

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

THE FUTURE OF LIBERALISM?

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Panelists:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GALSTON: Well, ladies and gentlemen, people are still trickling, or should I say surging in. This is a wonderful crowd and a great tribute to the topic, and especially the author of the book that we're gathered to discuss today.

A few preliminaries; I should begin by introducing myself. I'm Bill Galston, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies here at Brookings. And equally important, I should begin by introducing the series of which this event today is such a distinguished addition. The series is called Governing Ideas.

Many of you have attended previous events, some of you haven't, so forgive me for the repetition. The basic idea behind the Governing Ideas series is this: At Brookings and at think tanks around town, we spend an enormous amount of time debating public policy, and it's right and proper that we do that, but we're sometimes tempted to overlook that there is a context within which the discussion of public policy takes place. It's a context constituted in different measures, in different times and places, by culture, by religion -- insofar as the two can be distinguished -- by institutions, and not the least, by ideas. And we are gathered today to discuss a very large idea, namely liberalism, and one that bulks even larger in the U.S. context and in the context of our history than it does elsewhere around the world, although it's hardly trivial there, as well.

There are two faces of liberalism, if I can put it that way, there's a familiar sense, the political sense in which liberalism is opposed to conservatism, and the book that we're here to discuss today is, in part, addressed to that question.

But there is a less familiar sense of the term liberalism, the philosophical. And in that sense, liberalism came into being in opposition to alternative conceptions of political community, and of government -- the divine right of kings, theories of natural hierarchy and of the need for unresponsive authority in government among them. And one question that we'll have to wrestle with today, and long after today, is what the relationship is between those two senses of the term liberalism, and I'm sure that today's discussion will illuminate that.

The book that has made today's discussion possible, and in some sense necessary, is entitled *The Future of Liberalism*. Its author is the distinguished scholar

and public intellectual, Alan Wolfe, who in this context, needs less of an introduction than he deserves and less of an introduction than he will receive. You all picked up full biographies. In brief, he's the author and editor of more than 20 books. I won't read the full list, but the following will give you a flavor: *Does American Democracy Still Work?*; *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live our Faith*; *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice*; *One Nation After All*, I could go on. Many of these books have been singled out by the *New York Times* and other publications as notable books of their year.

Wolfe is a contributing editor to many different journals, including, most conspicuously, I would say, *The New Republic*, and he has contributed a series of distinguished and sometimes pointed book reviews to that journal. And as a political scientist, I'm pleased to note that he currently chairs a Task Force of the American Political Science Association on religion and democracy in the United States, and I can't think of someone who is better prepared to fulfill that.

After Alan speaks, which he will for about 15 minutes or so, we will have two wonderful commentators who equally require very little introduction, and therefore, will get one.

E.J. Dionne, Jr., who is also a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at Brookings and a long time columnist for the *Washington Post*. Those of you with longer memories will recall that he spent 14 years with the *New York Times*, and his datelines included Albany, Paris, Rome, Beirut, and the Vatican, where he was singled out for the excellence of his coverage.

The book for which he's probably best known, though it's far from his only one, is *Why Americans Hate Politics*, a phrase that has resonated with me and others for the better part of two decades now. And he's also a Professor at Georgetown University.

Our second commentator is one of the ablest, most penetrating young conservative intellectuals that I know, Ross Douthat. You probably know him best as a Senior Editor at *The Atlantic*. You may not know that he'll be leaving that position shortly to become a regular columnist for the *New York Times*. And so his voice is about to be amplified many fold, and I predict that he will spark many important debates in the years to come. Some of you may also know that he's the co-author, with Reihan

Salam, of a very interesting book called *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream*.

The flow of events will be as follows; Alan will speak for about 15 minutes from the podium. E.J. and Ross will then offer commentary for about ten minutes each, also from the podium. We will then return to our seats, get mic-ed up. I'll give Alan a couple of minutes to respond to any particular provocation that may have pierced his very thick skin in the preceding 20 minutes or so. We'll then turn to the question period. I'll take the Moderator's prerogative of addressing a question or two to Alan just to get his juices flowing even more robustly, and then I'll turn the remainder of the event over to you.

And a couple of final announcements before the show begins. The book is on sale in the rear. And if your questions are not too impertinent, the author may even agree to sign any book that you may choose to buy. And secondly, and this is a message to myself and everybody else in the room, please turn off your cell phones. Thank you very much. Lead by example. Alan, the floor is yours.

MR. WOLFE: Well, thanks, Bill, for that introduction, and especially thanks for asking me down here. You know, any author's dream is to be able to speak about his or her book, and then to have two such remarkable people to comment on it, so this is really one of the high points of my intellectual life, and I'm just thrilled that you put this together.

I also wanted just to spend a second to thank Strobe Talbott, the President of Brookings, who wrote a very nice blurb for the back of the book that also made me feel like maybe I was on the right track.

Assigned 15 minutes, I'm actually going to try to speak a little less than that, if possible. I can't wait to hear what people have to say and want to get to that as quickly as we can. Also, of course, I don't want to give away too much that's in the book for the hopes that you'll actually want to buy one, and so I'll try to keep it very, very short.

Essentially, I wrote the book, *The Future of Liberalism*, in large part – I mean I would have loved to have written a book that could persuade every conservative in America to become a liberal, but I didn't think that was possible. If George Bush and Dick Cheney couldn't do it, I didn't see how Alan Wolfe could. I'm pleased to comment that George Bush and Dick Cheney did actually persuade some conservatives to be

liberals, among some, some very, very important ones. But really I was very much more interested, I'd have to say, in speaking to my fellow liberals, because I sensed among my fellow liberals, A, a reluctance to use the term, a kind of preference for other words like progressive or something like that, but also a kind of defensiveness. It seemed to me that liberals in America essentially view their role as kind of adjuncts. They sort of take over power or dominate the specter of ideas when conservatives get tired and take a leave of absence.

At least that's what I felt in the last few years. In striking contrast to the past, in striking contrast to the America that I grew up in, when writers like Louis Hartz, the Harvard Government Professor, could write a book called *The Liberal Tradition in America* in 1955, in which he essentially argued that we're all liberals, and that liberalism was the only tradition in this country. So I wondered, you know, what had happened to produce this kind of lack of confidence, this defensiveness on the part of my fellow liberals, and it struck me that one way to do that was to try to do pretty much what Bill Galston suggested in his introduction, to remind us that while liberalism is a term that has political resonance in contemporary politics, it's also a philosophical tradition, and that there are things of enormous value in that philosophical tradition that are extremely relevant to the way we think today.

In the book, I offer a one sentence definition of liberalism, and it's this, that liberalism is committed to the proposition that as many people as possible should have as much control over the direction of their lives as feasible.

There are essentially two elements in that definition, the idea that we should be in control of our lives, that strikes me as a very, very important and powerful liberal idea, one I associate primarily with Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, with the idea of autonomy, meaning self-governance, that nobody is in a better position to govern us than we ourselves. This idea originally emerged, as Bill said in his introduction, in reaction to certain prominent ideas in the 17th and 18th century, divine rule of monarchs and so on. I like the term that my fellow political scientist, Mark Lilla, has coined, the idea of a political theology, of a fusing of religious and political authority, and in a sense, liberalism emerged in reaction to that, in reaction to the idea that God's commands, as

reinforced by the state, tell us how we should live, and that we, ourselves, play relatively little role in the process.

I do not in any way think that this original idea of autonomy makes liberalism hostile to religion. In fact, one of the sub themes of my book is that liberals ought to be welcoming of religion, and even of conservative religion, that a good liberal should be. It does accord with a particular kind of way of thinking about religion, one associated with that devout Christian and great liberal political philosopher, John Locke. It does have a Protestant resonance with the idea of individuals themselves choosing the best path to God for themselves.

