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Toward an environmental conservatism

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TOWARD AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATISM

BY

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Bachelor of Arts Degree, University of New Hampshire, 1981

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

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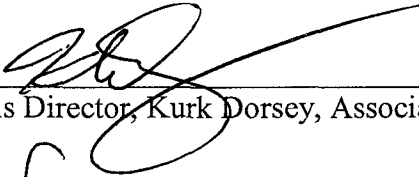
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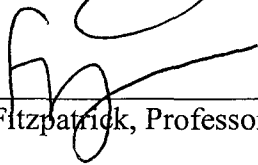


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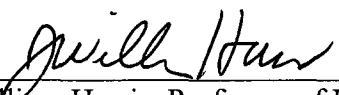
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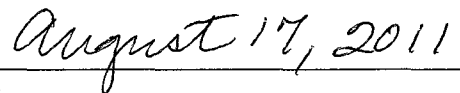
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Date

DEDICATION

For Patricia F. Woodbury *in memoriam*

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD AN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATISM

by

Terri S. Winters

University of New Hampshire, September, 2011

The Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) statement, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” argues that human-induced climate change is real and represents a moral challenge for Evangelical Christians that requires an urgent response. The actions of the ECI fit within an “environmental conservatism” whose elements have historical precedence. We find the seeds of parallel ideas in the writings of the Fugitive-Agrarians in the 1920s and 1930s—most notably the polemical book, *I’ll Take My Stand*. The Agrarians’ ideas were brought to full flower by Richard Weaver, an important figure in the development of a post-World War II traditional conservatism. We find a similar environmental conservatism in the writings of Aldo Leopold, a leader of the wilderness preservation movement and conservationist whose ideas influenced the modern environmental movement. These ideas together form a pattern of thought that anticipates the ECI and other conservative expressions of concern about the environment.

INTRODUCTION

A full-page ad in the February 9, 2006 edition of the *New York Times* announced that some 86 leaders in the evangelical community had come to a conclusion commonly held by environmentalists: “Our commitment to Jesus Christ compels us to solve the global warming crisis.” The day before, an organization called the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) had published *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*, which the 86 evangelical leaders had signed. The Evangelical Climate Initiative makes four claims: human-induced climate change is real; the consequences of climate change will be significant and will hit the poor hardest; Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem; and the need to act now is urgent.¹

The action of these leaders was denounced by some of their colleagues who claimed that they did not represent the evangelical community. Results of a national survey of 1,000 born-again or evangelical Protestant Christians by Ellison Research, which frequently surveys church leaders, indicated otherwise. According to that survey, a majority of evangelicals—some 54%—believed that their Christian faith should generally encourage them to support environmental protection. Sixty-six percent of those surveyed were completely or mostly convinced that global warming was happening and seventy percent thought global climate change posed a serious threat to future generations.² The ECI has prompted discussion of prospects for a green evangelicalism. This may seem

¹ “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” statement of the Evangelical Climate Initiative. Retrieved on March 13, 2011 from <http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/>.

² “New Poll Indicates Evangelic Shift on Climate Change, Environmental Concerns,” Stones Cry Out blog. Retrieved on March 13, 2006 from http://www.stonescryout.org/crchives/2006/02/new_poll_indicat.html.

surprising given typical conservative treatments of environmental issues that place concerns about the environment in dichotomous opposition to maintaining a strong economy.

One example of this typical treatment is *Conservative Environmentalism*, a book by James Dunn and John Kinney. In the book, the authors make more familiar conservative arguments regarding environmental issues. They contend that one must take an “anthropocentric” view of environmental issues. They quote environmentalists expressing the hope that viruses might wipe out humankind, and these views are presented as typical within the environmental community. They cite scientists’ interpretation of data to reveal that particular environmental problems are not as large or intractable as environmentalists insist. They suggest employing a balance sheet approach to environmental issues: record the assets and liabilities of various methods and make a cost-benefit analysis to decide the best course of action.³ In the typical conservative view of environmental issues as expressed in Dunn and Kinney’s book, there is little in common between conservatives and environmentalists. I contend that evangelical leaders are not motivated by material interests, but, rather, see environmental issues as symptomatic of spiritual problems. From that vantage, at least some evangelical leaders acknowledge that climate change is real, human-induced, and an urgent problem that they must help to solve.

The ECI demonstrates that there is, in fact, common ground between some branches of conservatism and environmentalism. I posit that the actions of the ECI fit within an “environmental conservatism” whose elements have historical precedence. We

³ James R. Dunn and John E. Kinney, *Conservative Environmentalism: Reassessing Means, Redefining End* (Westport, CT and London: Quorum Books, 1996), 1-8.

find the seeds of parallel ideas in the writings of the Southern Agrarians in the 1920s and 1930s—ideas that were brought to full flower by Richard Weaver, one of the figures who laid the foundation for a post-World War II traditional conservatism. We also find what might be cast as an environmental conservatism in the ideas of Aldo Leopold, a leader of the wilderness preservation movement whose ideas had great influence on the modern environmental movement. These ideas together form a framework of thought that anticipates the ECI and other conservative expressions of concern about the environment.

This study of environmental conservatism is written within the context of environmental history. Environmental historians have written about wide-ranging topics, including rural and urban environments, the effects of technology and industrialism, the environmental movement, and the social construction of nature. As Samuel Hays observed in 2001, a certain “eclecticism has evolved which tolerates a wide range of subjects.”⁴ This was not always the case. Two intellectual historians had influence on the field’s early development. Hays’ study of Progressive conservation in *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, published in 1958, and Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, published in 1967, are widely recognized for shaping the nascent field. Their works appeared concomitant with the emergence of the environmental movement in the U. S., and it was in that milieu that environmental history developed. At that time, environmental history focused on the past work and thought of conservationists and preservationists, their battles over government policy and wilderness areas, and their ideas about nature itself. Thus, as Richard White later wrote, environmental history’s

⁴ Samuel P. Hays, “Toward Integration in Environmental History,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (February 2001), 60.

focus was narrowed at its inception as well as deeply influenced by the moral concerns of the environmental movement.⁵

In 1988, *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, edited by Donald Worster, was published. This important work exemplified how the field had developed since its origins. In his preface, Worster sought to introduce readers to the field, define what environmental history was, and offer his view of how one did it. According to Worster, environmental historians are distinctive in that they consider the natural environment an autonomous actor in history and seek to explore “the role and place of nature in human life.”⁶

The book was divided into three sections reflecting Worster’s contention that the field proceeded on three levels of inquiry. The first level focused on the natural environment itself, its structures and dynamics in history. The second level engaged human modes of production and the resulting environmental changes. The third level sought to understand the effects of human perceptions, values, myths, and ideologies in the context of human interactions with nature. For Worster, environmental history could offer new insights into familiar historical subjects and themes by bringing to the fore the *places* in which history unfolded. He offered his ideas on how environmental historians should engage the place of nature in history in “Doing Environmental History,” an appendix to *The Ends of the Earth*. Preeminent among his ideas was the role of ecology

⁵ Richard White, “American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (August 1985), 300.

⁶ Donald Worster, “Preface” in *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, Donald Worster, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vii. Worster, “Doing Environmental History,” in *The Ends of the Earth*, 292.

in providing a foundation for environmental history: “Take away...ecology and environmental history loses its foundation, its coherence, its first step.”⁷

In 1990, Worster expanded on his “Doing Environmental History” essay in a roundtable published in the *Journal of American History*. The forum featured Worster’s expanded essay, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward An Agroecological Perspective,” with responses from, among others, Richard White and William Cronon.⁸ The forum provided an opportunity for prominent environmental historians to take stock of the field. Worster devoted the bulk of his essay to extolling the potential insights offered by a focus on his third level of analysis, with particular attention to the study of agriculture from an ecological perspective. Worster advised that historians of “agroecology” studies would benefit from the adoption of the “scientist’s conception of the *ecosystem*.” The science of ecology, in Worster’s view, is concerned with a world beyond, or more encompassing than human economies. Tracing changes in agricultural practices through time, especially those brought about by capitalist practices, would help “to bring back into our awareness [the] significance of nature and, with the aid of modern science, to discover some fresh truths about ourselves and our past.”⁹

Both White and Cronon criticized Worster’s approach as too narrow and deterministic. White chided Worster for imposing “a much older construct on the field”—the privileged place given capitalism as the “key environmental process”—and

⁷ Worster, “Doing Environmental History,” 294.

⁸ Donald Worster, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March, 1990), 1087-1106. Richard White, “Environmental History, Ecology, and Meaning,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March, 1990), 1111-1116. William Cronon, “Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March, 1990), 1122-1131.

⁹ Worster, “Transformations of the Earth,” 1106.

attempting to “set its agenda.”¹⁰ As White saw it, Worster’s approach inevitably led to determinism that failed to recognize that human values and beliefs influenced environmental change. Worster’s levels of inquiry were reductionist, because the material aspects of nature and economy shaped thoughts about environmental change. Instead, White called for driving a wedge between the material and social aspects of environmental history to avoid reductionism one way or the other. In his view, the integration that Worster sought through the model was unattainable.

William Cronon also criticized Worster’s approach, arguing that his excessive materialism discouraged the integration of ideology within his nature-economy dualism. That problem, Cronon asserted, plagued environmental history. Cronon also found another problem in using ecology to ground environmental history—its “holism.” The holism of ecological systems leads to a concentration on functional relationships as central to understanding social and environmental changes and, thus, conceals social divisions that exist in and shape those changes. This, for Cronon, was the “greatest weakness of environmental history...its failure to probe below the level of the group to explore the implications of social divisions for environmental change.”¹¹

Cronon set the task for environmental historians as understanding “cultures and ecosystems in history.”¹² His approach downplayed Worster’s contention that nature is an historical actor by emphasizing the relationship of humans to nature as the site for exploring ecological and social change through time. The systemic view inherent in Worster’s method, with its emphasis on the function of the system’s parts, would be replaced by a cultural view and concerns with how culture constructs understandings of

¹⁰ White, “Environmental History, Ecology, and Meaning,” 1112.

¹¹ Cronon, “Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History,” 1130.

¹² Cronon, “Modes of Prophecy and Production,” 1126.

nature. With Cronon's approach, cultural beliefs and values would be privileged over the reified functionalism of economics or ecosystems.

Cronon explored this approach in his edited volume, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, published in 1996. The result of a six-month seminar at the University of California at Irvine, *Uncommon Ground* featured essays by fifteen scholars, including Cronon and Richard White. They considered the social construction of nature in the United States and its implications for human-nature relationships and the environmental movement. The participants rejected the notion that nature was simply a physical reality. They argued instead that nature was a perceived reality, and that perceptions of nature should be understood in the context of specific times and places. The task they set for themselves "was nothing less than to rethink the meaning of nature in the modern world."¹³

The starting point for the group's rethinking was what Cronon described as "two key insights" from science and the humanities that had evolved regarding nature. The first insight derived from the changing views of scientists about the stability and self-sustaining features of the natural environment. Referring to the famous analyses of "ecological succession" by Frederic E. Clements, Cronon wrote, "...scientists were realizing that natural systems are not nearly so balanced or predictable as the Clementsian climax would have us believe and that Clement's habit of talking about ecosystems as if they were organisms...was far more metaphorical than real."¹⁴ Moreover, environmental

¹³ William Cronon, "Introduction," *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996), 24.

¹⁴ Frederic E. Clements was an American plant ecologist in the early 20th century who studied change to plant vegetation in "bare" places like plowed fields, mountaintops, and areas cleared by forest fires. He developed a theory of ecological succession, which held that plant successions lead to a stable, climax community of associated plant species. See John Phillips, "A Tribute to Frederic E. Clements and His Concepts in Ecology," *Ecology*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April, 1954), 1114-1115.

historians had been undermining the idea that, but for human disturbance, nature could preserve itself in a balanced state. Their research had shown human disturbance of nature to be the norm throughout recorded history. Taken together, these new approaches undercut the common appeal to undisturbed nature as the “objective measure against which human uses of nature should be judged,” and, therefore, challenged one of the basic premises of environmentalism.¹⁵

The second insight emanated from postmodernist scholars whose work, according to Cronon, had “yielded abundant evidence that ‘nature’ is not nearly so natural as it seems. Instead, it is a profoundly human construction.” Cronon asserted that such evidence required acknowledging the “deeply troubling truth” that humans cannot know a *real* nature, even through physical experience with it, because such encounters are always filtered through the “lens of our own ideas and imaginings.” Like the emergence of ecological theories which questioned Clement, this acknowledgement had profound repercussions for the environmental movement:

Much of the moral authority that has made environmentalism so compelling as a popular movement flows from its appeal to nature as a stable external source of nonhuman values against which human actions can be judged without much ambiguity. If it turns out that the nature to which we appeal as the source of our own values has in fact been contaminated or even invented by those values, this would seem to have serious implications for the moral and political authority people ascribe to their own environmental concerns.¹⁶

The foil for Cronon’s essay in *Uncommon Ground* was the belief, held by many environmentalists, that pristine wilderness is nature’s ideal state. This view imbues nature with a certain moral and practical authority: a “natural” state is inherently good, self-

¹⁵ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 25.

¹⁶ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 25-26.

regulating, and self-sustaining. It provides insights into the best ways for humans to live, but, paradoxically, is not “contaminated” by human habitation or activity. In “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” Cronon rebutted this conception by tracing the American historical view of nature as wilderness and showing that the meaning of “wilderness” was contingent on time and place. Cronon argued that a conception of nature as pristine wilderness left no place for humans, and that such a separation—literally and figuratively—posed significant barriers to realizing environmentalists’ goal of protecting the environment.

Rethinking the human place in nature, for the Irvine group, was critical to refiguring human relations with nature. This was, in turn, a significant first step in refurbishing environmentalism. Cronon stated that the overriding goal of *Uncommon Ground* was to “contribute to an ongoing dialogue among all who care about the environment. The outcome of that dialogue, we hope, will be a renewed environmentalism...renewed in its mission of protecting the natural world by helping more people live more responsibly in it.”¹⁷ Although it might appear that many environmentalists could embrace this stance, *Uncommon Ground* sparked controversy, and Cronon, in particular, was a lightning rod for much of the backlash. Environmentalists criticized *Uncommon Ground* as the work of “pointy-headed city slickers” and “postmodernist deconstructionists.” One reviewer said that Cronon wrote a new forward to the paperback edition of *Uncommon Ground* and changed its subtitle from *Toward Reinventing Nature* to *Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* because he

¹⁷ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 26.

was “clearly stung by his critics’ rage...”¹⁸ This suggests the complexity and diversity of ideas about the environment and their ideological consequences. Such complexity and diversity that is reflected in another context—one characterized by the emergence of what I call here an environmental conservatism.

In one respect, the controversy surrounding *Uncommon Ground* demonstrated the contention of its authors that the humanities were relevant to addressing practical problems. As public intellectuals, the authors sought to situate the humanities as a source of appeal for the general public in their quest to understand environmental issues. Almost seven decades earlier, another group of intellectuals devoted to the humanities wrote about the pernicious effect of industrialism on nature, community, and tradition. This group had also sought to position themselves as sources of public appeal. The Southern Agrarians, a group of twelve southerners, published a symposium in 1930, titled *I’ll Take My Stand*. Like *Uncommon Ground*, it stirred controversy and debate over its premise that Southerners should reject industrialism and retain the agrarian way of life that, they believed, was a defining feature of the Southern Tradition. In the Agrarians’ view, the values that served as the foundation for the Southern Tradition—living in harmony with nature, close ties to family and community, and moral grounding in Christianity—were under attack by modernist notions of the unadulterated good of progress, as embodied in an encroaching industrialism fueled by applied science.

This study explores the thought of the Southern Agrarians, their influence on the American conservative Richard Weaver, and the compatibility of Weaver’s views of

¹⁸ See Virginia Scharff’s review of *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (June, 1998), 196-197 and George Sessions, “Reinventing Nature? The End of Wilderness? A response to William Cronon’s *Uncommon Ground*,” *Wild Earth* 24 (Winter 1996/97).

nature and science with those of Aldo Leopold. The similarity among these historical figures' views suggests that the conservative values they espoused may present historical grounding for a contemporary environmental conservatism.

Leopold is a well-known figure and considered an icon among modern environmentalists. His classic work, *A Sand County Almanac*, and his essays and textbook have been required reading for many who share his concern for how humans can live in harmony with the land and its creatures. Richard Weaver has been studied for his influence on the nascent American conservative movement of the 1950s, but not in the context of his views of nature. And yet he shares much in common with Leopold's core thinking about the proper disposition of humans to nature. Several important environmental studies have featured Aldo Leopold including Curt Meine's definitive biography and Susan Flader's work on Leopold's intellectual development and his influence on the development of ecology and conservation. Because Leopold has been the subject of environmental historians, this study will focus on Richard Weaver and the Southern Agrarians who profoundly influenced Weaver's intellectual development. Leopold will return near the end of this thesis.

