



The Integration of Theory and Practice: A Program for the New Traditionalist Movement

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Introduction

This essay does not include a theoretical justification for, or even a definition of, a traditionalist (i.e., culturally conservative) society. Other writers have already done this with far more skill and erudition than I would be able to. For the sake of this essay, I will assume that the reader is already familiar with and sympathizes with the goal of a traditionalist society at some level.

However, none of those traditionalist thinkers, or anyone influenced by traditionalist thought, has made any serious attempt to directly put his ideas into practice. The unspoken assumption seems to be that if enough time is spent improving our intellectual sophistication and honing our arguments, our ideas will win more and more converts due simply to their irresistible appeal, and by some mysterious mechanism which no one has ever chosen to explain, our society will slowly but surely learn to cherish traditionalist values.

This way of thinking must be categorically rejected.

This essay is based on the belief that the truth of an idea is not the primary reason for its acceptance. Far more important is the energy and dedication of the idea's promoters--in other words, the individuals composing a social or political movement. The cultural conservative movement in particular has paid next to no attention to the qualities of the people working in the movement, and the relation of such qualities to the achievement of our goals. At least part of the reason for our failure must be attributed to insufficient interest by traditionalists in organization, the personal development of activists, and--most importantly--action and engagement in the world. The conservative movement has suffered, in other words, from a lack of follow-through on its most meaningful ideas.

The Problem--An Overreliance on Political Activism

The conservative movement is defensive, defeatist, depressed, and apologetic. It lacks self-confidence, virility, energy, intensity, vigor,

aggressiveness, vitality, and a firm belief in the rightness of its cause. This is because conservatives have failed to devote the proper amount of energy to developing an alternative cultural world-view opposed to the dominant leftist one. They have instead devoted much of their energy to electing sympathetic politicians and lobbying the government to pass or overturn particular laws.

There are two problems with this strategy. The first and more obvious is that it is exceedingly and progressively more difficult to exert political influence when the cultural assumptions underlying those political goals are being steadily eroded by the popular culture, if no serious attempt to retard or reverse that erosion is ever made.

Secondly, an overreliance on political change seems to reinforce the very politicization of society that conservatives often bemoan, by ratifying the notion that an individual's personal happiness is inextricably bound up in the activity (or inactivity) of government. While government is certainly intrusive and plays too large a role in our society, the government is not totalitarian. There are plenty of opportunities to make our society more culturally conservative, and our lives richer and fuller, apart from political change, but conservatives have shown very little interest in pursuing those opportunities. They have shown far more interest in expanding political freedom than in seeing that Americans make good use of the freedom they already have, and as a result, they have succeeded in neither. The lack of interest in the latter goal is curious, since freedom for its own sake has never been a conservative goal, at least in theory.

The result of this misplaced focus is a society that increasingly does not recognize culturally conservative views, and is gradually coming to despise them. The Left has long understood that nothing can be achieved politically unless and until one can capture the imagination of the people--and imaginations are seldom captured by policy wonks on C-SPAN. They understand that a governing regime must acquire moral legitimacy before it can win the consent of the people, and all governments, particularly one such as ours, require some level of consent to govern.

The relatively recent successes of New Left ideas in law and legislation have only been made possible because their proponents were able to capture the cultural institutions--e.g., the media, academia, publishing houses, advertising agencies, Hollywood--some years earlier. Conservatives have by and large surrendered all of these institutions to the Left, with any opposition being limited to assorted muffled complaints and pathetic appeals for fairness. Meanwhile, conservatives dedicate themselves to political activism all the more furiously in the hope that it can compensate for their weakness in the non-political sectors of society. This effort must be dismissed as hopeless and self-delusional.

Conservatives must honestly assess the predicament that we are in. We must understand that the American people are no longer on our side, at least not reliably so, and they will be less so as time goes on. But more worrisome still is the fact that conservatives themselves often no longer understand or support a truly culturally conservative vision of America. Being conservative has come to mean nothing more nuanced than holding the belief that every man has the inalienable right to make as much money as he possibly can. True traditionalist conservatives are now seen as oddities in the movement who must be tolerated, or even silenced in order that the movement appear credible in the eyes of the leftist guardians of good taste.

To sum up, the basic problem confronting us is that those who are familiar with the theoretical underpinnings of conservatism are not particularly interested in putting their ideas into practice, and those who are engaged in activism are not well-read and are obsessed with public policy matters. *Those who think do not act, and those who act do not think.* If this continues, the conservative movement will cease to exist in every way but name.

