Investing in Conservative Ideas

This past fall, shortly before the presidential election in November, some 300 friends and admirers gathered at the Plaza Hotel in New York City to pay tribute to John Kenneth Galbraith and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., the two aged warhorses of 20th-century liberalism. The event, sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, was billed as a “salute to democracy.”

It was also an occasion to recall an era when liberalism ran at high tide in the United States—a tough-minded doctrine that stood boldly for the working man at home and against tyranny abroad. The contrast between the past and the present must have been painful to many in attendance that night: today, the decline of the faith is mirrored in the fact that there is simply no one on the Left whose influence or stature even remotely approaches that attained so many decades ago by the evening’s two honorees.

The long descent of liberalism in recent decades has, no doubt, been not just a painful but a perplexing development for those once convinced that the future would be shaped by their ideals. The rise of conservatism must seem doubly perplexing. Galbraith himself had remarked, in 1964, “These are without doubt the years of the liberal. Almost everyone so describes himself.” And both he and Schlesinger had dismissed conservative thought in the most derisive terms as without intellectual substance of any kind. Today, not only has conservatism risen to prominence in the electoral sphere, but conservative thought has seized the initiative in the world of ideas as well.

Of course, there have been attempts by liberals to account for this reversal of fortune; but few have been accurate, thoughtful, or constructive. During last year’s presidential campaign, the general tone was well captured in liberal assaults on George W. Bush as a “liar” or an “idiot” for pursuing precisely the sort of cause—deploying American power on behalf of liberty and democracy in the world—that liberals like Galbraith and Schlesinger once championed.

Addressing the rise of conservatism, the Left resorts to explanations that stress manipulation and trickery, with corporate payoffs to politicians looming large in the story. Conservative ideas play but a minor role in the account, and are themselves generally characterized as mere stalking horses for corporate interests. A particularly sinister role is ascribed to those conservative philanthropies that have helped fund thinkers, magazines, and research institutions—on the assumption that no one would advance such self-evidently meretricious ideas unless paid to do so.

Indeed, the Left has displayed a near-obsessive interest in conservative philanthropies. A number of websites are devoted entirely to charting the activities of the “right-wing foundations established by major corporate polluters,” as the environmental activist Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., describes them in his book, Crimes Against Nature. Similarly, the journalists David Brock and Eric Alterman have devoted much energy to “exposing” the projects supported by these
institutions as well as their links to other organizations and their place in the broader constellation of conservative activism. Reports by People for the American Way and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy dwell with heavy emphasis on the supposedly nefarious strategies and tactics employed by the foundations to advance their highly dubious cause.

Invariably, these broadsides ignore the substance of the ideas themselves, quite as if John Stuart Mill's famous characterization of conservatives as “the stupid party” were still the rule in the early 21st century. But the plain fact is that modern conservatives have been engaged with the world of ideas to a far greater extent than most modern liberals. The columnist David Brooks has observed that, asked to name influences on their thinking, most conservatives are able to list a number of books or authors, while liberals have difficulty identifying any. This lively engagement with a coherent body of ideas forms a crucial if much overlooked aspect of the rise of conservatism, and one in which conservative foundations have played a central role.

In the period running from the end of World War II down to the present, conservative philanthropy has gone through at least two distinct phases, and is now entering a third. Surprising as it may seem, both earlier phases were defined by ideas rather than by narrow business or corporate interests.

The first phase, which began in the mid-1940's and ran well into the 70's, was guided more by an interest in classical liberalism and libertarianism than in conservatism as it has been understood more recently. The main donors were the Volker Fund, the Relm and Earhart foundations, the Liberty Fund, and business leaders like Jasper Crane of DuPont, Henry Weaver of General Motors, B.E. Hutchinson of Chrysler, and the British entrepreneur Anthony Fisher. (The Earhart Foundation and the Liberty Fund live on today.) These donors had only modest sums at their disposal, giving altogether around $3 million per year as compared with the $300 million that the Ford Foundation alone allocated annually in the mid-1960's.

There were, to be sure, important differences among these donors. The Volker Fund was generally libertarian in its approach, while the Earhart Foundation bridged the divide between classical liberalism, with its emphasis on liberty, and modern conservatism, with its emphasis on tradition and order. But the interests of all of them were, by design, intellectual and theoretical.