My approach is based on the third of the analytical levels of environmental history articulated by Donald Worster. According to Worster, this third level "is that more intangible, purely mental type of encounter in which perceptions, ideologies, ethics, laws, and myths have become part of an individual's or group's dialogue with nature."¹⁹ As William Cronon saw it, this analytical approach was "the cognitive lens through which people perceive their relationships" to nature; he asserted that "it is precisely this third level of analysis that has generally stood apart in the best environmental histories."

¹⁹ Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth," 1091.

By comparing the views of the Agrarians, Weaver, and Leopold on nature and science, I seek to understand the relationship of traditional conservatism to modern environmentalism. As the Evangelical Climate Initiative demonstrates, pairing conservative thought and environmentalism may not be as odd as it first appears in contemporary America.

It is in the context of human values that I seek to ground this study.

Environmental historians have often looked to values for clues to human relationships to nature. Samuel Hays has written that the “task of reconstructing how people perceive the world around them, what they desire for themselves and their families within that context, and...how the environment around them is an integral part of their more generalized values is poorly charted as part of environmental history.”²⁰ This study engages this task by considering the perceptions of the Southern Agrarians, Richard Weaver, and Aldo Leopold. Fernand Braudel, of the French *Annales* school that exerted early influence on American environmental history, wrote of the *longue duree* in history and believed that a “history in slow motion” would reveal “permanent values” of humans.²¹ The Agrarians and Weaver believed that the values embodied in the Southern Tradition were transcendent and absolute—immobile stars from which to chart life’s journey. They were appalled by the worship of progress and materialism that they perceived were promoted by industrialism. How could the Southern Tradition survive in the face of industrialism’s values: efficiency, the unquestioned good of “progress,” and the notion that the pursuit of wealth was the purpose of life?

²⁰ Samuel P. Hays, “Toward Integration in Environmental History,” 65.

²¹ Quoted in John Opie, “Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities,” *Environmental Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (Spring, 1983), 15.

Examining perceptions of these intellectuals also follows Cronon's contention that "the nature we study must become less natural and more cultural."²² This approach is also compatible with Richard White's observations in his 1985 essay about environmental history. According to White, what engaged historians writing about environmentalism was the question of values and not "just what the actual values...are but what the ethical basis of the human relationship to nature should be."²³ For White, there were two opposing approaches in such studies. One took the path of searching for absolute, transcendent values that could be plucked from the past and brought forward as didactic treasures for the present. The other insisted that ideas about nature in the past simply reflected the larger culture of the time. He was critical of both approaches because, in his view, both tended to simplify nature.

Considering the values of the Agrarians and Weaver in light of White's opposing approaches reveals several distinguishing characteristics. First, the Agrarians and Weaver believed that one's view of nature shaped one's conception of the world and that worldview in turn shaped what one did to nature. For them, the proper disposition to the natural and cultural world was paramount to living righteously. What contemporary lessons can be divined from their thought was not their concern. They sought to make an impact on their generation, and they presented their case in the starkest of terms. Second, both were conscious that their values separated them from the mainstream culture of the time. Studying these radical thinkers holds the promise of addressing Cronon's "greatest weakness of environmental history," since they espoused a dissenting view from the

²² Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 36.

²³ White, "American Environmental History," 314.

majority who held that industrialism and science represented civilization's greatest achievements.

Arthur McEvoy wrote about this clash of values in his study of the California fisheries. Writing about the effect of the "Tragedy of the Commons" view of resource use, he observed that the "only measure of values" from such a point of view is profit: "The only meaningful variable is economic effort—the only meaningful output is cash or its equivalent." An economic measure, then, ignores values which "are important but are too long-term, too diffuse, or too uncertain to register in the calculations of market bargainers."²⁴ McEvoy wrote that Pacific Northwest Indian fishing groups held to those other non-materialist values because "the social edifice in which [the harvest] is embedded [is] crucial to the survival of their communities, their cultures, and thus to their sense of themselves as Indian *people*, which is a moral obligation and thus has no price."²⁵ He could have written a similar assertion about the Agrarians and Weaver who held that the Southern Tradition had developed from a culture practiced in the "art of living."

If Cronon, White, and Roderick Nash, among others, are correct in their assertion that wilderness is the mythic core of the American mind and environmentalism, then it is possible to contrast that underlying myth with one that, according to the Agrarians, lay at the foundation of the Old South—the Cavalier. The Southern Tradition held that the gentleman—a transplanted English Cavalier—was a man governed by a code of honor; a patriarch who protected his family, community, and land. He was a man who viewed

²⁴ Arthur F. McEvoy, "Toward an Interactive Theory of Nature and Culture: Ecology, Production, and Cognition in the California Fishing Industry," *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, Donald Worster, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 224-225.

²⁵ McEvoy, "Toward an Interactive Theory of Nature and Culture," 227.

material considerations, like acquiring capital wealth, as beneath him. His life was tied to the land. Although several prominent historians have argued that the South was not much different from other sections of America, many Southerners accepted this core myth about their tradition and believed it distinguished them from the rest of the United States. Even Horace Mann Bond, the Black scholar and educator who worked to improve education for Blacks in the South in the 1930s and 1940s, could write in admiring tones of the virtues of the Southern Tradition: "...the Old Order was sufficiently virile to produce a tradition and to cultivate an ideal. It matters not if that tradition had no actual seat aside from certain seaboard cities and the Mississippi Delta. It is enough that it did produce here and there an expert in the art of living. Ideals, though held by a few, may affect the behavior of the many."²⁶

But he also wrote about the way the Southern Tradition ignored the contributions of Blacks. Mann's essay in *Harper's Magazine* in 1931 illuminates one Black man's view of his Southern roots and the Southern Tradition. Bond wrote about the nature of the white man's view of Blacks in the South: the "Negro is merely a bit of back-stage scenery used to deepen the effect of the leading silhouette. In the South, the white man is the Southerner, the Negro—well, a Negro."²⁷ Mann charged that the South had been "appropriated by white persons." He argued for the recognition of the historical contributions made by his ancestors to the Old South and to acknowledge that Blacks, too, were Southerners whose lives were inextricably tied to the South:

For two or three hundred years all of my ancestors were born in the South, and the record of the last hundred years, beginning with the memory of grandparents has enabled me to pierce the chaos of slavery, convinces me that they did

²⁶ Horace Mann Bond, "A Negro Looks at His South," *Harper's Magazine* (June, 1931), 106.

²⁷ Bond, "A Negro Looks at His South," 98.

no unprofitable service in the development of the region...Most of my life has been lived in the section, and all of the hope I cherish for the future is laid there. There are probably eight or nine million Negroes who, in the same manner, are Southerners...people whose forbears [sic] were born in the South, whose lives have been lived there, and whose hope of future security and happiness is intimately bound up with the fortunes of the section. These people are Southerners, and I am a Southerner.²⁸

Notably absent in both the Agrarians' and Weaver's writings on the South and the Southern Tradition were Black Southerners. To read the Agrarians and Weaver, one would surmise that all the people of the South who created and sustained the Southern Tradition were white. This impression is derived, not from any affirmative statements, but by the omission, save for scant mention of slavery and the one essay, "The Briar Patch," by Robert Penn Warren in *I'll Take My Stand*. The Agrarians largely ignored race in their rendering of the Southern Tradition. For Weaver, too, race held no prominent place in his defense of the South and the Southern way of life. As Bond wrote, for Southerners like the Agrarians and Weaver, Black Southerners were all but invisible and their contributions to the South and their place in the Southern Tradition were largely ignored. Ironically, a Black man like Bond could still show the power that the Old South and its tradition held for Black and White alike and how exceedingly complex those social relationships were and, perhaps, continue to be.

In 1930, the Agrarians constituted an intellectual elite endeavoring to uphold the ideals of a tradition they admired and seeking to defend it against the seemingly inevitable march of modern industrialism and the values it fostered. Their call to action to defend the Southern way of life was grounded in conservative values. These values were passed on, in turn, to Richard Weaver. Close reading of the works of Weaver and Aldo

²⁸ Bond, "A Negro Looks at His South," 98.

Leopold discloses that Leopold shared key elements of these conservative values. And these same values reveal a view of human-nature relations similar to those of contemporary environmentalists in so far as they privilege the importance of “nature,” whether considered from a spiritual or a naturalistic point of view. With Leopold, it is clear when he wrote about nature that he meant land, flora, and fauna. Weaver also meant the physical world, but considered as creation—the product of the work of a creator. Both men thought egoistic concerns should be subservient to “nature.”

At the core of these values is a disposition to nature that is informed by the twin beliefs that nature is fundamentally good and that humans are fundamentally imperfect. Nature is fundamentally good because it was created by a Creator and, thus, nature possesses moral claims. Therefore, humans should be humble before nature. Humans should also accept the limits imposed by nature because, ultimately, the workings of nature are unknowable. Purely material values should be rejected, and one should be skeptical toward the claims of science and the idea of progress. The Agrarians, especially, believed that these values inhered in an agrarian life grounded in small property holding, family, community, tradition, and Christianity.²⁹

This work tells the story of how the Agrarians were moved to defend those values and how one of their disciples, Richard Weaver, continued that defense. It is divided into four chapters and an epilogue. In the first chapter, I introduce the Agrarians and show how their work as poets informed their worldview and led to their undertaking the task of producing *I'll Take My Stand*. In the second chapter, I present the views of the Agrarians as articulated in *I'll Take My Stand*. They sought to defend the South from the

²⁹ My articulation of conservative values as they relate to environmentalism is influenced by Bruce Pilbeam's essay, “Natural Allies? Mapping the Relationship between Conservatism and Environmentalism,” *Political Studies*, Vol. 51, Issue 3 (October, 2003).

development of industrialism by attacking the underlying values they believe it promoted, including consumerism, progressivism, and scientism. They offered the agrarian way of life, as embodied in the Southern Tradition, as the preferred alternative, but they were more articulate concerning the evils of industrialism than they were about the benefits of the Southern Tradition. It was Richard Weaver, an Agrarian disciple, who forged a neo-Agrarianism that universalized the values inherent in the Southern Tradition, and, thus, Weaver argued that these values were transcendent absolutes for any society. The influence of the Agrarians on Weaver and his remaking Agrarianism to a form of traditional conservatism are the subjects of chapter three.

Weaver broadened his arguments regarding the values that represented the right disposition to life beyond the South in his book, *Ideas Have Consequences*. A stinging indictment of modern culture, the book was published in 1948. In chapter four, I explore Weaver's thought about nature and science as articulated in *Ideas Have Consequences*. His views are strikingly similar to those expressed by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*, published in 1949. By considering these two contemporaneous thinkers—one known as an American conservative and the other as an American conservationist—the parallels of traditional conservatism will be juxtaposed to ideas that are embraced by many modern environmentalists. In the Epilogue, I consider how the patterns of thought examined in the previous chapters may inform an environmental conservatism and speculate why Weaver's ideas regarding the proper disposition of humans to nature failed to have traction with politicians like Ronald Reagan who had such impact on the American conservative movement.

CHAPTER 1

Fugitive Prelude to Southern Agrarianism

A group of twelve southerners published a polemical volume, *I'll Take My Stand*, in 1930 that offered a countervailing view to the uncritical acceptance of scientism, progress, and materialism that they perceived as rampant in their time. Writing in defense of the Southern agrarian tradition, they sounded a bellicose warning about the dangers to the individual and the community inherent in an industrialized, consumer-driven society. *I'll Take My Stand* contained twelve essays on such topics as philosophy, literature, religion, and politics all aimed to set in stark contrast the Southern agrarian way of life from the way of life created by industrialism. It was a controversial book in its day, as its authors intended it to be. Critics called *I'll Take My Stand* nostalgic, sentimental, impractical, and “backward looking.” They compared the “Twelve Southerners” to ostriches and luddites; they called them “young confederates,” “reactionaries,” and “lazy cavaliers.” The appellation that had the most traction was the “Southern Agrarians.”

I'll Take My Stand is a work that exerted influence long after its publication. A *Time* magazine essayist, writing after the 50-year reunion celebration of *I'll Take My Stand* in 1980, posed the question: “Why do the Agrarians, with their crusty prophecies and affirmations, still sound so pertinent, half a very non-agrarian century later?”¹ The answer, he felt, lay in the power of agrarianism as a poetic metaphor. This was an apt

¹ Melvin Maddocks, “In Tennessee: The Last Garden,” *Time*, December 8, 1980, 1. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on January 5, 2007 from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/printout/0,8816,922154,00.html>.

observation as poetry played a significant role in the story of *I'll Take My Stand*. The intellectual forces behind the “Twelve Southerners”—John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate—were part of a group of poets who published a magazine, *The Fugitive*, from 1922 to 1925 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Another answer lay in the American love affair with agrarianism as a response to the alienating forces of modernism. These forces were rapidly transforming the nation in the 1920s when the future Agrarians were writing their poetry. Historian David Danbom has situated the Agrarians in the context of a broader American tradition of celebrating and promoting agriculture and country living as a route back to a simpler, morally superior life that would enable recapturing an innocence lost by the transition to an industrial, urban society. Danbom used figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Gustav Stickley, and Liberty Hyde Bailey to demonstrate how “back-to-the-land” sentiments represented in the Arts and Craft, Country Life, and Populist Movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflected that tradition. He contended that the Agrarians represented a particular strain of agrarianism—“romantic agrarianism”—which emphasized “the moral, emotional, and spiritual benefits agriculture and rural life convey to the individual.”²

² David B. Danbom, “Romantic Agrarianism in Twentieth-Century America,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn 1991). Historian William Issel cites “the Southern Agrarians, the English Distributionists, and the New Humanists” as well as Ralph Borsodi as sources of opposition to the industrialism and urbanization that rapidly transformed 1920s America from an agrarian to an industrial society. Eight of the Twelve Southern Agrarians, including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson, joined the Distributionists in contributing essays to the 1936 book, *Who Owns America?* Historian James Shideler poetically described the disruptive 1920s agrarian to industrial transformation: “Life was detaching itself from its agrarian foundation.” See William H. Issel, “Ralph Borsodi and the Agrarian Response to Modern American,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 1967); *Who Owns America?*, Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, eds. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press 1970). James H. Shideler, “‘Flappers and Philosophers,’ and Farmers: Rural-Urban Tensions of the Twenties,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (October 1973), 283.

The Fugitive poets were the driving force behind Agrarianism. It was they who conceived of a symposium on the Southern tradition. It was they who were its chief architects, organizers, and intellectual leaders. And it was their poetry that led to the discovery of the importance of their Southern roots and its traditions to their artistic endeavors. But as Agrarians, their all-consuming concern was that industrialism was headed south from its northern stronghold and bringing with it a way of life that would make an aesthetic life impossible. However, another of the book's main tenets—that the attitudes and beliefs industrialism fostered were destructive of nature—foreshadowed environmentalist criticism that began to resonate with the public forty years after its publication.³

This chapter examines the shared intellectual journey taken by John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate that propelled them from Fugitive poets to Agrarian polemicists. It explores how the three Fugitives came to see the Southern tradition as critical to the life of the artist. It then traces the formulation and organization of a “Southern symposium” chiefly through the correspondence among Ransom, Davidson, and Tate. This correspondence reveals their thinking and motivation for publishing *I'll Take My Stand*.

The core members of the Agrarians had all graduated from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Ransom and Davidson continued there as professors. Robert

³ Samuel P. Hays argued that a higher standard of living for most Americans gave rise to new environmental themes in the 1970s: “...we can observe a marked transition from the pre-World War II conservation themes of efficient management of physical resources, to the post-World War environmental themes of environmental amenities, environmental protection, and human scale technology.” According to Hays, this transition involved a changing emphasis from the more efficient use and development of natural resources to the desire to protect the environment from the adverse affects of industry and development. The 1970s witnessed a “search for a ‘sense of place,’ for a context that [was] more manageable intellectually and emotionally amid the escalating pace of size and scale...” Samuel P. Hays, “From Conservation to Environment: Environmental Politics in the United States Since World War Two,” *Environmental Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1982), 14-17.

Penn Warren, the Pulitzer Prize winning poet and novelist, was also a Vanderbilt graduate and the youngest member of the Fugitives. Ransom had taught Davidson, Tate, and Warren. In the 1920s, Ransom, Davidson, and Tate participated with others in a group that met to discuss their poetry. Warren later became part of this group. Ransom described the beginning of what would be the Fugitives in a letter to his wife in 1921: “Last night the Poetry Society met and organized and had a good feed. Charter members, Hirsch, Davidson, Johnson, Tate (Senior), Ransom; Prospective member, Stevenson. Regulations: to meet once every two weeks, each member to submit one (1) poem, all poems each evening to be discussed by an appointed critic.”⁴ These were intense, intellectually stimulating sessions that met every other Saturday evening starting at 9:00pm and sometimes lasted into Sunday morning. They led to close, enduring friendships. In 1922, the group decided to start a literary magazine, which they called *The Fugitive*, as a medium for publishing their poetry. Ransom’s poem, *Ego*, which appeared in the first issue, provides a glimpse into the Fugitives’ meetings:

...Friends! Come acquit me of the stain of pride:
Much has been spoken solemnly together
And you have heard my heart; so answer whether
I am so proud a Fool, and godless beside.