A New Direction

The dire predicament in which we find ourselves demands a drastic change in strategy by cultural conservatives. It is becoming increasingly clear that we must heed **Paul Weyrich's call** for a tactical retreat from the fields of political battle--not totally or permanently, but until such time as we can confidently proclaim that traditionalists are a force to be reckoned with in the wider society. Without this, any offensives using political means are doomed to failure. They are therefore a waste of our people's time, money, and energy, and for that reason should not even be attempted. We will never succeed in taking over political structures until we can convince the American people that we can be *trusted* to take them over, and to do that we must win the people over culturally--by defining how man ought to act, how he ought to perceive the world around him, and what it means to live the good life. Political arrangements can only be formed after these fundamental questions have been answered.

Once this basic belief is accepted, our next task is to develop the means by which it can be put into practice. We must, as Mr. Weyrich has suggested, develop a network of parallel cultural institutions existing side-by-side with the dominant leftist cultural institutions. The building and promotion of these institutions will require the development of a movement that will not merely reform the existing post-war conservative movement, but will in fact be forced to supersede it--if it is to succeed at all--because it will pursue a very different strategy and be premised on a very different view of its role in society.

Our movement--which we will call the New Traditionalist movement--will not seek to immediately replace the dominant culture. A retreat will allow us to regroup and find our bearings. The overemphasis on effecting change through political activism has left us disoriented, distracted, and overly prone to accept the cultural assumptions of the Left. But this tactical retreat will ultimately lead to strategic victory.

A central mission of this movement is to advance a true traditionalist counter-culture based on virtue, excellence, and self-discipline. The New Traditionalists will not be exclusively Christians, but many of them inevitably will be. What binds the New Traditionalists is a belief that each individual has a duty to obey a higher law than his own will and appetite. New Traditionalists reject the materialism, hedonism, consumerism, egoism, and the cult of self-actualization which permeate modern life. We share a willingness to face reality and repudiate ideology--i.e., a set of beliefs that bear no relation to how people really think and how people really live.

There will be three main stages in the unfolding of this movement. The first stage will be devoted to the development of a highly motivated elite able to coordinate future activities. The second stage will be devoted to the development of institutions designed to make an impact on the wider elite and a relatively small minority of the masses. The third stage will involve changing the overall character of American popular culture.

Still Engaged--But Outside of Politics

It must be emphasized that this new movement will not be "disengaged" from the wider society, only "differently engaged." We are, quite simply, replacing political activism with cultural activism as the center of our focus. And while the visibility of the new movement will be less pronounced than the existing (political) conservative movement in the short term, the seeds that we now sow will have dramatic repercussions over the long term. We have the capacity to fundamentally transform the face of American culture in the 21st century by following a different path, one built on the aggressive dissemination of our cultural values, rather than the idle hope that enough of our cultural values still remain in the body of the American people to carry us on to a few more isolated electoral victories.

We will never stop being engaged in the wider culture. We will not "hunker down" and wait for the storm to blow over. Our strategy will be to bleed this corrupt culture dry. We will pick off the most intelligent and creative individuals in our society, the individuals who help give credibility to the current regime. To do this, we will promote a set of beliefs more compelling than that of our opponents. We will launch a movement with more energy and more intensity than our opponents are capable of summoning. When the choice is made clear, the people--cultural elites and non-cultural elites alike--will vote with their feet by either joining or patronizing our institutions and abandoning those of the Left, and the reigning leftist regime will collapse from lack of support.

Our movement will be entirely destructive, and entirely constructive. We will not try to reform the existing institutions. We only intend to weaken them, and eventually destroy them. We will endeavor to knock our opponents off-balance and unsettle them at every opportunity. All of our constructive energies will be dedicated to the creation of our own institutions.

We will maintain a constant barrage of criticism against the Left. We will attack the very legitimacy of the Left. We will not give them a moment's rest. We will endeavor to prove that the Left does not deserve to hold sway over the heart and mind of a single American. We will offer constant reminders that there is an alternative, there is a better way. When people have had enough of the sickness and decay of today's American culture, they will be embraced by and welcomed into the New Traditionalist movement. The rejection of the existing society by the people will thus be accomplished by pushing them and pulling them simultaneously.

We will use guerrilla tactics to undermine the legitimacy of the dominant regime. We will take advantage of every available opportunity to spread the idea that there is something fundamentally wrong with the existing state of affairs. For example, we could have every member of the movement put a bumper sticker on his car that says something to the effect of "Public Education is Rotten; Homeschool Your Kids." This will change nobody's mind immediately; no one will choose to stop sending his children to public schools immediately after seeing such a bumper sticker; but it will raise awareness and consciousness that there is a problem. Most of all, it will contribute to a vague sense of uneasiness and dissatisfaction with existing society. We need this if we hope to start picking people off and bringing them over to our side. *We need to break down before we can build up.* We must first clear away the flotsam of a decayed culture.

