse and brought them closer together with libertarians and fusionists who were voiced similar arguments at the time.

Perhaps surprisingly, most neoconservatives who touched on religion when critiquing the environmental movement did not do so on the basis of personal belief or scriptural authority, despite the fact many of them were deeply religious. The pages of *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* combined carried only one article that made this particular critique in all of the 1970s – Milton Himmelfarb’s ruminations on some environmentally themed remarks made by Supreme

⁶⁴ On the prevalence of “doomsday” beliefs in the 1970s, see Jacob Darwin Hamblin, *Arming Mother Nature: the Birthplace of Catastrophic Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 151-178.

Court Justice William O Douglas in 1971.⁶⁵ But the work of one neoconservative intellectual in particular presented such a blistering assessment of the environmental movement as a religion that it deserves more in depth treatment here: Richard John Neuhaus' *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism* (1971). Neuhaus, a Lutheran cleric who converted to Roman Catholicism later in life, rose to prominence as a neoconservative along with his friend and frequent coauthor Peter Berger after their joint publication of *Movement and Revolution* (1970), which offered a canonical neoconservative perspective on the surfeit of radicalism in the 1960s.⁶⁶ At the time of the book's publication, both Berger and Neuhaus were members of the New Left who supported, with some reservations, its goals and aspirations.

It is true that Neuhaus was not yet a neoconservative when he wrote *In defense of People*, but the book's critique of radical environmentalist views on population growth signified the beginning of the evolution of his beliefs towards neoconservatism. Like Kristol, Podhoretz, and Glazer, Neuhaus raised serious objections to the activities of the environmental movement, although he did so for different reasons. As a member of the New Left in the early 1970s, Neuhaus lauded the Movement, but castigated its environmental dimensions. Over time, however, his general political and philosophical beliefs would bend toward his opinions on environmentalism more than his opinions on environmentalism would bend toward his beliefs. Instead of coming to terms with environmentalism's place within Movement culture, Neuhaus eventually opted to censure not just its environmental aspects, but even those he had once embraced. The Neuhaus who authored *In Defense of People* might have been more of a neoconservative than he would have been willing to admit at the time. Indeed, his condemnation of the environmental movement was not so far off from those offered by other neoconservatives.

⁶⁵ William O. Douglas, *New York Times* (August 17, 1971), quoted in Milton Himmelfarb, "Of Fish and People," *Commentary* 52 (December 1971): 75-80.

⁶⁶ See Berger and Neuhaus, *Movement and Revolution*, 87-236.

Neuhaus thus serves as a critical figure with which to examine environmentalism's impact on neoconservatism.

Neuhaus was skeptical of environmentalism initially because he believed that environmental issues might come to obscure what ought to have been more important concerns: the war in Vietnam and the need for international social and economic levelling. The early pages of *In Defense of People* present several instances in which Neuhaus made overt connections between the two. "The Movement, wanting to keep all the eggs in its basket, nonchalantly slips ecology into its catalogue," he told his readers with certainty, and "conservationists, long noted for their disengagement from larger social issues, hasten to assure the radicalized young that the movement for an ecologically sound world is really quite revolutionary."⁶⁷ But the Movement's tendency to see itself as a religion made Neuhaus uneasy, and his objection to the Movement's religious overtones portended his later shift to neoconservatism. According to Neuhaus, the many "points of similarity" between the Movement and "biblical witness should not be denied," and the "theology of the movement" must be taken seriously in order to understand just how potentially destructive its impulses were.⁶⁸ To Neuhaus, this was especially true of the environmental movement.

Neuhaus linked what he viewed as the religion of environmentalism to the kind of extreme totalitarianism that manifested itself in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The environmental movement's relentless rejection of modern technology and civilization drew "its nurture from ideological soil much closer to that of pre-Nazi Germany. It is inspired by a mystical vision of nature against man's dirty institutions and machines. It is an escape from historical contingency to the stable truth of the gods of nature." He further reminded his readers that Hitler's leadership was "welcomed by the flower children of the time" and told them that

⁶⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1971), 69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

that “although their search was not reinforced by scientific alarms about ecological collapse, they too distained the technology that obscured the truth of blood and soil, and finally they welcomed the leadership that had been arranged . . . by the Destiny of Nature.” Neuhaus did provide a caveat that he was not attempting to label environmentalists with “intentions of a fascist character,” but his qualification rang hollow. The religion of environmentalism, if carried out to its logical conclusion, could lead to the implementation of a totalitarian political regime in which the theology of the movement would reign unchecked, he believed.⁶⁹

Associations with Nazism aside, Neuhaus also insisted that a “revolution in values” created by environmentalism directly threatened to replace the sanctity and authority of the Judeo-Christian tradition with its own quasi- theological principles:

It is understandable that primitive animism attributed to nature human soul and mind. Our ancestors refused to believe that the great forces of reality were indeed so capricious and arbitrary as the incidence of hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods suggested. But it would be an unspeakable cultural regression from the worldview produced by biblical monotheism for us now to aspire to the mindset of primitive man. Ecological literature is rife with primitive prayers to stones and streams, suggesting these as examples of a healthier relationship between man and nature, but seldom noting that the primitive’s state of reverence merged from abiding terror and feeling of helplessness before forces he could in no way control except by notoriously unreliable magic. The abhorrent spectacle of human sacrifice to appease the gods of nature is not far removed from some ecological arguments as they may think.

Among the “prophets” whose ideas were responsible for this revolution, Neuhaus named such “population controllers” and “eugenicists” like Paul Ehrlich and Garret Hardin.⁷⁰

Neuhaus reserved his greatest anger for Lynn White, Jr., whose 1967 essay on “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” argued that modern environmental ills could only be solved by rejecting or altering Christianity.⁷¹ As to White’s instance that St. Francis of Assisi be held up as a model of a new environmental religion accountable only to nature, Neuhaus charged that White

⁶⁹ Ibid, 153-159.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 184;

⁷¹ Ibid, 183; Lynn Townsend White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March 1967): 1203-2017.

ignored the fact that “Francis’ line of accountability drove straight to the Father and not to Mother Nature. Francis was accountable *for* nature but *to* God.” He further added that “it was not the claims of creation but the claims of the Creator that seized Francis,” not the “rights of nature but the will of nature’s lord.” In sum, Neuhaus asserted, the gross misinterpretations given voice by White represented the logical outcome of the ecology movement’s “inability to understand sainthood” or the other sacred tenets of true religion.”⁷²

All of this is not to say that Neuhaus necessarily rejected the environmental movement in its entirety. Rather, Neuhaus railed against those strains of the environmental movement that unreasonably considered “all people flies in the ointment of nature’s holiness.” In other words, the voices of the environmental movement, including respected scientists such as Ehrlich and Hardin, economists such as Robert Heilbroner, and historians such as White, all evidenced profoundly hostile sentiments to humanity. What Neuhaus wanted instead was an environmentalism that placed all people on equal footing with one another and which exercised stewardship toward nature while still recognizing that nature’s beauty and bounty were gifts from a higher authority.⁷³ The key sticking point for him was the subordination of the natural to the supernatural.

In retrospect, it is easy, and perhaps not incorrect, to view Neuhaus’ call for a responsible rather than revolutionary movement on behalf of ecological awareness as nothing more than a casual nod to the spirit of the times. Whatever remarks he made that seemed to endorse some portions of the environmentalist program, he, like his fellow neoconservatives, evinced a deep skepticism of environmentalism that could spill over into outright hostility. Still, Neuhaus’ fulminations need to be taken seriously. *In Defense of People* did not sell nearly as well as many books written by authors he criticized within its pages, but it did prove worthy of a review in

⁷² Neuhaus, 182-183.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 200.

Living Wilderness – the journal of the Wilderness Society – though its members probably agreed with the poor marks given to it by the reviewer.⁷⁴ Even more importantly, in singling out figures like Ehrlich and Hardin, Neuhaus arrived at the same endpoint as the business conservatives writing in *The Freeman*. Neuhaus' critique of the religious dimensions of environmentalism differed noticeably from the libertarian emphasis on environmentalism's hostility to capitalism. But the neoconservative nevertheless agreed with the libertarians that the drive to control population growth represented a radical threat to the stability of American politics.