Sages and friends, too often have you seen us
Deep in the midnight conclave as we used;
For my part reverently were you perused;
No rank or primacy being hatched between us;

For my part much beholden to you all,
Giving a little and receiving more;
Learning had stuffed this head with but lean lore

⁴ John Crowe Ransom to Robb Reavill Ransom, November 20, 1921, in John Crowe Ransom Papers, Box 1, Folder 16, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

Betwixt the front bone and the occipital;...⁵

Donald Davidson described the Fugitives as “independent, not aligned with any cliques or influences...”⁶ They also shared a common Southern heritage: Ransom and Davidson were from Tennessee; Warren was from Kentucky; and Tate, whose maternal family had old, patrician roots in Virginia, was also born in Kentucky. There was, however, no evidence that the Fugitives were self-conscious about embracing a Southern tradition to inform their worldview. In fact, quite the opposite appears to be the case. Ransom’s “Foreword” to the first issue of *The Fugitive* sought to distance the work of the Fugitive poets from conventional views of Southern literature:

Official exception having been taken by the sovereign people to the mint julep, a literary phase known rather euphemistically as Southern Literature has expired, like any other stream whose source is stopped up. The demise was not untimely: among other advantages THE FUGITIVE is enabled to come to birth in Nashville, Tennessee, under a star not entirely unsympathetic. THE FUGITIVE flees from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South. Without raising the question of whether the blood in the veins of its editors runs red, they at any rate are not advertising it as blue; indeed, as to pedigree, they cheerfully invite the most unfavorable inference from the circumstances of their anonymity.⁷

⁵ “Ego,” John Crowe Ransom, published under the pseudonym, Roger Prim in *The Fugitive*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (April 1922), 3-4. Louise Cowan asserted that Ransom’s use of the pseudonym displayed his self-awareness about “his own formal and reticent temperament.” Louise Cowan, *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 45.

⁶ Donald Davidson to Ferris Greenslet, August 17, 1926, in Donald Davidson Papers, Box 1, Folder 10, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

⁷ “Foreword” in *The Fugitive*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (April 1922) in Donald Davidson Papers, Box 60, Folder 1, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives. Ransom’s statement about the “unfavorable inference from the circumstances of their anonymity” refers to the fact that the authors published in *The Fugitive* adopted pseudonyms. Ransom signed his poem, “Ego,” “Roger Prim.” *The Fugitive*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (April 1922). In a March 25, 1949 letter to Richard Weaver, Davidson wrote that “[T]he notice in Fugitive No. 1... was a kind of youthful rhetorical flourish... so far as it was serious it meant only that we wanted our poems to be read on their merits as poems; that we didn’t ask indulgence because of our ancestors. We wished to be dissociated from certain ‘literary ladies’ and other similar pests who at the moment were representing Southern literature in Nashville and elsewhere.” Richard Weaver Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

More evidence of their resistance to being fit into a Southern milieu is provided by their clash with Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*. *Poetry*, started in Chicago in 1912, exerted a national, cultural influence and Monroe, as founder and editor, sought to provide an audience for poets, especially new poets.⁸ She was extremely successful attracting contemporary talent, and a Who's Who of twentieth-century poets—T. S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens—had already been published in her magazine by the time of the Fugitives' quarrel with her.⁹ The quarrel can be seen as one-sided: an attempt to gain Monroe's attention by provoking her.¹⁰

The seeds of the conflict were sown by the April 1922 edition of *Poetry*, which Monroe devoted to a "Southern Number" that featured Hervey Allen and Du Bose Heyward, "two leaders of the Poetry Society of South Carolina," as editors. Between them, the two also had a dozen of their poems published in the "Southern Number."¹¹ Monroe wrote in her introduction to the special issue: "Ever since [*Poetry*] began, it has

⁸ The magazine included a quote from Walt Whitman as part of its masthead: "TO HAVE GREAT POETS THERE MUST BE GREAT AUDIENCES TOO." In a letter to Davidson, Allen Tate wrote that the interest which Monroe [and Louis Untermeyer] created in poetry was "a false interest... This interest has been simply a stirring of the bourgeoisie with the idea of 'culture' and 'self-expression' (two words that should be tarred and feathered), and poetry has thus become identified with the longings of misfits and weak sisters." *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1974) (June 19, 1926) 172.

⁹ *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse* was renamed to *Poetry* in 1950. *Poetry* has continued since its start in 1912 and is currently published by the Poetry Foundation. The Poetry Foundation continues Harriet Monroe's work: "a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture." See the Poetry Foundation Web site at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>. See also the Harriett Monroe Modern Poetry Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, online at <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/mopo.html>.

¹⁰ In a letter to Allen Tate, Donald Davidson wrote "...the first purpose of the editorial has been fulfilled, — i.e., we have succeeded in stirring them up, and at least they will watch us. As for what they may say in print (if they say anything), nothing they say, good or bad, but will help us." *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (June 26, 1923) 72.

¹¹ Harriet Monroe, "Comment: This Southern Number," *Poetry, A Magazine of Verse*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (April 1922), 31.

believed in, and tried to encourage, a strongly localized indigenous art.”¹² She then went on to tout the “wonderful material” the south-east coast offered its would-be poets:

...romantic episodes of early history and legend, involving three strongly contrasted races; plantation life and city life and sea life, with all their bewildering changes through three centuries of valiant history; a landscape of languorous beauty, melting into the vividly colored tropical ocean along white stretches of sand; and a proud people who have always commended life a bit cavalierly, contrasted with the sweetly indolent, humorous, more or less loyally subservient African.¹³

Perhaps of greatest interest to the Fugitives, she stated that “poetry societies in various [Southern] cities are gathering together” and that the “most important” was the Poetry Society of South Carolina, which was “exerting an influence which may yet be felt throughout the South.”¹⁴

Publishing the “Southern Number” in the established magazine and extolling the influence of the Poetry Society of South Carolina at exactly the same time that *The Fugitive* was launched was an unfortunate circumstance for the fledgling magazine. Ignoring the Nashville poets was another sting. But it was not until 1923, when Monroe praised *Carolina Chansons*, a book of poetry by Allen and Heyward, in a review in *Poetry*, that the Fugitives took public exception to Monroe’s depiction of a “southern poetry.” Monroe wrote that “an exceedingly rich store of romantic and heroic history and legend lies at the disposal of poets of the Caroline-Georgia region. As yet this is almost virgin soil. New England, New York, the Middle-West, the South-West, the Far West—all these sections of our marvelously varied country have had poets of authentic inspiration to speak for them. But the Old South is just beginning to find its voice...” To

¹² Monroe, “Comment” in *Poetry*, 31.

¹³ Monroe, “Comment” in *Poetry*, 31-32.

¹⁴ Monroe, “Comment” in *Poetry*, 33.

lift up that voice, Monroe exhorted “southern poets” to “...accept the challenge of a region so specialized in beauty, so rich in racial tang and prejudice, so jewel-weighted with a heroic past.”¹⁵

Donald Davidson, in a 1923 editorial in *The Fugitive*, decried Monroe’s exhortations. Her effort to set an agenda for Southern poets drew Davidson’s scorn. Poets would “guffaw at the fiction that the Southern writer of today must embalm and serve up as an ancient dish. They will create from what is nearest and deepest in experience—whether it be old or new, North, South, East, or West—and what business is that of Aunt Harriet’s?”¹⁶ The *Fugitives* strongly disagreed with Monroe’s notion that consciousness of locale was enough to inspire poetry. Such a view was wrongheaded and sentimental. Their more philosophical and critical approach to poetry put greater store in the values reflected in a region’s tradition.

Margery Swett wrote to strongly protest *The Fugitive* editorial.¹⁷ Allen Tate’s response shows that the *Fugitives* were critical of the Southern tradition and “local color” as a subject for their poetry. He expressed the *Fugitive* view that it trivialized their endeavors:

We do not disagree with Miss Monroe when she emphasizes the artistic possibilities latent in the traditions of the Old South; nor do we feel called upon if she feels—as evidently she does not—that this tradition is the only genuine source for Southern poets to draw upon...But we fear very much to have the slightest stress laid upon Southern traditions in literature; we who are Southerners

¹⁵ Harriet Monroe, “Reviews: The Old South,” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May 1923), 90-91.

¹⁶ Quoted in *The Fugitive Group*, 116. See also *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, 76.

¹⁷ Margery Swett was the business manager of *Poetry* in 1923. At the time that Davidson’s editorial appeared in *The Fugitive*, Harriet Monroe was travelling abroad. See Harriet Monroe, “Comment: Au Revoir,” *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May 1923), 88. See also “Editorships,” Harriet Monroe retrieved from <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/history.html> on June 12, 2010.

know the fatality of such an attitude—the old atavism and sentimentality are always imminent...¹⁸

In Davidson's own letter to Swett, he indicated that Tate had summarized "correctly the views of the editors of 'The Fugitive...'" Resorting to provincialism was fraught with problems for the Southern writer: "Miss Monroe...has put a most dangerous emphasis, it seems, on the very provincialisms against which many Southern writers are waging battles since these have more often led to the Slough of Sentimentality rather than to Parnassus."¹⁹ Tate's August-September editorial in *The Fugitive* amplified this critique of the Southern tradition: "...we fear to have too much stress laid on a tradition that may be called a tradition only when looked at through the haze of a generous imagination."²⁰

J. A. Bryant has written that the Fugitives' aims were simple—they wanted to write good poetry that would be taken seriously. They were not self-conscious about being Southern poets, but hoped that their poems offered proof that "a group of southerners could produce important work in the medium, devoid of sentimentality and

¹⁸ Quoted in *The Fugitive Group*, 116. Tate expanded his view in a letter to Davidson: "It isn't the old South as material that we object to, it seems to me (all Greek literature is a throw-back to a fragrant and heroic past), but the fatal attitude of the South toward this material... There's nothing wrong with local color... except when it drops to mere colored locality—everything must be placed in space and time somewhere, and the South is as good a correlative of emotion as any place else; and so I think that the trouble is in the damnably barbaric Southern mind, which would be provincial in London, Greenland, or Timbuctoo." *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (June 29, 1923), 79.

¹⁹ Donald Davidson to Margery Swett, June 28, 1925 in Donald Davidson Papers, Box 1 Folder 7, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives. In Greek mythology, Mount Parnassus was the home of the Muses and, thus, the home of poetry.

²⁰ Quoted in *The Fugitive Group*, 117. The second time that *Poetry* was devoted to a "Southern Number," Allen Tate served as editor and Donald Davidson contributed the essay, "The Southern Poet and His Tradition." Tate ended his Editorial Note with this strong praise for Harriet Monroe:

To Miss Monroe's sympathetic co-operation with me I cannot express enough gratitude. This number appears in the fortieth volume of *Poetry*. Each of these volumes attests to her eagerness to assist the cause of poetry not only here but abroad; she alone has come from the beginning of the late renaissance to the present, with all the vigor of a new start. No single compliment could do justice to her services to the American poet.

Allen Tate, "Editorial Note," *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May 1932), 94.

carefully crafted, with special attention to the logical coherence of substance and trope...”²¹

There is an irony to the disdain expressed by the Fugitives for Harriet Monroe’s view. Her introduction to “This Southern Number” sketched out in broad strokes the very traditional emphasis on particular locales that later animated the Agrarians. It is difficult to imagine that the Agrarians would not be sympathetic to Monroe’s observation that “[T]oday especially art needs to concentrate on the locale against the generalizing, scattering tendencies of the age; else it is in danger of become vague and diffused and theoretic, of losing precision and vitality.”²² As we shall see, the Agrarians would decry the generalizing tendency of science and warn about the evils of industrialism that threatened to usurp the Southern culture. But the Fugitives—focused on mastering their craft—could not countenance a poetry merely based on local color. That had a clear association with the “magnolias and moonlight” sentimentality associated with the Southern literature of the late 19th century that romanticized the Old South in nationally popular works like Thomas Nelson Page’s *Marse Chan* and Joel Chandler Harris’ Uncle Remus stories.

The problem of the Southern tradition as a foundation for art was tackled in essays written by Tate in 1925 and Davidson in 1926. Simply put, the South lacked a tradition of ideas. Without such a tradition, there could be no flower of Southern letters and no fertile soil in which to cultivate a Southern literature. Tate argued that the Old South eschewed critical self-reflection lest “its one idea—the permanence of a special politico-economic order” be destroyed. “The South could not afford to look at itself

²¹ J. A. Bryant, Jr., *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 40.

²² *Poetry*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (April 1922), 31.

critically,” he wrote, “and it is a commonplace in the history of intelligence that spontaneous self-examination...is the initial moral attitude which must preface the exacting business of beautiful letters.” He continued, the antebellum South “was an aristocracy of social privilege founded in a rigid social order. Deprived of that order, the Old South has degenerated into and survives only as a sentiment susceptible of no precise definition.” Tate’s generation of Southerners “is whooping it up in boosters’ clubs” and “has no tradition of ideas, no consciousness of moral and spiritual values...it has simply lost a prerogative based on property.”²³

In his essay, “The Artist as Southerner,” Davidson displayed the self-examination that Tate wrote was necessary to support an intellectual culture: “...what does it mean to be a Southerner and yet be a writer; what is the Southern character...and is it communicating itself to literature in any recognizable and valuable way?” Clearly, Davidson was not sanguine about the communication of Southern character through a Southern literature: “Today, the writer who lives South of the Mason-Dixon line may by accident or design choose his materials from the life about him, but that fact alone will not guarantee him as a genuinely autochthonous writer. The chances are that he will remain purely and narrowly provincial...”²⁴ Like Tate, Davidson was suspicious of the New South, but also critical of the Old South. He described the liminal state of the Southern artist, uneasily poised on the threshold between the Old and New South:

On the one hand he sees the decaying structure of Civil War sentimentalism and hears politicians braying their sectional platitudes. The gallantries of the Lost Cause, the legends of a gracious aristocracy, the stalwart tradition of Southern history, —these he may admire, but they come to

²³ Allen Tate, “Last Days of a Charming Lady,” *Nation*, 72 (October 28, 1925), 485-486.

²⁴ Donald Davidson, “The Artist as Southerner,” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 42 (May 15, 1926), 781.

him mouthed over and cheapened... And in the new order his situation is equally baffling. He sees industrialism marching on, and can digest the victorious cries of civic boosters even less readily than the treacly lamentations of the old school.²⁵

For both Davidson and Tate, the Southern artist was alienated from his native land.

Davidson wrote, "He can hardly find refuge among the Fundamentalists... He can hope for no aid from the Ku Klux... He is an alien particle in the body politic." Tate put it this way: "[H]e... is privy to the emotions founded in the state of knowing oneself to be a foreigner at home."

This alienation can be understood by examining the figurations of the Old South and the New South that both men confronted. As writers and poets, they were keenly aware of the nature of the Southern literature which was their inheritance. As their dispute with Harriet Monroe attests, they found the "local color" genre, so pervasive in the Southern literature of the late 19th century, a "cheapened," sentimental, and romanticized depiction of the Old South. They "may admire" the gallantry and graciousness of the Old South tradition, but the realism of their modern world prevented them from embracing something they knew to be false. On the other hand, the New South creed that had heralded the progress of the postbellum South for over thirty years was equally false. They could see that the promised prosperity prophesied by the New South spokesmen of the 1880s and echoed by the "boosters" of their own time had not materialized. The actual Southern experience was shaped more by poverty, frustration

²⁵ Davidson, "The Artist as Southerner," 782.

and defeat.²⁶ They were caught between a romanticized past and a barbarous future in an uninspired present.

Ellen Glasgow, a Southern novelist who was a harbinger of the Southern renaissance in literature that flowered in the 1920s and beyond, aptly articulated the Southern artists' dilemma at this time. She disparaged both the "intellectual stagnation bred by the Old South and the rampant materialism unloosed by the New South crusade." The characters in her novels typified the Southerners' dilemma—they were "forced to confront simultaneously both the Old South legend and the New South reality." In a 1928 *Harper's Magazine* article, Glasgow lamented the New South's ambition not simply "to be self-sufficing but to be more Western than the west and more American than the whole of America." Such enthusiasm for "Americanism" threatened to reduce southern life to "a comfortable level of mediocrity," save for an "impressive group of Southern writers" who had broken away "from a petrified past overgrown by a funereal tradition," but had also recoiled from "the uniform concrete surface of an industrialized South."²⁷

John Crowe Ransom would add his own essay about the South two years later in 1928. That essay, "The South—Old or New?" would reflect the changed view of the three men toward their heritage and home. What had begun as a shared journey to find their muse and develop their poetry ended up in the common cause of defending the South against the unconsidered adoption of industrialism and the urbanization that so

²⁶ The historian C. Vann Woodward describes the mismatch between the New South spokesmen's rhetoric concerning material progress and the realities of the Southern experience: "The abundance of natural resources and industrial opportunities was widely advertised and the desperate need of an industrialized and diversified economy was acknowledged, but in spite of thirty years of intensive propaganda and effort the South remained largely a raw-material economy, with the attendant penalties of low wages, lack of opportunity, and poverty." C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1971), 310.