In terms of our long term prospects, because we will be seen as a purely defensive movement, not interested in imposing our views on anyone, only interested in being left alone, we will surely gain the sympathy of the public. The dominant culture will see its life-force being sapped, and it will grow terrified. It will do whatever it takes to destroy its assailant. This will lead to the perception that the dominant leftist culture is empty, hollow, desperate, and has lost its mandate to rule, because its only basis for authority is coercion, much like the communist East Bloc. Sympathy from the American people will increase as our opponents try to persecute us, which means our strength will increase at an accelerating rate due to more defections--and the enemy will collapse as a result.

Remaining Importance of Defensive Politics

We must stay involved in the political arena. We do not expect to make any gains through politics. But as our movement grows, the Left will become increasingly likely to try to use the powers of the state to squelch our movement, using whatever pretext they are able to invent. We will need to stay engaged in politics for purely defensive purposes. But all hope for long-term restoration must lie with the new movement. Our only involvement in the political process should be designed to more effectively accomplish secession from, and perhaps eventually, a widespread influence over, the wider culture.

We have repeatedly shot ourselves in the foot by expecting too much from the Republican Party. Of course, New Traditionalists should not defend the Republican Party when it pushes legislation that makes the government more intrusive than it currently is. But we should not sacrifice a united front by trying to badger the Republican Party into doing what it is incapable of doing. That is a waste of the political capital of the party and the time and energy of our people, simply for the sake of "fighting the good fight."

New Traditionalists and Libertarians

There are operational libertarians and there are ontological libertarians. There is nothing in this movement that an operational libertarian would find objectionable. It does not seek to replace an intrusive leftist state with an intrusive traditionalist state. Moreover, the likelihood that this movement would result in a libertarian society is far higher than the likelihood of any strategy succeeding that self-identified libertarians are advocating, because this movement does not promote a direct confrontation with the state, but a sort of "weaning off," or a "walking away" from the state. The state will lose its power when people no longer feel they need it, and *only then*. Our goal should be to teach the cultural elite, and all people, to find meaning in their lives outside of politics. If they do, perhaps they will leave the rest of us alone.

But the New Traditionalist movement must be willing to lose allies among the libertarians we brought on board the post-war conservative coalition. While our movement is not anti-freedom, and the practical effect of our ultimate ascendancy to political power (should that happen) would be an increase in political freedom for Americans, we choose not to make a fetish of political freedom. We recognize that there are other freedoms besides political freedom--such as the freedom not to be subjected to a barrage of cultural decadence at every turn. In fact, it could be argued that this is a more important freedom, because popular culture is considerably more pervasive than the hand of government in most people's lives.

The ontological libertarians make their arguments in terms that the perfectly happy life is a life free from all restraint. The use of these arguments has been a convenient way to achieve some of the short-term goals of conservatives, because this argument is presented in ontological terms acceptable to the Left--but it has been disastrous to American society. It was an alluring temptation that should have been resisted. It has reaffirmed the world-view of the leftist, which holds the unbridled ego at its center. We have undermined the foundation of any resistance to the Left based on the promotion of a fundamentally different world-view. This devil's bargain has therefore helped to perpetuate the decimation of traditional American culture, with its accumulated wisdom and mores and traditions of self-restraint, which is the basis for any hope of a truly workable political freedom.

Libertarians must make their arguments in terms of the moral benefits of freedom, and not in terms of the glories of nihilism, if we can consider them allies and not opponents. As cultural activism becomes more important to our movement, and political activism less so, we may find that we have less and less in common with many libertarians whose philosophical foundations are not sound.

Movement Must Serve as a Force of Social Intimidation in Its Intermediate Stage

We must create a countervailing force that is just as adept as the Left at intimidating people and institutions that are used as tools of left-wing activism but are not ideologically committed, such as Hollywood celebrities, multinational corporations, and university administrators. We must be feared, so that they will think twice before opening their mouths. They must understand that there is some sort of cost involved in taking a

"controversial" stand--although positions cannot honestly be labeled "controversial" if conservatives are unable to mount a meaningful opposition. Perhaps once we are able to mount such an opposition, we will be able to take some of the trendiness out of leftist cultural activism, because lukewarm advocates of leftist causes will be forced to actually get their hands dirty. Support of leftist causes will no longer be the path of least resistance.

