

1-19-2024

The Forgotten Path of Liberal Conservatism: What Yoram Hazony Ignores

Daniel J. Mahoney

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/jcli>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mahoney, Daniel J. (2024) "The Forgotten Path of Liberal Conservatism: What Yoram Hazony Ignores," *The Journal of Contemporary Legal Issues*: Vol. 24: Iss. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/jcli/vol24/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law School Journals at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Contemporary Legal Issues by an authorized editor of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.

The Forgotten Path of Liberal Conservatism: What Yoram Hazony Ignores

DANIEL J. MAHONEY*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	A NON-LOCKEAN CONSTITUTIONAL TRADITION	84
II.	HAZONY’S HISTORICAL EMPIRICISM	87
III.	CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL AMERICA	88
IV.	CONCLUSION	90

Today, in academic and intellectuals circles it is a besieged minority that affirms that the freest, most prosperous, most self-critical societies in the history of the world have been bequeathed a patrimony worth preserving. We have lost a meaningful and robust sense of what constitutes the West as the West (in fact, the term itself has no real resonance with the younger generations). The “Other” in faraway places, to use a fashionable abstraction, is beyond criticism since cultural and moral criticism are in those cases *de rigueur*; but the appropriate response to the faults of rule-of-law societies in the West is an unrelieved self-loathing. As German bombs fell on London during the battle of Britain, the unclassifiable writer George Orwell argued in his admirable essay “The Lion and the Unicorn”¹ that the British people were too residually Christian (and

* © 2023 Daniel J. Mahoney. Professor Emeritus, Assumption University; Senior Fellow, Real Clear Foundation; Senior Writer, Law and Liberty.

1. This indispensable essay can be found in the volume *Orwell and Politics* published by Penguin Classics in 2020.

“decent”) to be taken in by totalitarian “power worship” and the left-wing intellectuals who indulged unsavory regimes and ideologies. Ordinary Englishmen still knew right from wrong, Orwell insisted. They could distinguish between legitimate British patriotism on the one hand, and the lupine imperialism of the Nazis and the systematic mendacity of the Communists on the other. A self-proclaimed democratic socialist and an unbeliever in matters of religion, Orwell was at the same time an unabashed patriot, a defender of the virtues of an imperfect Western world, and an eloquent critic of moral nihilism. Orwell and Winston Churchill agreed that our Western moral and civic inheritance was well worth preserving against both totalitarianism and the facile nihilism of the intellectual class, and that that precious inheritance owed a great deal to “Christian ethics.” Our patrimony included features that were at once liberal and conservative, features that were broader and deeper than electoral democracy and the “rights of Man.”

Today, that inheritance, inseparably liberal and conservative, is under fevered and systematic assault. The old verities and virtues—classical, Christian, and bourgeois—are attacked in the name of a liberationist or emancipatory ethic in which authority is reduced to authoritarianism, liberty is severed from law and self-restraint, and human relations are always and everywhere identified with “domination” and repression. In the antinomian theorizing of a Herbert Marcuse or Michel Foucault, and in the sloganeering of their much cruder and vituperative “woke” descendants, all traditions, institutions, and social practices, and even biological reality and the complementarity of male and female, are reduced to arbitrary—and oppressive—“social” constructions. An imaginary “liberation” requires the thoughtless and aggressive repudiation of everything that has been handed down by our forebears. The situation is grave. But how are our thoughtful and spirited defenders of ordered liberty to respond?

The Israeli political theorist Yoram Hazony provides one *soi-disant* conservative response. He has long argued that, confronted by a grave internal crisis, democracy needs a robust conservative articulation and defense to bring forth its most humane and vibrant possibilities. I am in full agreement with this judgment. But as will become clear in the course of this essay, Hazony and I part company in our respective understandings of the role that practical reason and natural law play in conservatism rightly understood, and in our broader accounts of how conservatism relates to the modern liberal tradition. In any case, in his long-awaited *Conservatism: A Rediscovery*,² Hazony forcefully challenges the

2. YORAM HAZONY, *CONSERVATISM: A REDISCOVERY* xvii (2022).

commonplace views on the Anglo-American center-right that “*What we are conserving is liberalism, or that Conservatism is a branch or species within liberalism, or that Liberalism is the new conservatism*”.

