CHAPTER TWO

Social Conservatism and the New Fusionism

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THERE IS NO CONSERVATISM in the United States and never has been—at least, if by "conservatism" we mean what we ought to mean: the preservation of the ancien régime, a government of throne and altar, and a perpetual endowment of medieval privileges for certain families, guilds, and classes. A nation born in political revolution may not appeal to the traditions of the polis as it existed before the revolution. And like a logical argument against the force of logic—or a grammatical complaint about the oppressive structure of grammar—a conservative rebellion against rebellion would only manage to instance, again, the thing it claims to undo. If we are conserving anything in America, it is the Revolution of 1776 and the founding generation's great experiment in freedom: an essentially anticonservative moment in human history.

This fact has consistently skewed the thought of everyone labeled, for one reason or another, a conservative. With *The Scarlet Letter*, we have American literature's most influential attack on the Mayflower Compact and the oppressive manners of close-knit communities—and it came from Nathaniel Hawthorne, cast by the majority of critics as the most conservative of New England's high nineteenth-century

intellectuals. John C. Calhoun's thought may have informed the constitution of the Confederacy, but his speeches and letters—indeed, even his mostly abstract works of political theory, such as the posthumous *Disquisition on Government* and *Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States*—show that Calhoun was, in fact, a progressive social Darwinist *avant la lettre*, who believed in eugenic racism and the modern advance of positivistic science.

Perhaps conservatives among America's Catholics suffered less internal contradiction during the course of the nation's history by living in a democracy with the reservation that they would establish a Catholic monarchy if they could. "When I was young," F. Scott Fitzgerald once explained, "the boys in my street still thought that Catholics drilled in the cellar every night with the idea of making Pius the Ninth autocrat of this republic." But regardless of what the surrounding Protestant culture shiveringly imagined about Catholicism, did any American Catholics actually feel this way? From the nineteenth-century Orestes Brownson to the twentieth-century Michael Novak, Catholic political writers—conservative and liberal alike—seem to have spent most of their time explaining to their fellow Catholics how Catholicism doesn't actually contradict the American founding. This seems to suggest that not even Catholicism is a genuinely conservative force in American history—again, that is, if "conservatism" means a desire for the return of the ancien régime. As it happens, I believe that those American Catholic thinkers who argue the essential compatibility of the American Experiment and Catholicism are correct: Catholicism is not, in fact, the sole surviving medieval opponent of liberal democracy in the world—as Pope John Paul II's 1991 two-cheers-for-capitalism encyclical *Centessimus Annus* manifestly demonstrated.

But can that really be right? How can traditional Christianity not be an inherently conservative force in the modern world? Certainly, in some contemporary battles—the death penalty, for instance—Catholics can take what is now typically labeled a liberal position in

American politics. But beginning with the social issues tangled around abortion, serious Catholics are clearly attempting to conserve *some* principle that the radical modern impulse is determined to eliminate. This looks like a contradiction—an incoherence that, say, a typical sociological explanation would resolve by looking for the differences between the things Americans say they believe and the way they behave. But there is another possibility, which might save the intellectual integrity of American Catholic thought—the possibility that there is, in fact, a conservative element to the American proposition and that the insistence on the essential anticonservatism of American history must be mistaken.

The Catholics serve here merely as a particularly visible example. We could perform the same analysis with any of a dozen other groups, typically religious but not necessarily so. Like the Catholics, so the Evangelicals; and so the Southern agrarians; and so the neoconservatives; and so certain libertarians, for that matter. For each, a group that thinks itself American finds at some point that it is at odds not merely with this or that particular policy but also with the whole drift of things—the whole modern impulse that radicals insist is definingly American. And if the thinkers in these groups have not somehow ceased to be American, then the American founding—from the Declaration to the Constitution—has to be open to a dramatically different reading.

In book after book, particularly his influential 1953 volume, *The Conservative Mind*, Russell Kirk made a career out of eliminating as much revolution from the American Revolution as he possibly could. As it happens, he was correct that the founding involved much more than the high-liberal consensus of the mid-twentieth century usually allowed: Contrary to the mainstream views of, say, the majority of law-school professors in 1965, the Constitution wasn't simply a canal to get from the ocean of John Locke to the sea of John Stuart Mill. Rather, the founding drew upon deep waters of ancient Greek and

Roman thought, Protestant theology, French skepticism, Scottish commonsense philosophy, and British legal constitutionalism.