²⁷ Quoted in James C. Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1999), 174.

often accompanied it. The explanation for this transition may be found in their need to reconcile their art with their experience. In *The New South Creed*, Paul Gaston described both the Old South and the New South as powerful “social myths” that prescribed their proponents’ worldview.²⁸ Daniel Signal argued that the Agrarians would create their own “special myth of the South” by “a sheer act of will” that would enable them to “resolve the psychic and literary dilemmas they felt.”²⁹ The importance of myth to the Fugitives is reflected in Robert Penn Warren’s conception of poetry: “The poem is a little myth of man’s capacity of making life meaningful. And in the end, the poem is not a thing we see—it is, rather, a light by which we may see—and what we see is life.”³⁰ In 1926, we can see the Fugitives awakening to the need to create a new myth for the South. In the act of that creation, they would make the transition from Fugitives to Agrarians—from discontented Southern artists to conservative defenders of tradition.

In March 1926, after sending his Southern Artist article to *The Saturday Review*, Davidson wrote to Tate that he was writing poetry of an epic nature that he hoped to sustain through a series of poems: “These will...present what I intend to be a fairly complex portrait of a person (say myself) definitely located in Tennessee, sensitive to what is going on as well as what has gone on for some hundreds of years.”³¹ This work would become *The Tall Men*, published in 1927. The poems were Davidson’s tribute to the pioneers of Tennessee, and contrasted their lives—simple, dignified, traditional—with the life of a contemporary Tennessean—chaotic, insignificant, bewildering. Tate

²⁸ Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 7.

²⁹ Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 201.

³⁰ Robert Penn Warren retrieved from the Web on March 13, 2011
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/r/robertpenn117158.html>.

³¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 29, 1926), 162.

wrote to Davidson in May 1926 after reading two of the long poems from *The Tall Men*, “Just reading these selections, I am reminded of the true definition of poetry with respect to time and place—that it must be local to be universal...”³²

Tate was also writing poetry grounded in the examination of the modern Southerner’s relationship to his heritage as well as doing research for a biography of Stonewall Jackson. Tate’s poetic effort, published in *The Fugitives: An Anthology of Verse* in 1928, ultimately produced “Ode to the Confederate Dead,” his most famous poem. Edward Hirsch has described this poem as a “southern analogue” to T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* in its impersonal dramatization of a tragic situation for a modern person. In this case, a modern Southerner hesitating at the gate of a Confederate graveyard “trapped in time...caught between a heroic Civil War past, which is irrecoverable, and the chaotic, degenerate present.”³³

During 1926, Ransom was absorbed in writing what he described as his *ars aesthetica*, “The Third Moment,” an elaboration on his aesthetical ideas. Although he labored on the manuscript for several years, he never published it. He described his ideas to both Davidson and Tate in letters dated August and September of 1926. He also sent criticism of several poems to Tate and solicited two of Davidson’s *Tall Men* poems. In the course of criticizing the negative quality of Tate’s poetry, which Ransom attributed to Tate’s idea “that we are fallen upon evil days,” he attacked urbanism and defended the provincial and narrowly local:

But here again I have to acknowledge a personal bias: of late years...I have become somewhat soft and easy in my

³² *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 29, 1926) 166.

³³ Edward Hirsch, “Helmet of Fire: American Poetry in the 1920s,” in *A Profile of Twentieth-century American Poetry*, Jack Myers and David Wojahn, eds. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 65.

assessments of human nature; I am particularly taken, on the positive side, with the idea that provincial life is the best; this was my idea before Spengler reinforced me; certainly in the provinces the personal themes for drama and poetry are the same as ever; life is just as prolific as ever of the cases; and only in the city, where for the most part the disaffected go, do you find that scorn for the Main Streeters which seems must now [be] such a blemish on our productive arts.³⁴

Ransom was also reworking a set of poems that would be published as *Two Gentlemen in Bonds* in early 1927. Tate wrote a review of the volume in the *Nation* in March 1927 where he remarked on two qualities of the poetry that he claimed connected Ransom to the eighteenth-century South—rationalism (which Tate described as “the evaluating instrument of the code of honor”) and *noblesse oblige*. Tate wrote that “Ransom is the last pure manifestation of the culture of the eighteenth-century South; the moral issues which emerge transfigured in his poetry are the moral issues of his section, class, culture, referred to their simple fundamental properties.”³⁵

Ransom wrote to Tate in February 1927 thanking him for the review which Tate had shared. The letter reveals that Ransom strongly agreed with Tate’s critical judgment: “I am obliged to see that in rationalism and Noblesse Oblige you have picked out two cues that penetrate very deep into my stuff—and I rather like, too, the more synthetic concept of the Old South under which you put them.”³⁶

Ransom’s statement about the “more synthetic concept of the Old South” shows that he viewed his poetry as reflecting one of the standard elements of the Old South and the Old South myth—the Cavalier—the Southern gentleman whose actions were

³⁴ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, Thomas Daniel Young and George Core, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 159. An edition of Oswald Spengler’s book, *The Decline of the West*, was published by Alfred Knopf, April 23, 1926.

³⁵ Allen Tate, “The Eighteenth-Century South,” *Nation*, 124 (March 3, 1927), 346.

³⁶ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, 160.

governed by a code of honor that produced his temperament and constrained his actions. Those actions were governed by his sense of noblesse oblige—that privilege entails responsibility. Tate explains how the Old South embodied these values in his biography of Jefferson Davis:

The impulse of [an] agrarian ruling class is to identify its power with inherited responsibility. This identification of power and responsibility is the best basis for a society...Men are everywhere the same, and it is only the social system that imposes a check upon the acquisitive instinct, accidentally and as the condition of a certain prosperity, that in the end makes for stability and creates the close ties among all classes which distinguished a civilization from a mere social machine. Only the agriculture order in the past has achieved this.³⁷

C. Vann Woodward showed in “A Southern Critique for the Gilded Age,” that Northern writers were also drawn to the Old South as a reaction to the “mediocrity, the crassness, and the venality they saw around them.” According to Woodward’s analysis, Herman Melville, Henry Adams, and Henry James each included a Confederate veteran in their writing to serve as “a useful foil for the unlovely present or the symbol of some irreparable loss.” This Southerner “serves as the mouthpiece of the severest stricture upon American society or, by his actions or character, exposes the worst faults of that society.”³⁸ Thus we see the power that the Old South myth held for many Americans.

Clearly by 1927 the Fugitive poets had awakened to the importance of their Southern roots and the Southern tradition. Louise Cowan in her book chronicling the Fugitive poets described 1926 as a year of transition for them. Some commentators have attributed this transformation to the attacks by H. L. Mencken and others on the South’s

³⁷ Quoted in *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians*, John L. Stewart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 135.

³⁸ Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 178.

backwardness during the media circus that accompanied the Scopes Trial in 1925.³⁹ That argument is too simple. As Singal expressed it, "...this explanation does not begin to account for the sudden emergence of their southern consciousness." Cowan also wrote about the Scopes Trial as an event that "caused many intelligent Southerners to reject their native land," but "propelled Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren into a careful study of Southern history." This study led these men "to defend in their native section characteristics which they knew to be inoffensive and even valuable. And...from an understanding of the deeply religious structure of life in the Tennessee hills, a structure which had its perhaps aberrant expression in Fundamentalism, grew the conviction that led these poets to their first overt defense of the South."⁴⁰ The attendant noise from the Scopes Trial and the generalizations about the South that emanated from it were a spur to Ransom, Tate, and Davidson. The real influence of the Scopes trial was in pricking the

³⁹ The conventional wisdom holds that the Fugitives were incensed by H. L. Mencken's and other commentators' attacks on the South during the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee and that it was a defining influence in their turn to Agrarianism. John T. Scopes stood trial in Dayton for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution in a Tennessee public high school. Though they were obviously aware of the proceedings, this view is attributable to Richard Weaver who, in a footnote to his "Agrarianism in Exile" essay, wrote: "It is instructive to know that the Scopes 'anti-evolution' trial, which the press of two continents made into an unparalleled sensation, was the decisive factor in turning the Nashville group against scientific rationalism." See Richard Weaver, "Agrarianism in Exile," in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, George M. Curtis, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987), 37. This exaggeration seems to have its genesis in Donald Davidson's one-sentence observation to Weaver in a 1949 letter that "[T]he Dayton trial, by the way, was one of the events that turned the Fugitives into Agrarians." See Donald Davidson to Richard Weaver, March 25, 1949, in Richard Weaver Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives. Louis Rubin, Jr. recounts the usual view of the Scopes Trial's influence on the Agrarians in *The Wary Fugitives*. See Louis D. Rubin, Jr., *The Wary Fugitives: Four Poets and the South* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 194-195. Regarding the Scopes Trial, John Crowe Ransom wrote: "I have not been able to see that either of the belligerents at Dayton escaped with perfect honor. The religionists were teased into giving battle on a field which they were bound to lose...the scientists...were so naturalistic, and so obtuse, that they lost caste while they were winning the field." John Crowe Ransom, *God Without Thunder, An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965 [c. 1930]), 101. For a discussion of how the importance of the Scopes Trial has been magnified, see Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 146-148.

⁴⁰ Cowan, *The Fugitive Group*, 238.

Fugitives to take a position, and that led to the development and shape of the ideas that resulted in the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*.

Davidson, Tate, and Ransom were obviously aware of the Scopes Trial. The June 1925 Commencement at Vanderbilt was turned into “a defense of evolutionary science,” where one speaker declared that “Christ did not come into the world to dictate to scientists what they should think.”⁴¹ James Kirkland, the Chancellor of Vanderbilt, announced in November 1925 a nationwide drive to raise \$4,000,000 to construct a new science building: “Vanderbilt's answer to the episode at Dayton is the building of new laboratories for the teaching of science.”⁴² In 1926, Davidson pitched a Fugitive anthology to a publisher using the incongruity of Tennessee producing both the Fugitives and the anti-evolution law that led to the Scopes Trial: “Perhaps even the fact that a collection of poetry should come out of ‘darkest Tennessee’ would be enough of a contradiction to excite curiosity.”⁴³ However, there is no allusion to the trial or any expression of chagrin in any of the letters of the period among these three Fugitives. The movement of the Fugitives to the beliefs and values they would adopt as the Agrarians was more gradual, and the result of serious self-reflection and study engendered by their poetry and writing. The Trial at Dayton may have forced them to re-examine their relation to the South, but theirs was not a defensive, knee-jerk reaction. It was not so much the depictions of the South as a backwater rife with diseased, illiterate Bible-bangers, but more the acceptance of these depictions by much of the country that shocked

⁴¹ Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scope Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 119.

⁴² “Education: In Tennessee,” *Time*, November 30, 1925. Retrieved on September 26, 2010 from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,736595,00.html#ixzz10dnSszQH>. Davidson also alluded to the \$4,000,000 campaign in a letter to Tate dated November 29, 1925 where he spoke positively about it. *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, 152.

⁴³ Donald Davidson to Ferris Greenslet, August 17, 1926 in Donald Davidson Papers, Box 10, Folder 1, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

the Fugitive-Agrarians. As Edward Shapiro has noted: “Perhaps for the first time in their lives the Agrarians realized they belonged to a scorned minority and that their own lives and careers were ineluctably enmeshed with the history and future of their region.”⁴⁴

In the spring of 1927 in a letter to Tate, Ransom revealed his conclusion that the Southern tradition represented the quintessence of the aesthetic attitude that he felt—given the re-examination of his beliefs—was superior. This was a turning point for Ransom. He now saw the Southern tradition as of paramount importance to supporting the life of the artist. He wrote Tate that the Fugitives had discovered their common cause—the Old South: “The Fugitives met last night. The more I think about it, the more I am convinced of the excellence and the enduring vitality of our common cause...we all have sensed this at about the same moment, the Old South...”⁴⁵ Ransom issued a clarion call for the work ahead:

Our fight is for survival; and it’s got to be waged not so much against the Yankees as against the exponents of the New South. I see clearly that you are as unreconstructed and unmodernized as any of us, if not more so. We must think about this business and take some very long calculations ahead.⁴⁶

Tate was also exploring his own relationship to the Southern tradition through his work writing biographies of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis. Travelling around the South to visit battlefields had a profound effect on him. He had been living in New York since he left Vanderbilt and harbored ambivalent feelings about his Southern heritage. But, in a letter to Davidson in March 1927, he pronounced: “I’ve attacked the South for the last time, except in so far as it may be necessary to point out that the chief

⁴⁴ Edward S. Shapiro, “The Southern Agrarians, H. L. Mencken, and the Quest for Southern Identity,” *American Studies* Vol. 13 (1972), 77.

⁴⁵ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom* (Spring, 1927), 166.

⁴⁶ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom* (Spring, 1927), 166.

defect the Old South had was that in it which produced, through whatever cause, the New South. I think the test of the True Southern Spirit would be something like this: whenever the demagogue cries ‘nous allons!’ if the reply is ‘non, nous retardons!’ then you may be sure the reply indicates the right values. The symptom of advance must be seen as a symptom of decay.”⁴⁷ Davidson’s response indicated that he, too, had come to see the Southern tradition as essential through examining his “own mind:”

I am delighted at your own new annunciation of the True Southern Spirit...I have fully decided that my America is here [in the South] or nowhere. I am thinking that I may make that projected new book (for which I have been reading) not so much a ‘history’ of Southern literature as a study of the Southern tradition—where it is, where it isn’t, what and how and so on. And I have been going through a spiritual ‘Secession,’ in fact, ever since that Sat. Review article which made me examine my own mind...I tell you I am very much stirred up.⁴⁸

Lucinda MacKethan has described what became the “agrarianism” of the Southern Agrarians as having its “roots in a myth of a traditional agricultural South—populated by self-sufficient, stoically religious, well-educated, non-materialistic gentry.” She claims for them a pastoral agenda that championed a “mythologically, instead of a historically, ordered past” that “invoked an ideal of communal memory in order to rebuke the disordered present.”⁴⁹ The nascent Agrarians desired a life, as Davidson later articulated, that had “order, leisure, character, stability, and that would also, in the large sense, be aesthetically enjoyable.”⁵⁰ He wrote to Tate: “Perhaps our program develops

⁴⁷ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 1, 1927), 191.

⁴⁸ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 4, 1927), 192-193. Davidson’s allusion to “that Sat. Review article” refers to his essay, “The Artist as Southerner” in the *Saturday Review of Literature*.

⁴⁹ Lucinda MacKethan, “Genres of Southern Literature,” *Southern Spaces*, February 16, 2004, <http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>.

⁵⁰ Stewart, *The Burden of Time*, 119.

into a program of provincialism...and with it all the values...that belong to a country life, decentralized, stable, local, self-sufficient, etc.”⁵¹

As Ransom had declared to Tate, the enemy was within—the “exponents of the New South.” The recognition of the enemy within echoed Old South traditionalists. Edward A. Pollard ended his influential book, *The Lost Cause*, published in 1866 with this warning:

The danger is that they [Southern states] will lose their literature, their former habits of thought, their intellectual self-assertion, while they are too intent upon recovering the mere *material* prosperity, ravaged and impaired by the war. There are certain coarse advisers who tell the Southern people that the great ends of their lives now are to repair their stock of national wealth; to bring in Northern capital and labour; to build mills and factories and hotels and gilded caravansaries; and to make themselves rivals in the clattering and garish enterprise of the North. This advice has its proper place. But there are higher objects than the Yankee *magna bona* of money and display, and loftier aspirations than the civilization of material things. In the life of nations, as in that of the individual, there is something better than pelf, and the coarse prosperity of dollars and cents.⁵²

The correspondence of Tate and Davidson reveals the genesis of ideas that brought about development of *I'll Take My Stand*. The Southern tradition had become Ransom's, Tate's, and Davidson's common cause. Examining the Tate-Davidson letters from March 1, 1927 through December 29, 1929 demonstrates that these two were chiefly responsible for getting the project underway and completed. As Davidson would later write to Tate: “There is nobody around here who has either sufficient zeal or vision to pitch into the business wholeheartedly. Ransom, you know, never was a man to push

⁵¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (December 29, 1929), 247-248.