A much more popular technique of neoconservative intellectuals in the 1970s revolved around the notion that the environmental movement made use of religious tropes for its secular political purposes. Podhoretz began using this form of criticism almost as soon as the 1970s began. The celebration of Earth Day, unsurprisingly, inaugurated this line of thinking. After all, as Podhoretz pointed out prominently in his critique mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the chief difference between environmentalism and the earlier conservation movement revolved around the “apocalyptic status” it enjoyed following the April 22nd teach-ins. In the years following Earth Day, Podhoretz would reiterate this argument a number of times in *Commentary*, but nowhere more forcefully than in 1971's “Doomsday Fears and Modern Life.” He started out by noting that the “contemporary avatar of an ancient expectation of an imminent End of Days,” which had once belonged to the specter of Nuclear War, “has passed to pollution. Technology is destroying ecology and will end by destroying us all.”⁷⁵

But Podhoretz remained as deeply skeptical of this strain of thought within the environmental movement. Even the scientific evidence marshaled by environmentalist to support their fears could not convince him that their views should be taken the least bit seriously. “No

⁷⁴ John J. McMahon, review of *In Defense of People: Ecology and the Seduction of Radicalism*, by Richard John Neuhaus, *Living Wilderness* 36 (Summer 1972): 36-38.

⁷⁵ Norman Podhoretz, “Reflections on Earth Day,” 28; *Ibid*, “Doomsday Fears and Modern Life,” *Commentary* 52 (October 1971): 5. For another neoconservative take on this subject, see Samuel McCracken's article “Apocalyptic Thinking” in the same issue.

proof exists that the end of the world is at hand,” he asserted with certainty, only “warnings and exhortations to the effect that we are doomed unless we repent and change our ways and return to the proper path. That such warnings and exhortations are often voiced by professional scientists and couched in the language of science does not endow them with the authority of tested scientific statements.” London School of Economics professor and trenchant critic of economic growth E.J. Mishan was the only scientist Podhoretz mentioned by name in the article, but it is not a stretch to believe that he may have also been referring to prominent scientists like Ehrlich or Hardin. In any event, Podhoretz ended by arguing that the “prophets of doom” hoped to scare up fears of environmental catastrophe in order to “justify the institution of extraordinary measures of political control.” His allusion to “political control” in this instance also hinted at a connection between environmentalism’s religious dimensions with its New Class dimensions.⁷⁶

Irving Kristol introduced similar arguments to his readers in the op-ed pages of *The Wall Street Journal*. “Lately Americans have seemed to be particularly fascinated with themes and images of catastrophe,” especially those centering on “the demon of Ecological Disaster,” he wrote in the early 1970s. Echoing his friend Podhoretz, he believed that “surely the most interesting and significant of the prophets of calamity are those thinkers – physical scientists and social scientists for the most part, but itinerant moralists of all kinds as well – who are informing us we have already entered a upon a period” of worldwide crisis. By introducing the idea of catastrophe to environmental discourse, these scientists eventually hoped to precipitate “a radical revision of American ways of life.” Kristol mentioned no scientists’ ideas specifically in his work, leading one to wonder whether his generalities on the subject bespoke an ignorance of the

⁷⁶ Ibid, 6.

specific premises and ideas of the environmental movement. Still, if the lack of evidence was indeed a sign of ignorance, it did not stop him from pronouncing judgment.⁷⁷

Nowhere was this more evident in Kristol's 1974 article "The Environmentalist Crusade." As the title indicated, environmentalist proclamations of crisis were in for a sound thumping. "There is in the United States a tradition of evangelical reform that has no exact counterpart in any other nation," went the opening sentence, and this "American dogma . . . is why we find ourselves being enlisted into movements of enthusiastic reformation." Now, he allowed, such impulses could be constructive if taken in small doses and exercised with restraint. But the environmental movement, like the temperance and abolitionist movements of the nineteenth century, had long since moved beyond the boundary that separated responsible reform from millennial fervor, despite the fact that it had begun with somewhat admirable goal of eliminating pollution. Kristol informed his readers forcefully that "there is now considerable evidence that the environmentalist movement has lost its lost is self-control, or, to put it bluntly, has become an exercise in ideological fanaticism."⁷⁸

Kristol's "evidence" in this case centered almost exclusively on the behavior of the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA's attempts to regulate urban planning and suburban sprawl, to set national standards for air pollution and automobile emissions, to prevent or restrain the development of offshore drilling and the strip mining of coal in the United States all represented the potentially dangerous consequences of allowing the environmental movement's "crusade" a proper hearing. Kristol even went so far as to proclaim, when addressing the ramifications of the Clean Air Act, that the "EPA proceeds as if its mission were not to protect Americans from dirty air, but to protect clean air from Americans." But even sarcastic statements

⁷⁷ Irving Kristol, "Ideology and Food," originally published in the *Wall Street Journal*; reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 28-39.

⁷⁸ Irving Kristol, "The Environmentalist Crusade," *The Wall Street Journal* (December 16, 1974), reprinted in Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 44-49. Quotations on pages 44 and 46.

such as this often were better than some of Kristol's more churlish remarks, such as his lament that the "environmentalists are implementing their regulations with all the indiscriminate enthusiasm of Carrie Nation swinging a baseball bat in a saloon." It is easy to criticize Kristol retrospectively for his more sardonic statements regarding the perceived fanaticism of the environmental movement, but it should be remembered he was nevertheless tapping into a growing and potentially powerful current of thought that by the end of the decade would become a trademark of neoconservative views on the environment. His opinions, or at least the general ideas he advanced, would not have been out of place in other conservative periodicals like *National Review* or *The Freeman*.⁷⁹

Kristol's interpretation of the environmental movement seemed also to filter down into an article he published in *The Public Interest* in 1977 by Howard Margolis, a Research Fellow at M.I.T. and future faculty member at the University of Chicago. In the article, Margolis sought to elucidate the politics of auto emissions in the United States. Part of that project involved tracing the history of emission politics back to the Clean Air Act of 1970. In his opinion, the policy goals and regulations implemented by the by the Clean Air Act were severely impaired by the fanatical forces of environmentalism. "In the mood of the moment, when cleaning up the environment had very much the character of a moral crusade, no analytical defense of the program seems to have been expected," he stated with incredulity; "the important thing was to get clean air, and get it fast." The inevitable result of implementing environmental standards as quickly as possible was a severe impairment of industry that threatened to unnecessarily hinder American corporations in the coming years, all because of a movement more concerned about moral purity than the vicissitudes of economic decision making.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid, pages 46 and 48

⁸⁰ Howard Margolis, "The Politics of Auto Emissions," *The Public Interest* 49 (Fall 1977): 8.