Of course, Kirk was also profoundly wrong in imagining that the American Revolution wasn't, nonetheless, a revolution charting a "new and more noble course." But there may be a way to rescue the Kirkian impulse by putting the emphasis in that phrase on the "more noble" rather than on the "new." The Founders were fond of asserting that they were building a "new order for the ages," but they were equally fond of asserting that they were rediscovering the ancient verities of human nature.

The distinction might be put this way: Was the American Revolution a setting free of the True Man or an experiment in creating the New Man? Did the Founders imagine that they were sweeping away the false accretions of prejudice to allow the reemergence of ancient principles, or did they believe they were establishing rights never before seen? Every utopia, W. H. Auden once remarked, is either backward-looking or forward-looking. The Americans gathered in Philadelphia in 1776 were hardly utopians in the sense that the French radicals and Marxist revolutionaries would later be. But it's still a meaningful question to ask whether the Founders generally had their eye back on the Old Eden or forward on the New Jerusalem.

The question seems answerable. There is a place to which the United States is entitled by "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," the Declaration of Independence maintains, and the nation's citizens "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Surely this suggests an Edenist element in the American experiment. For his existence, the True Man requires a general recognition that there is such a thing as truth and, for that matter, such a thing as man. And if the founding concerned a perduring human nature and a natural law by which we aim at happiness, then there is something essential to conserve in American politics—thus, there are genuinely American conservatives. And, yet, this seems inadequate as an analysis of the American founding. Some such Kirkian move is

mandatory if contemporary political conservatives are to justify their existence at all, and innumerable think tanks and institutions have made a huge investment in seeking the Revolution's conservative roots.

In some sense, the results have been gratifying, overturning seventy-five years of deliberate attempts—by progressive, then liberal, then radical historians and legal scholars—to teach the founding as an eighteenth-century secular-Enlightenment arrow aimed at the twentieth-century target of compulsory egalitarianism and radical liberty. Once again, religion affords the clearest example. In 2003, James Hutson put together an exhibition at the Library of Congress, illustrating the pervasive churchgoing and theological understanding of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. That same year Michael Novak published *On Two Wings*, collecting so many comments about God and church from the Founders that they seemed more theological obsessives than political theorists.

But apart from infuriating the likes of, say, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., how much does all this actually prove? The radical Enlightenment element of the American founding, the *revolution* of the Revolution, remains untouched, however nuanced our understanding of it may have to be. Perhaps we have overemphasized the written documents, ignoring the context—particularly the Protestant religious setting from the Mayflower Compact through the Great Awakening—in which they were written. Eighteenth-century America possessed a set of received ideas the Founders both relied upon and had to make concessions to. If the Constitution strikes a balance, then the conservative impulse requires insisting that the secular Enlightenment elements were counterweighted by other things—some of which may not be clearly in the Constitution at all.

Natural law, in all its complexity, as passed from the Jesuit Francisco Suarez to the Dutch and English Protestant scholastics, is perhaps the most obvious example, but there are innumerable others. Conservatives in America are those who begin to think, at some par-

ticular moment in the nation's history, that the butcher's thumb is coming down too hard on the radical side, and it has always made them nervous and peculiar.

We might call this the perpetual dilemma of American conservatism. Politically speaking, modernity *is* liberalism, and liberalism *is* modernity. Setting aside science, the political implications of which have not been fully explored by theorists, the turn to modern times is best defined by the rejection of the medieval structure of special privileges—by political liberalism, in other words. The most recent popular thinker to point this out in a persuasive way was Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man*. History didn't come to an end in 1989, he insisted; the fall of Soviet communism was merely the final proof of liberalism's implacable triumph. History, as the clash of genuine alternatives, actually ended right where G. W. F. Hegel said it did—in 1806, when Napoleon's victory at the Battle of Jena ensured that there no longer existed any real political possibilities other than liberalism.

But as modernity chugged bloodily along, while liberalism's triumph worked itself out over the next two hundred years, certain people felt the desire to get off the train. The twentieth century affords many examples. For some people, the impetus was the disaster of Socialist economics. For others, it was an inability to stomach abortion. For others, it was crime rates. For others, it was euthanasia. For a few recent converts, it is the threat of eugenic biotechnology. But for all of them, they reached a point where they decided "This is where I say, 'Enough.' This is a good place to stop."