The seminal influence on these funders was F.A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, published in London in 1944 and in the United States the following year. This slender volume, an articulate call to battle against socialism, turned its author, then an obscure professor at the London School of Economics, into an enduring hero among conservatives and classical liberals on both sides of the Atlantic. No other writer at the time had made the case against collectivist ideas and policies with such audacity and clarity. For this reason alone, *The Road to Serfdom* quickly became a reference point for those with misgivings about the expanding welfare state.

Named in many surveys as one of the most influential books of the 20th century, *The Road to Serfdom* caused something of a sensation when first published, provoking reviews and comment from such leading figures as John Maynard Keynes and George Orwell, and scathing rebukes and rebuttals from scores of lesser lights. A condensed version, brought out in 1945 by Reader's
Digest, reached over 2 million of the magazine's subscribers and aroused enough interest to bring Hayek to the U.S. for a national lecture tour.

The Road to Serfdom advanced two broad themes, one negative and the other positive. The first was that socialism leads almost inevitably to tyranny and the loss of liberty in all of its forms. The second was that the antidote to socialism is to be found in the revival of classical liberalism as articulated by British-Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith, David Hume, and Edmund Burke. The book was in some ways highly pessimistic: socialism was advancing everywhere and appeared irresistible. (As if to confirm Hayek's analysis, England's 1945 parliamentary election saw the Labor party winning on a platform that called explicitly for the nationalization of British industry, and the victorious party proceeded to make good on its promise.) At the same time, Hayek saw a way out through the revival of a tradition of thought that was in the process of being lost.

As for present-day conservatism, in Hayek's view it suffered from a fatal weakness. Because it relied on tradition rather than principle, it could slow down or resist but never fundamentally alter the direction in which events were moving. That is why he took pains to emphasize that he himself was not a conservative at all, but rather a liberal in the Whig tradition. (A later essay of his was titled, simply, “Why I Am Not a Conservative.”) This, as it happened, was one feature of Hayek's thinking that appealed in particular to Americans.

The American polity, as Hayek understood, was originally built on the principle of liberty, and its political tradition was greatly influenced by the Whig ideals of limited government and the rule of law. As a consequence, defenders of the American tradition were themselves frequently “liberals” in the European sense. For Americans concerned about the expansion of government, the alternative to socialism and the welfare state was not conservatism but individualism.

Another enduring contribution of The Road to Serfdom, perhaps more influential in the long run than Hayek's critique of socialism, was its emphasis on the importance of ideas in the growth of political movements. Challenging the assumptions of the historical school of thought, Hayek insisted that socialism and statism were products not of economic forces beyond anyone's control but of erroneous and destructive ideas. The Whig principles that had influenced continental thought during the 18th and 19th centuries had been displaced by German thinkers from Hegel and Marx down to Sombart and Mannheim, whose collectivist doctrines had captured the imagination of intellectuals. In another essay, “The Intellectuals and Socialism” (1949), Hayek mapped out a broad, long-term strategy for combating this challenge.

Practical men of business, Hayek wrote, were at a decided disadvantage in the war of ideas because of their deep distrust of theoretical speculation and their “tendency to orthodoxy.” Businessmen, moreover, did not understand the link between ideas and political movements, and therefore did not see the need to mount a sustained intellectual defense of their own interests. He urged his followers to learn from the success of socialism, which had originated as a construction of theorists and philosophers and only later emerged as a political movement fielding candidates for office and appealing to voters.

“What we lack,” Hayek wrote, “is a liberal Utopia, a program which seems neither a defense of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism . . . which does
not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible.” The positive content of such a program was necessarily vague, but it was plain that Hayek envisioned a movement operating at the level of principles and theory and aloof from electoral and legislative agendas or the immediate controversies of political life. He proposed, in other words, a true war of ideas, one that might appeal to the best and most adventurous minds of the age but that might take a generation or more to bear fruit.

Hayek's platform—theoretical, abstract, and utopian—might seem an odd basis on which to build a philanthropic program. There was no pretense here of promoting piecemeal reforms, of helping a party or a candidate, of passing a piece of legislation, or, indeed, of producing immediate consequences of any kind. Yet the philanthropists I have mentioned responded to his call.¹

Hayek's writings had a more or less direct impact in Great Britain, where Anthony Fisher (with Hayek's encouragement) established the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) in London in 1955. Directed by the economist Ralph Harris, the IEA was the original free-market think tank, publishing books and pamphlets that documented the inefficiencies of socialism and state-run enterprises. True to Hayek's prediction, it would spend more than two decades advancing these ideas and gradually winning converts until a sympathetic friend, Margaret Thatcher, was elected prime minister and began to implement reforms that were much influenced by its work.