⁵² Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 155. The use of the word pelf instead of wealth shows Pollard's contempt. Pelf is generally used to describe wealth that was dishonestly gained.

anything. He will give moral support, he will write, he will be a strong man in conference, but he does not energize.”⁵³ John Crowe Ransom would provide the intellectual foundation for the Agrarians. He would pen the “Statement of Principles” that introduced the essays in *I’ll Take My Stand* as well as the lead essay in that volume, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate.” But it was chiefly Davidson and Tate who provided the energy to actually bring the project to fruition.

The idea for a “Southern symposium of prose” appeared in Tate’s letter to Davidson on March 17, 1927: “By this time you’ve probably seen my recent communication to John [Crowe Ransom] regarding a Southern symposium of prose...Tell me what you think of it. I asked John to pass it on to you.”⁵⁴ Davidson’s immediate reply was that “I am out-and-out enthusiastic about the project. I’ll join in and go the limit. Am willing to write on almost anything.”⁵⁵ In Tate’s next letter he raised the Southern symposium again indicating that it “could be put off until next fall [1928]. I should have to postpone my part in it; I’m swamped now with other things. But it’s not too early to plan it. Fletcher wants to contribute...Let’s hear more from *you* about it.”⁵⁶

The Agrarians knew their project would encounter significant opposition from proponents of the New South, who championed industrialization for its promise of prosperity. Lyle Lanier, one of the “Twelve Southerners” who contributed “The Critique of the Philosophy of Progress” to *I’ll Take My Stand*, later described the dynamic nature of these times:

⁵³ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (October 26, 1929), 235-237.

⁵⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 17, 1927), 195.

⁵⁵ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 21, 1927), 196.

⁵⁶ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (March 24, 1927), 197. John Gould Fletcher contributed “Education, Past and Present” to *I’ll Take My Stand*. Emphasis in the original.

...[there were] national economic and cultural kinds of conditions that created crises of one sort or another. People were groping for some means to respond—some way to behave—in relation to these unusual conditions. There were local irritants, among which I might list a publication called *The Advancing South*, and associated kinds of activities in which the effort was being made to industrialize the South and to bring into the South some of the evils, as we saw them, of industrialism in the rest of the country.⁵⁷

Inevitably, it seemed, industrialism was coming to the South and the pace of its approach was quickening.⁵⁸ As the emerging Agrarians saw it, it was a contest between two ideas of the “South”—the nostalgic “Old South” proponents embodied in Southern writers “who mooned over the Lost Cause and exploited the hard-dying sentimentalism of antebellum days,” and the progressive “New South” represented by Southern Chambers of Commerce, booster clubs, and, closer to home—one of Lanier’s “local irritants”—advocates like Edward Mims, the head of Vanderbilt’s English department. Mims’ ideas were anathema to the developing Agrarians. In his book lauding the progressive South, *Advancing South—Stories of Progress and Reaction*, Mims exhorted: “liberal leaders are bearing the burden the forward-looking men have always borne...they have the faith of men who are fighting for emancipation from worn-out traditions. They are cheered by the vision of a new age and a finer civilization.”⁵⁹ Worse still, and more dangerous in the Agrarians’ view, were the intellectuals espousing a liberal view—

⁵⁷ *A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians After Fifty Years*, William C. Harvard and Walter Sullivan, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1982), 161.

⁵⁸ In the 1920s, a Northern newspaper reporter wrote that “business progress” headed South where it was greeted with great enthusiasm. His vivid description gives a taste of the New South hyperbole against which the Agrarians would react: “...the clamor of Chambers of Commerce, the seductive propaganda of city and state industrial development boards, the rattling knives and forks and pepful jollities of Rotarians, Kiwanians, Lions, and Exchange clubs are filling the erstwhile languorous wisteria-scented air with such a din these days that every visitor must recognize immediately a land of business progress.” Quoted in Rubin, *The Wary Fugitives*, 191-192.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Virginia Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand: A Study in Utopian-Conservatism, 1925-1939*. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1961, 4.

especially the ones at the University of North Carolina led by sociologist Howard Odum and including literary critic Howard Mumford Jones.⁶⁰

Mumford Jones wrote in 1944 that competing schools of thought developed at Vanderbilt and the University of North Carolina in the 1920s. Each searched for solutions to the problem of Southern values which had as their foundation the common idea that the “Southern way of life is both valuable and defensible:”

At the University of North Carolina...a group of men arose determined not merely that the Southern way of life should be improved, but also that it should be preserved. A second group arose at Vanderbilt. In the one university, men like Howard W. Odum...and others decided to focus the best brains they could assemble upon the problem of Southern values.

In the other university a group of young poets, weary of Southern sentimentalism, determined that the South was entitled to an intelligent literature. They were presently forced by the logic of their philosophy to consider the question of Southern values, and the result was the Agrarian pronouncement, *I'll Take My Stand*. One may debate endlessly the question whether the Tarheels or the Tennesseans advanced the right solution, but the point is that a solution was looked for.⁶¹

Shapiro has called the focus on regionalism by Southern intellectuals in the 20's and 30's as “[T]he most prominent characteristic of Southern intellectual history...” of the time.

According to his argument, these intellectuals were “busy exploring and defining Southern identity.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Howard T. Odum and Eugene P. Odum, the sons of Howard Odum, were both important contributors to the nascent field of ecology at the University of Georgia and the University of Florida respectively. They collaborated on the first textbook on systems ecology, *Fundamentals of Ecology*.

⁶¹ Quoted in Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 18.

⁶² Shapiro, “The Southern Agrarians, H. L. Mencken, and the Quest for Southern Identity,” 75.

At least two things separated the Agrarians from these other Southern intellectuals. Like Mims, Odum believed that employing science would lead to progress. He viewed himself, in fact, as a scientist and social reformer.⁶³ Worse still from the perspective of the Agrarians, where the Agrarians used humanist values to make their arguments, the progressives analyzed data to present the South in objective terms.⁶⁴ To the Agrarians, the progressives' views seemed even worse than the quixotic nostalgia for the Old South. Davidson described how the progressives affected him in a letter to Tate: "When I see that so-called magazine, *The New South*...I get sick with black vomit and malignant agues...I am willing to take to my bed and turn up my heels." But he was not quite ready to expire: "...I am too mad to die just yet, and itchin for a fight, if I could only find some way to fight effectively. If genuine sectional feeling could be aroused there might be some hope; I do not yet venture to say whether that is possible. John Ransom and I are greatly riled."⁶⁵ Tate responded with sympathy saying, "I share all your exasperations and belligerences," but lamented that "we are so reduced that we can't even fight it out on paper, except in the secrecy of letters." The closing of his letter indicated that Tate, too, was not yet willing to completely acquiesce to the impotence of their position. "What is your plan for a Southern magazine? My skepticism is hardly disinterested."⁶⁶

The Agrarians began to forge a third view of the South between alternatives they found unacceptable—Old South and New South.⁶⁷ We can look again to Ellen Glasgow

⁶³ Michael O'Brien, *The Idea of the American South, 1920-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), 55.

⁶⁴ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 15.

⁶⁵ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (May 9, 1927), 201-202.

⁶⁶ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (May 13, 1927), 203.

⁶⁷ Michael Kreyling presents the Agrarians as posturing for their cultural view of the South between the New Humanist view represented by Irving Babbitt, Norman Foerster, and Paul Elmore More, on the one

for an explanation of the direction of the Agrarian turn. James Cobb cites Glasgow's assertion that the rise of Southern writers was grounded in their movement to "the middle ground between sentiment and skepticism."⁶⁸ Gaston wrote that Glasgow "voiced the concern" that permeated the "major authors—Faulkner, Warren, Ransom, Tate, and Wolfe, among others..." in the time between the two World Wars. Her prescription for the South was blood—"because Southern culture has strained too far away from its roots in the earth"—and irony—"the safest antidote to sentimental decay."⁶⁹ This is how she described the rising Southern writers of the time:

Already a little band of writers, inspired by no motive more material than artistic integrity, is attempting a reevaluation of both the past and the present, and subjecting the raw material of life to the fearless scrutiny and the spacious treatment of art. In the midst of a noisy civilization these writers are quietly evolving a standard for the confused mind of youth; and it is worthy of remark that in a higher degree than almost any other group of American artists they have retained a poetic quality of style in dealing with the pedestrian prose of experience.⁷⁰

The idea for a Southern symposium or magazine did not surface again until February 5, 1929, when Davidson wrote a long letter to Tate, who was in Paris on a

hand, and Southern progressives like Howard Odum and Howard Mumford Jones on the other. In his view, the Agrarians were traditionalists, advocating a return to the Old South. I agree that the Agrarians were opposed to the secularism of the New Humanists and that they saw in the tradition of the Old South values they believed critical to living a balanced life. As I have shown, however, the Agrarians were not uncritical of the Old South. I, therefore, would assert that the Agrarians sought a third alternative—one placed between the "treachery" tendencies to retreat to sentimentalism and nostalgia of Old South advocates and the misplaced optimism in science and progress of New South Advocates—that would retain the values of the Old South while employing the conveniences and improvements offered by modern industrialism. For Kreyling's discussion, see *Inventing Southern Literature*, 6-13. For a discussion of the New South-Agrarian debate, see Michael O'Brien, *The Idea of the American South*, 6-27. For the Agrarians' view of the New Humanists, see Virginia Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I'll Take My Stand*, 273-276.

⁶⁸ Cobb, *Redefining Southern Culture*, 173.

⁶⁹ Gaston, *The New South Creed*, 229.

⁷⁰ Ellen Glasgow, "The Novel in the South," *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 158 (December 1928), 82. Ellen Caldwell has argued that the Agrarians and the Agrarian movement influenced Glasgow's later novels. See Ellen M. Caldwell, "Ellen Glasgow and the Southern Agrarians," *American Literature*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (May, 1984).

Guggenheim fellowship, describing a great scheme involving a Southern magazine, a publishing house, and a chain of bookstores to distribute their ideas of the South.

Davidson allowed that he was “an impossible visionary, but I should dearly like to get embarked on some grand enterprise that had only a fighting chance of success.”⁷¹ He went on to ask “...what is to be done in the South, anyway? My impression is that the people who are of your opinion and mind and John’s [Crowe Ransom] about things Southern are few and far between, and furthermore of little influence. If there were a Southern magazine, intelligently conducted and aimed specifically, under the doctrine of provincialism, at renewing a certain sort of sectional consciousness and drawing separate groups of Southern thought together, something might be done to save the South from civilization.”⁷²

But Davidson still saw obstacles blocking the founding of a magazine. First there was no such Southern magazine that existed and no real hope that one could be created. Second and “...still worse, there is no real issue strong enough to renew or create the conception of Southern life for which I think we could argue.” Davidson lamented that “[E]conomics, government, politics, machinery—all such forces are against us. With the issue of prosperity before everybody’s eyes, Southerners get excited about nothing else—except religion...” The question was: “Where can we join up, with our mysterious doctrine of provincialism?” Even with these seemingly overwhelming odds, Davidson was willing to fight for his view of the South: “Still, I believe in agitating. The losing cause is not always the better one, but it is in this case.” His letter ends with an invitation to Tate to join the lost cause: “Ransom, Wade [John Donald], and I have been trying to

⁷¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (February 5, 1929), 221.

⁷² *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (February 5, 1929), 221.

get up a symposium on Southern matters, but without success so far... You were on our list of prospective contributors. Will you come across with something, if we revive the project?"⁷³

Tate wrote back a long letter in which he covered a range of issues including the lost cause of a Southern magazine. In it we find the philosophical genesis of *I'll Take My Stand*:

At the outset, of course, the question of "lost causes" would come up. There is no such thing as a lost cause. There are permanent forms of truth which, under the varying conditions of time and place may be made pertinent. Our time and place would require the adjustment of these truths to our provincial history. The trouble is that Americans are afraid of any idea of which the immediate fruition in action is not clear. Any coherent point of view, whether it have any chance of practical success or not, becomes a valuable instrument of criticism. The chief virtue of such a stand is to make contemporary abuses stand forth for what they are. By finding good in a little of everything, as the modern liberal does, you find no good in anything. No cause is lost so long as it can sustain a few people in the formulation of truths.⁷⁴

Davidson's reply was more political and pragmatic. He pressed Tate to participate: "...your services are badly needed in a big fight which I foresee in the immediate future." He went on to describe the "big fight:"

For several months, with the partial and somewhat hesitating encouragement of Ransom, I have been agitating the project of a collection of views on the South, not a general symposium, but a group of openly partisan documents, centralizing closely around the ideas that you, Ransom, & I seem to have in common. It would deal with phases of the situation such as the Southern tradition, politics, religion, art, etc., but always with a strong bias toward the self-determinative principle. It would be written

⁷³ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (February 5, 1929), 221-222. John Donald Wade contributed "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius" to *I'll Take My Stand*.

⁷⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (February 18, 1929), 224.

by native Southerners of our mind—a small, coherent, highly selected group, and would be intended to come upon the scene with as much vigor as is possible—would even, maybe, call for *action* as well as ideas.⁷⁵

Davidson enclosed “a prospectus of this scheme” as well as a letter he had received from Howard Mumford Jones. This letter, inviting Davidson to participate in a symposium about the South, was the catalyst for Davidson continuing to agitate for their project. He wrote to Tate: “You will see, after reading it, what is before us. If Jones...puts his scheme on foot, the ‘progressive’ note will be accented very much, I greatly fear.” The issue, as Davidson saw it, was: “Will we let the Progressives (some of whom are ‘immigrant’ Southerners) capture the field and walk off with public opinion?” He saw the “progressives” as formidable: “...they have great strength on their side...They can get eminent contributors. They may even cut the ground out from under us.”⁷⁶ Davidson then enlisted Tate’s help:

I’m therefore asking you...to write me your opinion and to indicate whether, if we should launch our own ship of ideas, what you would contribute and what you would propose, in special and in general. I am much hampered by the uncertainty of my own mind, by lack of possible contributors, and by a certain hesitancy on the part of Ransom, which, I fear, might be duplicated in others. If within the next three months, there doesn’t develop a clear possibility of getting the project under way, I’ll prefer to drop it, for the time being. But I’d like to make a fight, and I’d like to have your advice & help.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (July 29, 1929), 227. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁶ Davidson’s concern about the progressives beating them to the punch did not materialize. *Culture in the South*, the book that Jones was editing, did not appear until 1934. Jones was also replaced as editor by W. T. Couch who judged the book produced under Jones to be “lifeless and soporific.” Interestingly, only the article written by Davidson on southern literature met Couch’s standards. See Singal, *The War Within*, 281.

⁷⁷ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (July 29, 1929), 227-228.

Tate's immediate response⁷⁸ included a "tactical program" which he indicated he had shared in a letter to Robert Penn Warren. He also had been in correspondence with Ransom about their activities "in behalf of a Southern movement." The first step of Tate's program was to create an "academy of Southern *positive* reactionaries" which would include a "philosophical constitution...as the groundwork of the movement. It should be ambitious to the last degree; it should set forth, under our leading idea, a complete social, philosophical, literary, economic, and religious system." The letter to Davidson contained the tack that the Agrarians would eventually take in publishing *I'll Take My Stand*: "In short, this program would *create an intellectual situation interior to the South*. I underscore it because, to me, it contains the heart of the matter." Tate also emphasized the need for organization and discipline in their effort: "For the great ends in view—the end may be only an assertion of principle, but that in itself is great—for this end we must have a certain discipline; we must crush minor differences of doctrine under a single idea." He suggested that they publish a manifesto which would "relieve any one person of the responsibility for what his colleagues say" and enclosed a list of ten subjects and contributors—a revision to the prospectus that Davidson had sent.⁷⁹

Davidson responded that work on the Southern symposium had not progressed, but credited Tate with "defining sharply and ambitiously the loose aspiration that have been rattling around in our heads. It's a tremendous stimulus...I want you to know that your letter shook me up from top to toe and filled me with a new fire. Ransom and I talked it over at great length...we were raised up—but all we seem to be able to do for

⁷⁸ Tate began the letter by indicating his pleasure at reading Davidson's letter to him: "Yours of the 29th is just here. My delight is best witnessed by the speed of my taking up pen and ink." *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (August 10, 1929), 229.

⁷⁹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (August 10, 1929), 229-233.

the time being is talk.”⁸⁰ He was discouraged and did not think the symposium could be developed until Tate returned from Europe.