As a corrective to a widespread simplification, Hazony succeeds admirably in widening the horizon of conservative reflection. At the same time, he highlights how estranged the dominant currents of liberalism are from an empirically accurate and morally viable understanding of human nature and politics. But instead of aiming to correct, moderate, and elevate liberalism, surely a desirable goal, his aim is more or less to bury it once and for all. In my view, there is something profoundly unconservative about that ambition. While I certainly appreciate that unalloyed liberalism can corrode the moral foundations of democracy, I do not believe that a viable modern conservatism should reject liberalism *tout court*.

Conservatives have a vital role to play in reminding complacent modern men and women that individual rights are always accompanied by responsibilities, that the West’s precious cultural and spiritual capital can only be depleted once, and that a free political community is precisely a political *community*.³ As the late Roger Scruton insisted, civilized constraints and moral obligations (to family, country, neighbor, and to common life per se) must be gladly “accepted as a part of citizenship” and of a serious human life.⁴ Conservative prudence is in no way reducible to liberalism. At the same time, it aims not to bury liberalism but to prevent it from burying itself.

Without guidance from an older and richer conservative wisdom, liberal theory and practice rapidly comes to emphasize freedom without spiritual ballast or purpose. It does so to the detriment of salutary traditions, shared civic bonds, and deep-seated loyalties that transcend felt needs and the requirements of the present moment. Such liberalism is largely defenseless against moral nihilism voluntarily assented to. But it would entail the heights of ingratitude to forget the genuine achievements of the liberal order: the rule of law, the rights of property, the solid bourgeois

3. See my account of the necessarily dialectical relationship of conservatism to modern liberty in DANIEL J. MAHONEY, *THE CONSERVATIVE FOUNDATIONS OF THE LIBERAL ORDER* (2011). One might call this work a “liberal conservative” manifesto, not to be confused with the “right liberal” moral neutrality, or emphasis on neutral principles, derided by integralist thinkers.

4. I am very much indebted to Roger Scruton’s account of the crucial role that conservatism can play in correcting and modifying the “individualist” errors of liberalism. See ROGER SCRUTON, *CONSERVATISM: AN INVITATION TO THE GREAT TRADITION* (2018).

virtues of delayed gratification, monogamous marriage and dedicated family life, and what Scruton called “the prosperity and security provided by science and the market, the two inevitable by-products of individual freedom.”⁵ One must also be grateful for what the great French conservative liberal political thinker Raymond Aron called “the wisdom of Montesquieu,” a wisdom that rightly saw that “power must check power” and that “even virtue has need of [political] limits.” In the late modern age, to remain open to the golden common sense and sublime moderation of Aristotle’s *Politics* is to appreciate that a decent political order must judiciously blend the best features of conservatism and liberalism. Today, however, some impatient thinkers and activists on the Right have joined the Left in forgetting that crucial point.

Let us return to Hazony. There is much to commend in his perspective. His conservatism is deeply rooted in the Anglo-American tradition. His nationalism is not to be confused with xenophobia, imperialism, or the denial of the right of any self-respecting people to defend its own version of humane national loyalty. Rooted in respect for biblical principles and a sober “historical empiricism”⁶ as Hazony calls it, he also adamantly rejects any identification of conservatism with white identity politics or any other form of pagan self-assertion.⁷ His is a moderate and humane vision, one that is appealing on multiple levels.

Hazony’s learned and lucid book aims to rediscover the “history and philosophy of conservatism,” forgotten as Hazony claims it is, as well as “the practice of conservatism” or the moral necessity of “being a conservative person and leading a conservative life.”⁸ In those larger tasks, Hazony succeeds unevenly although his book richly illumines the subject matters under consideration. I am tempted to call his book, with all due respect, a welcome and noble failure, with emphasis on every word in that succinct formulation.

I. A NON-LOCKEAN CONSTITUTIONAL TRADITION

In his account of the history and philosophy of conservatism, Hazony enriches our self- understanding by freeing us from a one-sided identification of Anglo-American liberty with the not so empirical empiricism of John Locke. Hazony is not wrong to do so. There is no doubt that Locke ultimately subordinated moral duty to the great desideratum of comfortable self-

5. On this crucial point of avoiding conservative ingratitude for the best achievements of the liberal order, see the final chapters of ROGER SCRUTON, *MODERN CULTURE* (2019).