But even the Catholic Church, in many ways liberalism emerged against and in reaction to the Catholic Church, and in particularly, the Catholic Church's alliance with absolute monarchs has certainly come around I think in post-Vatican era to that conception, as well. And we no longer have a Catholic church that could issue documents like the Syllabus of Errors and other 19th century attacks on liberalism.

So it's that idea of self-governance that's so important. But it also seems to me that the liberal tradition holds that if self-governance is good for one person, it should be as good for as many people as possible. That, in fact, self-governance for one person is impossible without self-governance for many people; that a society in which only a few are able to be in control of their lives would not be a stable society, it would not be a just society, it would not be a fair society, and it would rapidly collapse. So that within the liberal tradition is, as well, the notion that if autonomy is good for one, it ought to be good for all.

And in that sense, at least as I see it, there is no fundamental tension within the liberal tradition between liberty and equity, that so long as ideas of equality are pursued in the spirit of liberty, and that so long as ideas in the pursuit of liberty are promoted in the spirit of equality, that these two things are not only not in contradiction with each other, but are dependent upon each other for their mutual success. One of the things I take up early in the book, and for me, as the author, this was the theme I got most kind of interested in in a lot of ways, was that if political theology was once the major threat against which liberalism developed, in today's world, where there is no political theology of this type anymore, liberalism's great enemy is no longer religion, but I argue forms of

sociobiology and evolutionary psychology that deny the fundamental autonomy of human beings, that view human beings as the product of their genes, their lives as pre-determined by forces outside of their control, the views of the world as randomly organized, in which we have no ability to engage in purpose of planning of the kinds of lives we are going to lead.

I'm just struck by the fact that out there in the real world, you find that the Darwinists and the more conservative Christians are going to court suing each other. To me, they have almost identical conceptions of human nature and of human purpose - that sin plays much the same role in conservative Christianity that the genes play in various attempts to apply Darwinian theory to human beings and to human purpose, and they ought to stop fighting each other, for God's sake, and get together and just recognize how much agreement they have on the really fundamental and basic issues. In fact, as I'm elaborating the arguments in the book I spend some time on the way in which religion and liberalism and equality were played out in the latter part of the 19th century, a period in which the Darwinists of that time, Herbert Spencer in Victorian England, and William Graham Sumner in the United States were stringent libertarians and advocates of laissez-faire, and atheists. Whereas the people who are arguing for greater equality and the welfare state were people committed to the social gospel in Protestantism or Catholic social teachings in the Catholic tradition. And in those days, at least, the relationship between religion and left and right was almost totally reversed from what it is today.

This leads me to just the second point that I want to make before turning it over, and that is, I also argue in the book, and have been arguing recently in The New Republic blog site, that the book rejects a distinction between something called classical liberalism and something called modern liberalism. I hear this all the time, especially among more conservative audiences where I sometimes speak, and always the first question when I talk about this is, well, which liberalism are you talking about, are you talking about the laissez-faire classical liberalism of Adam Smith, you know, which, at least my interlocutor would say, that we like, you know, that's great, we call that conservatism today, but you know, it was liberalism then, or are you talking about the statist road to serfdom, totalitarian fascist liberalism of the welfare state and so on. And

for many people I think there's just an absolutely sharp distinction between these two traditions, and you've got to sort of belong to one or the other.

I try to argue that once we understand liberalism in this more philosophical sense of autonomy and equality, that there is one unified liberal tradition that Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes both belonged to it; that in the conditions that were bequeathed to Adam Smith's Europe as a result of mercantilism and feudalism, that the way to pursue the liberal idea of autonomy for as many as possible was through the market, which would break down some of the obsolete structures that were confronting and preventing human progress, and that the market represented a great advance in liberty and an ability to pursue this fundamental liberal idea. But in the conditions of the 20th and 21st century, those conditions are not the same, empirically speaking, now that objective needs, especially with all powerful and centralized markets, some help from government to promote that idea, and while, you know, fully aware, as we all are, especially in a period of recession like we're having, that economic issues can be enormously important.

My book is not really addressed to economic issues, and I'm not personally all that interested in economic issues. This raging controversy between whether we ought to prefer the market or the state strikes me as fundamentally an empirical question, a matter of technique, which one will better advance the philosophical goal that liberalism stands for? In some cases, it can be the market; in some cases, it could be government, and you resolve that by looking at actual situations rather than by some kind of rigid commitment to principal one way or the other. And so you can consider that a kind of theme that the book tries to address.

Another way of putting it is that one of the themes of the book is that liberalism actually existed before the New Deal. Sometimes liberals forget that. One liberal I sometimes admire and sometimes don't is a fellow columnist of Ross' at the *New York Times*, Paul Krugman, and I think Krugman sometimes does forget that liberalism did actually exist before the New Deal, and that there's more to liberalism than economics, and that there's a much richer tradition behind it. My greatest hope would be that people like him would read the book and that it would have some kind of impact upon the way they're thinking.

Once we are reminded of that, I think we're also reminded of the fact that liberalism and progressivism are not the same thing, that a great deal of the libertarian critique of the modern state strikes me as a much more valid critique of American progressivism than of American liberalism.

There is and has been a tendency in, for example, the progressivism of Woodrow Wilson to run over what Immanuel Kant called the crooked timber of humanity. Progressivism does imagine life as pretty much a straight line from one place to another, without the appreciation of multiple purposes and diversity of objectives that a true liberal would stand for. Finally, the last chapter of the book tries to talk about what liberalism means today with respect to some of the major issues that we're facing. I review some of the controversies that have been inspired by globalization. For example, we do have these days campaigns against globalization and anarchist protests when the WTO or other kind of organizations meet.

And I try to remind my fellow friends and colleagues on the left that liberalism has always had an international dimension, that the period in which liberalism was founded in the latter decades of the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century was a period of incredible internationalization and ferment of ideas, that people like Thomas Paine were going from one country to another, that people were visiting France and coming back to England and then to the United States, or even to Russia and Germany and other countries.

I think that fundamental to the liberal outlook on the world is a kind of default position in favor of the world, and therefore the protectionist reaction and the xenophobic reaction to globalization, whether it comes from the left or the right, the dislike of immigrants, and the kind of want to retreat behind our borders is an anti-liberal tendency that liberals ought to resist.

I also address in the last part of the book some of my contemporary liberal writers, for example, the person I admire, but disagree with, the writer Paul Berman, who wrote an important book called *Terror and Liberalism*, in which he kind of almost admires in a certain kind of way the power of fanaticism.

When he writes about Islamic terrorism, there's almost a sense in which he feels that liberals are unable to really meet the fanaticism that inspires terrorism and

other challenges to the liberal world, that they have something, these fanatics, that we don't, that they have some kind of almost romantic conception that gives them a sense of purpose that we indifferent and compromised liberals don't have, and I think that's a very, very unhelpful way of thinking.

I think that when we appreciate the liberal tradition in all its glory, we have, in fact, an enormously powerful, philosophical tradition that has been attractive to people throughout the world, that in any head-on contest with fanaticism or with terrorism, would win hands down, and that the best approach to a world characterized by terrorism is the same as the best approach to a world characterized by globalization. Seemingly opposites, Jihad and McWorld, as Ben Barber puts it, but liberalism has enormous resources to deal with both. That's why the book is called The Future of Liberalism, although truth be told, the reviewers who said that it doesn't deal much with the future are probably right. I got the term from a 1934 lecture that John Dewey gave to the American philosophical society at New York University called The Future of Liberalism, a very interesting lecture, and I then sort of did my usual Google-ization and discovered that no one had ever used it as a title for a book, that's why it's the title of this book. Thank you all so much.

MR. DIONNE: I want to thank Bill for doing this and say it's such an honor to be here today with Alan and Ross and Bill to celebrate Alan's truly important new book. Just so I don't bury the lead, let me say I love this book. It's smart, it's hopeful, it's clear headed, it's beautifully crafted. I hope every politician and engaged citizen reads it. We will have much better and smarter argument if it gets a wide readership.