Davidson also pointed out what he perceived as a weakness in Tate’s program: “The Southern people are not actually united on anything these days—except the Negro question...How are they going to be attracted to a Cause unless it is linked up to something very concrete and of an importance that overwhelms all else—it can’t be a mere intellectual issue or pure sentiment. It must be as important as Food, Money, Sex, before real work can be done.” The problem of contributors also remained to be solved:

We have either got to find the right men for the various subjects or write the entire book ourselves. I don’t know how to find the men except by a process of watchful waiting and slow inquiry. We run up against, here, the lack of knowledge of our own people that is a handicap to promoting anything in the South. I know all the people we ought *not* to ask, but I don’t know who our friends are, for they are heretics and must keep quiet, or they are sentimentalists and have been squelched. What can be done but study the situation and chew the rag cautiously until we get the right line-up? I wish you would rack your brain for suggestions. I’m willing to take almost any line-up of topics if we can only get the right people.⁸¹

In a postscript to his letter, Davidson again raised the idea of writing the book themselves:

We might consider doing the “Symposium” between us—you, Ransom, possibly Red Warren and Lytle, possibly S. Young. Maybe you Ransom & I could do it. There is nothing to keep us from plunging into economics & politics as we have already plunged into religion & history. If we, by ourselves, published such a book, we would then be able to find our real friends. They would surely make

⁸⁰ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (October 26, 1929), 237.

⁸¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (October 26, 1929), 236-237.

themselves known. And it is our great weakness not to know *who* is on our side.⁸²

Tate's response spoke to Davidson's discouragement about the project. What becomes clear is that Tate did not necessarily have faith that the Agrarians would enjoy *practical* success, but, as a matter of principle, he felt their project had great value and he was morally obliged to participate:

There is one feature of our movement that calls for comment. We are not in the least divided, but we exhibit two sorts of minds. You and Andrew [Lytle] seem to constitute one sort—the belief in the eventual success, in the practical sense, of the movement. The other mind is that of Ransom and Warren and myself. I gather that Ransom agrees with me that the issue on the plane of action is uncertain. At least I am wholly skeptical on that point; but the skepticism is one of hoping to be convinced, not by standing aside to watch the spectacle, but by exerting myself. In other words, I believe that there is enough value to satisfy me in the affirmation, in all its consequences, including action, of value. If other goods proceed from that, all the better. My position is that since I see the value, I am morally obligated to affirm it.⁸³

On December 29, 1929, Davidson wrote to Tate that "...we [Davidson, Lytle, and Ransom] have decided to push things to a rapid conclusion...we should be able to have the articles all written and ready by early spring...we ought to get it out by next fall."⁸⁴ Their understanding of the possible "Souths" in the late 1920s spurred the Agrarians to action. *I'll Take My Stand* can be seen in this context—the Agrarians sought to defend the Southern way of life against the encroachment of industrialism, scientism, and materialism that advocates of the "New South" were embracing and promoting. Their

⁸² *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (October 16, 1929), 239. Lytle refers to Andrew Lytle who later contributed the essay "The Hind Tit" to *I'll Take My Stand*. S. Young is Stark Young who later contributed the essay "Not in Memoriam, but in Defense" to *I'll Take My Stand*.

⁸³ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (November 9, 1929), 241.

⁸⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (December 29, 1929), 246.

will to defend the Southern tradition was based on their belief that it held values that were critical foundations of a civilized society. The Old South nostalgics would only sink into sentimentality; the Agrarians felt compelled to step into the fray. They were ready for battle in the confrontation between what they would lay out as a stark dichotomy: the modern, industrial, urban culture of the North and the traditional, agrarian, rural culture of the South.

CHAPTER 2

The Agrarians and *I'll Take My Stand*

The work of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate to organize a Southern symposium was realized in the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* with contributions from twelve Southern authors. Without the tireless efforts of Davidson and Tate, the book would probably never have been published. However, the intellectual underpinning of “The Statement of Principles,” and the lead essay in *I'll Take Make Stand*, were the product of John Crowe Ransom’s intellect. This chapter examines the thought of the Southern Agrarians with an emphasis on Ransom’s formulation of their ideas about nature, progress, and science. These ideas will be examined in the context of historian Donald Worster’s distinction of the three analytical levels on which environmental history proceeds.¹ I will show that the Agrarians’ ideas are relevant to environmental history as it transpires at Worster’s third level, that “purely mental type of encounter” that becomes “part of an individual’s or group’s dialogue with nature.”² The Agrarians fundamentally sought to expose the spiritual poverty of a life under industrialism—including estrangement from nature—and to contrast that impoverished life with the traditional Southern agrarian way of life. Through the dialectic between agrarianism and industrialism, the Agrarians found what Worster would have called their “essential themes:” the foundations for the proper attitude toward nature, the problems inherent in the worship of progress, and the dangers that follow uncritical support of applied science.

¹ For the balance of the essay, I will refer to the Southern Agrarians as “Agrarians.”

² Donald Worster, “Transformations of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (March, 1990), 1091.

These themes would become prominent in the 1970s during the emergence of an environmental movement that would seem to have nothing in common with the Agrarians. This is what makes the Agrarians of interest to students of environmental history.

Whatever influence the Scopes Trial in 1925 exerted on Southern minds or passions, it did very starkly pit religion against science. The Fugitives at that time were working on their poetry and criticism, and their correspondence reflected no inflamed passions or righteous indignation at the media assault on the South. But during the latter half of the 1920s, Davidson, Tate, and Ransom were each working out views on progress, religion, and science. Donald Davidson assailed indiscriminate progress in a 1928 article entitled, "First Fruits of Dayton." Davidson argued for an organic progress which he framed as "...improvement of what you have, not mere addition or change..." Fundamentalism, wrote Davidson, "...offers a sincere, though a narrow, solution to a major problem of our age: namely, how far science, which is determining our physical ways of life, shall be permitted also to determine our philosophy of life."³

Tate had also contemplated religion and science. His thinking was expressed in a letter to Davidson which began, "[Y]our letter came to me in a time of considerable excitement...I have simply been drunk with an idea." The idea concerned the basis for criticizing science and religion, and he hoped to write an essay that would "contain a discussion of Fundamentalism." He articulated his emerging idea:

My purpose is to define the rights of both parties, science and religion, and I'm afraid I agree with Sanborn [a Vanderbilt professor who had taught both Tate and Davidson] that science has very little to say for itself. I

³ Donald Davidson, "First Fruits of Dayton: The Intellectual Evolution in Dixie," *The Forum*, Vol. 79, No. 5 (May 1928), 907, 898.

remember he used to emphasize that view, but I scoffed at it; I see he was right. The principle is, Science as we inherit it as mechanism from the 17th century has nothing whatever to say about reality: If the Church or a fishmonger asserts that reality is fundamentally cheese or gold dust or Bishop Berkeley's tar water, Science has no right to deny it. On the other hand, the Church has no right to forestall criticism by simply saying science is wrong. The Church these days is of course decayed, but the attack on it should be ethical, not scientific.⁴

Tate never wrote that essay on Fundamentalism, but did later publish "The Fallacy of Humanism" that contained a critique of "New Humanism" based on its reliance, ultimately, on science and because it lacked "the background of an objective religion... The religious attitude is the very sense...of the precarious balance of man upon the brink of pure Quality. But if you never have Quality...you have no religion...It is experience, immediate and traditional fused—Quality and Quantity—which is the means of validating values."⁵

Ransom admired Tate's essay and wrote about it in a letter dated July 4, 1929: "It is just as you say: Religion is fundamental and prior to intelligent (or human) conduct on any plane. I had this in mind even in so secular a paper as my Southern one...Religion is the only effective defense against Progress, & our very vicious economic system;...It is our only guarantee of security and—an item that seems to me to carry a good deal of persuasive power—the enjoyment of life."⁶ Later in the same letter, Ransom shared some

⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 1974), 158.

⁵ Allen Tate, "The Fallacy of Humanism," *The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium*, C. Hartley Grattan, ed. (New York, 1930), 163. I suspect that Tate was referring to the Catholic Church in his reference to the "Church" in his letter to Davidson and "an objective religion." Tate later became a Roman Catholic and Catholic thought influenced his later criticism. See John M. Bradbury, *The Fugitives: A Critical Account* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 108-110.

⁶ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, Thomas Daniel Young and George Core, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 180. The Southern essay Ransom refers to in the letter is "The South—Old or New?"

ideas he was working out regarding the Western World's orientation to religion. He describes the apprehension of the Lord's love by the Western World (W.W. in his shorthand) as akin to the scientist and his test tubes. He wrote to Tate:

...in the N.T. [New Testament] it seems (to the soft-headed W. W.) that the love of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and it's the kind of love a world bears to a faithful slave population, or public service that never sleeps; better, the kind a scientist bears to the gentle, tractable elements in his test-tubes, which so gladly yield him of their secrets, and work for him.⁷

Eventually Ransom's ideas about the antithetical nature of religion and science were published in 1930 in *God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy*. According to Ransom, appreciation of nature disclosed either an aesthetic or a scientific attitude. For the person with an aesthetic attitude, "nature is feared and loved." The consequence of this fear would be the recognition that nature cannot be controlled, that it is "unintelligible and contingent." In this view, man would be subservient to nature. The consequence of loving nature would be a respect for it and a desire to conserve it. For those with a scientific attitude, "nature is only studied and possessed." The consequence of this view of nature is that, because it operates under laws that can be apprehended, nature can be mastered and controlled. Anything beyond comprehension—anything that does not fit into the types, functions, laws, or principles those with a scientific attitude can formulate—escapes their awareness or is, perhaps, characterized as an "outlier." For "[s]cience is an economy which is progressive. Understanding implies use, and

⁷ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, 180-181.

understanding defines itself more and more precisely in order that use may take place more and more practically.”⁸

One’s attitude toward nature promotes a particular way of acting towards it. Those who fear and love nature find it mysterious and contingent. Through contemplation of nature, they seek to learn to live with it. Those who study nature in order to possess it, seek only to understand it in order to use it to serve their needs and desires. According to Ransom, Orthodox religion cultivates the aesthetic attitude while science cultivates the scientific attitude.⁹ Orthodox religion, as experienced, promotes the attitude of fear, respect, enjoyment, and love for the “external nature in the midst of which we are forced to live. We were born of earth—why should we spurn it?” Science, on the other hand, promotes the attitude that nature should be subdued, controlled, and transformed to meet human expectations. It is “an order of experience in which we mutilate and prey upon nature; we seek our practical objectives at any cost, and always at the cost of not appreciating the setting from which we take them.”¹⁰ Science promotes only practical and utilitarian relations with nature.¹¹

⁸ John Crowe Ransom, *God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1965 [c. 1930]), 33, 136, 156, 176.

⁹ By “Orthodox religion,” Ransom was referring to “...the religion of the historically elder varieties that antedated modernism...such a religion as that of the Eastern or Orthodox Church. Perhaps a little less, it is that of the Roman and Anglican Churches, and perhaps still less that of several major nonconformist communions.” The “characteristic doctrine of orthodoxy,” as Ransom explained it, was “...that of the stern and inscrutable God of Israel, the God of the Old Testament.” Ransom, *God Without Thunder*, 4-5.

¹⁰ Ransom, *God Without Thunder*, 136.

¹¹ Ransom held a dualistic view that starkly distinguished between an aesthetic perspective on life and a scientific perspective on the world. This is but one manifestation of Ransom’s dualism of thought which has been discussed in Thomas Daniel Young, *Gentleman in a Dustcoat* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976). See especially 162ff. In *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians*, John Stewart wrote about John Crowe Ransom’s poetry: “Throughout his poetry and prose is an awareness of the radical difference between what men yearn for and what they get. It informs the elements which make up his double vision of man: the ‘fury against abstractions,’ the conception of the modern mind as divided and at war with itself; the mistrust of monistic philosophies and sciences; the image of a pluralistic universe and the belief that the arts offer the most comprehensive mode of representing it; the argument in support of an agrarian culture; and the irony of his delivery.” See *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 206. Robert Penn Warren also wrote an essay about John

Ransom's devotion to aesthetics expanded into a philosophical position that provided the foundation for a powerful opposition to what he viewed as the pernicious qualities of industrialism. From aesthetics, Ransom built the case that the agrarian life is the only way of living properly adapted to nature that can offer the capacity and ability to develop aesthetic senses. For Ransom, the Southern agrarian life represented the "right sort of living" that would invite culture. The ideas he expressed in *God Without Thunder* would find their way into the "Statement of Principles" that introduced the essays in *I'll Take My Stand* as well as his lead essay in that volume, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate." The dialectic between aesthetic and scientific would become "Agrarian versus Industrial," a dualism on which all of *I'll Take My Stand* rested.¹²

John Stewart and Daniel Signal have both cited *God Without Thunder* as the foundation of Agrarianism. Signal wrote that, in *God Without Thunder*, Ransom was attempting to turn around the trend of science wilting away the belief in orthodox religion: "Ransom was trying to reverse this process by assaulting naturalism at its philosophic roots and thus restoring the potential for belief in the transcendent and mysterious."¹³ Stewart described *God Without Thunder* as furnishing the entire justification for Agrarianism. The "conceptions of the aesthetic life and the function of myth" that Ransom articulated were the "very heart" of Agrarian philosophy.¹⁴

Crowe Ransom's use of irony in his poetry which serves as a good place to start in any effort to understand Ransom's dualism. Robert Penn Warren, "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XI (January, 1935), 93-112.

¹² Twelve Southerners, "Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xxxvii.

¹³ Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 212.

¹⁴ John L. Stewart, *The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 140.

According to the “Statement of Principles,”¹⁵ the motivation for publishing the book was to influence Southerners to spurn the temptation of inviting Northern industrialism to accelerate its move south. New South advocates had been inviting Northern industrialism south for some time. Various proponents of industrializing the South had been trumpeting the promise of prosperity that exploiting the South’s rich natural resources would bring Southerners since the end of the Civil War. There were especially concerted and widespread efforts after Reconstruction. Part of the plan to produce this wealth was the investment of Northern capital. But, as C. Vann Woodward wrote, there was a mismatch between the New South spokesmen’s rhetoric concerning material progress and the realities of the Southern experience: “The abundance of natural resources and industrial opportunities was widely advertised and the desperate need of an industrialized and diversified economy was acknowledged, but in spite of thirty years of intensive propaganda and effort the South remained largely a raw-material economy, with the attendant penalties of low wages, lack of opportunity, and poverty.”¹⁶ Although there was some industrial development in the South at the time *I’ll Take My Stand* was published (notably the steel mills of Birmingham, Alabama and the textile mills of North Carolina), the South was largely still impoverished. In 1938, FDR would cite the South as the nation’s “number one economic problem.”¹⁷

¹⁵ The “Credo” or “Manifesto,” about which Davidson and Tate had corresponded, became the “Statement of Principles.” The Agrarians tried several methods to write the “Statement of Principles,” but, in the end, they were written by John Crowe Ransom and accepted by the group with minor edits. For a discussion of the Agrarians’ work to create the “Statement of Principles,” see Virginia Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand: A Study in Utopian-Conservatism, 1925-1939*, University of Minnesota, Ph.D. diss., 1961, 245-251.

¹⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1971), 310

¹⁷ George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press and The Littlefield Fund for Southern History of the University of Texas, 1967), 599

The Agrarians expressed concern that Southerners might finally yield to the New South rhetoric: “Of late, however, there is the melancholy fact that the South itself has wavered a little and shown signs of wanting to join up behind the common American industrial ideal. It is against that tendency that this book is written.”¹⁸ They called for their readers—young Southerners in particular—to reject the false promises of a New South and return to the roots of their tradition: “The younger Southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel, must come back to the support of the Southern tradition. They must be persuaded to look very critically at the advantages of becoming a ‘new South’ which will be only an undistinguished replica of the usual industrial community.”¹⁹ It is difficult to square the Agrarians’ ideal of an agrarian life with the grinding poverty experienced by many Southern farmers and tenants.

More than becoming “an undistinguished replica” of other industrial communities was at stake. Woodward wrote about the realities of industrialism in the South. Quoting a New South advocate, we see what was offered: “...we must induce capital for manufactures to come here by offering cheaper money, cheaper taxation, cheaper labor, cheaper coal, and cheaper power, and much more public spirit.” This widely adopted program “included tax exemptions, municipal subsidies, tacit commitments against wage-

¹⁸ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, xxxviii-xxxix James Cobb wrote that “. most of the ‘Agrarians’ . were less intent on defending agrarianism or even deriding industrialism than on inciting their fellow white southerners to rise in revolt against what they saw as the ongoing New South effort to northernize their economy and society and thereby destroy their regional identity ” James C Cobb, *Away Down South A History of Southern Identity* (New York Oxford University Press, 2005), 116

¹⁹ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, xxxviii-xxxix The Agrarians had many programmatic schemes to reach Southerners. For example, Allen Tate wrote to Donald Davidson and laid out a “tactical program” for “a Southern movement,” including the formation of “an academy of Southern *positive* reactionaries ” *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, 229 Davidson suggested six areas to pursue including “[T]he Southern book,” “[T]he possible establishment of a magazine,” and “[W]ays of getting in touch with the young people, especially young literary groups at colleges, & heading them in the right direction ” None of these programs were realized *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, 233-234 *I'll Take My Stand* itself has had staying power After its initial publication, it has been reprinted in five different editions with a special 75th anniversary edition published in 2006

and-hour laws and social legislation, and a ‘co-operative’ spirit regarding the handling of labor troubles. The social costs were charged up to ‘progress.’”²⁰ The Agrarians sought to defend the Southern way of life and recoiled from the noise and hustle of New South advocates, but they understood little of the actual reality of Southern industrialization.