6. Hazony, *supra* note 2, at 16, 22, 26, 30, 32, 199, 336, 339, 341.

7. *Id.* at xv.

8. *Id.* at xix.

preservation. Like Thomas Hobbes before him, Locke denied the realities of intrinsic goods or the *summum bonum* and defined the moral life as an unending “flight from evil(s).” Eschewing abstract rationalism, and the tendentious claim that modern liberty arose out of a state of nature untethered by tradition, historical memory, and deeply-seated moral obligation, Hazony recovers a conservative constitutionalist tradition that takes its bearings from John Fortescue’s emphasis on national character and the rule of law, Richard Hooker’s “Protestant Conservatism,” his concomitant rejection of Puritan fanaticism in religion and politics, and John Selden’s defense of English liberty rooted in the concrete experience of English liberty and law.⁹

Hazony is right that each of these admirable figures recognizes “the inherent weakness of individual judgment” and thus the need to draw on the wisdom of our forebears and “the traditions of the past.”¹⁰ But Hazony goes too far in reducing these three English proto-conservatives to the category of “historical empiricism.” Because Hazony sees no real middle ground between abstract rationalism and historical empiricism, he loses sight of the real and not merely residual role that natural law plays in the moderate conservatism of all three thinkers. Hooker opposed the efforts of the radical Reformation to impose one universal model on the Protestant church. He insisted that national traditions matter and must be respected. But as a Christian Aristotelian, Hooker unquestionably upheld the universality of the natural moral law, a law that, properly understood, left latitude for the prudence of statesmen and the specificity of national traditions.

Hazony himself acknowledges that John Selden accepted the truth and reality of the natural law in his book *Natural and National Law* (1640) and would never suggest that national law can disregard the requirements of the seven laws given to the children of Noah or the even more famous Decalogue.¹¹ To affirm the legitimate plurality of national laws, and the need for prudence and attentiveness to own’s own traditions and experiences in discerning and applying the natural law, is not to take one’s bearing *exclusively* from history or tradition. Natural law, practical reason, and the latitude proper to the prudent statesman are all integral to conservatism rightly understood.

9. *Id.* at 4–21.

10. *Id.* at 6–7, 17.

11. *Id.* at 17–18.

But Hazony's much invoked "historical empiricism" risks severing tradition and national historical experience from the larger theoretical and practical framework that gives it life and meaning. For my part, I'm inclined to agree with John Courtney Murray, S.J., who argued in his classic work *We Hold These Truths*¹² (1960) that in the end the American founders had a far more elevated conception of human liberty and the moral obligations that inform it than Locke did. For one thing, they did not share Locke's rationalism and nominalism. To be sure, the founders used the idioms of the "state of nature" and the social contract for their own far from morally subversive purposes. For example, in "The Farmer Refuted" (February 1775) the young Alexander Hamilton roundly rejected the idea that justice and moral obligation were conventional in origin and lacked any foundation in natural or divine law. He loathed Hobbes for denying "an intelligent superintending principle who is the governor, and will be the final judge of the universe."¹³ The founders neither rejected Enlightenment thought nor bought into it hook, line, and sinker. Their practice was significantly better than the Enlightenment theory—and some of the accompanying political/philosophical categories—that they had imbibed along the way.

Hazony is right to esteem the thought and statesmanship of Edmund Burke, the friend of American liberty and the scourge of Jacobin despotism in revolutionary France.¹⁴ But Burke's admirable defense of the wisdom of the ages would make no sense if the discerning mind could not distinguish "sound prejudice" from various superstitions and moral abominations. Burke, the critic of Warren Hastings' various depredations in colonial India, could do that very well. Hazony claims at several points that conservative wisdom—practical reason as the Western tradition calls it—must learn to apply inherited tradition to particular circumstances facing citizens and statesmen.¹⁵ But this is to abridge and distort the wisdom of Burke and Aristotle. It is not tradition per se, as valuable as it is, that performs this necessary task, but practical reason drawing on the wisdom inherent in tradition, man's "second nature" as the Tradition calls it. Burke, like Selden, is a qualified empiricist, who knew the crucial difference between rationalism (which Hazony rightly excoriates) and prudence or

12. I have consulted the edition of Murray's *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* published by Sheed and Ward in 2005 and luminously introduced by the late Peter Augustine Lawler.