And I suspect, Alan, you will make converts. Indeed, now that Ross has read it he will soon become the New York Times' new liberal columnist, I'm quite certain of that. I also –

MR. WOLFE: You can stop there.

MR. DIONNE: Wait, it gets better. Alan actually is the author of very acerbic reviews occasionally, and I think I lost his respect when I told him how much I liked his book.

I have to confess that I have an affinity for reading Alan's books under the most auspicious circumstances. As he knows, I still believe that his book from nearly two

decades ago, Whose Keeper? is one of the most important and underrated books of our moment. And I may be biased because I read that book on my honeymoon in 1991. It's a work of social science in which love, marriage, family, and commitment are very important, so it was entirely appropriate that I read it under those circumstances.

And I read The Future of Liberalism under closely related circumstances, during a spring break trip with my son to the beach in Florida. Now, some may find it strange that someone's idea of perfection is a beach trip with your son and the opportunity to read The Future of Liberalism. But for me it was, indeed, a splendid experience, and since Alan defends individual autonomy and our right to pursue our own notions of happiness, I suspect he won't have a problem with that.

It takes less courage than it once did to defend liberalism, and I believe Alan's book, along with Paul Starr's fine contribution, Freedom's Power, and many other recent books, signal an intellectual effervescence and renaissance among liberals. But it is still not always easy to be called a liberal. A friend of mine who belonged to Democratic Socialists of America was campaigning some years ago for a candidate supported by the regular Democratic organization in Queens, New York. My friend was at a polling place on Election Day working with a gentleman from the Democratic machine who asked him what organization he represented, and he got up all his courage and he said, "Democratic Socialists of America." And the machine guy replied, "Oh, good, at least you're not one of those goddamn liberals." And so I think we made some progress from those days, though as Alan writes in his book, it's still often true that liberals are treated "as carriers of infectious political diseases."

In truth, I would love to give a 60 minute lecture on this book; it's that engaging. There are a few areas where I'd like to argue with Alan, but won't: I think, for example, the problem of elitism is somewhat more pressing and complicated than he allows, and we might talk about that. I'd also love to ponder at length the question of how liberals can be as open as Alan rightly suggests they should be. He writes, "A world in which the only ideas were liberal ideas would not be a liberal world." That's an excellent thought. But how can they believe that without falling victim to that old criticism that a liberal is someone so open-minded that he can't even take his own side in an argument.

I do want to praise Alan's courage in writing the following sentence: "No one is more temperamentally conservative than a Manhattan leftist living in a rent-controlled apartment and holding tenure at a university. His or her way of life is inevitably bound to breed a sense a complacency that is incompatible with liberalism's historical commitment to be open to the new." Since many book reviews are written by Manhattan leftists living in rent-controlled apartments holding tenure at a university, that is truly a brave sentence.

What I want to do briefly is to call attention to what struck me as some of the most important aspects of Alan's argument, and then take friendly issue with Alan's treatment of socialism, globalization, communitarianism, and the American progressive tradition by way of suggesting that he underestimates the influence of ideas and forces outside liberalism in creating the very form of liberalism he rightly commends to us.

Central to the book, as Alan suggested in his remarks, is the emphasis Alan puts on equality as being just as essential to a proper liberalism as liberty itself. As Alan writes, "It is not sufficient for me merely to be left alone, I must also have the capacity to realize the goals that I choose for myself. If it requires an active role for government, then modern liberals are prepared to accept state intervention in the economy in order to give large numbers of people the sense of mastery that free market capitalism gives only to a few." I think that's exactly right.

His treatment of religion is marvelous. I'm glad he talked about that at some length. Believers and atheists have much to learn from Alan's capacious sense of respect in a sphere where there is so much mistrust. "Liberalism's enemy," he writes, "is not religion, but religious oppression, and its friend is not skepticism, but freedom, including religious freedom." Again, I think that's exactly right.

His discussion of the thinking of Carl Schmitt is hugely revelatory. And while I like poetry in speeches, I appreciate Alan's warning about the dangers of poetry in politics. "Let the passions reign in the museums and concert halls," Alan writes. "In the halls of government, reason, however cold, is better than emotions, however heartfelt." That sounds like a slogan for the No Drama Obama, to me.

I love his treatment of the 1755 Lisbon earthquake -- I won't tell you about it, you'll have to read the book. And I think he is correct that the Bush Administration's

handling of Hurricane Katrina was not only a political Waterloo for Republicans, but also a philosophical Waterloo for conservatism. "The response to Hurricane Katrina," he writes, "became a test case for the conservative understanding of the role of government, and it was a test that conservatism failed." He argues that the Bush Administration's response to Katrina was a case of "planned incompetence," his lovely phrase, because it was premised on the idea, and I quote, that "the federal government existed not to meet the needs of citizens but to convince those citizens that they were not entitled to the things they had come to expect."

Now because Alan's project in this book is to demonstrate liberalism's compelling coherence, I think he does underestimate the extent to which liberalism has changed. In particular, he understates how contemporary American and British liberalism differs from the European variety, and also from the original idea. And I think he also underestimates the tensions within liberalism. In the process, he is also at times unfair, I think, to liberalism's competitors on the left. He does a good job reconciling liberty and equality, but I think he is not willing as fully as he might to face up fully to the tensions within liberalism between individualism and the quest for community.

Alan does justice -- indeed, this is one of the many parts of the book I like very much -- he does justice to the role played by turn of the century New Liberals -- T.H. Green and Leonard Hobhouse -- in moving liberalism away from pure laissez-faire. He writes very well about the Christian roots of Green's ideas, the importance of Walter Rauschenbusch's social gospel, but I don't think he acknowledges as fully as he should how liberalism was changed by its encounter with progressive Christianity -- and prophetic Judaism that were so important to movements for social justice. Liberalism, I think, needed these outside corrections.

On globalization, I'll only say that Alan criticizes and sometimes pokes fun at the anti-globalizers, and then takes on a large part of their argument as his own. The key problem with the global market is that it's not subject to the very process of democratic deliberation and rule-making that Alan recommends. I think in the end he recognizes that but there's a tension in his treatment of globalization.

And I think he is so eager to rescue the word "liberal" that he is unfair to America's progressive tradition. I understand what he's doing here: the fear of the word

“liberal” has made me call myself a liberal more and more, because if liberals can’t defend a word, how can anyone expect them to defend their ideas. And I sometimes think that a progressive is a liberal who has looked at the polls and decided to find a new label. But in truth, American progressives really were modern new liberals. They became New Deal liberals on the whole. It is unfair, I think, for Alan to associate progressives with the abuses of civil liberties at the end of the Woodrow Wilson Administration, even though I share some of Alan’s doubts about Wilson himself.

I also think he understates the degree to which liberalism profited from its encounters with democratic socialism and social democracy. Again, I think Alan is so eager to push back against those who try to tar all efforts at social reform as socialism, something we saw a bit yesterday on teabag day, that he ends up presenting his own parody at times of Social Democrats and Democratic Socialists. He grudgingly concedes, and I quote him, “Some forms of socialism moderated their revolutionary character in the 19th century and found ways to make themselves compatible with liberal democracy in the 20th.” I think it’s more than some forms. The most successful democratic socialist and social democratic regimes, notably in Western Europe, also in Chili, Brazil, and I would say India, have made peace with both liberalism and the market. And American liberalism of a New Deal variety successfully introduced what the late Seymour Martin Lipset called a “social democratic tinge” to American politics. In brief: social democracy, Christian democracy, liberalism, and progressivism, I believe, represent different emphases within the larger project that Alan is advancing, and are less antithetical than some moments in the text suggest.