Some Basic Premises

The Movement Must Understand What Motivates Human Beings

We must perform a brutally honest analysis of what motivates human beings. We must understand what makes them tick, whether that motivation is attractive or not. We must channel undesirable impulses to serve good purposes. For example, it is important to emphasize that the alternative counter-culture must be just that--alternative. It must be different from anything people are familiar with. It is a basic fact that an us-versus-them, insider-versus-outsider mentality is a very strong motivation in human life. For better or for worse, this has to be recognized and taken advantage of for the good of the movement.

Moreover, the New Traditionalists must be interested in learning about sociology, social psychology, and the dynamics of social change. We must study examples of dissident and counter-cultural groups that succeeded in ascending to dominance--we must learn from them.

We must recognize the world as it is, not as we may like it to be; but we must never let this line of thinking descend into cynicism.

Good Results More Important than Good Intentions--Naiveté Not Excusable

We will apply a scientific analysis to every problem. We will be results-oriented rather than good intentions-oriented. Making a good-faith effort and being ideologically sound will be less important than advancing the goals of the movement. We must learn to be more self-critical. Our efforts should be less haphazard, less prone to fits and starts, and they should make better use of accumulated knowledge and past errors.

We must not get hung up on the evils of our opponents. We can only control our own actions and responses. We must stop whining when we see an example of leftist double-standards and hypocrisy and accept reality as it exists. The only question to be asked is, what are we going to do about it? We must learn to change our *own* thinking and our *own* behavior. We must always operate based on this cardinal principle: *Leftists are never morally responsible for the evil they commit; but we as conservatives are morally responsible for not having done more to prevent them from committing that evil.* We must learn to treat leftists as natural disasters or rabid dogs. If we act as if this were in fact true (of course, it is not), we will not needlessly expend our energy on being upset with our opponents.

This is not to discount the importance of reminding ourselves on a regular basis why we ought to hate leftist ideology, in order to keep ourselves motivated to better fight it. But we must be aware that this is what we are doing as we do it--such propaganda must be seen as a catalyst for action, not a substitute for action. *We must always understand exactly why we do what we do as we do it, and why our opponents do what they do.* We must stop operating according to self-delusion and wishful thinking. Good intentions and good effort count for *nothing*.

The new movement must learn never to be satisfied with the way things are. We must ask a long series of "whys" to understand how we arrived at our current condition and what must be done to change it. For example, if a fight is winnable, why have we not won it? If it is not, why are we not diverting our efforts elsewhere?

We must always recognize and anticipate the strategy of our opponents. There is no excuse for ever being surprised by the ferocity or ingenuity of their attacks.

One especially naive belief held by most conservatives (at least as betrayed by their actions) that seems to have real staying power is that ideas have a way of disseminating themselves. In many conservative publications, for example, it is unclear who the intended audience is. Articles tend to cover old ground and rehash old arguments, which is pointless if the intended readership is made up of conservative activists who are already familiar with them. But if the intended audience is made up of people who do not already agree, they most likely will not be reading such a specialized publication, but rather reading a newspaper or watching television news, or more likely, they will not follow public affairs at all.

What the activists instead need is a better understanding of how the current situation has arisen and how to coordinate strategy, so they will be prepared to take action in the real world. For instance, they need to know more about the history of the Left than any leftist. They need to be able to beat a leftist in any debate. They need to be able to make him look utterly foolish. They need, in other words, to become *hyper-intellectual*--this will make them more self-confident, and with self-confidence, they will have the power to prevail. But the conservative movement is not properly preparing its activists to do what needs to be done. They are instead tossing random opinions into the circulation of national discourse, and merely hoping for the best.

Support of an Elite More Valuable than Support of the Masses

We will initially operate according to the belief that it is more important to win over the elites (or create a new, better one) than to build up a mass movement. Furthermore, it is more important to have a few impassioned members than a large number of largely indifferent members. The amount of energy, *élan*, and self-assurance that we are able to inculcate in the leaders of our movement will ultimately determine its success or failure.

The new movement must be, in part, exclusive and elite. It must not be afraid to pass along a body of knowledge that is not readily accessible to and understandable by everyone. The strong appeal of a feeling of exclusivity and superiority will give our members a reason to endure the slings and arrows of popular disapproval.

The New Traditionalist movement will appeal to the masses, but not immediately. The ideas of the masses never come from the masses. To the extent that the masses are more conservative than the elites, this is primarily because the masses have a long collective memory, and they still value the beliefs articulated by a long-lost elite. The conservative instincts of the American people will continue to erode unless a new elite is formed to refresh that memory.

We must recognize that literature and philosophy do not appeal to the masses. This is why we must develop ways to spread our philosophy using non-rational means--especially the moving image.