Thus, Evangelicals wish to hold their position in the 1910s, the economic libertarians in the 1920s, the Southern agrarians in the 1940s, and the old *National Review* conservatives in the 1950s. Even after the great rush of Vatican II *aggiornamento*, Catholics essentially froze the modernity they were willing to accept at 1964. A variety of factors, most prominently the cultural upheavals of the 1960s, drew

off the neoconservatives around 1972. Reagan's great conservative coalition of the 1980s, which was essentially a uniting of all these dissenters from the progressive liberal project under one big Republican tent, was enormously successful in closing off certain economic lines of development that advanced thought had once assumed were identical with modern liberalism.

But in other ways, particularly for social conservatives, the Reagan revolution was unsuccessful—as the rise of out-of-wedlock births, the apparent ineradicability of abortion, and our lockstep march toward biotechnology's Brave New World all demonstrate. And that is because there really never was much chance of success. Examined closely, each detraining group was seeking not to undo modernity but to freeze it at a particular moment—a moment when certain vestigial elements left over from the premodern world kept at bay the worst effects of modern times.

The problem is this: Lacking a coherent unmodern philosophy, we can offer no compelling reasons for modernity to stop where we wish it to. The economic and political battles against communism, by returning liberalism to its original course, certainly changed the direction of modernity, but they did nothing to slow modernity down. Take, once again, the question of religion. Over the past few decades, political scientists, sociologists, and scholars of the American founding have all pointed out that at least a smidgen of religious belief seems necessary to prevent modern liberalism from devouring its own political and economic gains. But this insight hasn't brought us much—a culture's religious belief doesn't derive from the desire, however sincere and well-informed, for that culture to have a religious belief. Meanwhile, since its Enlightenment beginning, modernity has conceived of religion as its great enemy, and the antireligious impulse of the modern world is still steaming on and on—unchecked by the conservative belief that this impulse ought to have stopped somewhere before this.

Consider, for another example, whether we could have had a liberalism against abortion. We did manage to find an anti-Communist liberalism, after all—however much the Communists insisted they were merely liberals in a hurry. Similarly, hard as it is to remember, there was a moment in the late 1960s when several liberal writers insisted that care for the poor and the weak demanded the rejection of abortion: The pro-abortion flag, wrote the then-Leftist Richard John Neuhaus in 1969, is "planted on the wrong side of the liberal-conservative divide"; it ought to be heartless Republicans who demand abortion and tender Democrats who wish the community of care to include the unborn. But the liberationist impulse was simply too strong and the sexual revolution too much fun. And so abortion came, despite those who wanted a modernity without it. They had bought a ticket this far; what means—what right, for that matter—did they have to stop the train from going further?

And now, modernity has brought us the biotech revolution, and yet other neoconservatives have reached the point of saying, "Enough. We must get off." But the question is how we are to stop now—for the steam engine of modernity is what drove us here, and everyone who finds eugenic biotechnology the step they cannot take has already accepted vast plains of modern development. There was a revealing moment, during testimony on the House of Representatives' bill to ban human cloning, when Congressman Ted Strickland of Ohio complained, "We should not allow theology, philosophy, or politics to interfere with the decision we make" on what ought to be a purely scientific matter. Like so much that was said in the cloning debate, this comment was both profoundly silly and profoundly true. Strickland was merely vulgar enough to say out loud what we all perfectly well understand: science has its own imperative force, and we cannot resist it without ceasing to be modern. You and I may get off the train, but the train is going on.

One of the least edifying spectacles in American conservatism is the

determination, among those who've gotten off at later stations, to disparage those who got off at earlier stations. For the past seventy-five years, the soft Left in America has had a guilty conscience about its softness: the radicals always made the moderates feel a little bad. On the Right, too, there have been guilty consciences; but, curiously, these also have to do with Leftness. Although the Right, of course, trains its most intense fire at the Left, nearly everyone on the Right deems it necessary to find a more Rightist group *against* which to distinguish themselves. If "No enemies on the Left" is more or less the motto of liberals in America, "Always also enemies to the Right" seems to be a motto of conservatives.