Lastly, I think liberalism is always in need of a communitarian correction, which is why I am probably closer to the thinking of the philosopher Mike Sandel than Alan is, even though I know both of us admire Mike’s work. “When politics goes well,” Sandel has written, “we can know a good in common that we cannot know alone.” I don’t think Alan disagrees with that, but I think that idea is only possible if we accept that liberalism’s emphasis on liberty and equality sometimes shortchanges the importance of building a community in which all of us are prepared to come to the defense of the liberty of each of us, and all of us are prepared to vindicate each other’s calls for justice. Without fraternity, liberty and equality are in danger.

But I want to close with three of Alan's sentences that I think summarize this book so well, and they are sentences with which I heartedly agree: "We need liberalism because without its politics, we are less free and less equal. But we also need liberalism because without its morality, we are less fair, and without its psychology, we are less generous. Our goal should be the recovery of liberalism in full." This is Alan Wolfe's liberalism, and may many rally to its cause. Thank you.

MR. DOUTHAT: They initially told me that we would be delivering our remarks in a seated position, so I have hastily scrawled notes rather than a deeply impressive and eloquent speech, so I apologize in advance for not living up to the example that E.J. just set.

But I'd begin by thanking you all for coming, thanking Bill for inviting me, thanking Alan, obviously, for writing the book that made all this possible. And I guess I'll begin by saying something favorable, which is that as liberals go, and as debates between them go especially, from my point of view, I would say that Alan Wolfe has many, if not all of the right enemies.

Obviously, it's very nice for a conservative to read a liberal who has unkind things to say about Woodrow Wilson, who attacks the hubris of the progressive movement, who has favorable words for school choice and for welfare reform, and even has unfavorable things to say about Roe versus Wade.

And from the point of view of a religious conservative, it was extremely nice to read a liberal book that attacks the new atheists and militant secularism with at least as much vigor as it attacks the religious right. And this is a topic we can probably get into more in the conversation, but I think that Alan is absolutely right to identify – he talks about evolutionary psychology and sociobiology. I would say more broadly the tension between what you might call scientism and liberalism, which I think is going to be more important for liberalism going forward potentially than the tension between liberalism and religious conservatism that we've spent so much time talking about during the Bush years.

That said, I think all of this admirable willingness to criticize his own side and his own side's excesses has the paradoxical effect of sometimes letting liberalism off the hook a little bit. In the sense that Alan wants to separate liberalism from its excesses

constantly, so liberalism is not the worst mistakes of the progressive movement, it is not the eugenicists of the 1930's, it is not the new atheists, it is not the bloated welfare bureaucracy of the 1980's, it is not even, perhaps, the excesses of the teacher's unions and so on, while at the same time identifying liberalism's opponents in here -- in particular I'm talking about the conservative tradition in modern America -- entirely with their own excesses. So conservatism is Michael Brown, it is John Yoo, it is Jerry Falwell full stop. Liberalism is to be separated from its worst mistakes and follies, and conservatism is to be identified completely with them. And from a political point of view, obviously, this is fair enough, since we've just passed through a period of ineffective and unpopular conservative governance, and we have entered into an era when the American conservative movement seems to be meeting the attempts of liberals to parody by descending into self-parody of its own.

So that's all fair enough, but I do think that it renders a Wolfian liberalism a little bit more dismissive than it should be of what I would characterize as the deep American conservative critique of modern liberalism. And the extent to which that modern conservative critique really is a critique from within liberalism broadly construed, and to an extent that I think the book sometimes glosses over and diminishes.

So Wolfe depicts the American right, I would say -- again, generalizing a bit -- as a fusion of hard libertarianism and a kind of reactionary romanticism than he associates with religious conservatism, and this is, I think, part of the truth. But it's also part of the truth that what Wolfe calls libertarianism is often better described as simply a straight forward critique of the tendency of liberals like Wolfe to down-play the role that economic liberty plays within a liberal society. And so he paints Hayek, for instance, in colors that I think would be better reserved for Ayn Rand. And I think that this is sort of a thread running through the book, where the role that economic liberty plays is down played, both to the extent that it's a means for the kind of wealth generation and economic growth that makes welfare state liberalism possible, but also economic liberty as an end in itself.

And I don't think I'm being unfair to Alan when I say that his remarks about not being that interested in economics and and so on except as a practical problem do reflect the extent to which he is much more interested in political liberty, personal liberty,

than he is in economic liberty, and is inclined to down-play, I think, the extent to what liberals think of as economic intervention in the economy often becomes economic coercion of liberty and does not always necessarily redound to the benefit of the people that it is aiming to uplift and whose freedom it aims to increase.

And by the same token, I think what Wolfe calls romanticism, reactionary romanticism and so forth, can also be an argument in defense of liberalism, but an argument that the liberal order depends on for its stability and prosperity and so forth on pre-liberal or even illiberal habits and institutions. The unchosen or semi-chosen, but necessarily permanent obligations of family and community, and also the habits and morays associated with the traditional religions that have been present in most of the societies in which modern liberalism has come into being.

And I think both of these critiques are ones that both Wolfe and liberals in general would do well to keep in mind as we enter into what seems to be an era of left liberal dominance in American politics.

From the point of view of the libertarian or critique from economic liberty in particular, it is not necessarily the case that Barack Obama's high spending, high borrowing, and eventually high taxing economic policies will place the American economy on quite the sound footing that liberals hope for. Nor is it necessarily the case that a government that tends to be inclined to pick winners and losers in its quest for economic regulation and in its quest to develop green collar jobs, to take an obvious example, is ultimately going to be conducive to the economic liberties of taxpayers and entrepreneurs alike. And likewise, I think Wolfe and other liberals are very eager to talk about the necessity of equality and to criticize the record of conservative governance in the United States over the past 30 years, for its tolerance of growing economic inequality.

It is, I think from, again, from the point of view of the social conservative, somewhat difficult to see how we can enjoy the kind of equality that we enjoyed in say the 1950's, in a culture where 40 percent of births are to non-married mothers.

And similarly, and here I think I'll just conclude with a subject that's dear to both my and Alan's heart, which is the subject of religion; I think he has, frankly, wonderful things to say about the proper role of religion and religious believers in American life,

but I think Alan is very sympathetic to what he's described, I think rightly, as the sort of broader, general liberalization of Christianity in particular and religion in general in American life over the past 30, 40, 50, 100, 150 years.

And I would only say on that point that it's been interesting in the wake of the financial crisis, the real estate boom, the boom/bust economy of the past ten years, if you delve into the practical, well, practical is perhaps the wrong word, but the popular expressions of modern Christianity, liberal Christianity, pseudo Christianity, and so forth, and here I'm thinking of most of the religious best sellers that crowd the shelves, and the sort of pseudo religious best sellers, the self-help books, Joel Osteen, the Oprahfication of religion, this is, I think, the religion that a liberal society has a tendency to give rise to.

And I think it's very difficult in the wake of the crises that we have endured to pick up those writers and to watch those thinkers talk about the ends and purposes of human life on earth and not feel at least a touch of nostalgia, perhaps not for the medieval Catholicism that condemned usury and speculation, but maybe for the kind of thrifty Calvinism of the Protestant era and the early American era.

And I think over the long run, I think that liberals like Alan Wolfe may miss traditional religion perhaps more than they would expect. So that's the beginnings of a conservative critique of Alan's excellent book. And there I will step back to my chair, taking my scrawled notes with me. Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: We'll now pause for 30 seconds to get mic-ed up. At this point, usually someone rushes in from the Technical Department.

(Pause)

MR. GALSTON: Well, thanks so much. And, Alan, if you have anything that you would like to say in response to these excellent commentaries, this is the first of your several chances.

MR. WOLFE: Well, first, they were excellent, and thank you both so much, I couldn't have asked for more; it really lived up to everything I had hoped would happen today. Let me just say one thing about progressivism and two things about libertarianism.