Value of Art and Images

We must place a high value on art, because the most important thing any movement can do is capture the imagination of the people. One must give them dreams and ideals that have been put in terms they can understand, and that touch their hearts, as opposed to their rational minds. If we cannot capture the imaginations of our members, then we cannot expect our members to make great sacrifices for us. There must be a common repository of books and movies that everyone in our movement is familiar with and inspired by, so anyone can quote a line that will be recognized by everyone else. Young people already do this, only with the wrong movies, songs, and other products of popular culture.

We have the example of schoolboys studying Homer in Ancient Greece. No Greek would be considered properly educated without an intimate familiarity with Homer. This taught Greeks what their ideals should be, how they should act, and gave them a common base of reference which united them as members of a society. The films *Braveheart* and *Gladiator* are possible examples from current popular culture that could serve a similar, but clearly more limited function.

There is no medium more conducive to propagandistic purposes than the moving image, and our movement must learn to make use of this medium. A skillfully produced motion picture or television documentary has tremendous persuasive power. It has the power to bypass not only the old prejudices that have been assiduously cultivated by the Left over the past few decades, but also the innate skepticism of the viewer, the resistance to new ideas. Rational arguments simply do not have this power, and all arguments made in print tend to appeal to the rational, critical faculties of the mind to a greater or lesser degree.

The visual image allows us to illustrate our beliefs and arguments to our members and others in highly compelling terms--we will be able to show all the examples of cultural decadence, irrationality and disingenuousness in public debate, combined with our commentary, selectively edited and arranged for maximum impact. It avoids the vagueness and generalizations that tend to characterize many conservative arguments. It also allows us to show what we think is right about our current culture--examples from movies or television that we as cultural conservatives support and are excited by. The large amount of capital needed for involvement in this medium is hard to come by, and those with the most creativity and skills in this area are by and large not cultural conservatives--but these hurdles *must* be overcome sooner or later.

Value of the Tangible Versus the Abstract

This movement will understand that it is not enough to talk in abstractions only. We need to offer clear examples whenever possible. And the ideas must be lived by our members if they are ever to be actualized in the wider society. The power of example is far greater than the power of exhortation. This is a cardinal premise of the new movement.

An excessive amount of intellectualization divorced from application in the real world is a kind of escape from reality, or the creation of a virtual reality. Thinking becomes tired, static, and inward-looking. People become more interested in creating mental utopias than in having a real impact on society. Scholars become mere pedants; ideas are no longer creative and vital.

Ideas interest us only insofar as they offer a guide to action. There is a place in society for abstract, academic discussion. This is not that place.

Movement Must Be Based on the Transmission of Ideas, Not Their Creation

This movement is not about the creation of ideas, it is about the transmission and dissemination of ideas. Intellectual cultural conservatism already exists, but it is largely unknown. As it finds its audience, intellectual cultural conservatism will become more creative and will respond to the challenges of the present. The creators of the future will find their inspiration from the great ideas of the past. We maintain that the dearth of new creative thought grounded in conservative sensibilities is due to a disconnection from the great ideas of the past, because those ideas have not been given life and relevance. The New Traditionalist movement will be a revolution in organization, not ideas, but the results will be equally, if not more dramatic.

The ideas that form the basis of the new movement have been well articulated by people who value theory but not action. It will be the job of the New Traditionalist movement to transmit these ideas to a more action-oriented elite, and through them, to the masses. An action-oriented elite is necessary to force people to confront ideas they would otherwise not be exposed to. Ideas do not automatically have consequences. They do not have an impact in direct proportion to the truth they contain. They have an impact only insofar as adherents of those ideas are willing to take measures to propagate those ideas.

New Traditionalists Must Be More Culturally Sophisticated

The new movement cannot be seen as a movement of rubes, or knee-jerk yahoos, or surly malcontents. We must make it clear that we are seceding from popular culture not because we are unable to cope with modern life, but because we are *superior* to modern life. We understand popular culture--*we get it*--we simply find it empty and meaningless.

We may reject the culture of our opponents, but we must never fear it. We must understand the appeal of popular culture before we can hope to draw people away from it. People will not take us seriously until they are convinced we have taken the time to understand its appeal. We need the perspective to be able to compare our current culture with culture at its best, so we not only know when popular culture falls short, but also when it, on occasion, provides examples of culture at its best.

It Is in the Movement's Self-Interest to Improve the Quality of Its Membership

We have a dearth of human material that shares our traditionalist values. These people must be created in *our own* institutions. They must be given a refuge as their nascent beliefs are coming into fruition. They must be sheltered and protected. Improving the quality of the people who make up the new movement will be a primary concern.