The reaction of neoconservative intellectuals to the environmental movement's use of religious themes and rhetoric can also be viewed in some of the specific contextual developments that occurred in the 1970s as well. The controversy in the early 1970s over the ecological consequences of population and, more importantly, economic growth serve as a case in point. The publication of two books in particular seemed to strike a particular chord among neoconservatives. Neoconservative intellectuals attacked Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* and *The Limits to Growth* for a number of reasons, but by far their most frequently voiced concern had to do with the books' perceived use of religious ideas. Some of these criticisms made their way into the pages of *Commentary*. Frequent contributor Samuel McCracken blamed Ehrlich's book on population for setting forth the "dogma" of the environmental movement's segment most concerned with population restriction, and he lambasted the "astounding trust in his own righteousness" Ehrlich manifested when talking about the coming crisis. London University's Rudolph Klein offered an even more unfavorable interpretation of the *LTG* study. Klein's article, like many criticisms of the *LTG*, made almost no mention of the modeling of exponential growth rates that the authors undertook. Instead he seemed content to call the *LTG* the latest in a long line of secular works of "social prophecy," likening the authors' predictions of disaster to those of "Roman Soothsayers" who "consulted the entrails of a slaughtered ox . . . to put the value of their prophecies into perspective" or to hermits of the Middle Ages who claimed to predict the coming of the Antichrist. In the end, he admonished his readers not to heed "prophets" like those responsible for the *LTG* who "sell the future like a patent medicine."⁸¹

Unsurprisingly, Podhoretz also joined in the action of criticizing the *LTG* study. Reflecting on the book's publication in *Breaking Ranks* (1979), Podhoretz remembered how its call to halt the disruption of the planet's ecological balance gave rise to a host of "prophets

⁸¹ Samuel McCracken, "The Population Controllers," *Commentary* 53 (May 1972): 45, 49; Rudolf Klein, "Growth and Its Enemies," *Commentary* 53 (June 1972): 37-39; for a more economically based critique of the *LTG*, see B. Bruce Briggs, "Against the Neo-Malthusians," *Commentary* 5 (July 1974): 25-29.

disguised as scientists” who, “waving computer projections instead of scriptural texts, now began warning that unless a halt were called to growth, the world would soon – again literally, not metaphorically – come to an end.” Even more embarrassing for Podhoretz was the fact that he had worked on the campaign of 1972 Presidential hopeful Ed Muskie of Maine, the politician most in tune with the environmental movement. Indeed, it was partly while witnessing Muskie’s refusal to challenge the forces animating the *LTG* study that Podhoretz moved even more firmly into the conservative camp in the 1970s.⁸² Podhoretz remarks on the *LTG* study deserve additional consideration. While it is true that the *LTG* study received criticism by both sides of the political spectrum, its projections of ecological catastrophe seemed to imbue intellectuals on the Right with the same zeal they accused of animating environmentalism. Podhoretz’s remarks, for example, echo almost to the letter Wilfred Beckerman’s article published in *National Review*. Beckerman was not a fusionist conservative in the manner of, say, M. Stanton Evans, but the fact that Podhoretz’ response to the *LTG* echoed *NR*’s chosen reviewer further testifies to the anti-environmental links being forged among conservative intellectuals in the 1970s.

Of all the neoconservatives, only Peter Berger seemed determined to view the *LTG* study in anything other than a work of ideologically distorted science. In fact, in 1974 Berger, whose views on the environmental movement had not yet been hardened by its associations with the New Class, appeared to applaud the *Limits to Growth* study and the “ecology movement” for revealing how “modern technology . . . has not only poisoned our natural environment but our souls as well.” But even he was willing to go only so far, noting that “it seems likely that the apocalyptic projections of this movement are exaggerated.” Berger remained highly doubtful of the viability of scientific methods and conclusions that seemed to support many of the contentions made by environmentalists. He did not go as far as to refer to the environmental

⁸² Norman Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks*, 342.

movement's concern over economic and population growth as a charade cooked up by charged fanatics, but Podhoretz and the contributors to *Commentary* were more than willing to pick up the slack, and they had no shortage of fusionist or libertarian allies to support their conclusions.⁸³

No Cheers for Environmentalism

In addition to their emphasis on the New Class and religion, neoconservative intellectuals in the 1970s also attacked the environmental movement and its offshoots for its hostility to capitalism. Even when in the context of neoconservative critiques of the New Class or religious dimensions of environmentalism, its threat to capitalism also frequently reared its head. This particular critique may seem curious to some, however, as neoconservatives themselves often criticized free enterprise capitalism in America much more so than the Chicago School economists, the libertarians at *The Freeman*, or the fusionists at *National Review*. Reflecting on the positive aspects of capitalism in the late 1970s, Kristol argued that capitalism deserved “two cheers.” On the one hand, it deserved to be cheered because it created material betterment for people, while on the other hand it deserved a second cheer for its ability to preserve individual economic liberty from the invasiveness of the state. Kristol withheld the proverbial third cheer, however, because he believed that capitalism alone could not provide moral and spiritual fulfillment in an age marked by lethargy and apathy. If Kristol's remarks on capitalism in this instance resembled those of any other intellectual on the Right, it would have been Russell Kirk. Kirk supported capitalism because of its potential to fight communism, but like Kristol he doubted its potential to serve as a source of spiritual fulfillment.⁸⁴

Other neoconservatives viewed capitalism in similar terms, including Kristol's good friend and colleague Michael Novak. In *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Novak sought to

⁸³ Peter L. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 44-45.

⁸⁴ Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, ix-xiv.

bridge the serious structural divisions between America's economic, political, and cultural spheres first alluded to in Daniel Bell's *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Unfettered free enterprise capitalism could never serve as the glue holding these three spheres together, Novak argued. Only a kind of capitalism infused with and restrained by democratic principles could give rise to a political culture that gave individuals liberty and freedom while restraining the economic interventionism of the state.⁸⁵ For both Kristol and Novak, capitalism in, of, and for itself could have no positive meaning or effects without a direct infusion of moral purpose.

But despite their misgivings, neoconservatives and the intellectuals whose ideas fell within their orbit rarely had a problem with wholeheartedly defending corporations, "business culture," or any other of capitalism's concomitants from the perceived ravages of environmentalism. Kristol excoriated the environmental movement for its alliance with the New Class not just because it threatened to invigorate the political power of the American Left, but also because it portended the implementation of a "national economic plan" that would restrict individual economic liberty.⁸⁶ He further argued that the "consumers' protection movement," like the "environmentalist Movement," were both evidence of "a revulsion against the kind of civilization that common men create when they are given the power, which a market economy does uniquely give, to shape the world in which they live."⁸⁷ Even his attacks that focused primarily on religion mentioned capitalism prominently, as when he commented that the EPA threatened to become "the single most powerful branch of government, having far greater direct control over our individual lives than Congress or the Executive."⁸⁸ Despite his own reservations

⁸⁵ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: American Enterprise Institute/Simon and Schuster, 1982), 14-15; Also see Ibid, *The Denigration of Capitalism: Six Points of View* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute), 1-7. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

⁸⁶ Kristol, "Corporate Capitalism in America," reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 16-17.

⁸⁷ Ibid, "Capitalism, Socialism, Nihilism," reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 62.

⁸⁸ Ibid, "The Environmentalist Crusade," reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 47.

about capitalism's spiritual values, the environmentalist threat to it filled Kristol with a burning indignation.

Kristol was willing to get even more specific in a 1977 article on the "Hidden Costs of Regulation." In particular he blamed federal environmental agencies for forcing U.S. Steel to spend 600 million dollars to clean up one of its coke works in Pittsburgh. The thirty percent decrease in the production of bituminous coal between 1970 and 1977 could, in his estimation, be directly linked to the draconian regulations put in place by the 1970 Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. On a more general level, Kristol's readers learned, industry would have to spend over seven billion dollars to implement the noise pollution, health, and safety regulations imposed by OSHA. In all of these cases, Kristol failed to hide his contempt for these measures that placed what he argued was an unfair burden on businesses and corporations, even as they endeavored to provide necessary services for the American people.⁸⁹

Kristol's is views on the environmental movement's anti-capitalist and anti-business stance filtered their way down into the articles he edited for *The Public Interest* throughout the 1970s. William Lilley and James C. Miller's article on the "New Social Regulation called into question the validity of almost every environmental law, ranging from the Clean Air Amendments of 1970 to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, because they radically altered "the relationship between the federal government and the private sector." Albert L. Nichols and Richard J. Zeckhauser were no kinder in their assessment of OSHA, and Eugene Bardach and Lucian Pugliaresi's piece on the National Environmental Policy Act vehemently refused to admit any usefulness for EIS's except as hindrances to doing business. Perhaps the most telling article belonged to Bernard J. Frieden, author of *The Environmental Protection Hustle* (1979). According to Frieden, the wave of environmental legislation passed in the 1970s had altered the

⁸⁹ Ibid, "The Hidden Costs of Regulation," *Wall Street Journal* (January 12, 1977), reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 52-53.