I think E.J. and I will have to disagree a little bit about the progressive tradition. It wasn't just Wilson that I found a little disturbing. I think there were progressive elements in the New Deal. Just to cite one example that I cite in the book, like so many liberals, I'm enormously moved by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inaugural address, the only thing we have to fear is fear itself, and found it a very, very moving testimony to the liberal tradition.

But Roosevelt also talks about viewing domestic reform is like an Army that has to be mobilized to achieve a particular objective, and that's more the kind of progressive language that I think does run through some elements of the New Deal, as well, and that's the side of it that bothers me. I guess I'm too much under the influence of another liberal, Isaiah Berlin, to really trust that kind of humorless, unironic sense that we know exactly what progress is, and that's what I see progressivism as kind of – so it's a subtle difference, but an important one, and I appreciate your highlighting it.

With respect to some of the comments that I found enormously helpful and very thoughtful from Ross, let me just say this, he mentioned Hayek and Rand, and that libertarians come in many, many different colors, and I agree that there's a vast world of difference between the kind of – I would put heroic, romanticism of Rand, and a much more down to earth and skeptical Hayek.

But I still have problems with the idea of Hayek as a liberal, at least the way I talk about it, not because I'm not interested in economics, but I think the very notion that's so central to Hayek and in his thinking of imperfect knowledge, that we lack so much the capacity to understand how something as complicated as an economy can work, that we need to rely on almost pure indirection, to almost what, in his day, might have been called the cybernetic understanding, really undermines the capacity of human beings themselves to control the world. We're controlled by almost invisible processes, that the great advantage of the market is that no one effectively controls it. I think that's the philosophical point, that, for me, at least the way I define it, differentiates libertarians like Hayek from liberals.

Hayek, toward the end of his life, was very attracted to sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, and it would make a lot of sense, because people who write in his spirit, like Virginia Postrel and so on, I think are attracted to that side of an almost

cybernetic like, you know, everything will – we just don't have the knowledge to know what to do. And I think liberals believe that while it would be a mistake to think we have perfect knowledge, we do have some knowledge and we ought to be able to use it. So I'd be interested if that corresponds with your understanding, but that's kind of the basis.

The other thing you said about libertarianism, particularly – I actually agree with you completely, and I teach at a Catholic University, and I do miss that kind of. Especially with my students. You know, they're born libertarians. I don't know what kind of Catholic parents they come from sometimes but it's all about choice, everything is about choice, and I almost want to say, look, I'm maybe not the person to tell you this, but your religion has a figure named Augustine, and maybe you should go back and read him, and he actually had some interesting things to say about original sin. It's actually a powerful idea, original sin, and maybe we ought to think about it and so on. And so I'm constantly astounded by the almost longing I sometimes feel for that kind of thing.

And I recognize that, yeah, that's a little hard to reconcile with everything I said about liberalism, but I'll put it this way: libertarianism comes in the economic form that you've described, but in the sort of grand census today, it also comes from a kind of moral and cultural "anything goes" style of libertarianism. And that bothers me as a liberal as much as the economic libertarianism. I'm not a free for all, anything goes kind of person. We had an issue on the ballot in Massachusetts to decriminalize marijuana, and to the shock of my kids, who all voted for decriminalization, I voted against it, and I can't even explain why. I just thought there's got to be some rules somewhere. So I'll leave it for someone else to figure out how that fits in with the author of a book called The Future of Liberalism. Thank you both so much.

MR. DIONNE: Could I just say at 30 seconds, no one is more opposed to humorless or unironic politics than I am, I would argue, and I just think that, on the progressive tradition, A, there were progressives with a sense of humor, I'd argue FDR himself, Fiorello LaGuardia, two good examples.

But I just think that the two traditions are far more intertwined, and that it's almost an accident of history that progressives came to be known as liberals, because FDR decided to call – he came straight out of the progressive tradition, decided in the

'30's to call himself a liberal, to the great consternation of people like Hoover and Robert Taft, who, themselves, always said they were the true liberals.

I think the effort to make a clean separation between these traditions doesn't work and ends up requiring you to do some violence to each tradition. And there were a bunch of things that Ross said that I am actually quite sympathetic to which I think only proves that he is a communitarian conservative, I'm a communitarian liberal; it may have something to do with the fact that we're both Catholic, and all Catholics I think are necessarily communitarian at some level, so I agree with Alan's critique of his libertarian Catholic students.

But I think that the whole question of where does liberalism need correction is a very useful one to discuss. And I think one of the great things about Alan's book is, without always explicitly acknowledging it, he implicitly acknowledges it through his scholarship of where the influences on liberalism pushed it in certain ways that, on the whole, I think were, let me use the word, providential.

MR. GALSTON: Well, we have now -- we've now reached the question period, which I am going to take the moderator's prerogative of initiating. And after that, it's over to you. There will be a couple of roving microphones. I will recognize you, and when you are recognized, please identify yourselves and then address either a short pointed question or a short pointed comment to some or all members of the panel. No long speeches, please. Just a couple of things, Alan; as your colloquy with E.J. and Ross proceeded, I was reminded a little bit of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Your critique of progressives was that they thought they knew too much. Your critique of the Hayekians was that they thought that we knew too little. And the great thing about liberalism is, we know just enough, and I hope you're right.

I must say, I found myself wondering -- this would be my second prelude before my actual question -- I found myself wondering whether you hadn't sort of reinvented Louis Hartz in a way, which is, not the worst thing that can be said about you or any book, because as you stated the central substantive principal of liberalism in the book and from the podium, I found myself asking, how many Americans would really disagree with that statement as a matter of principal? I suspect that you'd have to go not one, but two standard deviations out from the political median in this country before you found

people who really disagreed with that principal. From that standpoint, most of the real debates in American politics may be below the level of principal, which is just a speculation. Louis Hartz certainly thought so, and you may have recreated a sort of a Hartzian thesis for the 21st century. But now let me get to my question. You're free to respond to my comments when you respond to my question, by the way.

In your opening description of liberalism in the book, although you didn't quite get there in your comments, you offered a triad of substance, procedure, and temperament, and so to put a question on the table that moves us a little closer to this course in Washington, although we've done an admiral job of avoiding that up until now, let me just read a couple of sentences from your book.

"Understood in a procedural sense, a liberal is anyone who supports a constitutional form of government, believes in a government of laws rather than of men, and holds that exceptions to general rules should be rarely, if ever, granted", you know, a classic sort of rule of law interpretation of liberalism. And I think it's that procedural sense that motivates one of my favorite chapters in the book, which has the wonderful title of "Mr. Schmitt Goes to Washington."

Now, those of you who have studied 20th century thought will know that the Mr. Schmitt in question is Carl Schmitt, the conservative German constitutional theorist who became a Nazi apologist during the 1930's, which led to the eclipse of a very interesting body of thought that is now being rediscovered. And your argument in that chapter is that an essentially Schmittian idea of executive power migrated to Washington and became a central thought during the past eight years in the conduct of the war on terror.

And let me put a counterproposal on the table, which is one that you may actually endorse in the book, and I'm not sure where it goes, and let me put this proposal on the table by reading some famous words that I think you will recognize.

"Many things there are which the law can by no means provide for, and those must necessarily be left to the discretion of him that has the executive power in his hands, to be ordered by him as the public good and advantage shall require. Nay, it is fit that the laws themselves should in some cases give way to the executive power, or rather to this fundamental law of nature and government, namely, that as much as may be, all the members of society are to be preserved."

Sounds a bit like Dick Cheney, but, in fact, it's John Locke on prerogative. And now, so it seems to me that if I were an inventive and theoretically knowledgeable member of the Bush Administration, I would root what they did, not in some German Nazi theorist, but in your favorite originary liberal, namely John Locke, and that leads me to my question, namely, is the controversy between you and the Bush Administration in Mr. Schmitt goes to Washington on the level of principal, or is it on the level of the application of that principal to the particular case?