In 1947, the Volker Fund sent a group of Americans to Switzerland for the organizing meeting of the Mont Pelerin Society, founded by Hayek to promote the free market in economics and the broad ideals of classical liberalism. In conformity with Hayek's vision, Mont Pelerin functioned as an exclusively scholarly enterprise, avoiding political debate in favor of in-depth theorizing about the foundations of a free society. A short time later, Volker underwrote Hayek's appointment as professor of moral science—Adam Smith's title at the University of Edinburgh—in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and also provided funds for New York University to hire Ludwig von Mises, Hayek's Austrian mentor and friend.

In addition to these appointments, Volker and other donors lent assistance to the “Chicago School” of economics, led by Milton Friedman and George Stigler, and to the University of Virginia's school of political economy led by James Buchanan—all three of whom would later win the Nobel Prize in economics. They supported hundreds, perhaps thousands, of graduate students, mostly in economics but also in allied fields like government and history; many later became prominent scholars in their own right. And they subsidized a few institutions, generally libertarian in outlook, including the Foundation for Economic Education, the Institute for Human Studies, and the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, which helped circulate market-oriented ideas to professors, students, and even businessmen.

It is difficult to recall today how radical the ideas of a Friedman or a Hayek appeared in the 1950's and 60's, when the future seemed already to point in the direction of central planning, socialism, and the welfare state. In this phase of things, the role of philanthropy was largely to maintain the vitality of a remnant of thought until it could be brought forth again as an alternative to doctrines that had failed. That the movement did not find its way into the wider world of policy and public debate was in part, as we have seen, deliberate: aiming for influence beyond the daily headlines, Hayek and his followers eschewed a strategy that might have
enabled them to reach a broader audience. But, working as they were against the intellectual grain of the time, they also had little success in breaking into the world of the universities—and without gaining a foothold in the academy, there was little hope of converting the next generation of scholars. By the mid-1970’s, Hayek himself had been dismissed as an extremist, even a reactionary, and the influence of the classical liberals was at a low ebb.

If the work of the conservative foundations in this period attracted little attention beyond their immediate circle—Waldemar Nielsen's standard histories, *The Big Foundations* and *The Golden Donors*, do not mention them at all—the leading liberal philanthropies were, by contrast, advancing their own agenda with vigor and to general applause. These foundations—Ford and Rockefeller, along with the Carnegie Corporation—were guided by the view that social progress was to be achieved through expert knowledge and scientific research, by the expansion of government's role into new areas, and by the use of international organizations to promote cooperation among the major powers. Their funds went to well-entrenched and highly regarded institutions: universities, research centers, international organizations, and, occasionally, governmental bodies. In sum, the liberal foundations formed an integral part of the era's liberal establishment, a circumstance for which they were roundly criticized (to little effect) by both conservatives and left-wing radicals.

A significant shift in liberal philanthropy took place after McGeorge Bundy, a former dean at Harvard and National Security Adviser to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, was appointed president of the Ford Foundation in 1966. Sharply preferring activism to research and expertise, Bundy pioneered a strategy of “advocacy philanthropy.” Soon Ford and other liberal donors were investing in a maze of activist groups promoting feminism, affirmative action, environmentalism, disarmament, and other cutting-edge causes. The Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Women's Law Fund, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, were among the products of this initiative.

These groups claimed to speak for and to be the legitimate representatives of their respective causes. In that capacity, they promoted ideas that led to legislation, and then sought to influence the regulatory bodies and federal courts that implemented and interpreted the laws. Thus, Ford and Bundy helped develop an institutional structure that, by means of litigation and the leverage it exercised over administrative agencies, could push its favored programs beyond any limits contemplated by the politicians who enacted them.

A strategy designed to bring about large change by circumventing the electoral process was well suited to philanthropic institutions with links to experts and advocates. And it led indisputably to results: employment quotas for women and minority groups, the expansion of welfare, new environmental legislation, and the like. It also produced some spectacular blowouts, most notably the effort in 1968 by the Ford Foundation to decentralize the New York City public schools. Over the long run, the Bundy approach was instrumental in inventing what is by now a familiar phenomenon on the American political scene: the well-placed advocacy group nursing a grievance against American society and seeking compensation on behalf of its members.