“country’s economic life,” and he believed it had nearly crippled the homebuilding industry in suburbs throughout the country.⁹⁰

Nor was this type of thinking was not limited to Irving Kristol or his colleagues at *The Public Interest*. In the pages of *Commentary*, Podhoretz and Bardach both defended the forces of capitalism from its environmental foes. Even before the controversies over the environmental effects of technologic and economic growth became popular, Podhoretz argued that Americans should accept “modern society, with its imperatives of restless growth, as a *viable* possibility . . . and a *natural* one” rather than denigrate it as the environmentalists did. Bardach proved even more direct. “For those who disapprove of Western, and particularly American, bourgeois materialism,” he argued without much subtlety, appeals to environmental protection represented the “ultimate rhetorical weapon” in the attempt to undermine society’s most cherished principles. Outside of *Commentary* Robert Bartley charged the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental organizations with attacking business in the name of the New Class interests.⁹¹ In spite of their unease with free enterprise capitalism, some neoconservative reservations appeared to be mitigated by the potential threat to it posed by the environmental movement.

Neoconservative attacks on the environmental movement represented significant ideological salvos in the struggle to portray the environmental movement’s goals as inimical to those of a capitalist society, but neoconservative intellectuals achieved their greatest successes in this regard through their work at the American Enterprise Institute beginning in the late 1970s. The AEI was founded in 1943 to serve as a bastion of free market economics in an era dominated

⁹⁰ William Lilley III and James C. Miller III, “The New Social Regulation,” *The Public Interest* 47 (Spring 1977): 49; Albert L. Nichols and Richard J. Zeckhauser, “Government Comes to the Workplace: and Assessment of OSHA,” *The Public Interest* 49 (Fall 1977): 39-69; Eugene Bardach and Lucian Pugliaresi, “The Environmental Impact Statement VS. the Real World,” *The Public Interest* 49 (Fall 1977): 22-38; Bernard J. Frieden, “The New Regulation Comes to Suburbia,” *The Public Interest* 55 (Spring 1979): 15.

⁹¹ Podhoretz, “Doomsday Fears and Modern Life,” 6; Bardach, “Save Energy, Save a Soul,” 57; Bartley, “Business in the New Class,” in *The New Class?*, 61.

by the liberal interventionism of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. In the early 1970s, the think tank took on an increasingly neoconservative bent and became one of the most influential institutions in America, capable of significantly influencing wider debates over public policy on economic matters. Unsurprisingly, the AEI also provided significant funding for neoconservative intellectuals to formulate and disseminate their ideas. In particular Kristol and Novak both joined the AEI as senior fellows in 1978 and set about publishing copious amounts of material designed to educate American business leaders on how to defend corporate capitalism and business culture from those who most sought its ruination: the New Class. Along with the libertarian oriented Cato Institute, the Olin Foundation, and the Volker Fund, and the Heritage Foundation, the AEI provided a significant boost to American conservatism in the 1970s by providing conservative scholars access to the mechanisms of policy and through the dissemination of conservative ideas.

Kristol had already become something of a CEO whisperer by the time he arrived at the AEI through his work at the *Wall Street Journal*. By 1980 he devoted a significant amount of space in his op-ed columns to counseling executives on strategies to beat back the New Class assault, including withholding their philanthropic donations to universities in an attempt to defund the New Class while simultaneously funding those intellectuals who, like Kristol and his fellow neoconservatives, believed in a strong private sector.⁹² On this subject, Kristol was more modest about his influence in the business community than his achievements warranted. "I raise money for conservative think tanks," and "I am a liaison to some degree between intellectuals and the business community," he once said in rank understatement. In actuality Kristol, from his perch at the AEI, helped to construct a vast network of neoconservative intellectuals and

⁹² Irving Kristol, "On Corporate Philanthropy," *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 1977; reprinted as American Enterprise Institute pamphlet 65 (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1977); also reprinted in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 141-145. For Kristol's other *Wall Street Journal* articles advising business leaders see the second section of *Two Cheers for Capitalism* titled "The Corporation and the Dinosaur."

corporate executives that played an increasing role in shaping public perception and policy against the New Class.⁹³

Novak rose to prominence as a valued corporate adviser directly through his work at the AEI, and even more so than Kristol he honed the business community's response to the threat of the New Class. For instance, in a 1978 AEI pamphlet on "The Future of Democratic Capitalism," Novak informed the corporate world that it was engaged directly in a politically charged "war of ideas" with the forces of the New Class. Novak and his fellow neoconservatives greatly feared that the losing outcome of such class warfare would be nothing short of the decay of the very fabric of the American polity. To help business win the war, he proposed that "corporate executives [develop] a political strategy that step-by-step meets that of the new class." Education and advertising would not be enough. The only way to truly win the war of ideas would be to create a counter-intelligentsia dedicated to the production of knowledge that directly subverted New Class interests. Think tanks like AEI, publications like the *Wall Street Journal*, and even universities must be enlisted for this counter maneuver to succeed.⁹⁴ Naturally, Novak had neoconservatives like himself in mind for the job.

Many neoconservatives associated with the AEI mentioned the environmental movement prominently as a critical battleground in the war of ideas taking shape in the 1970s. Novak listed biologist Barry Commoner, one of the major scientific spokespeople for the environmental movement whose 1971 book *The Closing Circle* helped bring ecological awareness to countless Americans, as an agent of the New Class assault on capitalism.⁹⁵ He also held up the interactions between oil companies and environmentalists as a specific way of how *not* to conduct proper

⁹³ Quoted in Sidney Blumenthal, *Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (New York: Times Books, 1986), 148; Also see Jon Weiner, "Dollars For Neocon Scholars: the Olin Money Tree" in *Politics, Professors, and Pop* (London: Verso, 1991), 99.

⁹⁴ Michael Novak, *The American Vision: an Essay on the Future of Democratic Capitalism* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1978), 52-53.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

ideological warfare. “The oil companies . . . have tried to reply to attacks by environmentalists by announcing that, in effect, ‘We protect the environment, too,’” he said, adding that “The game has been defined as holier-than-thou. The corporations accept the game.” But by meeting environmentalist skirmishes on moral terrain, business was bound to lose. Only by emphasizing the issue of costs – a tactic also favored by *The Freeman* and *National Review* – and forcing New Class environmentalists to capitulate to the notion that environmental protection may cost more than they were willing to pay for could businesses hope to “change the game” in their favor.⁹⁶

Kristol made similar arguments in his work for the AEI. In the inaugural issue of AEI’s *Regulation Magazine* in 1977, he explicitly cast environmentalists as members of the New Class, “though officialdom will deny it,” he snickered.⁹⁷ In a volume on capitalism and socialism edited by Novak, Kristol warned that “Capitalism today is facing, not an economic crisis in any real sense of the term, but a crisis of belief. Demands are being generated by groups and individuals that will wreck this society.” With the specter of the New Class, as ever, in the background, Kristol expressly pointed the finger at the environmental movement. “The environmentalist movement as well as all movements for economic planning embody an aristocratic impulse, an impulse to tell this society what shape it should take,” he stated in an argument that by that time had become an old hat. He even recast his old arguments about the misplaced appropriation of religion in the environmental movement when he mockingly called environmentalists “the experts, the spiritual authorities on what is good for humanity and what is not.”⁹⁸ These critiques offered a neoconservative slant to the familiar argument about the elitism of environmentalists.

But it was not just Kristol and Novak among the archetypal neoconservatives who contributed to the fight against environmentalism taking place at the AEI. Ben Wattenberg, a

⁹⁶ Ibid, 43-44.

⁹⁷ Irving Kristol, “A Regulated Society?” *Regulation* 1 (American Enterprise Institute, July/August 1977), 13.