The twelve authors presented themselves as a like-minded group in the “Statement of Principles” to show the unity of their belief that a Southern agrarian way of life was superior to an industrial way of life. By explicitly defining themselves as a group committed to a set of clearly articulated principles, they invited others to rally to their cause. In this way, *I’ll Take My Stand* was programmatic. The authors of the book decided they “ought to go on and make themselves known as a group already consolidated by a set of principles which could be stated with a good deal of particularity...It was then decided to prepare a general introduction for the book which would state briefly the common convictions of the group. This is the statement. To it every one of the contributors in this book has subscribed.”²¹ The essays in *I’ll Take My Stand* extolled a Southern agrarian way of life as opposed to the life created by industrialism. According to the “Statement of Principles,” the group agreed that the “...best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial.”²²

The complete Agrarian philosophy was summed up in three key paragraphs of the “Statement of Principles” that articulated the Agrarians’ view that an agrarian life best supported the roles of religion, art, and community in the life of the individual.²³ Under

²⁰ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 310.

²¹ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xxxviii.

²² Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xxxvii. Emphasis in the original.

²³ Stewart, *The Burden of Time*, 151.

an agrarian life, religion and art can provide the basis for the right relation of man to nature. The agrarian life also supports the right relation of man to man.

Religion can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society. Religion is our submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable; it is the sense of our role as creatures within it. But nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent. The God of nature under these conditions is merely an amiable expression, a superfluity, and the philosophical understanding ordinarily carried in the religious experience is not there for us to have.

Nor do the arts have a proper life under industrialism, with the general decay of sensibility which attend it. Art depends, in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature; and in particular on a free and disinterested observation of nature that occurs only in leisure. Neither the creation nor the understanding of works of art is possible in an industrial age except by some local and unlikely suspension of the industrial drive.

The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly-business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these (the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs) are founded on right relations of man-to-man.²⁴

The Agrarians were motivated to take action because they saw in industrialism a grave danger for the South. Given this view, their definition of industrialism seems surprisingly banal and rather scientific: “Industrialism is the economic organization of the collective American society. It means the decision of society to invest its economic

²⁴ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, xlii-xliii.

resource in the applied sciences.”²⁵ Ransom provided a more strident definition in his essay, “The South Defends Its Heritage,” one of two essays on which “Reconstructed but Unregenerate”²⁶ was based:

It is only too easy to define the malignant meaning of industrialism. It is the contemporary form of pioneering; yet since it never consents to define its goal, it is a pioneering on principle, and with an accelerating speed. Industrialism is a program under which men, using the latest scientific paraphernalia, sacrifice comfort, leisure, and the enjoyment of life to win Pyrrhic victories from nature at points of no strategic importance.²⁷

Within Ransom’s definition, one sees the totality of the arguments against industrialism that appeared in *I’ll Take My Stand*.

The Agrarians were not sanguine about the ability to control the “latest scientific paraphernalia” or improve industrialism through regulation. Ransom declared in a debate in Richmond in 1930 with Stringfellow Barr, an historian at the University of Virginia that “[N]either Barr nor anybody else will succeed in regulating into industrialism the dignity of personality, which is gone as soon as the man from the farm goes in the factory door.” Donald Davidson later said that arguing for regulation of industry “was like opening the house to a dragon and then deciding whether he should eat in the kitchen or dining room.”²⁸ In literature we learn people often set in motion things that spin out of control. Mindless worship of technology reflects the hubris at the source. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is an obvious example.

²⁵ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xxxix.

²⁶ A note to “Reconstructed but Unregenerate” pointed out that the article was “made up largely” from two previously published articles. These were “The South—Old or New?,” *The Sewanee Review*, 36 (April 1928) and “The South Defends its Heritage,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, 159 (June 1929).

²⁷ Ransom, “The South Defends Its Heritage,” 113.

²⁸ Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 580.

The Twelve Southerners believed that the agrarian society was a superior alternative to the industrial society because they saw agriculture as the most prestigious and pleasurable vocation. It should be the standard for other forms of work to approach as well as they could. However, they did not see an agrarian society as one without need of or use for industry. As Ransom wrote, “The South must be industrialized—but to a certain extent only, in moderation.”²⁹ Nor were they necessarily opposed to progress. As Donald Davidson had written, “To contend that there are different ways of progress is not to be a foe to progress...One can readily see, however, that the social heritage of the South ought naturally and unconsciously to modify the course of progress...Thus we can imagine a Southern industrialism, somewhat affected by elder ideals, that would be not wholly utilitarian in its philosophy and conduct.”³⁰ What they did vehemently oppose was materialism and, as historian Eugene Genovese has observed, the “messianic pretensions” of science which served as the engine for modern industry.³¹

The work to be done, then, was to attack industrialism in order to sharpen the contrast between the way of life that it supported and the way of life the Southern Tradition supported. The Agrarians were not reformers—they were dubious that industrialism could be “fixed.” It could only be restrained by the ideals inherent in the Southern Tradition. That would amount, in essence, to a non-utilitarian industrialism.³² They were not revolutionaries—their impulse was to look backward. They were radicals—they disputed the current system of operation. Industrialism, as the Agrarians

²⁹ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” *I’ll Take My Stand*, 22.

³⁰ Donald Davidson, “First Fruits of Dayton: The Intellectual Evolution in Dixie,” *The Forum*, Vol. 79, No. 5 (May 1928), 905-906.

³¹ Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 12-13.

³² I am aware of what seems to be a contradiction in terms. It is difficult to envision a “non-utilitarian” industrialism. But this depiction only speaks, again, to the radical aspects of their thinking.

vigorously amplified, was fraught with problems. In the “Statement of Principles” they systematically presented those problems.

They began with the effect of applied science on the laborer. The devotion of industrialism to the applied sciences and practical production had the effect of enslaving the laborer: “But the word science has acquired a certain sanctitude...The capitalization of the applied sciences has now become extravagant and uncritical; it has enslaved our human energies to a degree now clearly felt to be burdensome.”³³

The dependence on and worship of applied science creates “economic evils.” Even the “apologists of industrialism” admit that it can cause overproduction, unemployment, and an inequitable distribution of wealth. The apologists believed they could ameliorate industrialism’s evils and the Agrarians delineated the source of the various approaches. Capitalists put their faith in “bigger and better machines.” Socialists looked to the “benevolence of capital, or the militancy of labor” to make things right. Communists believed that “super-engineers” who serve on “Boards of Control” would find the answers.³⁴

Industrialism changes labor in fundamental ways from an avocation to a means to consumption. The labor industrialism demands is hard and fast-paced. With the application of science in industry, labor is also insecure since the laborer is ever threatened with becoming superfluous by the introduction of new machines designed for efficiency. The Agrarians believed that labor must be effective, but it must also be agreeable. It should be performed with leisure and enjoyment: “Labor is one of the largest items in the human career; it is a modest demand to ask that it may partake of

³³ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, xxxix.

³⁴ Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand*, xli.

happiness.” The application of science to produce efficiency creates the “labor-saving device,” and the philosophy of applied science holds that “the saving of labor is a pure gain, and that the more of it the better.” Such a philosophy, however, assumes that “labor is an evil, that only the end of labor or the material product is good.” This assumption demeans one’s labor, makes it “mercenary and servile.” The end result of reconceptualizing labor in industrialism’s terms, then, is to abandon “the act of labor as one of the happy functions of human life” and to practice it only for its material rewards. Laborers become consumers, and people lose their sense of vocation.³⁵

The Agrarians held that the material rewards that industrialism offered its workers—consumption of the products of labor—were a deceit. The fierce tempo of work insinuates itself into the worker’s leisure time as well as making it—like his labor—vile and rushed. The laborer cannot indefinitely shorten his work and increase his time to consume which leaves him discontented and aimless. Other things are lost as well. Religion and art “can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society.”³⁶ Nor, as mentioned earlier, could the “amenities of life...such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love...the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs” thrive.³⁷

The dehumanizing effect of industrialism cannot be overcome by promoting educational programs that promote the arts. The Agrarians thought ludicrous the belief that all can be made right through educational efforts for the folk which will promote historic culture. But the problem of alienation in the modern world is caused by a misplaced belief that one’s purpose in life is to consume the products of industrialism.

³⁵ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xl.

³⁶ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlii.

³⁷ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xliii.

Such a problem cannot be fixed by instruction in the arts and humanities: “We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground.” Art in such a world is just another consumer good. For the Agrarians, culture was not abstract. It was “the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition.”³⁸ Industrialism was anathema to an “imaginatively balanced life,” which requires mastery, so to speak, of an art of living.

Industrialism creates estrangement from nature. Applied science, as the instrument of industrialism, is used to control nature in order to serve the needs and desires of industry. This implies that nature—infinite, inscrutable, and contingent in the Agrarians’ view—is ultimately knowable and can be mastered. A relationship of man to nature that is driven solely by the use principle leads to alienation. Man loses his connection to nature: “But nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent.”³⁹

The unrelenting pursuit of progress—interminable growth without a specific goal—keeps life in a state of flux. The Agrarians also noted that the “fierce tempo” of industrialism never slowed. The pace continually accelerated because its aim was not

³⁸ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlv.

³⁹ It is interesting to note how closely Ransom’s description of “nature industrialized” recalls the concept of “second nature” as that term is understood by environmental historians. Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlii.

stability—“some set form of industrialism”—but a ceaseless progress.⁴⁰ Unrelenting progress is pernicious because it initiates an unending cycle of production: development of new labor-saving devices with their forced obsolescence of laborers, production of new products, and development of new marketing gimmicks to sell products to consumers who have expressed no need or desire for them. This cycle results in an “increasing disadjustment and instability” where production “greatly outruns the rate of natural consumption.”⁴¹

The twelve articles that followed elaborated the themes laid out in the “Statement of Principles.” In the lead essay, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” Ransom amplified the Agrarians’ critique of industrialism and contrasted it with the Southern agrarian tradition. Other essays addressed various topics as they related to the themes and the South including art (Donald Davidson’s “A Mirror for Artists”), education (John Gould Fletcher’s “Education, Past and Present”), progress (Lyle Lanier’s “A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress”), religion (Allen Tate’s “Remarks on the Southern Religion”), the economy (Herman Clarence Nixon’s “Whither Southern Economy?”) and race (Robert Penn Warren’s “The Briar Patch”).⁴² The ultimate question for the Agrarians was

⁴⁰ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlv.

⁴¹ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlv. The Agrarians are offering a radical critique of the American social order. It is one informed by these principles and what they enable us to say about then contemporary society. It is not founded on an empirical investigation, as one would anticipate in a social scientific inquiry.

⁴² Robert Penn Warren argued in his essay that rural life “provides the most satisfactory relationship between the two races” because of the “common consciousness of depending for the same external, unpredictable factors [of nature] for the return on their labor.” The rural life afforded “personal contact” between the races which led to better understanding: “...there is all the difference in the world between thinking of a man as simply a negro or a white man and thinking of him as a person, knowing something of his character and his habits, and depending in any fashion on his reliability.” He also argued against industrialism citing the “conscious or unconscious exploitation of racial differences” to insure cheap labor for the “profit of the few.” Robert Penn Warren, “The Briar Patch,” *I’ll Take My Stand*, 262, 258. These arguments were too much for Donald Davidson who worried that it would “irritate and dismay” Southerners, “the very people to whom we are appealing.” He wanted to exclude Warren’s essay, but Ransom and Tate overruled him. Although readers today might indict the Agrarians as racists—and they

“whether the South will permit herself to be so industrialized as to lose entirely her historic identity and to remove the last substantial barrier that has stood in the way of American progressivism...”⁴³

The “Statement of Principles” explicitly raised a number of important questions, but offered no practical solutions. That was not the purpose of the book. It was meant to be a polemic—to starkly contrast the opposing values inherent in agrarianism and industrialism, and to rally Southerners to the Agrarian point of view. To, in Donald Davidson’s words, find out “*who* is on our side.”⁴⁴ To that end, the “Statement of Principles” closed with a clarion call:

If a community, or a section, or a race, or an age, is groaning under industrialism, and well aware that it is an evil dispensation, it must find the way to throw it off. To think that this cannot be done is pusillanimous. And if the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it cannot be done, then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence.⁴⁵

I’ll Take My Stand stirred controversy in its day. It was reviewed widely in newspapers in the South, the North, and the Midwest, as well as in magazines and journals.⁴⁶ Donald Davidson collected over 100 reviews.⁴⁷ The Agrarians did find some friends, but most reviewers remained unconvinced of the merit of their arguments.

certainly all were segregationists at the time—aside from some critics’ comments on the fact that the Old South’s economy was based on the system of slavery, race was not a critical factor at the time in assessing the book’s value or potential influence. In a 1957 interview Warren said, “In the essay I reckon I was trying to prove something. On the objective side of things, there wasn’t a power under heaven that could have changed segregation in 1929—the South wasn’t ready for it, the North wasn’t ready for it, the Negro wasn’t. The court, if I remember correctly, had just reaffirmed segregation, too.” *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 302. For a discussion of Warren’s essay, see *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 300-304. For Davidson’s view of Warren’s essay, see *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, 250-251.

⁴³ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” 22.

⁴⁴ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (October 16, 1929), 239.

⁴⁵ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlviii.

⁴⁶ Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 330-331.

⁴⁷ Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 86.

Typical of the ridicule the Agrarians faced was the editorial in the *Nashville Tennessean* which asked: “Can the distinguished Donald Davidson, the poet and critic, milk a cow? Can the brilliant John Crowe Ransom plow? Can Allen Tate mend a spring which stubbornly refused to pour water out of the designated place? Ah, friends, I fear these philosophers and poets will need a few of us farmers to set them right on agrarianism.”⁴⁸ T. H. Alexander asked a similarly scornful question: “Wonder how the Young Confederates who yearn for agrarianism and hate the machine age in the South reconcile the fact that Messrs. Harpers published their book ‘I Take My Stand’ [sic] on a printing press and it was distributed, thanks to industrialism?”⁴⁹

Allen Tate had anticipated this reaction when he opposed the title, *I’ll Take My Stand*, because he (and Robert Penn Warren) felt that it did not reflect the principles and ideas that were the foundations of the book. Tate had recommended the title *Tracts Against Communism*.⁵⁰ In a letter to Davidson, Tate appealed for the members of the group to vote for or against sending a letter to Eugene F. Saxton, their editor at Harpers, requesting a change to the title. Davidson, writing for himself and Ransom, sent a letter on September 5, 1930 outlining the impossibility of making such a request given their publication date of October 15th.⁵¹ He defended the title saying it was “[A] statement of convictions by Southerners; take them or leave them, specifically, we unite Southernism with agrarianism, on grounds both historical and philosophical.”⁵² Tate acquiesced in a letter dated September 7, 1930, but was prescient in outlining his concerns:

⁴⁸ Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 340.

⁴⁹ Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 340.

⁵⁰ Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 251. His belief—shared by the other Agrarians—was that industrialism would lead to Communism.

⁵¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (September 5, 1930), 253-254.

⁵² Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 259.

...I observe that [T. H.] Alexander today on the basis of the title defines our aims as an 'agrarian revival,' and reduces our real aims to nonsense. These are, of course, an agrarian revival in the full sense, but by not making our appeal through the title to ideas, we are at the mercy of all the Alexanders—for they need only to draw portraits of us plowing or cleaning a spring to make hash of us before we get a hearing. My melancholy is profound.⁵³

Some reviewers did concede the pernicious nature of industrialism. William Knickerbocker is a typical example. In his review he "admitted...the dangers and abuses of a predatory and capitalistic industrialism which recklessly exploits or paternalistically controls the lives of human beings or of natural resources...I assume that its evils and abuses are as patent to my readers as they are to the Nashville Agrarians and to me. Its great weakness is its incidental, removable, and unnecessary exploitative character; that it is acquisitive, brigandish, predatory."⁵⁴ H. L. Mencken also had misgivings about industrialism: "That [industrialism] needs an occasional overhauling is plain enough, and that it should be watched pretty sharply at all times is also evident..."⁵⁵

A common line of argument criticizing the Agrarians' stance was that their call for a return to the land was unrealistic and impractical. Most critics expressed their belief that industrialism in the South was inevitable. As one critic wrote, "There is no turning back from industrialism; there is only the hope that the agrarian section of society can be saved from exploitation at the hand of the industrial section."⁵⁶ Another critic expressed his ambivalence about industrialism while pointing out its inevitability: "It is fallacious to think of reviving an historical mode of life which has no spiritual significance for the majority of people, whose social and economic inheritance grows increasingly urban. It is

⁵³ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (September 7, 1930), 255.

⁵⁴ William S. Knickerbocker, "Mr. Ransom and the Old South," *The Sewanee Review*, 39 (1931), 238.