Reinforcing this trend was the fact that, simultaneously, the Democratic party was beginning to alter itself along parallel lines. Following the tumult at their 1968 convention in Chicago, the Democrats established a commission, chaired by Senator George McGovern, whose mandate
was to make the nominating process more representative. Quickly captured by liberal activists, the commission pushed through new delegate-selection rules requiring the representation of women, blacks, and young people in line with their respective proportions in the population.

The effect was to displace the elected office holders, party officials, and union leaders who had controlled Democratic conventions in the past and to replace them with activists speaking for designated groups. Under this approach, the groups that now found a home in the party began to look very much like the ones Bundy had tried to organize through the Ford Foundation. In many cases, they were the same groups.

Finally, liberalism itself came to be recast along interest-group lines. The welfare state was redefined from a package of programs through which Americans lent assistance to the poor, the sick, and the disabled to a system through which certain defined groups could command government support as a matter of right and as compensation for past injustices. Society was cast as the guilty party, the recipients as its aggrieved victims. This sleight-of-hand in turn made it difficult for government to require the beneficiaries of its aid to adapt their behavior to the standards of middle-class life.

As liberalism gradually absorbed the adversarial assumptions of the age, group-based claims became ever more strident and accusations of discrimination and injustice multiplied. In time, the new order would erase those large-hearted features of liberal philosophy that had made it appealing to middle-class Americans from the 1930's through the 1960's.

These developments could not have been foreseen. They were not a consequence of broad social or economic factors or of public pressure. Rather, they were engineered by a narrow circle of activists with access to money and influence within the Democratic party. They also defied Hayek's assessment that far-reaching changes take a generation or more to be put into place. Here, an established doctrine and a political party with a proud tradition were turned upside down within just a few years.

At the time, many observers took note of the role that charitable foundations had played in this upheaval. Inserting themselves into the political life of the nation, liberal philanthropists parlayed their ability to fund experts, research, and advocacy groups into a new potential for influence. With their inbuilt advantage over elected politicians and traditional business associations, they were a quintessential expression of what came to be known as the “new politics,” a politics driven largely by ideas. This was, without question, a crucial development in our political life—and in response to it, more than a few conservatives, joined by alarmed or disillusioned liberals, began to look for a different way.

This brings us to the second phase of conservative philanthropy. It began to take shape in the mid-1970's through the work of a handful of donors, especially the John M. Olin and Smith Richardson foundations and, later, the Bradley Foundation. The Scaife Trusts of Pittsburgh were also involved to a certain degree.

These funders were more self-consciously conservative than libertarian. While sympathetic to the writings of Hayek and the ideals of classical liberalism, they adopted a broader intellectual framework encompassing fields beyond economics: preeminently religion, foreign policy, and
the traditional humanities. In contrast to Hayek and his followers, they were also prepared to engage the world of politics and policy and to wage the war of ideas in a direct and aggressive style.

The foundations themselves had been endowed by successful businessmen who wished to preserve the system of private enterprise that had enabled the country to prosper. In the mid-1970's, the outlook for any such program appeared especially bleak, but the sense of swimming against the tide gave their efforts an air of invigorating urgency. And they soon discovered, within the intellectual world, a seemingly unlikely group of allies imbued with a no less urgent set of priorities.

Just as the earlier donors had looked to Hayek for guidance, these foundations looked to the neoconservatives. Writers and editors like Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Hilton Kramer, and Michael Novak had for the most part spent their formative years on the Left. Rather than by Hayek, their ideas had been influenced by George Orwell, Lionel Trilling, and Raymond Aron—intellectuals of Hayek's generation who had dwelled on the evil of totalitarianism from a moral and political standpoint. Many of them, like Hayek, traced their intellectual lineage back to the 18th-century Whigs, but in so doing they once again emphasized the moral and cultural rather than the economic dimension, typically preferring Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to his *The Wealth of Nations*. In brief, they understood the moral foundations of a free society to be prior to and more important than its economic foundations.

The neoconservatives had an added advantage: having come from the Left, they understood the thought processes of contemporary liberals and leftists. They also understood that the war of ideas had to be fought by engaging in real-world controversies, with stakes wagered on the outcome. Through their writings, and through the advice they were able to offer, they helped to orient the conservative foundations to the ongoing contest over which set of ideas would govern the nation.