⁹⁸ Kristol, “The Disaffection of Capitalism,” in *Capitalism and Socialism: a Theological Inquiry*

friend of both Kristol and Novak who had undergone the transformation from Great Society Democrat in the 1960s to budding neoconservative in the 1970s, reinforced the opinions of his colleagues. He argued in his contribution to Novak's volume *Capitalism and Socialism* that "the corporation also has been attacked on the ground that it is a great polluter and raper of resources," and while he conceded that "there is an element of truth to that," it did not stop him from excoriating environmentalism for diminishing "severely the standard of living in this country." The environmental movement's opposition to nuclear power, to offshore drilling, to the Alaskan pipeline, to suburban sprawl, and to the building of the Tellico Dam all demonstrated the twisted logic of environmentalism's anti-capitalist yearnings. Wattenberg, Novak, and Kristol proved highly effective throughout the 1970s in institutionalizing their view of environmentalism as wholly anti-capitalist in the AEI, and in turn the AEI helped take the anti-environmental ideology and make it a permanent feature of the business world.⁹⁹

In the end, the neoconservative vision of capitalism had much in common with the libertarian and fusionist visions. From their writings, it is clear neoconservatives believed corporate capitalism by itself to be morally bankrupt, and in this they shared much with traditionalists like Kirk. But Kirk, at least in the 1960s and 1970s, refused to compromise his stance on capitalism even when it appeared that environmentalist demands appeared to threaten it. For Kirk, support for environmentalism remained important because doing so helped him fulfill his part in the eternal contract. If some aspects of the environmentalist program seemed like they would constrain free enterprise or increase the use of state power, then he believed perhaps capitalism ought to be restrained and government power harnessed. Kirk's respect for nature translated into unwavering support for environmentalism during much of the environmental decade. This was not so for neoconservatives. When it appeared that

⁹⁹ Ben Wattenberg, "The Success of the American Economic System," in *Capitalism and Socialism: a Theological Inquiry*, 165-166.

environmentalism and capitalism were locked in a struggle over a particular political and social vision of the American polity, neoconservatives always sided with the former. Capitalism might not be able to lead to spiritual fulfillment, but it was still preferable to the totalitarian controls that would be imposed if radical environmentalists had their way. For all of their lip service to tradition, morality, and restraint, neoconservative ideas about the environment clearly had more in common with libertarianism and fusionism than they did with traditionalism.

Conclusion

By the time the sun set on the 1970s, neoconservative intellectuals occupied a radically different position with regard to the environmental movement than they had at the end of the previous decade. For much of the early 1960s, many future neoconservatives wrote very little regarding the efforts of many Americans were making in the pursuit of clean air, clean water, and open spaces. In the middle of the 1960s, as environmentalism became an increasing presence on the national stage, publications like the radicalized *Commentary* and the more reserved and technical *The Public Interest* published a number of articles by leading intellectuals who lent their considerable energy to supporting the movement's goals and aspirations. But in 1980 scarcely a neoconservative could be found who did not heap mockery, scorn, or derision on the environmental movement and who did not dedicate themselves to undermining, countering, and beating back its advances. In all of the 1970s, *Commentary* did not have one article that professed anything other than what James Buckley in the previous chapter referred to as "perfunctory obeisance" to the environmentalist cause. *The Public Interest* did carry a smattering of articles that could be called "pro-environment" in the 1970s, but much more often than not they were written by non-neoconservatives like Daniel Bell, and they decreased in frequency as

the decade passed.¹⁰⁰ Something had changed between the late 1960s and early 1980s that set neoconservatism and environmentalism on radically different and conflicting trajectories

In retrospect, it appears that the conflict between the two movements was almost inevitable given how they developed historically in the United States. Above all else, the rise of neoconservatism in America represented a reaction to the excess radicalism of the 1960s and all of its concomitants, especially the many mass movements taking place at universities all throughout the country. It was one thing to identify oneself as a Cold War liberal, but quite another to wholeheartedly endorse the style and trappings of the counterculture or the New Left. On the other hand, environmentalism in the 1960s and especially after Earth Day became a prominent feature in American society exactly because it arose as a mass movement in the same vein as the anti-war or student movements. Indeed, the cross pollination between the environmental movement and the social movements of the time is striking in hindsight. It is thus no small wonder that intellectuals like Kristol, Podhoretz, Berger, and Novak frequently listed the environmentalism of the Left as a not inconsiderable impetus for their decade-long journey toward the right side of the ideological and political spectrum.

In addition, when the veterans of these movements entered the bureaucracy or the “knowledge industry” and coalesced into the “New Class,” environmentalism could hardly leave anything but a bitter taste in neoconservative’s mouths. Further, although neoconservatives proved much less condemnatory of the welfare state than did their conservative counterparts elsewhere, they warned ceaselessly of the potentially disastrous unintended consequences of wonton federal expansion. When the EPA, OSHA, and other government agencies began to

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Bell, “The Corporation and Society in the 1970s,” *The Public Interest* 24 (Summer 1971): 5-33; for other such articles, see Thomas E. Schelling, “On the Ecology of Micromotives,” *The Public Interest* 25 (Fall 1971): 61-98; Anthony Downs, “Up and Down with Ecology: the Issue Attention Cycle,” *The Public Interest* 28 (Summer 1972): 38-50; A. Myrick Freeman III and Robert H. Haveman, “Clean Rhetoric and Dirty Water,” *The Public Interest* 28 (Summer 1972): 51-65; Marc J. Roberts, “Is There an Energy Crisis,” *The Public Interest* 31(Spring 1973): 17-37.

sprout up and institute theretofore unheard-of levels of regulation, neoconservatives once again saw the hand of the liberal Left at work. To make matters worse, many environmentalists seemed infused with true zeal in their pursuit of a cleaner and safer environment, and still even more seemed ready to do away with democratic capitalism, free enterprise capitalism, or any other capitalism they could find. All of this was too much for neoconservatives to take. They decided to fight back and in the process added a distinctly anti-environmental strain of ideas to the growing body of neoconservative thought.

Nor, it should be mentioned at this point, was the neoconservative interpretation of the environmental movement that gave birth to that ideology *precisely* wrong or inaccurate. The New Left and counterculture *did* embrace environmentalism enthusiastically. The EPA and similar organizations *were* staffed by professionals who cared about protecting the environment and who could well have resembled the “New Class.” Scientists like Paul Ehrlich and the authors of the *Limits to Growth* *were* possessed of some notions that no doubt seemed radical and apocalyptic given the standards of the time. Barry Commoner really *did* have significant grievances with the capitalist system, and federal environmental agencies *did* impose strict regulations on businesses and corporations. Of all neoconservative views of the environmental movement, perhaps only Neuhaus’ decision to compare the environmental impulse with the impulse that gave rise to Nazism seems severely out of touch with the realities of the decade.

Where neoconservatives, and libertarians and fusionists too, for that matter, truly erred in the formulation of their anti-environmental ideology was not so much what they chose to emphasize in their work, but rather in what they chose not to. In almost every case they preemptorily dismissed or outright ignored the mainstream elements of environmentalism and instead chose to accentuate only what they saw as the most radical people, ideas, and implications associated with the movement. Earth Day and other mass efforts to raise

environmental awareness did not represent a tectonic shift in the values of the American people as a whole; instead they were framed as a conspiracy organized by a small class of individuals hoping to secure their own political power. The drives for cleaner air, cleaner water, safer workplaces, and better amenities were explained away as the trumped up efforts of fanatics who had replaced their own religion with environmentalism or else had mixed up the two somewhere along the way. And, above all, the attempt to implement regulations on industry and business represented nothing so trivial as an attempt to curb pollution and promote better public health; it portended nothing less than the complete dissolution of the capitalist principles that had served as the bedrock of the American nation since its founding. A majority of Americans welcomed the arrival of the environmental movement and the changes it brought, but neoconservatives could not escape the ideological shackles they had fashioned for themselves enough to recognize it.