A few figures have tried to hold together the ragtag collection of refugees: Ronald Reagan in his big-tent Republican party, Frank Meyer with his "fusionism" of libertarian and traditionalist writers in the *National Review* of the 1950s and 1960s, and Robert Bartley on the *Wall Street Journal* op-ed pages of the 1980s and 1990s. But mostly, when American writers and politicians have what seems a conservative impulse, they immediately distinguish themselves from the bulk of conservatism. There was a period in the 1980s in which nearly every article in the ostensibly liberal *New Republic* opened with something like: "I'm not one of those horrible conservatives, and I'd never vote for a Republican, but, gosh, there actually seems to be some merit to the idea of welfare reform"—or a strengthened military, or a mistrust of the United Nations, or any of a dozen other conservative topics.

Thus, the neoconservatives explain what is despicable about libertarians, and libertarians denounce the social conservatives—and on and on. Some of this disagreement is clearly necessary. The anti-Semitic neoconfederacy of the crowd gathered around *Chronicles* magazine deserves dismissal; as his eugenic embrace of evolutionary biology proves, its editor is not a seeker of the True Man but rather of a Calhoun-style New Man. So, too, the differences between the followers of Pat Buchanan and the writers for the *Weekly Standard*—

particularly about America's role in the world—cut to the heart of American policy and have genuine consequences. But the tone of conservative self-analysis is somehow off. Always missing is any reverent interpretation, meaning the ameliorative effort to find common ground or take opponents in the best sense. In a widely noticed 2003 article in *National Review*, David Frum declared that traditionalist conservatives "have turned their backs on their country. Now we turn our backs on them." In a more recent article in the *Public Interest*, Adam Wolfson took much the same line, more gently, in defending the neoconservatives. Meanwhile, Pat Buchanan and others on the Far Right fulminate in issue after issue of the *American Conservative*.

To say the *Weekly Standard* takes hard positions would be, in the contemporary political debate, an understatement. But the magazine, in general, tried to avoid publishing articles on conservative deviationism—thanks to the editorship of William Kristol, aided by the fact that the executive editor, Fred Barnes, is universally liked on the Right (and, to a lesser degree, by my own desire to run a strong back-of-the-book that isn't dominated by some conservative form of literary Stalinism). Still, even the *Weekly Standard* hasn't managed to avoid the temptation to find enemies on the Right. Despite my own editorial impulse toward a united front—a belief in the familial unity of the Right, born of my training among the Catholic neoconservatives—I cannot see how to put the cracked egg of conservatism back together. There seems no place in America these days for Frank Meyer's fusionism, or even Ronald Reagan's big-tent Republicanism, and it gives the Left an electoral advantage it doesn't otherwise deserve.

To find the missing piece, we would have to go back to the Founders and remember what it is that conservatism is supposed to be conserving—the element, the absence of which makes each conservative, however unconsciously, step off the liberal train. The answer, I'm afraid, will not please many libertarians, and some secularized neoconservatives and even a handful of the ultra-Rightists will

not smile. For it is biblical religion, and the moral things held in place by Christianity, that the Constitution took for granted as the counterweight to Enlightenment radicalism.

There's a curious moment in the *Confessions* in which St. Augustine wrote that he could find many religious truths in the books of the philosophers. He could find that in the beginning was the Word. He could find that the Word was with God, and that the Word was God, and even that by the Word were all things made. But one truth he could not find in the philosophers was that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. This may not seem a great difference: if we admit the metaphysical necessity of the Divine at the highest level of human philosophical thought, then it seems not much more to allow that God might occasionally concern Himself with human affairs. But, Augustine concluded, Christ is the truth that turns everything upside down; if God acts directly and willfully in human affairs, then He has broken history over His knee—choosing the foolish things of the world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the mighty. And where in this is there any room to speak of the preeminence of politics or even the authority of justice?

St. Augustine was, relative to other Christian thinkers, a political realist, as *The City of God* demonstrates. But political philosophy, however theological or deistic it may be, cannot entirely accommodate this central fact of Christian revelation—this willingness to disdain political order and be true, though the heavens may fall as a result. And, yet, if the political order doesn't allow it, then the political benefits of religion cannot be held and democracy itself decays. "Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure," George Washington warned in his Farewell Address, "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle." Public order in a constitutional democracy—the structure of liberalism that needs a people of virtue to maintain itself—seems to require the majority of citizens to believe in God. But no one, especially Amer-

icans, ever believed in God for the sake of public order in a constitutional democracy.