13. See Alexander Hamilton, *The Farmer Refuted*, in 1 THE POLITICAL WRITINGS OF ALEXANDER HAMILTON 35 (Carson Holloway & Bradford P. Wilson eds., 2017).

14. Hazony, *supra* note 2, at 21–29.

15. *E.g.*, *id.* at 22.

political reason, “the god of this lower world,” as Burke so strikingly called it.

II. HAZONY’S HISTORICAL EMPIRICISM

Hazony is no moral relativist. The Bible, more than the natural law he seems to categorically reject, provides him with the material for non-arbitrary moral judgment.¹⁶ But isn’t historical empiricism vulnerable to a relativist appropriation if it rejects the authoritative guidance provided by both reason (properly understood) and Revelation? As Richard Reinsch has observed in his review of Hazony’s book, Hazony comes perilously close to relying on a “biblical positivism” unavailable to those who do not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹⁷ That is a mistake his great predecessors would never make.

As we have seen, historical empiricism is at the center of Hazony’s conception of the Anglo-American tradition. But his understanding of this concept is perhaps too imbued with Humean skepticism and too hesitant to recognize a moral and philosophical universalism open to circumscribed political judgment. His self-subsisting “historical empiricism” gives us no ground for discerning the wisdom inherent in sound tradition. Practical wisdom, *phronēsis* as Aristotle called it, gives way in his presentation to an odd and unstable mix of skepticism about the ability to discern the good, and a fideistic reliance on Divine Law. Without practical reason and natural law, the humanizing dialectic of principle and prudence gives way to a “conservatism” that is more invented than real.

Throughout his book, Hazony repeatedly emphasizes that “human beings form national collectives characterized by bonds of mutual loyalty and unique inherited traditions”.¹⁸ About this, he is surely right. But his understanding of the nation is almost exclusively biblical in character and ignores, or at least downplays, the reflection on “political forms” in the wider tradition of political philosophy. As a result, he tends to conflate the nation and the tribe and to understate the specific features of the modern nation as a form of territorial democracy crucial for sustaining self-government in the modern world.¹⁹

16. *Id.* at 181, 190, 194, 197.

17. See Richard M Reinsch II, *Revolution Principles and American Conservatism Now*, in 35 RELIGION AND LIBERTY 3 (2022).

18. Hazony, *supra* note 2, at 30, 100–01.

19. *Id.* at 100–01.

For a more fulsome and historically capacious account of humane national loyalty (in relationship to other political forms—the pre-political tribe, the city, the empire, and even the Church) I recommend that the reader compare the writings of Roger Scruton and Pierre Manent with those of Hazony. Scruton and Manent are much more careful to differentiate humane national loyalty from nationalism *per se*. Such a careful differentiation of the full variety of political forms would show that the nation, with its strong links to territorial democracy, is anything but a “tribe” in the biblical or any other sense. But there is no doubt that Hazony is himself a partisan of humane national loyalty and not the rapacious, angry, or aggressive national self-assertion that is too often confused with it. Likewise, Hazony defends limited executive power and various constitutional forms, and individual freedoms (basic civil liberties, the right of property, freedom for the family to flourish) as vital elements of our civic inheritance. And in line with the best conservative wisdom (and an older sober liberal wisdom, too), Hazony sees religion as central to a dignified human life, to “justice and public morals,” and to “the integrity and well-being of the nation as a whole.”²⁰ Hazony is a faithful Jew with no animosity to the various religious traditions (especially those rooted in biblical wisdom) that allow one to live a “conservative life.”²¹

III. CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL AMERICA

Hazony is no “Throne and Altar” Conservative—far from it. He eloquently defends precious liberties that are indistinguishably conservative as well as liberal. But that leads us to a recurring problem. His account of America is partial and one-sided. He gives an impressive account of the responsible nationalism of the Federalist party, emphasizes the admiration that some founders had for the British constitution (and common law), and highlights the vigorous opposition of John Adams and Alexander Hamilton to the lawlessness, fanaticism, and hostility to the Christian religion that informed the theory and practice of the French Revolution. He likewise shows how the mature Hamilton even endeavored to establish a “Christian Constitutional Society” in response to pro-Jacobin sentiment fermenting in the United States in the 1790s.²²

And Hazony quotes from a stirring speech by Gouverneur Morris at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 denouncing race-based slavery as “the curse of heaven,” a “nefarious institution” at odds with liberty

20. Hazony, *supra* note 2, at 30.

21. *Id.* at 389–94.

22. *Id.* at 77–78.

and human dignity, and “the prosperity and happiness of the people.”²³ In doing so, Hazony helpfully highlights the facts that those American thinkers and statesmen who were most opposed to the fanaticism of the French Revolution—among them, Hamilton, John Adams, Gouverneur Morris—also passionately opposed chattel slavery.²⁴ The American current of conservatism that Hazony most admires is eminently humane and adamantly opposed to racialism and pagan self-assertion as well as the modern revolutionary temptation.

Yet, the American political tradition is as much liberal (and communitarian) as it is conservative. And it owes much to the English tradition of law and liberty that Hazony draws upon, including the likes of Hooker and Selden, but is in no way reducible to it. The idiom of natural rights is also central our tradition. A cursory examination of the speeches and writings of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson makes that readily apparent. And the religious communalism of the Puritans and the preference of the Anti-Federalists for morally robust small-scale communities represents a distinctive communitarian strand in the American tradition, a fraternal “second voice” as the late Wilson Carey McWilliams called it in his magisterial 1973 book *The Idea of Fraternity in America*, a work that was reissued by the University of Notre Dame Press in 2023. To be sure, the dominant idiom of natural rights needs to be both supplemented and limited by natural law and a sane moral and intellectual emphasis on self-limitation and humble deference to the Creator God. But it cannot be wished away. When radicalized, shorn of respect for the moral capital of the Western tradition, liberalism does indeed undermine what Pierre Manent so suggestively calls the “moral contents of life.” It readily becomes a form of Nietzschean self-assertion and is powerless before the most reckless forms of moral nihilism. That is the situation we face today.

But the American framers were statesmen more than theorists and surely did not intend to emphasize rights at the expense of duties (whose continuing relevance they largely took for granted). We must theorize and make explicit what they could still take for granted.²⁵ Hazony is right that theoretical liberalism cannot lead us out of our present quandary—how to respond to the near collapse of civic spirit, the eclipse of biblical religion,

23. *Id.* at 80–81,

24. *Id.* at 73–74, 76–77, 78–81.

25. On the need to make more explicit the crucial truths that the founders could afford to “presuppose,” see Daniel J. Mahoney, “Civic Virtues as Moral Facts: The Other Half of Our Founding” at the “1776 Series” of the RealClear American Civics website.

a vulgar emphasis on individual and collective autonomy, and a culture of repudiation (as Roger Scruton called it) that attempts to neglect the best of classical and biblical wisdom, and even the sober currents of modernity itself. What we need is a liberal conservatism aiming to correct and elevate moderate modern liberty without trying to refound our democratic dispensation root and branch. Hazony is far from helpful in that helpful, salutary, and necessary task.

In addition to its genuine insights, its admirable sense of gratitude for the best in our Western and Anglo-American traditions, Hazony's project at times smacks of a utopian confidence that we can begin again, founding a new tradition that can leave the "mistake" of liberalism behind. That is neither tenable nor desirable as a prudent conservatism ought to readily acknowledge. But Hazony is surely right that henceforth a truthful and viable defense of Anglo-American liberty must acknowledge conservative truths and emphases that have long been overshadowed by liberal dogmatism and by what Eric Voegelin called "modernity without restraint."²⁶ Modernity *with* restraint is precisely that current of liberal theory and practice open to, and informed by, classical, biblical, and conservative wisdom.

Is this still a going proposition, a viable practical option? Who knows for sure? In my view, however, we have no choice but to bet on the possibility that old-fashioned patriots can renew a conservative wisdom open to the best of the old liberalism, and a liberalism open to conservative wisdom reminding it of long-forgotten truths. This is a vision that hopefully can still inspire men and women of good will.