But it is because of the misunderstandings and misinterpretations rife within neoconservative anti-environmentalism that it must be taken seriously both intellectually and as a historical force. *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* were the two major vehicles for the articulation of neoconservative ideas on the environment, but the ideas expressed there did not simply reverberate through an echo chamber where only neoconservatives could hear them. Neoconservatives disseminated their ideas to the general public and to elite power brokers through an increasingly intricate network that helped contributed to and helped sustain the environmental opposition in America. Many neoconservatives maintained positions within the academy where they served as a bulwark against the liberal establishment. James Q. Wilson was at Harvard, Irving Kristol called CUNY home for much of the decade, Michael Novak taught in the SUNY system and briefly at Syracuse, and Eugene Bardach and Nathan Glazer secured things on the West Coast at Berkeley, just to name a few of the most prominent. Kristol and other members of his cohort could address millions of Americans on a consistent basis through

their work on the *Wall Street Journal*'s op-ed page. Robert Bartley's plan to make the *WSJ* the most conservative periodical in the country succeeded with flying colors in large part thanks to the prolific writings of the aforementioned neoconservatives.

The big break for the spread of neoconservatives, however, came in the mid-1970s when they infiltrated the American Enterprise Institute. Through the AEI, neoconservative scholars like Kristol and Novak established connections with other conservative think tanks like the CATO Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Olin Foundation and secured funding for further research. In addition, their work at AEI provided them a direct line to business leaders and the heads of corporations throughout the country. Kristol alone once sat on the board of directors for no fewer than five American corporations.¹⁰¹ By the end of the decade, neoconservative intellectuals had come to resemble that which they most despised: the New Class. Only instead of entering the knowledge industry to strengthen state power, fight capitalism, and make America susceptible to the ideas of the Left, neoconservatives entered it to weaken the state, promote the values of democratic capitalism, and move America to the Right. Through all of these means, neoconservative anti-environmentalism ultimately had an ideological impact far incommensurate with the relatively few numbers of intellectuals who drove its production.

But even more importantly, the anti-environmental ideas of neoconservatives did not exist in a vacuum on the American Right. Rather, neoconservative contributions to the growing environmental opposition in the 1970s merged with other strains of anti-environmentalism advanced by the fusionist conservatives at William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review*, by the conservatives in the University of Chicago's departments of economics and law, by the business conservatives at *The Freeman*, and by the libertarians at the Cato Institute. The critiques made by

¹⁰¹ Blumenthal, *Rise of the Counter-Establishment*, 148.

these different strands often differed, but their polemical thrusts all pointed at one inescapable truth: the environmental movement's values and aspirations were antithetical to those that animated and sustained American conservatism – and they therefore needed to be opposed. Long before Ronald Reagan took office in 1980, neoconservatives and their fellows had helped to work out the form and nature of anti-environmental arguments to such an extent that when Regan did take office, he only had to make use of existing conservative tropes in his anti-environmental revolution rather than invent them himself.

Neoconservatism thus deserves a special place in the history of conservative thought. Unlike traditionalists, libertarians, and most fusionists, neoconservatives arrived at their conservatism through a conversion experience rather than through instinct or intuition. The Left had always been – and is always likely to be – the great enemy of American conservatism. But unlike Kirk, or Buckley, or any number of other conservatives, the neocons had once been allied with that enemy. Their defection from the liberal establishment and subsequent enlistment in the conservative camp remains one of the seminal moments in the history of American conservatism. It demonstrated just how powerful the political tumult of the 1960s could be, and it showed that conservative ideas in the 1970s were becoming. It was not inevitable that the neoconservatives would move Right following their mass desertion at the end of the 1960s, but the tectonic shifts occurring within the American conservative movement during that decade had, perhaps inadvertently, produced an intellectual climate that proved enormously hospitable to neoconservative ideas. It was no accident when William F. Buckley, Jr.'s remarked in 1972 that Irving Kristol was “writing more sense in *The Public Interest* these days than anybody I can think of.”¹⁰² Their ideas had come to align with one another in surprising ways, and the

¹⁰² William F. Buckley, Jr. “Re Irving Kristol,” *The Alternative* 5 (June-September 1972): 7-8.

neoconservative and the fusionist would influence American conservative thought for decades to come.

Nowhere was this convergence more evident than the way in which neoconservatives viewed environmentalism. In the 1960s, when they were members of the Left, neoconservatives supported environmentalism in much the same way that Buckley and *National Review* had: sometimes enthusiastically and sometimes tentatively. But support it they did. But after 1970, both fusionists and neoconservatives came to oppose environmentalism with increasing frequency, and by the end of the decade their opinions on environmental issues had become indistinguishable from one another. Kristol's diatribes on "the environmentalist crusade," to take one example, would not have been out of place on the pages of *National Review*. In addition, the fact that the neoconservative Rightward turn in the 1970s occurred at the very same time a discernable anti-environmental perspective emerged in *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* speaks of greater forces at work than mere coincidence. Neoconservative anti-environmentalism joined with libertarian and fusionist anti-environmentalism to form a sensibility among American conservative intellectuals, one that transcended the divides that existed between them.

Neoconservatives did not always engage in frequent dialogues with these other strains of conservative thought, but their opposition to environmentalism placed them in tacit agreement with one another. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the American conservative movement would be riven from within as a resurgent Old Right, motivated by isolationist and traditionalist principles, challenged the neoconservative place within the conservative establishment. Even the most ecumenical American conservative, William F. Buckley, Jr. could not hold the movement together, and liberal opponents gleefully greeted this "conservative crackup." But despite these grievances, the revulsion against environmentalism remained a common thread that yet held out hope for common cause between neoconservatives and their fellow travelers on the Right. Anti-

environmentalism has become a hallmark of American conservatism that even the most bitter disputes have proven unable to alter this fact.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ For the best treatments of the internecine struggles of the 1980s and 1990s, see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement In America*, 2nd ed., 567-570; and Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind*, 341-349.

Conclusion

The Problem of Selective Memory: The Neo-Traditionalist Revival and Modern Conservative Environmentalism

The neoconservative turn in the 1970s helped cement the unification of American conservatism around anti-environmental principles. Traditionalist conservatives like Richard Weaver, Russell Kirk, and James Buckley had done their best to articulate reasons as to why conservatives should support environmental protection, but their ideas were marginalized, if not wholly jettisoned, in the larger intellectual consolidation of American conservative thought in the 1970s. Libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives subordinated the traditionalist notion of piety towards nature, and they evinced none of the humility that traditionalists exhibited in the face of divine creation. The transformation of the environmental movement in the 1970s convinced the intellectuals associated with these three strains of conservative thought that environmentalism had become a tool to be wielded by radicals who wished to implement a national political agenda with interests antithetical to their own. The primary goal motivating this agenda, at least to their minds, was nothing less than the complete and utter destruction of free enterprise capitalism in America and its replacement with a new system of regulation that threatened to punish corporations and stamp out individual liberty root and branch. Libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives often disagreed heatedly with one another; their conservative principles arose from different wellsprings and were organized around different sets of values. But in the 1970s, conservatives of all stripes realized that their sectarian struggles must be set aside if ever they were to influence national politics in any meaningful way. Anti-environmentalism proved to be an issue that transcended the ideological divide existing between the non-traditionalist strains of conservative thought. By 1980, support for environmentalism

ceased to play any role in the broader conservative intellectual movement while anti-environmentalism reigned unchallenged.

But the question must be asked at this point: what is the legacy of the anti-environmental consolidation of American conservative thought in the 1970s? In terms of influencing national politics, the legacy is decidedly mixed. It is well-known that when he presidency in 1980, Ronald Reagan sought to implement a sweeping anti-environmental counterrevolution that was designed to roll back regulatory framework established by environmentalists in the 1970s and create a climate conducive to business interest. Reagan's anti-environmental initiatives no doubt appealed to libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives because it showed them that they no longer had to feel guilty about their opposition to environmentalism: their pro-business, anti-environmental stance was *right*. But it is also well known that Reagan's anti-environmental initiatives failed to achieve the grandiose goals he had set. His appointment of Sagebrush Rebel James Watt to the position of Interior Secretary and Anne Gorsuch as head of the EPA earned a thorough rebuke from environmentalists, and by the second term of his administration Reagan was forced to curtail much of his anti-environmental agenda.¹⁰⁴ This is not to say that Reagan's anti-environmental agenda did not achieve any successes. It did.¹⁰⁵ But environmentalism also emerged stronger from the conflict. As one *Sierra* article put it in 1988, "After eight years of Ronald Reagan, the environmental movement finds itself stronger than ever – thought the national bears battle scars that will take decades to heal."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Examples of works that highlight the endurance of environmentalism in the face of conservative political and intellectual opposition, see Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence*, 491-526; Jeffrey K. Stine, "Natural Resources and Environmental Policy," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacy*, W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Gram, eds. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Byron W. Danes and Glen Sussman, *White House Politics and the Environment* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2010), 173-188; Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*, 186-189.