Liberalism, in other words, needs religion, and needs it in a variety of ways, from the simple genealogy of modernity's birth out of the spirit of Christendom to the complex reliance of modern times on a perduring set of premodern beliefs about right and wrong and good character. To reap the benefits it needs, a liberal democracy must allow religion to remain a possible authority—for individual conscience and for guiding legislative power—outside a modern state that longs to have no authority beyond the will of the people and the state's interpretation of individual rights. The United States as it naturally wants to be—what we might call the platonic ideal of America—contains a tension we must be careful not to resolve. What's more, it is a tension that the Founders themselves did not resolve and, I believe, were consciously careful not to resolve.

Whether the participants willed it or not, the American Revolution occurred in a Christian moment, giving the Founders certain advantages. From the political thought of St. Augustine to the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, innumerable arguments have suggested that biblical religion offers enormous public benefits. Indeed, Charles Murray argued—with his curious statistical reading of human greatness in *Human Accomplishment: The Pursuit of Excellence in the Arts and Sciences, 800 BC to 1950* (2004)—that Christendom's benefits are, by history's measure over the past thousand years, easily the greatest of any religion.

But the overwhelming Christian faith of America also presented the Founders with disadvantages, for the Bible cannot be entirely tamed to any public purpose or ethical reading. The tense and awkward solution of the Constitution derives, I think, from an awareness that the benefits and the dangers have the same root. To be a conservative is to recognize that if we lose either our extra-public religion or our Enlightenment use of public religion—if we break the delicately poised balance between the force of Christianity and the drive

of modernity, if either side in this tension ever entirely vanquishes the other—the United States will cease to reflect its platonic ideal.

Of course, as support for the Wilsonian project of exporting liberty around the world, this isn't a particularly useful way of understanding democracy. Certain geographical analyses of the West's domination of the world since the Middle Ages—Jared Diamond's 1999 *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, for instance—seem to suggest the only hope for the poverty-stricken people in the Third World is to hire tugboats and have their countries dragged up to the Tropic of Cancer. In the same way, it has to be a little disheartening to tell, say, the Congolese that all they need for stable liberal democratic government is to begin as a colony of religious exiles, then read Locke and Montesquieu to pieces, then undergo a Great Awakening of Christian fervor—and then, at exactly the right moment, have a revolution, argue deeply about Federalism, and write a constitution. One feels there must be more to the success of the American Experiment than the fact that it occurred in a lucky moment during the Enlightenment struggles of faith and reason.

But quite what that "more" is seems hard to say. If I have correctly analyzed the real conservatism of the founding, then the most pressing conservative issue today ought to be the active participation of the culture in the most un-Christian act available at the moment—the thing most at odds with the background assumed by the Constitution. That is, of course, abortion. Whatever fusionism I fondly wish for the Right in American politics, my own ameliorative impulses will never extend to baby-killers or those who license infanticide. But, in fact, the murderousness of abortion is the single most defining political element today. It all comes down to abortion: every issue in contemporary politics is poisoned by abortion and reflects the cultural divide about its legality.

The pressures of the presidential campaign have helped translate the war in Iraq from what was primarily a foreign-policy issue to what is now overwhelmingly a culture-wars issue. A handful of foreign-

policy neoconservatives may sympathize with legalized abortion, and a few traditionalists may mate their anti-abortion stands with distaste for the war. Once the translation is complete, however, the divisions about the war among ordinary voters match, to a startling degree, the divisions over abortion.

The British philosopher G. E. M. Anscombe, in a brilliant essay in 1958, pointed out that somewhere between John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century and G. E. Moore in the twentieth, the British utilitarian tradition lost the ability to assert that the taking of innocent life is wrong. Anscombe also predicted that there would eventually come along someone willing to say that we should kill babies because utilitarianism offers no explanation of why we shouldn't. Anscombe intended this as the final rejection of utilitarian ethics—for, after all, killing babies is wrong, and a moral theory that arrives at the contrary conclusion must be mistaken.

But with Princeton University's Peter Singer, among others, we finally have utilitarians who have abandoned the last vestiges of cultural Christianity that skewed the purely philosophical structure of their ethics. They have accepted Anscombe's dilemma by denying that the taking of innocent life is always wrong. "John Paul II proclaims that the widespread acceptance of abortion is a mortal threat to the traditional moral order," Singer wrote in "Killing Babies Isn't Always Wrong," a 1995 article in the *London Spectator*. "I sometimes think that he and I at least share the virtue of seeing clearly what is at stake." For a believer, all of this demonstrates that there is nothing in the liberal philosophical tradition that can be counted upon to preserve, unaided by faith, the sanctity of innocent life.