MR. WOLFE: It's on principal; but let me first say about Hartz: I am writing in the spirit of Hartz, and I did try to develop a definition of liberalism that, in a sense, almost identifies liberalism with modernity, and in that way, almost with the United States. And it's meant to be inclusive in that sense. I'm not sure this is –

MR. GALSTON: It is.

MR. WOLFE: Because it really relates to your question. In the chapter on Carl Schmitt, I was wrestling with, in a sense, the Straussian tradition. I have a lot of colleagues where I teach who are followers of Leo Strauss' political philosophy, and Straussianism relies heavily on that quote from Locke. Strauss himself cites that quote from Locke, a natural right in history. And you could, if you wanted, sort of draw a straight line from Strauss to John Yoo and to Dick Cheney, and I actually didn't want to do that, I wanted to draw it from Carl Schmitt instead, and not from Strauss, because Strauss had something that Schmitt lacked. Schmitt had really almost nothing but contempt for the American founders. To him, Madison and Jefferson were liberals, and because they were liberals, they were wooly headed parliamentarians who talked, talked, talked, and never made decisions. And the tradition of the separation of powers, which, of course, as you know, the founders got from Montesquieu, and so it was entire antithetical to Schmitt.

Strauss, on the other hand, was a great admirer of the American founding, and Strauss and the political philosophers are second to none in keeping the spirit of that founding alive. So I wanted to make it as clear as I possibly could that I was not one of those wild-eyed, left-wing conspiracy theorists saying Leo Strauss goes to Washington, you know.

MR. DOUTHAT: You were saying that Adolph Hitler went to Washington.

MR. WOLFE: Mr. Schmitt himself; Hitler, you know, I mean Schmitt had a terrible life, and I think made terrible personal decisions, including his speeches, his anti-Semitic speeches in which he said as our Führer has said about the Jews, and then went on to repeat what the Führer said about the Jews.

But it wasn't that so much, although I think tied sometimes to distinguished comments like that from a person's political views, so it was Schmitt's political views, so it was an effort to be fair, in my own way, to the Straussian tradition by blaming it on the Schmittians.

Interestingly enough, that also allows me another thing, which I do say in the book, and that is that Schmitt has been enormously attractive to left wing thinkers these days. He's, in fact, all the rage among left wing post-modernist thinkers, you know, the people who follow Michel Foucault really sort of trace it all back to Schmitt. And so you could never say that Strauss was popular among left-wing thinkers; I don't think you'll find that – so that's what it grows out of.

Now, with respect to the quote from Locke itself, if you take the words on the page, yes, you could use Locke's comments upon executive privilege, as we would call it today, and say I'm just simply operating in the spirit of liberalism, but finally, your first point, you know, where you mention that I have a kind of temperamental substantive and procedural. If you do that with Locke, you're not getting the Lockian temperament, you're not seeing that Locke's comments I think were in the context of a genuinely liberal temperament, within which he allowed for a kind of exception.

So the question is, what do you do? Do you just cite the words on a page, or do you try to get the sense of Locke's larger ambition? And if you're trying to get the sense of Locke's larger ambition, you would, as Hartz did, and as I do, say that's more important than what he happened to say about the condition, so that's why I think it's the principal.

MR. GALSTON: Fair enough.

MR. DOUTHAT: Well, can I just quickly – I mean, I think that that was one of the chapters that I had in mind, where I thought that Alan's admiral criticisms of the excesses of liberals and/or progressives past ended up being unfair to conservatives, because I think that, you know, you can locate John Yoo and Dick Cheney in a tradition

that goes back to Carl Schmitt and the jurists of Nazi Germany, but I think it's a lot easier to locate them in a tradition of American presidential conduct in war time that goes back through Nixon, through FDR, through certainly Woodrow Wilson, all the way back to Lincoln, and then all the way back to the Alien and Sedition Acts, where there is a tendency in the American political system for presidents and those around them to claim extraordinary power in war time.

And it's completely reasonable to say that you and Cheney did absolutely terrible things in the name of this; I don't think it's fair to say that this is an eruption of Nazi tinged ideology into American liberalism, I think it's a tendency within American politics. I mean Woodrow Wilson was locking up his political opponents in the latter days of World War I.

And I think a lot of it also has to do with the extent to which, you know, we are here in 2009, and because there hasn't been a terror attack since 9/11, we think, and perhaps rightly, that the Bush Administration treated it as a kind of war that it really wasn't, treated it as if it were a crisis on the level of, you know, the Civil War, when Lincoln was suspending habeas corpus, or World War II, where FDR was executing Germans without a trial, German saboteurs without a trial and so on. But, you know, in the aftermath of 9/11, that was not the prevailing understanding of the nature of the crisis, both on the right and on the center left, I think, and I think that again, absolutely, if you want to condemn John Yoo, condemn John Yoo, but I think it's worth recognizing that this is not a particular affliction of a Nazi-tinged conservatism, it's an affliction of American executive power.

MR. WOLFE: Thanks for that. Let me quickly – because you did say this in your comments, and I did mean to comment on it. I see where you're coming from, and I would probably even admit that the eight years of the Bush/Cheney Administration may have set me off a little in my anger toward what they did, and that on your general point, you know, that I dismiss the excesses on my side, but I point to the excesses on the conservative side as embodying the essence of conservatism, that strikes me as an imminently fair criticism.

And if I were writing this book with a little more detachment from the Bush years, it probably wouldn't have been that sharp, because there are some conservative

figures that I do deeply admire, as you know, because we've been through this, and in a sense, Russell Kirk isn't one of them, you know, but there are people that I do. And I feel, in rereading the book, that I made myself vulnerable to your kind of criticism; I didn't have to, and should have anticipated it more.

Now, having said all that, I disagree with you on this specific point about Yoo and Lincoln and so on, and the reason is this: Lincoln strikes me, yes, he suspended habeas corpus, but he was a man with deep humility, he was a man with deep awareness of the tragedy of the human condition, of what we would call in the contemporary world sort of trade-offs, that sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do and are reluctant to do, but necessity forces you to do so.

That, to me, is a very different sensibility than the Yoo/Cheney temperament, which was much more in your face. What really bothered me about John Yoo is not only his abrogation of his legal duty as a lawyer in serving his client -- which was the country, not the president -- what really bothered me about John Yoo was, in his books, he takes this Constitution that we all love and twists it and turns it for his own particular ends in a way that did, in fact, remind me of the most extreme kinds of Schmittian thought. So, you know, we can disagree, but I would still say I was fair in doing that in that particular instance.

MR. DIONNE: I just want just 30 seconds. I thought Alan was being way too liberal and open to the critique from Ross. I want to defend the Alan Wolfe of the book. You know, where I don't think he, in invoking Carl Schmitt, he is saying that these guys were Nazi's, or that they were rooting their ideas and Nazi ideas, he was saying that there are affinities between what Carl Schmitt said about the executive and some of the ideas they were proposing.

And I do think that while there is a, you know, sure, Ross is right to the extent that there have been abuses of civil liberties in war time throughout our history, that's true, but I think there were some theoretical advances, as it were, I mean I don't view them advance in the positive sense, in the Bush years, in Yoo's ideas, you know, the idea of the unitary executive, which I think probably goes beyond Alexander Hamilton, who had a very expansive view of the executive. So I don't think Alan was, no matter how impatient he was with Bush and Cheney, I don't think he accuses them of being

Nazi's or rooting their ideas in Nazi ideas; and his treatment of Schmitt, he's tough on the left, as he pointed out, as well as on the right, who had a fascination with Schmitt.

MR. GALSTON: Okay. We'll begin at the front and work back. So if we could have a microphone up here, please, go from right to left, not the usual Brookings procedure.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks; Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report, and a wonderful conversation, I must say. I want to pose a question and do it with this set up, and also say that it's not my anticipation that the question will get answered today, but I want to pose it.