¹⁰⁵ On the subtle alterations to environmental policy achieved during the Reagan years, see Judith A. Layzer, *Open For Business: Conservatives' Fight Against Environmental Regulation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), 83-134.

¹⁰⁶ Carl Pope, "The Politics of Plunder," *Sierra* (November/December 1988), 49-55.

This has been the fate of most of the political attempts to implement conservative anti-environmental ideas. As was the case during the Reagan years, the conservatives who spearheaded the Contract with America in the early 1990s and during the Administration of George W. Bush have found it difficult to achieve their most ambitious anti-environmental goals. They have been successful in gradually altering the machinery of environmental regulation in some areas, but they have also been frustrated the ability of environmentalists to doggedly challenge their agenda in other realms. Put simply, if the lasting impact of the anti-environmental ideas formulated by conservative intellectuals is to be judged on their influence on national politics, then they will inevitably be found wanting.

But their true influence of conservative intellectual opposition to environmentalism is more subtle. Despite the struggles of conservatives to implement their anti-environmental agenda in American politics, the ideas formulated by the likes of Milton Friedman, Irving Kristol, William F. Buckley, Jr., and Normand Podhoretz have remained strikingly resilient over the years. Indeed, though the conservative movement has become much more variegated in the years since 1980, to this day anti-environmentalism remains the dominant discourse within the intellectual Right in America.¹⁰⁷ *National Review Online*'s section on environmental issues, for example, is titled "Planet Gore," and features a photo of former Vice President and famous environmental activist Al Gore running a hand through his hair with an exasperated look on this face.¹⁰⁸ A perusal of recent issues of neoconservative periodicals will yield articles with titles such as "The Liberal War on American Energy Independence" and "Hot and Bothered: When

¹⁰⁷ On the proliferation of American conservative ideas from the 1980s to the present, see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American Since 1945*, thirtieth-anniversary edition (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006, 55-574.

¹⁰⁸ *National Review Online*, <http://www.nationalreview.com/planet-gore>

Liberals Want Conservatives to Talk About Climate Change Instead of the Middle Class.¹⁰⁹ A look through *The Freeman*, or any of the periodicals produced by conservative think tanks like the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, or the Heritage Foundation will yield similar results.¹¹⁰ The skepticism with which these publications and authors treat environmentalism demonstrates the extent to which today's conservative intellectuals practice a striking amount of filial piety to their intellectual forebears in the 1970s. The opinions promulgated by Friedman, Kristol, William F. Buckley, Jr, and Podhoretz may not have translated directly into victories for anti-environmentalism on the national stage, but their endurance over the years suggests that their real triumph has occurred in transforming the realm of ideas, not politics, at least in the traditional sense of the word. Anti-environmentalism remains one of the chief sources of unity for American conservatives, and if they have not quite achieved their ambitious political agenda, they nevertheless remain committed to shaping the national discourse on environmental affairs.

Of course, anti-environmentalism has not operated in a hegemonic fashion in conservative intellectual circles. At varying points over the last twenty years, a small sect of conservative writers has begun to argue that conservatives ought to be among the staunchest supporters of American environmentalism. In many ways, this impulse has been a reaction against the anti-environmental reputation conservatives cultivated thanks to the anti-environmental policy measures advanced by the Reagan Administration, Newt Gingrich's

¹⁰⁹ Arthur Herman, "The Liberal War on American Energy Independence," *Commentary*, February 1, 2015; Adam J. White, "Hot and Bothered: When Liberals Want Conservatives to Talk About Climate Change Instead of the Middle Class," *The Weekly Standard*, June 4, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Some examples include Andrew P. Morriss, "Silent Spring After 50 Years," *The Freeman* 62 (July/August, 2012): 21-25; Benjamin Zycher, "The Shallow Opposition to Keystone," American Enterprise Institute, January 15, 2015; Patrick J. Michaels, "EPA's Mercury Rules: Dumb and Dumber," *The Hill*, February 10, 2015, reprinted by The Cato Institute; and Nicolas Loris, "Enough is Enough: Obama's Keystone Obstructionism Must End," The Heritage Foundation, January 14, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2015/1/enough-is-enough-obamas-keystone-obstructionism-must-end> .

Contract With America, and the George W. Bush administration.¹¹¹ But for certain other writers, the impulse also flows from a deeper ideological wellspring: an intense dissatisfaction with the moral turpitude and crass materialism that has come to define American conservatism since the 1970s. “We believe modern conservatism has become too focused on material conditions, and insufficiently concerned with the character of society. The point of life is not to become a more satisfied shopper,” proclaimed *National Review* contributor Rod Dreher in his book detailing the rise of so-called “crunchy cons,” a small and scattered group of countercultural conservatives interested in living a more authentic life in tune with the rhythms of nature.¹¹² As a basis for their claims, these conservative supporters of environmentalism have pointed specifically to the traditionalist ideas espoused by Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver. They do not discount the viability of a market-based conservative solution to current environmental problems – on the contrary, they would welcome it – but in their minds the only true conservative environmentalism is that formulated by Kirk and Weaver.

Foremost among these neo-traditionalists, as I call them, has been John R.E. Bliese, a communications professor at Texas Tech University. In an 1996 article published in *Modern Age*, a journal not coincidentally founded by Kirk, Bliese argued that if Americans harken back “to the ‘Founding Fathers’ of American traditionalist conservatism,” Bliese has argued, “we will find a solid philosophical basis that would lead conservatives to be environmentalists.”¹¹³ Bliese reiterated this point more forcefully in his book *The Greening of Conservative America* (2000). In the book’s final chapter, Bliese gently but firmly rebuked libertarians and other non-traditionalist conservatives who evinced unlimited faith in the free market. For Bliese, such faith

¹¹¹ John R. E. Bliese, *The Greening of Conservative America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 1.

¹¹² Rod Dreher, *Crunchy Cons: How Birkenstocked Burkeans, Gun-Loving Organic Gardeners, Evangelical Free-Range Farmers, Hip Homeschooling Mamas, Right-Wing Nature Lovers, and Their Diverse Tribe of Countercultural Conservatives Plan to Save America (or at Least the Republican Party)* (New York: Crown Forum, 2006), 1.

¹¹³ Ibid, “Richard M. Weaver, Russell Kirk, and the Environment” *Modern Age* 38 (Winter 1996): 148; Also see Ibid, “Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature,” *Modern Age* 49 (Spring 2007), 102-109.

could never serve as the basis for a true conservative environmentalism and often led insidiously to an anti-environmental perspective. In the minds of these writers, the Burkean notion of the intergenerational contract and Weaver's notion of piety towards nature provide a deep philosophical grounding for a "green conservatism" in the twenty-first century.¹¹⁴

Bliese's message for American conservatives is clear: traditionalist conservatism is the only *authentic* form of American conservatism. Libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives might all call themselves conservatives, but in the minds of Bliese and other neo-traditionalists this conservatism was counterfeit. Their principles could never lead to conservative support for environmentalism, and, indeed, had played a formative role in transforming American conservatism into a bastion of the environmental opposition. Since the publication of Bliese's book, other conservatives have taken up Bliese's broader arguments about the authenticity of the traditionalist philosophy. For example, Dreher has argued that "Crunchy conservatism is a way of life that calls for a change of culture. It's about returning to tradition, in the face of a rampant and energetic consumerism, to reclaim a way of life that's richer, more satisfying, more grounded, more sustainable, more meaningful and, in the end, more authentically joyful than what mainstream American life offers."¹¹⁵ David Jenkins, a former Vice President of the defunct Republicans for Environmental Protection (now ConservAmerica), a conservative organization dedicated to environmental protection, voiced similar sentiments in a recent article on climate change. Titled "Russell Kirk Would not Recognize These 'Conservatives,'" Jenkins cited passages from Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* as evidence of what a true conservative environmentalist perspective looked like. At one point, he passionately denounced "the libertarian-inspired ideology that is masquerading as conservatism today" for its impious

¹¹⁴ Ibid, *The Greening of Conservative America*, 264-266; For a similar interpretation from an English Conservative, see: Roger Scruton, "Conservatism Means Conservation" *Modern Age* 49 (Fall 2007), 351-359.