The new movement must understand that it is not enough to wait for people to come to us. Conservatives now seem to feel that the success a conservative activist can achieve in the conservative movement is his own business, merely a matter of building a career. This view must be categorically rejected. *It is in the interest of the New Traditionalist movement* that every member be given the support to reach his maximum potential. It is imperative that every member be made to feel more confident about his beliefs and abilities, because the movement as a whole suffers from a lack of confidence. Furthermore, there must be a place for people who do not work in the movement for a salary. *The New Traditionalist movement is a cause, not a business.*

The new movement will promote discipline and loyalty and self-sacrifice. Advancing one's personal interests by harming the interests of the movement will never be overlooked or forgotten. Modern conservatism has an intolerable tolerance for backstabbers and traitors--it reflects a movement that lacks the self-confidence to demand victory for itself, and to ostracize individuals who interfere with the realization of our goals. I

do not refer to genuine differences of opinion. This is not a totalitarian movement. I refer to "conservatives" who feel tempted to denounce other conservatives merely to gain the approval of the cultural elite, or for personal gain.

New Traditionalists Must Concentrate on Students and Young Adults

The new movement will inevitably be geared toward children and young adults, especially their education. We will accomplish the goal of retaking our country only when large numbers of young people are educated outside of the indoctrinating environment of many public and private schools, universities, and of course, the popular culture. At this point in their lives, many of their ideas are still in the formative stage, the more so the younger they are. Furthermore, young adults (of college age and above) should be given a large role in the organization of the New Traditionalist movement, as many older people, because of work and family life, simply do not have the time to devote to reading, discussion, and action (and all three are equally important). They also often lack the necessary energy, enthusiasm, and idealism that is prevalent in youth. However, retirees could also make a valuable contribution to the movement.

College students must be a key audience for our movement, since they are free of excessive time commitments and they find themselves in an environment that (theoretically) encourages activism and exposure to new ideas. We should consider creating alternative fraternities where traditionalists can live, interact with each other, learn from each other, socialize with each other. New Traditionalist fraternities can help replicate lifestyles from the past--emulate "civilized" behavior from the past--by discussing traditionalist ideas, literature, and art, and then acting based on what has been learned. Members of the fraternities and collegiate study groups should build each other up in every possible way: in terms of public speaking skills, debating skills, physical fitness, intellect, manners, aesthetic sense. It is imperative that our ideas be lived and not merely discussed.

A basic problem is that most bright, creative, dynamic, energetic young people with leadership skills become leftists, and this is why most student leaders--who eventually become the leaders of society--tend to be leftists. New Traditionalist fraternities and collegiate study groups can help reverse that tendency.

The Movement Must Be Willing to Appear Obnoxious

Our movement must be highly provocative. The thing we have most to fear is that we will be ignored.

Cultural conservatives must understand the predicament we are in. We must be willing to take measures that perhaps we would be unwilling to take under different, more ideal circumstances. We will have standards--we will never try to justify dishonesty, destruction of the personal reputation of our opponents, cheating, assault, etc., in the service of victory for our movement. However, we will not consider ourselves above appearing "unseemly" or surrendering some of our personal dignity. We must be willing to shake people out of their complacency--which means being obnoxious if the situation requires it--because given the fact that the dominant leftist culture is safely ensconced, complacency only serves the interests of our opponents.

It is not enough to say that conservative philosophy is more sensible than that of the Left. If we leave it at that, we will only attract "sensible" people to our movement. But "sensible" people do not go to the barricades, they do not make great sacrifices for a movement. And the experience of the conservative movement has shown this to be the case. We need more people with fire in the belly, and we need a message that attracts those kinds of people. As Plato said, "madness comes from God, whereas sober sense is merely human." We should keep this in mind if we expect our people to make superhuman sacrifices for the movement. We must reframe this struggle as a moral struggle, as a transcendent struggle, as a struggle between good and evil. And we must be prepared to explain why this is so. We must provide the evidence needed to prove this using images and simple terms. Putting the debate in terms of mere freedom, the "leave us alone" mentality, does not inspire apocalyptic fervor.

Some will argue that "conservatives" do not believe in apocalyptic fervor. The reader should simply ask himself, is he happy with the state of cultural conservatism in this country? If not, does he think it likely that conditions will improve in the future by operating according to the current rules? And if not, is he willing to witness the death of true civilization in this country so that conservatism will not suffer the ungentlemanly taint of "fervor"? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, this movement will not appeal to the reader.

Ground Zero of the New Traditionalist Movement: The Study Group

What Are Study Groups?