A couple of days ago, more than one of us in this room attended a session at a think tank that shall go nameless that was talking about the next progressive era. And there were two things that were very clear about that conversation; the first was, there was a great deal of clarity about what progressivism had been in the past, and there was an almost total lack of clarity about what it would be and mean going forward.

So as I've been sitting listening to this conversation, and with Alan's admission that he doesn't spend as much time on the future of liberalism, and the sort of colloquy about progressivism and liberalism and what the differences are, I want to pose a question to the four of you, and do it this way, and that is that some number of years ago, truthfully decades, I studied with a sociologist by the name of Howard Higgman, who had a way of teaching the basics of Freudian behavior of anal, oral, and genital, and he would do it by saying anal, oral, and genital are in a car, they're driving along, and the tires blow out, and then he describes what oral does, what anal does, and what genital does. It's actually a very funny story and I won't take you all the way through it, but it was a way of describing what oral, anal, and genital do in situations of crisis.

The question I want to pose is, instead of oral, anal, and genital, let's just take liberal, progressive, and conservative, and if you want to throw libertarian in, that's fine with me, and they are all driving along, metaphorically, and come to a screeching halt because they are alerted to the same set of facts that this country faced in late '08 and early '09, about an automobile industry that was disappearing, AIG, Fannie, Freddie, you name it, and my question is, what would they do, and in doing that, how would we understand the distinction between liberal, progressive, conservative, and libertarian?

MR. DIONNE: I don't have an answer.

MR. GALSTON: Anyone else want to take it up?

MR. WOLFE: You know, the whole point of doing the book, please take this – the whole point of doing the book was to talk – I'm not qualified to answer, I can't answer, I just don't know enough. I write about a different thing.

MR. GALSTON: I think it's fair to say that building on your remarks from the podium, that you regard the answer to that question as essentially an instrumental and fact-driven question and not a question at the level of basic political philosophy.

MR. WOLFE: Thank you; that's much better said than I just did. Thank you for saving my butt.

MR. DIONNE: I feel like we should have a Contest, and the winner will get a free copy of Alan's book, whoever can fill in Mr. Mitchell's joke about what anal, oral, and genital said in that story. You know, to me, because I collapse the distinction between liberal and progressive, if I took the question, it seems to me that there are a set of reasonably predictable liberal and progressive responses. I assume – are you talking basically about the economic crisis and what we've hit? You know, because I think that liberals and progressives alike have less problem with playing with government intervention, seeing the market as valuable but not sacrosanct, and I think there's a real crisis for conservatism in this – I'm going to say this to try to provoke Ross, where I think that conservatives are really divided in their own tradition in terms of how to deal with this.

I like the fact that Alan talks about Israel in the book. And there is a kind of interventionist conservatism that was prepared to give some ground to interventionism, and that modern conservatism is – contemporary conservatism is probably far more effected by Hayek and pure libertarianism that I think cripples them in responding to certain kinds of crises, because they're against various forms of intervention on principal, so their highest principal really is to do nothing, and they might argue in the long run that's still better.

But I don't think all conservatives believe that, and you know, to plug Ross' book, I think one of the things he's been struggling with is a conservatism that is a little less influenced by a certain style of radical libertarianism, and so that's my –

MR. DOUTHAT: Yeah, I don't have any answers on the sort of – the libertarian, what does the libertarian and the conservative do I think is a question that's, you know, I think there was a broader crisis in conservative thought before the economic crisis of 2008, but certainly there's a crisis there now, and I think, you know, it depends on which libertarian, you know, there are libertarians who supported the bail-out, there are libertarians who are against the bail-out, there are free market economists who wanted the stimulus package, there are free market economists who didn't, and you can see that playing out throughout the conservative side.

I think if you wanted to make a distinction between liberals and progressives here, and I agree with E.J., I'm not sure that you can or should, but you might say that the liberal is the person who says that we needed the bail-out, and you know, we need to do everything in our power to prevent absolute economic collapse, but we don't necessarily need to turn this crisis into an opportunity to do the laundry list of things we wanted to do before the crisis hit. And the progressive is the person, and here I'll take another mild whack at Alan. Alan, at one point in his discussion of Hurricane Katrina says, isn't it appalling, all of those conservatives who would look at a disaster like Hurricane Katrina and say, this crisis is a great opportunity for the reforms we always wanted to do.

Well, I think that we have heard that kind of commentary quite a bit from – and whether we want to call them liberals or progressives or on the left in general, but certainly that has been one of the dominant modes of left conversation in the United States over the past year or so, and it seems to be the operating principal of the Obama Administration, which is that this is a crisis that is an opportunity to – it's a crisis that requires massive spending on bail-outs and massive spending on stimulus to get us out of the immediate crisis, but it's a crisis that's also an enormous opportunity for reshaping the health, energy, and education sectors of the United States.

So – and I think that that's the dynamic that's going to be playing out throughout the Obama Administration.

MR. GALSTON: You're next. The microphone, please, and identify yourself.

MR. HARRIS: David Harris, a retired academic. The degradation of the word "liberal" into a dirty word, of course, has a multiplicity of causes, and I won't get into it,

but from a historical perspective, if you say Katrina was sort of a Waterloo for what was represented, to me, the McGovern Campaign of the early '70's, it seemed to symbolize to many Americans sort of a capture of the liberalism by the left and specifically the wild-eyed excesses of the '60's, and we're still dealing with the heritage of the '60's.

MR. WOLFE: I couldn't agree more. Liberalism has its problems, being proud of itself, not only because Karl Rove and Sean Hannity spend all their time attacking it, but because of these legacies, which, by the way, Bill Galston has written very, very eloquently about the consequences for liberals and the Democratic party of those excesses, I couldn't agree more.

MR. DIONNE: I think one of the ironies is, liberals – everybody, when they look back at the '60's, look at the rise of the new left and forget that the '60's also saw the rise of the conservative movement, and a new right in young Americans for freedom, and what Bill Buckley was doing, and the irony is, liberalism came under attack simultaneously in that period from the left and the right, and it always struck me that the right used to refer to the liberal establishment and the left referred to establishment liberals, and the left didn't like them because they were in the establishment, and the right didn't like the establishment because it was liberal.

I don't want to get into it, but I would defend dear George McGovern himself and a lot of that movement. I don't think, you know, whatever – we could be here all day, so I won't do that. But I think it's somewhat unfair to McGovern to toss him into some of the excesses of that period, though some of my neocon friends would absolutely disagree with me on that.

MR. GALSTON: Okay. I'm going to take one more from the front and then move to the rear. Yes, in the teal, I believe it's teal, blue.

MS. OSWALD: Hi, my name is Rachel Oswald, and this question is for Alan. You said something very interesting, that the new enemy of liberalism is a kind of socio biological, or as Ross said, scientism, and it kind of touches on something I'm working on right now, co-writing a book on climate change, in light of, once this recession passes, what I feel strongly to be the greatest challenge of the 21st century is, climate change, and the desires of soon to be nine billion people to strive for a lifestyle similar to America, with the reality of there not being enough natural resources on the planet to

make that possible, how does liberalism respond to, how you described it, the desire for as many people as possible to have as much self-government as possible, how does liberalism respond to the reality of just not enough natural resources?

MR. WOLFE: I think there's a – I do try to address that issue in the book, and I do it by not talking about the scientism here so much as various strains of radical environmentalism or radical ecology that, in a sense, value the earth more than the human beings who live in it.

And that way of thinking does strike me as alien to what, for example, Immanuel Kant would say about the same issue, also a number of other liberal thinkers. So I think that, you know, we have to always remember that problems with the degradation of the environment or climate change are not "natural problems", they're problems that human beings cause and can only be solved by human beings. So I think the one thing I would just warn against is some idea either that these things will take care of themselves through some scientific scientism, that would be one problem, or attacking as enemies of all good things, the very human capacity to make choices, and to design a world in which we want to live that would strip from us our ability to deal with those kinds of problems.

