

This comes up in the context of globalization. In one aspect, it is certainly Left, an evolution from that original notion of equality under the law to the proposition that it is wrong for Americans to favor their fellow Americans over foreigners in any way. Probably several million Americans believe that citizenship is a racist concept. I think we would all place such people definitely on the Left.

On the other hand, there are many reasons for ordinary people to resist globalization, and so many publicly-funded plum jobs for the right people in the globalist bureaucracy, that there inevitably arises the kind of supercilious, privileged, and increasingly endogamous elite characteristic of the folk sitting on the right in that original Assembly.

I would say that since the globalized elites offend the Right's sense of patriotism—our favoring of this nation, this people—and since, being largely unelected, they can violate our personal liberty or dismantle our institutions with few consequences to themselves, we should place globalization firmly on the Left, notwithstanding the fact that it offers some freedoms (of migration, of commerce) not previously available and sets up a managerial elite. The case is certainly arguable, though.

The world is way more complicated than it was in 1789, and the concepts Left and Right don't capture all that complexity. I have some math books showing five-dimensional solid figures projected down into two dimensions so that they can be printed on an ordinary page. That's the kind of thing we do when we talk about Left and Right. Like those geometric projections, it's not very satisfactory; but it's not useless, either. ■

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Ross Douthat The most welcome rhetorical ploy of the last decade was the decision by liberals tired of being tagged with the dreaded l-word to re-label themselves as “progressives.” Liberalism and conservatism have always been ill-matched antonyms, since the former refers to a set of political philosophies—Lockean liberalism, Rawlsian liberalism, and so forth—whereas the latter is something more nebulous, an orientation toward the world rather than a programmatic approach to it. The term “progressive,” with its implied utopianism, is a more precise antonym for “conservative,” and fans of linguistic precision should join subscribers to *The American Prospect* in applauding its revival.

Still, if one accepts that when people say liberal they usually mean progressive, then the liberal/conservative binary is still a useful way of looking at politics in the West and

increasingly worldwide. It's true that neither term is exact enough to enable an observer to discern the definitive “conservative” or “liberal” line on every policy issue and cultural controversy. But even so, if you call someone a conservative or a liberal, anyone willing to accept a touch of ambiguity in their definitions ought to understand what you mean.

Liberals are Baconists: they believe in Francis Bacon's dictum that the ends of politics are “the conquest of nature for the relief of man's estate.” A conservative, meanwhile, is anyone who either says no to Baconism, or who says yes, but only up to a point—and so conservatism embraces anyone who has jumped off liberalism's fast-moving train at any point over the last five centuries. If you're a monarchist who thinks that liberalism went wrong with John Locke and the Glorious Revolution, step on up. If you're a West Coast Straussian who thinks it went wrong with Woodrow Wilson,

“They were unwilling to give up freedom for the sake of progress, but they're happy to give up virtue.”

then welcome aboard. And if you're a neocon who loved the New Deal but found the Great Society and George McGovern to be a bridge too far, there's a place for you as well.

But here's the rub, and the reason for a great deal of recent conservative confusion: the Right actually won a victory in the latter half of the 20th century, after centuries of defeat, and turned modernity away from a particularly pernicious path. This unexpected triumph has meant that many people who became accustomed to calling themselves “conservatives” when the conquest of nature seemed to require socialism or Communism are back on board the Baconian train, racing happily down a different track into the brave new future. These are the people who insist that conservatism ought to mean “freedom from government interference” and nothing more—the Grover Norquists of the world, for instance, or the Arnold Schwarzeneggers. In fact, they are ex-conservatives, because they are no longer sufficiently uncomfortable with the trajectory of modernity to be counted among its critics. They were unwilling to give up freedom for the sake of progress, but they're happy to give up virtue.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that because conservatism only really exists to say “no” to whatever liberalism asks for next, it fights nearly all its battles on its enemy's terrain and rarely comes close to articulating a coherent set of values of its own. Liberalism has science and progress to pursue—and ultimately immortality, the real goal but also the one that rarely dares to speak its name—whereas conservatives have ... well, a host of goals, most of them in tension with one another. Neoconservatives want to return us to the New Deal era; Claremont Instituters want

to revive the spirit of the Founding; Jacksonians want to rescue American nationalism from the one-worlders and post-patriots; agrarians and Crunchy Cons pine for a lost Jeffersonian or Chestertonian arcadia. Some conservatives think that liberalism-the-political-philosophy can be saved from liberalism-the-Baconian-project and that modernity can be rescued from its utopian temptation; others join Alasdair MacIntyre in thinking that the hour is far too late for that, and we should withdraw into our homes and monasteries and prepare to guard the permanent things through a long Dark Age.