The study groups will develop a cadre of scholar warriors. They are the vanguard of a counter-cultural movement. Study groups are the basis of all short-term activity.

Study groups will be imperative because they will be the means by which we combine thought and action. Members will be asked to read relatively difficult or abstract works of political and social philosophy. They will then be asked to come up with examples from our current society that might illustrate some principles contained therein.

This will not be a movement of talkers. Participants will be expected to engage in tangible, constructive activity. They will be asked often what precisely they have done for the good of the movement. The new movement will not, unlike much of modern conservatism, be a spectator sport.

Study groups, as their name implies, will be engaged in the intensive study of culture and ideas, but the understanding achieved through that study will be applied in the form of action. Action is defined as either 1) the subversion of leftist-controlled institutions, or 2) the creation of our own institutions of civil society, whose sole purpose is outreach to, and the conversion of, non-traditionalists. Action is partly designed to lead to direct results in society, mostly as a way to build up the qualities of the membership. A membership that never acts is useless, because it does not become more capable, and does not learn from its mistakes. Furthermore, action in the world encourages the identification of the member with, and dedication to the group.

For example, we will go to public lectures given by leftists and ask them "impolite" and highly critical questions. We must, of course, be fully prepared beforehand for these sorts of excursions, and we must also be prepared to embarrass ourselves, especially at first.

Money for the new movement will come primarily from the membership at first, because very few foundations will be willing to support us initially. As our movement grows, even if more funding comes from foundations, requirements for personal contributions must remain high to make people believe they are personally invested in this movement. Again, members cannot be allowed to think of themselves as spectators in this movement.

Study Groups Will Cultivate Civilized Values

The coming battle for the hearts and minds of Americans is ultimately a battle between civilization and barbarism. The fight between civilization and barbarism is a fight that takes place in society at large, as well as in the heart of each individual.

Civilization means, in part, the mores and inherited traditions that encourage self-restraint and consideration for other individuals, as well as an appreciation for objective truth, in a way that is sustainable and in harmony with our essential human nature. It is concerned with the health of society as an organism and as the body responsible for perpetuating those traditions. It is the opposite of barbarism, which means obeying one's lowest instincts and drives; barbarism means fidelity solely to oneself, not to an enlightened social code worked out over centuries, representing the accumulated wisdom of generations of men and women. Albert Jay Nock defines culture at its best as "lucidity of mind, intellectual curiosity and hospitality, largeness of temper, objectivity, the finest sense of social life, of manners, of beauty." And this view of culture is clearly incompatible with pure egoism.

This is also the opposite of a society produced by ideology. Ideology is a substitute for genuine thought, and it is the opposite of all true civilization. A central goal of the movement will be the destruction of ideology in whatever form it takes. It will not strive for its replacement with a "traditionalist ideology," because such a thing is a contradiction in terms.

The study groups, and through them, the New Traditionalist movement as a whole, will be the means by which the goals of civilization, high standards, and cultural refinement are injected back into society. We have claimed the prerogative to be obnoxious when the occasion demands it. Furthermore, we recognize that refinement and obnoxious behavior can conflict. A rule of reason will mediate. Means should not be allowed to compromise ends, but talk of ends is moot if there are no traditionalists in existence to pursue those ends.

Study groups will provide an opportunity to discuss movies and books and other cultural products that reflect the values of this society and those of societies separated from ours by time or place. Study groups will rediscover and disseminate our conservative heritage. They will share examples of the conservative ethos at work today, perhaps even unbeknownst to the creator of the work. From there, the long-term objective will be to encourage the creation of new works of art that self-consciously reflect the values of the New Traditionalist movement. We operate according to the belief that current popular culture is distinctly uninspiring, and a great people ought to be able to find inspiration in its culture.

Study Groups Will Provide a Communal Experience

Modern conservatism is excessively individualistic. We must find meaning as part of an organization with shared values. For example, it is not enough for a conservative writer to watch a movie, write up a good review in a magazine, encourage other people to watch it, and expect that to form the basis for a movement that is able to stand up to the dominant culture. We must watch movies together. We must feel part of the group as we watch it. And we must then discuss that movie *as a group*.

Study groups should engage in charitable activities, partly to build *esprit de corps*, partly to create positive feelings about our group in the minds of the public, partly to create an alternative to government solutions. Study groups together with other organs of the movement should provide everything that a person could want in terms of social interaction, with the exception of the workplace and the church (although churches will in some cases be allied with the movement).

We must recognize that bonding with others in one's generation or society is the means by which values are strengthened and perpetuated. It is vitally important that we bond in such a way that the values perpetuated are *our own*.