With his 2002 book *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama went looking for a way, entirely within liberal philosophy, to argue against the motors of business and scientific inventiveness that are driving biotechnology; the work of Leon Kass at the President's Council on Bioethics has been directed toward much the same end. But Fukuyama and Kass have been, for the most part, defeated. The

engine of eugenic biotechnology has chugged along undeterred, and the allies on the philosophical Left that the President's Council on Bioethics hoped to mobilize have proved mainly critics, despite their antibusiness impulses.

The reason for their defeat, of course, is abortion. Cloning, experimentation with the embryo, the whole panoply of biotechnological innovation, are wrapped up in the determination of the Left to ring yet another layer of prenatal murder around the right to abortion—the Left's unwillingness to admit the least theoretical crack in the pro-abortion wall. For much the same reason, the literary Left in America, which proudly claims to own the heritage of English literature, has embraced the biotechnological revolution, despite the fact that the literary imagination—from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*—has never pictured the prospect of manufactured human beings with much joy. Nor, for that matter, has the literary imagination, from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, been much taken with scientists who manipulate the deep things of life just because they can.

There are a range of other social conservative issues at the moment, beginning with same-sex marriage and extending through education reform, but to a large degree, the divisions on these issues track the divisions on abortion. With only minor exceptions, the people who feel strongly on one side of the abortion debate are the people who feel strongly on one side of the same-sex marriage debate. Some of the contemporary issues involve narrower questions of church-state relations. Last year, the Ninth Circuit did what it could to help President Bush's re-election campaign by declaring the phrase "under God" an unconstitutional addition to the Pledge of Allegiance. Again, however, the issues involve the role of religion in America, and they cycle back to the abortion question.

Where opposition to communism once held the Right together—

it was critical to Meyer's fusionism and Reagan's Republicanism—little unites conservatives today or forces them to play nice with one another. But there may be more linking the Right than appears on the surface. The neoconservatives gathered around the *Weekly Standard* might appear to have made a fairly cynical bargain with social conservatives, from the Evangelicals Chuck Colson and Gary Bauer to the Catholics George Weigel and Richard John Neuhaus: "If you support us in an activist and moralist foreign policy, we'll support you in the pro-life fight—with all the social implications that follow." And, yet, the actual creation of this fusion resulted from mutual persuasion not political bargaining. Indeed, the prior opposition to abortion by the Catholic, Evangelical, and Jewish neoconservatives—and the mutual trust that opposition inspired—is one of the things that drove the social conservatives to support, in general, the invasion of Iraq.

In 1995, Jerry Z. Muller published a cover story in the *New Republic* entitled "The Conservative Case for Abortion." His utilitarian argument that "the right-to-life position undermines [the] fundamentally conservative effort to strengthen families" didn't persuade many on the Right: It may be true, as Muller wrote, that "conservatives have long assumed that government should promote those social norms that encourage the creation of decent men and women," but conservatives have long assumed as well that decent men and women don't slaughter their young. If anything seemed designed to persuade social conservatives that philosophical analysis could not be counted upon to defend the innocent, this was it.

Yet, Muller was right in another way. After the fall of Eastern European communism in 1989, there was a narrow window in which it still seemed possible to disunite the old *Commentary* and *Public Interest*–style neoconservatives and the new Evangelical and Catholic social conservatives. There were natural tensions between them, as instanced when the journal *First Things* started a firestorm by running a symposium on judicial tyranny called "The End of Democracy?"

Still, Muller failed miserably at the task of dividing the neoconservatives from the social conservatives. Abortion was not the issue to use, for opposition to abortion is, in fact, the defining feature of anything that shows the conservative impulse today. Not only does the new fusionism between social conservatives and neoconservatives suggest that this is so, but also a general shift seems apparent among the neoconservatives. Those who were mildly pro-abortion are now less so; those who were mildly anti-abortion are now extremely so.

What's more, opposition to abortion ought to be the definition of conservatism. If the American founding actually did preserve something, if there were any Edenist impulses in the Revolution that looked to allow the True Man to stand forth, then the slaughter of the innocents is the great betrayal of the platonic ideal of the United States. Here is the new fusionism to which the Right ought to look. Conservatives are those who refuse to forget what the American social order is an answer to. As they get off the radical modern train, at station after station, they will find this fact uniting them, and they will discover that many other divisions—not all, but many—can be put aside for the sake of life.