Liberals, on the other hand, dream the same dream and envision the same destination, even if they disagree on exactly how to get there. It's the dream of Thomas Friedman as well as Karl Marx, as old as Babel and as young as the South Korean cloners. It whispered to us in Eden, and it whispers to us now: ye shall be as gods. And no conservative dream, in the 400 years from Francis Bacon until now, has proven strong enough to stand in its way. ■

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Rod Dreher Nearly 20 years ago, the leftist critic Christopher Lasch said something that must have struck most people as odd: that the terms “conservative” and “liberal” have outlived their usefulness and serve more to obscure our understanding of the conditions under which Americans live than to illumine them. Given the partisan passions of the day—the Reagan era was coming to an end—and the vast stores of energy that both liberals and conservatives had remaining for the battles ahead, it's easy to understand why it was hard to see Lasch's point. From where we stand today, with liberalism intellectually exhausted (still!), and a once vigorous conservatism having no idea how to rescue itself from its own shipwreck of the last five years, Lasch—who died in 1994—looks prophetic. It's time that the rest of us catch up with him.

I assume readers of this magazine don't need to be instructed on what a dead end liberalism is. But if the Bush administration and the Republican misrule of the Congress don't make conservatives rethink our approach to politics, we are in miserable shape. The conventional conservative response, of course, is to say that Republicans failed to be sufficiently conservative—a neat trick that absolves us from having to consider how the problem could well be with our ideas themselves. Lasch forces us to consider that what we've been identifying as conservatism really isn't conservative at all, but merely an older form of liberalism. Or as philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has similarly observed, “the

contemporary debates within modern political systems are almost exclusively between conservative liberals, liberal liberals, and radical liberals.”

What does this mean? At the risk of oversimplifying, American politics today are built around the sovereignty of the individual, with progress measured across the board by the degree to which the individual is emancipated to exercise his own will. Liberals tend to favor emancipation from constraints on sexual activity, while conservatives tend to favor emancipation from constraints on economic activity. Neither questions the basic assumption that “freedom” means an expansion of individual choice. While both liberal and conservative politicians will differ on the implications of this conviction, it has become sacrosanct in American politics today. No politician dares to appeal to the American people with a message of material sacrifice for some higher good. We are consumers before we are citizens.

It seems to me that few of us are willing to look radically—meaning, at the roots—of the American way of life and whether it can be sustained. Over a decade ago, Wendell Berry, the Kentucky agrarian and essayist, wrote a devastating essay called “Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community” in which he dissected how Left and Right, with their complementary doctrines of expanding sexual and economic freedom, undermined the kinds of traditions necessary to hold community life together. Lasch took this critique—which is generally shared by conservatives of an older tradition—much further. He condemned the Left for its vanity and contempt for ordinary people and the Right for uncritically celebrating a market-oriented individualism that conserves nothing, least of all the traditional values the Right purports to defend. “What is traditional about the rejection of tradition, continuity, and rootedness? A conservatism that sides with the forces of restless mobility is a false conservatism. ... Instead of confronting the forces in modern life that make for disorder, it proposes merely to make Americans feel good about themselves.”

While not remotely being tempted to apostasize to the Left, thoughtful conservatives will wonder whether the Republican Party and the conservative movement, as it is now constituted, are worth hoping and believing in. This is not to say that conservatives won't continue to vote Republican, if only as the lesser of two evils. But it is to say that the time has come to think and talk politically but beyond the conventional categories that have degenerated into empty ritualism and assertions of tribal identity.

I have been impressed—haunted is the more honest term—by Professor MacIntyre's famous conclusion to his influential 1981 book *After Virtue*, in which he argued that the radical individualism of the Enlightenment had reached its end in a morally incoherent and therefore unstable society. MacIntyre ended his book by suggesting that we might