¹¹⁵ Dreher, *Crunchy Cons*, 237-238.

relationship with nature.¹¹⁶ Like Bliese, both Dreher and Jenkins believe that non-traditionalist conservatives should not be allowed to speak for conservatism more broadly, and in no small part because of their anti-environmental beliefs.

The impulse driving Bliese, Dreher, and Jenkins is significant. Nor are they precisely wrong in looking to Kirk and Weaver for their philosophical principles. Indeed, this dissertation has argued that the beliefs of these two traditionalists had the potential to have served as a foundation upon which to build an intimate relationship between conservatism and environmentalism in the 1970s. But as noble as the neo-traditionalist impulse may be, it ultimately proves problematic in two ways that must be discussed in more detail. The first problem centers on the neo-traditionalists' desire to reclaim the ideas of Weaver and Kirk's view of nature from the dustbin of history. This impulse raises an important question: which Weaver and which Kirk?

It is true that Weaver had much in common with thinkers like Joseph Wood Krutch, and that his dissatisfaction with materialist civilization seemed vaguely to anticipate later environmentalist arguments. And it is also true that Kirk himself supported environmental protection unequivocally in the 1960s and 1970s. But Weaver's speech at the University of Chicago given shortly before his death suggests that he had begun to embrace the very capitalist ethos he had once rejected and which neo-traditionalists have repudiated. Furthermore, Kirk's writings on the environment shortly before his own death in 1994 indicate that he, too, had gravitated toward non-traditionalist ideas. He had gone from excoriating technology in the 1960s and 1970s to viewing it as the ultimate solution to environmental problems in the 1990s. As Samuel Hays noted, such beliefs are not themselves inherently anti-environmental, but they are often appropriated by anti-environmentalists and used as a weapon to combat environmentalist

¹¹⁶David Jenkins, "Russell Kirk Would not Recognize These Conservatives," *Frum Forum*, December 2, 2011.

fears about the fragile state of the planet.¹¹⁷ Nowhere in the neo-traditionalist writings do the late-career writings appear. Perhaps the neotraditionalists are not aware of their existence. After all, Kirk's seemingly anti-environmental remarks were published in a rather obscure textbook on economics. But whatever the reason for this omission, neo-traditionalists have yet to confront what these writings state about American conservatism's relationship with environmentalism. It is a very real possibility that environmentalism's transformation in the 1970s drove even staunch supporters like Kirk into the anti-environmental camp.

An even larger problem with the arguments of the neo-traditionalists arises from their selective memory concerning the past. Put simply, the neo-traditionalist revival is an exercise in historical forgetting. Intellectuals like Bliese wish to claim that Kirk's ideas as well as Weaver's provides the soundest of philosophical basis for supporting environmentalist goals, but in so claiming they ignore the history of conservatism in America. In particular they seem unaware that traditionalist environmentalism was one of the primary casualties of conservative intellectual unification in the 1970s – the very unification that made this resurgence possible. In that decade, traditionalist support for environmentalism waned as Kirk and other traditionalists ceased to exert any intellectual leadership on environmental matters. Their abdication of responsibility allowed intellectuals from other strains of thought to fill the vacuum and determine the course of conservatism's broader relationship with environment. And whereas traditionalist principles seemed well in line with the general thrust of American environmentalism, libertarianism, fusionism, and neoconservatism in the 1970s all proved to be implacable enemies of the environmental movement. Traditionalist conservatism did not die entirely in the 1970s, and remains an important part of American conservatism to this day, albeit less so than in decades past. Yet for much of the last forty years traditionalist voices on environmental issues have

¹¹⁷ Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2000), 121.

remained silent in mainstream conservative intellectual publications. Bliese and those who ascribe to his views must adequately explain that silence. Their claim that traditionalism represents the only authentic form of conservative thought is ultimately based on a selective reading of the past, and one that is out of tune with the power brokers that drove the conservative revival. The history of conservative environmental ideas in the 1970s and subsequent decades shows that it is perhaps traditionalism that is the least influential form of conservative thought.

Perhaps, then, it is this disconnect that has ultimately led to the contemporary political polarization on environmental issues. Neo-traditionalists like those mentioned above often view conservative polarization as evidence that their ideology has been hijacked by extremists whose views of the environment do not accurately reflect real conservative values. Implicit in their critique is the notion that this polarization could be eliminated if they, and not the fanatics, were allowed to speak for all conservatives. True conservatives would work to bridge the current gulf that exists between Left and Right on issues such as global warming and climate change. But in reality it appears that the most influential conservatives are the ones driving present polarization and have been since the 1970s. The project of unification in the 1970s appears not to have been an accident. The broader conservative movement in America coalesced around the ideas and values of libertarians, fusionists, and neoconservatives precisely because conservatives, and, importantly, those institutions that funded conservative scholarship, preferred their values to those of the traditionalists. Free enterprise capitalism, the well-being of corporations, and economic growth proved more important than piety towards nature.

At first glance, the neo-traditionalist revival might appear to be nothing more than an inconsequential exercise in intellectual housekeeping. But such a reading of the resurgence in traditionalist environmental thought would be an error. The dialogue between the neo-traditionalists and their avowed opponents operating in other circles of conservative thought has

the potential to influence the modern political landscape in important ways. As early as 1976, intellectual historian George H. Nash recognized the power that ideas exerted over the conservative movement in America in the postwar period. For Nash, American conservatism was “a decidedly activist force.” “An intellectual movement in a narrow sense it certainly was,” he further elaborated, yet also “one whose objective was not simply to understand the world but to change it, restore it, preserve it.”¹¹⁸ The political successes of American conservatives since the 1970s, in other words, have only proved possible because they rested on a firm and self-reflective ideological basis. If Nash is correct, and I think he is, then it is not unreasonable to assume that neo-traditionalist environmental ideas might come to serve as a precursor to conservative political action on contemporary issues such as global warming and climate change.

But neo-traditionalists have proven surprisingly reluctant to embrace the political implications inherent in their ideological challenge to the continuing dominance of the non-traditionalist anti-environmental synthesis. Dreher, for example, has argued that that goal of conservative environmentalism should not be to implement “a set of policy prescriptions,” but rather to advance “a critique of the assumptions on which mainstream” conservatism is built, and to secede “from the mainstream – all to conserve those things that give our life weight and meaning.”¹¹⁹ Such antipathy toward political action will make it all but impossible for neo-traditionalists like Bliese and Dreher to help implement any conservative solutions to contemporary environmental problems. This reluctance only serves to further insure that the modern conservative political discourse on the environment remains dominated by those who oppose rather than support environmentalism. Neo-traditionalists would do well to remember Richard Weaver’s admonition that ideas have consequences. Non-traditionalist conservatives have certainly not forgotten it over the years, and the present political polarization over

¹¹⁸ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), xi.

¹¹⁹ Dreher, *Crunchy Cons*, 23.

environmental issues testifies to the continued success of their agenda. If neo-traditionalists truly believe that their principles are more authentic, more worthy of the label “conservative,” then they must offer a more forceful intellectual *and* political alternative to the anti-environmental ideas that have helped unify their ideology since the 1970s. In the absence of such a challenge, the relationship between conservatism and environmentalism in America will continue to proceed along the anti-environmental trajectory mapped out in the 1970s.

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