MR. DIONNE: Can I just read one passage from Alan that I think gives a good feel for what – it's a couple of sentences I like, "For a conservative Christian like Jerry Falwell, man's great scene is to imagine that he can substitute himself for God; for popularizes of evolutionary psychology, man's great mistake is to believe that he can escape the destiny evolution has in store for him. Perhaps fundamentalists Christians and Atheistic Darwinists should stop taking each other to court, and instead, join forces, united by their mutual contempt for the quintessential liberal idea that human beings have the capacity to create that monument of artifice called culture, which, in turn, enables them to bring meaning and direction to their lives." It's one of the great moments of – right and left simultaneously for your own purposes that I have run into in a book, but I think that's right.

MR. GALSTON: Yes.

MR. WEINSTUCK: I'm Larry Weinstuck, I'm a Brookings Fellow on the Hill right now. The thing that I find interesting in the criticism of liberalism is the sense of its anti-

communalism. And perhaps because I work in an environmental field, what I see as the only people in this country who are seriously working to bring communities together and empower communities to make their own decisions are all on the left.

I mean the reality of a whole series of laws which increase the ability of communities to affect the planning decisions all come from the left, the organizations that are bringing communities together for planning, environmental purposes and others are all on the left, and I don't see why there is this continued criticism of the left as being anti-community when the only people who are building institutions in communities that I see, other than religious ones in the extent to which you say a church is a community, are all on the left.

MR. GALSTON: Any response?

MR. WOLFE: Correct me if I'm wrong, but there are certainly conservatives like Ron Dreyer, who are environmentalists, in some sense, and there's a strong, you know, if you weren't looking at the world through their current left and right perspectives, it seems to me you would naturally identify issues like community and protection of the environment with the conservative tradition much more than with – that would be the sort of natural place in which you'd come out, because we're talking about protection, we're talking about keeping things pretty much the way they are, we're talking about a kind of instinctive criticism of the promethean tendency to change the world anew at the heart of those environment.

But I think what's happened is that, while the – what you might call the natural predisposition of community and environmental protection groups would be conservative in that philosophical sense in the real world, then you get big corporations, vested interests, profits to be made and so on, and that then throws everything out of whack, in a sense, because, you know, it starts putting vested interest and money into the equation, and people on the right generally identify more with corporations, and you know, so on, and so it gets mixed up in that way.

MR. DIONNE: Well, there's also something that goes on, and this I think relates to the previous question, where as crises are perceived to be first national and then global, there's a tendency, one, towards centralization of authority and centralization of action, the idea that you need – you have to have global governance

and global responses to deal with global crises, and at the same time, there's a tendency towards – and this is sort of what I was getting at with my remarks about scientism, towards an idea of disinterested management and expertise as the sort of – part of the necessary function of government, if not the necessary function.

And here I think that we are entering an era where the tensions, the sort of liberal progressive tensions that existed in the '20's and '30's, when the progressive movement was more likely to talk in terms of sort of, you know, managerial elites who would run things for the good of the general population, I think as we're talking about global crises, whether it's the financial crisis or global warming, you're going to have a lot more debates on that level, where, you know, I mean if you look at the debates that are happening in the EU right now, and this is a sort of complete loss on it, but one of the big questions is, the current crisis could lead to the fracturing of the European Union in different ways. It could also lead to, ultimately, the greater centralization of the European Union out of a sense that these kind of crises can only be managed effectively if the EU centralizes even further, and arguably, if the governance of the EU is further removed from the level of democratic control.

And I think you have similar issues going on in the United States right now, sort of below the surface of the debates about stimulus packages and so on, that are going to become more and more important, where you have a sense of – I mean you reach a point where a lot of people begin to believe that you cannot ultimately have democratic self-government in a world facing the kind of interconnected problems that we have today, and I think that that's a huge challenge for liberalism, which is about autonomy and creativity and all these things, but it is ultimately about constitutionalism and democratic self-governmenance.

And if I may throw out one sort of controversial assertion, I think that the response to the nomination of Sarah Palin for the Vice Presidency of the United States ought to be very troubling to liberals going forward, not because they are required to believe that Sarah Palin herself was actually a good candidate for Vice President, but because part of the revulsion against Sarah Palin seemed to be driven by the idea that somebody who had gone to five colleges, and hadn't gone to an ivy league school, and had, you know, sort of – essentially the idea that people who hadn't emerged from elite

environments were incapable of the kind of governance that a modern society requires.

And, now, it may be true that people who emerge from non-elite environments are incapable of that kind of governance, but if that's the case, it's a real problem for liberalism.

MR. WOLFE: I agree, if I –

MR. GALSTON: Go ahead.

MR. WOLFE: You know, I think you're absolutely right, that the liberal progressive thing is re-emerging; it's re-emerging in a slightly different form I think than it did in the past. The progressives knew exactly where we should go, and there was clearly a strong paternalistic element to it.

The new progressivism, I believe, will be inspired by behavioral economics, which has its links to the anti-liberal tendencies and sociobiology. It will sort of be the way, you know, nudging people into a pre-determined direction rather than just pushing them directly, that human beings are fundamentally irrational, they don't know what's in their own best interest, but we can design what Cass Sunstein and Richard Failor called a choice architecture, you know, to sort of – now, is that better because it's less overtly paternalistic than progressive in the past, or is it actually much worse because it's insidiously paternalistic? I'm actually sort of inclined to the latter; something about its sheer insidiousness bothers me.

MR. DIONNE: Just very quickly, I think there were very good reasons to oppose Sarah Palin, and to the extent that people might – I wrote about this at the time, to the extent that people made elitist sounding arguments against her, they were undercutting all the good reasons why the choice of Sarah Palin was a terrible mistake, and I think there's some consensus on that.

I appreciate the spirit of the question. It seems to me you really have two kinds of communitarians. Right of center communitarians tend to focus on the ways in which the centralized state interferes with the actions of various local communities. But they are very reluctant ever to confront the ways in which centralized economic forces meddle with local communities, and in some cases can destroy them. I think people on the left are much more ready to use government to empower communities to have some voice against those economic forces. And there is oppressing debate about this

between Bill Schambra and Theda Skocpol which goes back to the progressive era, where Bill, a conservative, focuses on how the central government has disempowered communities; Theda argues that in our history, the central government has actually been more empowering to local communities. Given my own views, I'm closer to Theda. But I think it's a very important debate, and I think you've raised an important issue in terms of the left's relationship to community.

MR. GALSTON: Well, alas, we have reached and passed the end of this session. I have a feeling that if Brookings' rules permitted, we could probably go on indefinitely. And those of you who want to continue the colloquy with Professor Wolfe can do so across the book table, among other places.

But let me just conclude before thanking everybody with a couple of random thoughts on the question just posed. The first is that there is an interesting ambiguity in the idea of self-direction, namely, what the conditions of self-direction are in particular circumstances, and whether you interpret that phrase, self-direction, in an individual sense or a communal sense, and what are the circumstances in which the former, as opposed to the latter, or the latter as opposed to the former conception of self-direction ought to take pride of place. And I suspect that a lot of contemporary debates can find a place in that concept distinction which is embedded in Alan's basic principal.

The second is that, as the son of a biologist, you know, I do have to insist, and I hope nobody will disagree, on the distinction between science and scientism, and surely liberals must figure out ways of taking on board, how could they not, the truths that scientific advances produce and will continue to produce, including the truths that modern neurobiology is uncovering.

And it is an interesting philosophical question, how what we find out in the empirical sphere about scientific and biological and neuroprocesses can or should influence our sense of human agency, but unless you're a Kantian and draw an absolute hermetic seal between the former and the latter, that's not a question that can be taken off the table so easily. But I know, Alan, that's a longer debate between us. Third, and finally, what is our Constitution if it is not the greatest piece of choice architecture ever struck by the hand of man? And so I think we have to think twice

before we dismiss that line of argument. With that, let me ask you to thank our panelists.

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