The political world that these writers saw around them in the 1970's looked much different from the one that had so troubled Hayek in London in 1944. Instead of leading us down the path to collectivism, the welfare state had produced fragmentation, group conflict, disorder, and a general loss of authority in society. In the United States, moreover, the welfare state had advanced itself not through the nationalization of industry but through incremental expansions of social programs and accretions to federal regulatory power. It was the intersection of these programs with the cultural revolution of the 1960's and 70's that gave rise, as the neoconservatives saw it, to urban crime, illegitimacy, broken families, and educational failure. The contemporary problem was thus not so much collectivism or socialism as the loss of morale and self-confidence that was in some ways characteristic of all affluent societies—a problem to which classical liberalism did not promise any obvious solution.

In contrast to Hayekian liberalism, neoconservatism never developed a full-blown theory of government, economics, or society. (Instead of a movement, neoconservatism itself was more a “persuasion,” as Kristol called it, or a “tendency,” as Podhoretz described it.) Rejecting orthodoxies and abstract theories alike, the neoconservatives tended to operate in close proximity to ongoing events. Kristol, though sympathetic to Hayek, once wrote that “he too often gives the impression that he considers reality to be one immense deviation from true doctrine.”
In keeping with this stress on real-world outcomes, neoconservatives drew upon social science to assess the practical consequences of the various programs and policies that made up the modern welfare state. Documenting the disturbing consequences of initiatives that had promised to end poverty or to transform the cities, analysts like James Q. Wilson and Charles Murray demonstrated that ideas adopted with the best of intentions were making matters worse. The effect of such studies was to throw cold water on the vast expectations that had been nourished by liberal theorists and activists. As promises were scaled back, so was the momentum behind the expansion of the welfare state.

Not that the neoconservatives were against a welfare state in principle, or necessarily embraced the unfettered market as an alternative. They criticized the welfare state because it demoralized the poor and made them dependent on government, but they hardly objected to well-crafted measures to aid the unemployed. A conservative welfare state, one that encouraged work, family, and middle-class values, was something they could endorse. In foreign policy, they believed that the cold war was a vital moral and political struggle, and rejected efforts to conciliate the Soviet Union as naïve or worse. In another time, they might well have been called liberals; in the 1970's and beyond, they were most definitely conservatives.

Like Hayek, the neoconservatives envisioned an important role for intellectuals, but they were not prepared to wait a full generation for their efforts to yield results. It was plain that liberal and left-wing intellectuals had promoted ideas and programs that were wildly out of touch with the operating assumptions of the vast majority of Americans. This opened up an opportunity. The task of conservatism, as Kristol said, was “to show the American people that they are right and the intellectuals are wrong.” Over time, that is more or less what happened.

What the neoconservatives understood was that neither the intellectuals' dislike for capitalism nor their penchant for socialism was a function of economic analysis. By the mid-1970's, the economic promise of socialism was dead; it was obvious to everyone that socialist economies could not even feed their own people. What attracted liberal intellectuals to socialism was something else: mainly, the idea of community, which they contrasted invidiously to the individualism and competition of a market society.

Thus, as Kristol and others argued, an effective defense of capitalism required a defense of the cultural assumptions on which a commercial civilization is based. It had to be shown that free societies encouraged values far superior to anything that socialism could deliver.

The conservative foundations followed this lead. Though they continued to fund programs in free-market economics, they also made gifts in the fields of history, philosophy, government, even art and literature. They came to consider religion, morals, and marriage to be as important as economics and markets—and closely bound up with them. The foundations strove to move into every major area of debate and controversy. They allocated funds to prominent institutions, including Ivy League universities where conservative ideas were in a decided minority, and they proved ready and willing to support magazines and journals addressing a spectrum of controversial issues.

Such magazines, they understood, were not simply products for sale in the marketplace, as businessmen might see them, but institutions in their own right, with ongoing responsibilities,
reputations to be built and preserved, and networks of authors and supporters. Above all, they were seedbeds of ideas, nurseries of new talent. Not only was their cumulative effect large, but individual articles published in any one of them could have far-reaching consequences.

The neoconservative magazines, COMMENTARY and the Public Interest in particular, routinely published authors whose critiques of liberal ideas and policies were factual, pointed, and ruthlessly logical, and whose analyses pointed the way to everything from the welfare reform of the late 1990's to the paradigm shift in American global policy that is being carried out by the Bush administration. There were also the New Criterion, a journal of literature and the arts edited by Hilton Kramer, and the National Interest, a foreign-policy quarterly established by Kristol and edited for many years by Owen Harries.