IV. CONCLUSION

Two final notes. Hazony is uneven, to say the least, in addressing various forms of "cold war conservatism." He is certainly right that Friedrich's Hayek's anti-rationalist conservative liberalism is torn between an excessive emphasis on "spontaneous order" as the mechanism by which the Great Society moves forward, and his more Burkean recognition that corrosive ideologies have gone a long way toward undermining the moral foundations of the constitution of liberty. But by making liberty his "supreme principle" Hazony rightly suggests that Hayek undermines his own "Old Whig" sobriety (*CAR*, 289, 291).

In respect to Russell Kirk, the author of *The Conservative Mind* (1953) and *The Roots of American Order* (1974), Hazony rather ungenerously suggests that Kirk's admiration for Calhoun as a political theorist suggests

26. This remarkably suggestive locution appears on the last page of Eric Voegelin's best known work, *THE NEW SCIENCE OF POLITICS*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1952.

an implicit openness to (or at least indulgence of) a more racially-tinged conservatism (*CAR*, 277-278). But Kirk never evinced a sympathy for slavery or racism, and unlike many contemporary traditionalist conservatives, he admired Lincoln as the consummate embodiment of *prudentia* in the American context. That admiration is there for all to see in Kirk's discussion of Lincoln in *The Roots of American Order*.

As for the political philosopher Leo Strauss, Hazony badly misreads (*CAR*, 290-296) his greatest and most accessible book, *Natural Right and History* (1953). He confuses Strauss's classical philosophical defense of universal truths (or at least the search for them) with modern political rationalism and seems to confuse Strauss as a Lockean (Strauss famously took aim at Locke's "political hedonism" which leads to a degraded "joyless quest for joy"). Hazony fails to appreciate the multiple ways in which Strauss admired Edmund Burke as a statesman in the classical tradition, embodying the high arts of prudence (whatever his other more "theoretical" criticisms of Burke). Moreover, Strauss took aim at the doctrinaire endorsement of "natural public law," as he called it, by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and their ilk, replacing the latitude necessary for statesmanlike prudence with a narrow emphasis on the one legitimate rights-based polity that is right "regardless of the circumstances."²⁷ About that position, Strauss had nothing good to say.

Strauss's Platonic view of philosophy was thus supplemented by an admirable understanding of practical reason much closer to Aristotle, Montesquieu, and Burke than to the rigid political (though not moral) universalism of Hobbes and Locke. Hazony makes a "mangled wreck" (to cite Lincoln's vivid formulation) of Strauss's reflection on these matters. Strauss was above all a philosopher but one who was conservative-minded on most practical or political matters while going to the root of strictly theoretical questions. He truly loved America, his adopted country, and deeply admired Winston Churchill as the pinnacle of the Anglo-American tradition of practical wisdom. But in his important essay, "The Three Waves of Modernity," published posthumously in 1975, Strauss argued that the survival and sustenance of Western liberty depended upon continuing openness to the premodern wisdom of the Western tradition. Strauss was no modern rationalist or "doctrinaire." The fact that Hazony cannot understand Strauss's practical conservatism and moderation is quite revealing.

27. LEO STRAUSS, *NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY* 190-94, 191 (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953) for the quotation.

Let us end on a deservedly positive note. Hazony is at his very best emphasizing the need for morally serious men and women to cultivate a conservative life and to be conservative persons, open to the wisdom of tradition, the liberating self-restraint proffered by biblical religion, and informed by gratitude before the givenness of things. Hazony rightly stresses that “by valorizing freedom and only freedom” (*CAR*,394) we will fail to attain, individually or collectively, peace, stability, sanity, and happiness. This is old wisdom beautifully renewed. In that sense, conservatism begins at home with souls who link freedom with restraint, initiative with tradition, and who see in the path of salutary constraints an opportunity to live lives informed by true freedom and dignity. Such wisdom surely corrects and elevates modern liberty, whatever Hazony’s intention, “bringing old gods to a new city” as the late political theorist Wilson Carey McWilliams once put it so eloquently and suggestively.