Book Clubs Lay the Groundwork for Study Groups

The movement should imitate the communist distinction between party members and fellow travelers. Study groups will require high levels of dedication, discipline, and self-sacrifice. Those who are unable to perform will be asked to leave. But it would be unwise to send the signal that there is no place in the movement for people who are otherwise sympathetic to our message. They will be considered allies, but they will not be accorded the status of movement leaders.

Based on this premise, the book club is designed to be the organ of the New Traditionalist movement that is most accessible to outsiders. The book club will be open to all interested individuals, and will be responsible for introducing its members to traditionalist ways of thinking. The level of commitment required of book club members will be much lower than that required of study group members.

The study group will recruit mainly from the book club. Members of the book club will discuss ideas at a lower level of intellectual sophistication than the study group. Once the study groups have been firmly established and have arrived at an adequate level of intellectual sophistication, the leaders of the study group will be responsible for choosing the books or other cultural products that will be discussed in the book club, and drawing up the agenda and list of discussion questions for each meeting.

Acceptance by Fellow New Traditionalists More Important than Acceptance by Wider Society

The members of the New Traditionalists must make public affirmation of their identification with the new movement. They must seek approval for their actions from other New Traditionalists, and not from the wider society. It is unrealistic to assume that very many mortal human beings will be able to withstand in isolation the vitriol and hatred that our movement's program will engender. Culture wars generally seem to inspire higher emotions than verbal wars over economics, foreign policy, etc., because they address the most fundamental questions of what matters in life. Our people must learn to have contempt and scorn for the wider society, and reject it in all ways. This will never happen so long as our people seek accommodation with it.

It is important that we form fully well-rounded people who feel that they are lacking nothing that the dominant leftist culture can offer them. For example, sports leagues will be included for young people in the intermediate stage, in order to bring in people who might not otherwise be interested in joining. It is important that there be something for everyone, that there be a place for all kinds of different people. Not all members will be intellectuals, although intellectuals will instigate the new movement.

Final Thoughts

Even if We Lose, We Still Win

Even if our views do not become the dominant views in society at any point in the near future, this must not be seen as a defeat. At least we will have offered many Americans another choice, a refuge from the dominant culture, and a way to at least live a reasonably decent and pleasant life in the midst of rampant social corruption. We will provide people with access to the best civilization has produced--literature, philosophy, and art. We will be a godsend to those who want to raise themselves up, makes themselves more than what they are. Popular culture now acts as a giant narcotic, offering an escape from the difficulty and hard work of realizing our higher selves. Our movement's intention is to break that addiction for as many individuals as possible.

Discussion Lists Have Little Value -- Action Is More Important

We must be careful not to overtheorize, or wait until we have everything thought out perfectly before we start to take action. Action is the most important element at first, because much of learning is evolutionary, and one of the best ways to learn is by making mistakes in the real world--but, of course, there is never any excuse for making the same mistake twice.

Conservatives have an excessive tolerance for incessant talking. The discussion list based on this essay will only involve as much discussion as it takes to form the philosophical basis for local study groups in various parts of the country, and the list will then coordinate the agendas of the study groups. Study groups will be in charge of conducting actual activities. Study groups must form the primary venue for the transmission of ideas, because a discussion list cannot lead to action. Again, the basis of our movement is the integration of thought and action. Neither one is more important than the other.

We should expect some infighting and sectarianism in our movement at first, as we try to decide what exactly we think should be the basis of our movement--precisely which cultural values we are fighting for. This should not worry us especially, because over time, as we engage each other, as well as the wider society, an equilibrium will be achieved, and a balance will be struck between the competing goals of unity and size in our movement.

The Next Step

The reader will have noticed that this essay contains no evidence. It is not concerned with converting anyone to a certain way of thinking. However, certain people will find that its arguments resonate with them, and express beliefs they have long held on an inchoate level. These are the people who will provide the critical mass to begin the organization of the new movement.

If you are sympathetic to the basic premises set forth in this essay, I welcome your questions and criticisms in order to better clarify my positions and my thoughts on the direction the New Traditionalists must take, particularly in the initial stages. Please contact me at ehubeck@freecongress.org. I would particularly like to invite your participation if you would be willing to organize a book club in your hometown. And I especially encourage you to send the link to this page to anyone who you think might be interested in any of the ideas contained in the essay.

We have a lot of work to do. Let's get started.

If you would like to make a submission to a discussion list based on this essay, send an e-mail to ntp.list@freecongress.org. Please include your first name and town, and specify whether you would like your e-mail address included in the posting.

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