In bringing a different approach and emphasis to modern conservatism, the neoconservatives enlarged its appeal, made it more effective in the political world, and helped it to adapt to the challenges of the time. The advance of conservatism in recent decades owes much to them, and to their partnership with the conservative foundations.

In addition to aiding institutions shaped by neoconservatives, the foundations supported magazines, think tanks, and research centers led by free-market economists, libertarians, religious conservatives, and even Straussian philosophers. When Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980, there were but a few organizations that he could look to for research and information; by the time George W. Bush was elected in 2000, there was a proliferation of such groups working actively in every area of public policy. These organizations have developed ideas and nurtured talent that over time have helped change the balance of power between liberals and conservatives in America.

All this was accomplished with modest financial resources—amazingly modest when compared with the spending of their liberal counterparts. In one recent year, the five leading liberal philanthropic organizations—the Ford, Rockefeller, and MacArthur foundations, the Pew Trusts, and the Carnegie Corporation—reported combined assets of $24 billion and annual expenditures of $1.2 billion. By contrast, the combined assets of the five largest conservative foundations do not exceed $1.5 billion, and their annual expenditures barely reach $100 million. Yet they were able to achieve a great deal with focus and discipline, and by allying themselves with an unusually talented generation of writers and scholars.

The network of publications, university programs, and research centers built from the 1970's onward will continue to wield influence in the years ahead. But, as I suggested at the outset, this phase of conservative philanthropy has now run its course—in part because it has done its work, in part because conditions have changed, and in part because some key donors are leaving the scene. In the decades ahead, new funders, now entering the field, will shape the next chapter of conservative philanthropy.

That next phase will necessarily be different from those that have gone before. For one thing, conservative philanthropy will likely be based more on individuals than has been the case till now. The prosperity of the past few decades, along with the success of conservative groups and ideas, has created a cohort of such individuals, few with enormous wealth but many prosperous enough to make significant gifts to conservative enterprises. At the same time, some
conservative foundations—Olin preeminently among them—have spent themselves or intend to spend themselves out of business in accordance with their founders' wishes, and others have begun to shift their priorities.

The reason for this shift has to do with the fact that conservatism has become a governing philosophy, and governance leans toward the practical. This is a natural evolution in a movement that has assumed national responsibility, and that needs workable agenda items—school vouchers, personal retirement accounts, legal reform, elimination of the estate tax, and so forth—to propose and enact. In addition, various conservative donors have themselves become involved in promoting one or another specific policy, and see the passing of a piece of legislation, or the implementation of a reform, as the most tangible measure of their success.

Does this mean that there is no longer a great need to sustain and renew the intellectual basis of conservatism? Hardly. The dynamism of American life, and the relentless competition between the political parties and among interest groups, forces every movement of ideas to test those ideas on a more or less continuous basis if it means to survive and flourish. One need only think of last fall's tribute to Galbraith and Schlesinger to be reminded of the precarious and temporary nature of intellectual influence.

Conservatism has accomplished this process of renewal more successfully than any of its competitors in the postwar period. This has been done not through an emphasis on policy so much as through broader arguments about where we have been, where we ought to go, and what threats and obstacles stand in our way.

“Who owns the future?” Orwell asked. It is the great question of life and the great question of politics. Few will be persuaded to embrace conservatism only on the grounds that it promotes private social-security accounts or caps on liability awards. In the end—as we saw dramatically actualized in the national furor over the fate of a woman kept alive by a feeding tube in a Florida hospital—the fight over the future is cultural, and moral.

In this sense, Hayek and the neoconservatives have had it right all along: any movement, if it is to maintain or augment its influence, will need to wage an ongoing battle of ideas. To do so, conservatives, no less than liberals, will need the help of sympathetic philanthropists.

Footnotes

1 Because of their theoretical approach, these donors were not necessarily involved in some of the other key intellectual events of the period, among them the founding of National Review in 1955. In launching this magazine, which was to play so great a role in the rise of modern conservatism, William F. Buckley, Jr., aimed to create a forum of ideas that would at the same time address the controversial issues of the day; he also intended it as a for-profit enterprise, legally free to support and oppose candidates for public office. Both factors made the participation of these particular donors unlikely; in addition, their commitment to classical liberalism did not fit neatly with Buckley's own economic views.
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