⁵⁵ H. L. Mencken, "The South Astir," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 11 (January 1935), 53.

⁵⁶ Rupert B. Vance, "Is Agrarianism for Farmers?" *The Southern Review*, 1 (1935), 44.

not a matter of whether we want the South, or indeed the world, to become industrialized—we are sure we do not want it—but an evasion is useless.”⁵⁷ This exhortation to face reality was put more frankly by Mencken: “The mills and factories are there to stay, and they must be faced. Nothing can be done to help the farmers who still struggle on, beset by worn-out soils, archaic methods and insufficient capital. They are doomed to become proletarians, and the sooner the change is effected the less painful it will be.”⁵⁸ Henry Hazlitt pointed out that farmers in the South could not “make a decent living.”⁵⁹ Vanderbilt’s Chancellor Kirkland was quoted in the *Nashville Tennessean* rejecting the Agrarians’ views as impractical: “You can’t get back to the agrarian scheme of things. There are arguments on both sides as to the virtues of each system of living, but it’s an entirely academic discussion because the anti-industrial plan is impracticable.”⁶⁰

Of course Kirkland’s remarks imply that the Agrarians had an “anti-industrial plan.” They had, in fact, put forward no plans or programs, and were clear about that in the “Statement of Principles:” “These principles do not intend to be very specific in proposing any practical measures.”⁶¹ The objective was to stir debate and challenge complacency. This, at the least, they did accomplish. Their candor, however, did not insulate them from criticism. Many critics found their strident indictment of industrialism especially galling because they did not offer any solutions: “Why did not these doctrinaires who are so cocksure about their diagnosis, leave us a prescription to cure

⁵⁷ Thomas D. Mabry, “Look Away, Look Away,” *The Hound & Horn*, Vol. 4 (April-June 1931), 438.

⁵⁸ H. L. Mencken, “Uprising in the Confederacy,” *American Mercury*, 22 (March 1931), 380.

⁵⁹ Henry Hazlitt, “So Did King Canute,” *The Nation*, 132 (January 7, 1931), 48.

⁶⁰ Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 336.

⁶¹ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlvii. The timing of the publication of *I’ll Take My Stand* just as the Depression hit led the Agrarians to propose specific programs in the 1930s. As Rupert Vance pointed out in “Is Agrarianism for Farmers?” in 1935: “Today the agrarians are hearing less about the futility of tilting at windmills and of trying to turn back the clock. They are, in fact, being asked for programs.” For a description of the programs the Agrarians offered during the 1930s, see Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians*, 89-127 and Virginia Rock, *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 345-400.

what ails us?”⁶² Even more sympathetic critics bemoaned the fact that the Agrarians’ call for action included no specifics: “Their devotion, as type and example of devotion all over the South, is in itself praise, defense and argument. But it is not action...I could wish at this point that they were clearer and more unified as to their plan of action.”⁶³

There was no plan, insinuated Hazlitt, because the Agrarians were overcome by nostalgia and sentiment: “It is obvious that this book is, in the main, the rationalization of a nostalgia for ancestral ways rather than a rational approach to real problems.”⁶⁴

Practical measures would help Southerners adapt industrialization to their special circumstances. Even as critics conceded that the Agrarians had illuminated the insidious nature of industrialism, they indicated the worst abuses could be checked by policies and regulations. The problem with the Agrarians was that they were not showing leadership in helping to address the problem. Given that industrialism was inevitably coming to the South, the Agrarians were criticized for so starkly framing the problems while not so forthrightly offering solutions. Mencken’s critique was typical: “The way to help them [the people of the South] is not to talk boastingly and vainly of putting down industrialism; it is to seize industrialism by the horns, and try to shake some measure of justice and decency into it.”⁶⁵ Another critic said that the South’s “best minds should exercise their creative thought, not so much in seeking a withdrawal from the rest of the world as in the attempt to develop a new genius to meet the social-economic problems which confront us.”⁶⁶

⁶² T. H. Alexander, “I Reckon So,” *Knoxville Journal*, January 10, 1931. Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 338.

⁶³ Virginia Moore, *New York Herald Tribune*, November 30, 1930. Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 339.

⁶⁴ Hazlitt, “So Did King Canute,” 48.

⁶⁵ Mencken, “Uprising in the Confederacy,” 380.

⁶⁶ Mabry, “Look Away, Look Away,” 439.

But the Agrarians were not reformers and believed that they were prescribing the antidote to industrialism. Industrialism could only be controlled by the stable community of an agrarian society. Ransom wrote in “The South—Old or New?” that “[I]ndustrialism is rightfully a menial, of almost miraculous cunning but no intelligence; it needs to be strongly governed or it will destroy the economy of the household; only a European society with a tough conservative philosophy, only an exceptional American community, can master it.”⁶⁷ So to reject agrarianism was to forestall the check on industrialism’s abuses.

Although the Agrarians sought to promote the agrarian life as superior, there was little about what constituted that way of life in *I’ll Take My Stand*. They did articulate that the “theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers.” The right way of living—what they called “the genuine humanism”—was discernable in the traditions of the antebellum South and these traditions were rooted in the soil and “deeply founded in the way of life itself—in its tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs.”⁶⁸ Their arguments were uncompromisingly anti-industrial, but they wrote little else that could create a clear image or vision for their ideal of Southern agrarian life. Given that their intended audience was their fellow Southerners, they may have felt that it was not necessary to be specific regarding a tradition they held in common. This omission, however, allowed their critics to articulate what that Southern tradition was.

⁶⁷ John Crowe Ransom, “The South—Old or New?” *The Sewanee Review*, 36 (April 1928), 145-146.

⁶⁸ Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, xlvi.

Some critics—especially those who were Southerners—did seem to understand the Agrarians’ vision. Allen Cleaton, writing in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, described the Southern yeoman farmer whom he said the Agrarians had held up as an example: “...the agrarian Southerner, simple in his demands and joys, unhurried, honest, with time to be courteous, living close to the soil, away from the noise and dirt, the speed and mechanized pleasures of the city...he finds time to help a neighbor with the harvesting, or a sick animal...”⁶⁹ W. B. Hesseltine, another Southerner and historian, also offered a description that indicated what the Agrarians wished to “present and to preserve:” “It was a land of simple people, with simple arts and leisurely graces, with pride of family, and a love of kin, and withal a gracious, almost lazy, carelessness for the economic standards of the businesslike north.”⁷⁰ The Agrarians would render a “real service” to the people of the South, Hesseltine suggested, “if they but succeed in convincing the southern people that the old south was not a land of broad verandas which stunk of lavender and old lace...”⁷¹

Some critics remarked that the Agrarians’ Southern tradition was “hopelessly outmoded” and based on a “nostalgia for ancestral ways.”⁷² Other critics filled in the blanks regarding the Southern tradition and pointed out the error of the Agrarians’ nostalgic vision. For the editor of the *Macon Telegraph*, the Agrarians were the most recent incarnation of the Luddites: “...They desire horses and buggies and music boxes to replace automobiles and radios. They want huge Georgian plantation homes with well

⁶⁹ Allen Cleaton, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 7, 1930. Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 332.

⁷⁰ Hesseltine, “Look Away Dixie,” 97.

⁷¹ Hesseltine, “Look Away Dixie,” 98.

⁷² Editorial in *Macon Telegraph*, September 9, 1930. Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 335. Hazlitt, “So Did King Canute,” 48.

filled slave quarters to take the place of suburbs and industrial villages. They want plows and hoes to take the place of looms and cards. Their housewives will wrap cheese cloth around the butter and lower it into the well instead of placing it in automatic refrigerators...”⁷³ Hazlitt’s indictment was even more damning: “Reading them, one almost forgets that such a culture as the old South had rested on slavery, that it was confined to a small privileged upper class, relieved of the more menial duties. All these writers see in farm work a mystical and ennobling satisfaction; and the reader almost forgets that the ‘genuine humanism...rooted in the agrarian life of the older South’ was not that of the man who picked the cotton, but that of the man who owned the plantation.”⁷⁴

As a more recent critic of the Agrarians has written, “Their agrarianism...had its roots in a myth of a traditional agricultural South—populated by self-sufficient, stoically religious, well-educated, non-materialistic gentry. Their agrarianism exalts Nature over the Machine, Contemplation over Competition, Rootedness over Progress. ...today their image of the South is often attacked as the construction of a southern male elite promoting a segregationist ideal as a false ‘Golden Age.’”⁷⁵ The Agrarians’ call to embrace the Southern tradition as embodied in the yeoman farmer as the backbone of the agrarian society foundered because they did not offer an explicit articulation rich enough in its particularity to clearly present their view. Nor could contemporary Southerners recapture their antebellum society. For, although Jim Crow laws throughout the South

⁷³ Editorial in *Macon Telegraph*, September 24, 1930. Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I’ll Take My Stand*, 335.

⁷⁴ Hazlitt, “So did King Canute,” 48. The question of race in the Old South was alluded to by Ransom in his essay “Reconstructed but Unregenerate:” “Slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice.” *I’ll Take My Stand*, 14.

⁷⁵ Lucinda MacKethan, “Genres of Southern Literature,” *Southern Spaces*, February 16, 2004, <http://southernspaces.org/2004/genres-southern-literature>.

enforced a rigid segregation, the slavery upon which the Southern society had been built was, thankfully, never to be resurrected.

Historical treatments of the Agrarians often offer an analysis of their influence on the development of a traditional political conservatism.⁷⁶ If *I'll Take My Stand* is considered from the perspective of the Agrarians' view of nature, and man's relation to nature, their ideas can also be seen in the context of environmental history.⁷⁷ While some of their critics interpreted their agrarianism as championing a return to farming, we can now see from an historical perspective that Agrarianism relates to a distinct pattern of environmental thought. That pattern of thought informs a philosophy of human-nature relations founded on a disposition toward nature characterized by respect, love, and fear. A sense of place—embodied in the South—was a powerful exemplar for the Agrarians.

Albert Way, writing about Charles Frazier's 1997 novel, *Cold Mountain*, asserts that the book reflects "a broader tradition of southern agrarian writing." He cites the Agrarians as one example of that tradition. In *I'll Take My Stand*, Way argued, the Agrarians' vilification of industrialism was tied to their belief that a turn to industry from farming "resulted in the loss of a fundamental connection to the land." And "the loss of a fundamental connection to the land had implications for one's conception of the world."⁷⁸

Taking an environmental perspective on the Agrarians' ideas is warranted partly by the comments of one of three surviving "Twelve Southerners"—Lyle Lanier—at the

⁷⁶ For extended treatments of this theme see Eugene D. Genovese, *Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Mark G. Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South: The Agrarian Thought of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

⁷⁷ See Conkin's discussion of the Agrarians in terms of the environmental movement in *The Unregenerate South*, 87-88. See also Genovese's discussion in *The Southern Tradition*, 13.

⁷⁸ Albert Way, "A World Properly Put Together: Environmental Knowledge in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*," *Southern Cultures*, Winter 2004, 37.

50th anniversary celebration of the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* in 1980. During that multi-day celebration, Lanier explicitly linked *I'll Take My Stand* to contemporary concerns about industrialism's threat to the environment. Lanier said (and Lytle and Warren, the other two surviving Agrarians, indicated that they agreed with his assessment):

I think it's a fair statement to say that *I'll Take My Stand* is a gross understatement of the condition we face today...the situation is now far more serious, more difficult to control. We have the degradation of the environment, the depletion of nonrenewable resources...There is talk in *I'll Take My Stand* about depredations committed upon natural resources, but it was different in kind, and certainly in scale, from what would be said today. The industrial impairment of human health, all the kind of things that you read about, pollution and food additives and the science of chemistry and the sciences related to radiation, all of these hazards were existent, but not extremely prominent at that time. There was not the kind of urgency about them that we have now...there is not merely the threat to values and to the kinds of society we would like to live in, there is the threat to the planet, to all civilization..."⁷⁹

Viewing the Agrarians' ideas from an environmental perspective is also warranted by their influence on Wendell Berry, American poet, novelist, and farmer. Berry is well-known for his efforts to develop a sustainable land ethic that promotes local, experience-based environmental adaptations. Berry's orientation is on the past to help learn what is best for the land in the present. His agrarianism does not seek "the best way to use land," but "the best way to farm in each one of the world's numberless places, as defined by topography, soil type, climate, ecology, history, culture, and local need." For Berry, place is always local: "...the agrarian standard inescapably, is local adaptation which requires

⁷⁹ Quoted in *A Band of Prophets: The Vanderbilt Agrarians After Fifty Years*, 162-164.

bringing local nature, local people, local economy, and local culture into a practical and enduring harmony.”⁸⁰

The Agrarians’ ideas speak to Worster’s third analytical level of environmental history: “that more intangible, purely mental type of encounter in which perceptions, ideologies, ethics, laws, and myths have become part of an individual’s or group’s dialogue with nature.”⁸¹ The impact of place, and a sensibility derived from the Agrarians’ espoused human-nature relationship, as well as their restorative vision of a human connection to the land, are important ideas relevant to Worster’s third level of environmental history.

Although a concept of “environmentalism” was not known at the time of the publication of *I’ll Take My Stand*, I would characterize an Agrarian environmentalism as rooted in a life lived close to nature where one accepts limitations and makes adaptations based on experience of a particular place, for example, of seasonal cycles. This kind of life enables a religiosity, a cultivation of human relations, and a sense of one’s place in the world. The Agrarians’ environmental vision offers a largely imaginative standard for challenging the consequences of rationalism run amok—rampant materialism, utilitarianism bereft of humane purpose, and industrial degradation of the natural world and of human communities. Counterposed to industrialism, agrarianism is the foundation for a community to live a well-adapted life.

Fundamentally, the Agrarians sought to expose the spiritual poverty of a life under industrialism and offer Southern agrarianism as a compelling alternative. Control of nature through applied science was industrialism’s defining practice—a practice

⁸⁰ Wendell Berry, “The Agrarian Standard,” *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land*, Norman Wirzba, ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 33.

⁸¹ Worster, “Transformation of the Earth,” 1091.

buttressed by the belief in the unquestioned good of progress to continually produce material gain which was accepted as the purpose and goal of life. The Agrarians contrasted such a life with one supported by the Southern agrarian tradition which acknowledged the inscrutability and contingency of nature—qualities that demanded respect and required man to adapt to his natural environment. In that enterprise, they attacked the “perceptions, ideologies, ethics, laws, and myths” of industrialism in relation to agrarianism.

Like the dualism of “Agrarian *versus* Industrial” presented in the “Statement of Principles,” the Agrarians—John Crowe Ransom in particular—used a technique of setting out pairs of oppositional concepts concerning nature.⁸² One dialectical opposition they presented was adaptation versus manipulation. An agrarian society adapted itself to nature: “In most societies man has adapted himself to environment with plenty of intelligence to secure easily his material necessities from the graceful bounty of nature. And then, ordinarily, he concludes a truce with nature, and he and nature seem to live on terms of mutual respect and amity, and his loving arts, religions, and philosophies come spontaneously into being; these are the blessing of peace.”⁸³ An industrial society warred on nature: “But the latter-day societies have been seized—none quite so violently as our American one—with the strange idea that the human destiny is not to secure an honorable peace with nature, but to wage an unrelenting war on nature. Men, therefore, determine to conquer nature to a degree which is quite beyond reason so far as any specific human advantage is concerned, and which enslaves them to toil and turnover.”⁸⁴

⁸² See *Inventing Southern Literature* for Michael Kreyling’s discussion of John Crowe Ransom’s use of an oppositional technique, 12.

⁸³ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 7.

⁸⁴ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 7-8.

Another dialectical opposition that showed the contrast of “Agrarian *versus* Industrial” was permanence versus change. An agrarian society promotes stability: “For it is the character of a seasoned provincial life that it is realistic, or successfully adapted to its natural environment, and that as a consequence it is stable or hereditary.”⁸⁵ An industrial society promotes change: “But it is the character of our urbanized, anti-provincial, progressive, and mobile American life that it is in a condition of eternal flux.”⁸⁶ The members of an agrarian society are connected to nature while those in an industrial society are estranged from it. In an agrarian society, one “...identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness. A man can contemplate and explore, respect, and love an object as substantial as a farm or a native province.”⁸⁷ In an industrial society, nature is commodified and one’s environment is artificial, and, thus, man loses his connection to nature: “A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of ‘natural resources,’ a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system.”⁸⁸

It may seem odd—and certainly impractical—for poets to undertake an attack on industrialism and to extol agrarianism, but it was, in fact, their deep sense of the aesthetic

⁸⁵ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 5.

⁸⁶ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 5.

⁸⁷ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 19-20.

⁸⁸ Ransom, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate,” in *I’ll Take My Stand*, 20. Again, it is interesting to note how Ransom’s description here brings to mind William Cronon’s powerful arguments about the commodification of nature in *Nature’s Metropolis*. See William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

life that motivated them. For the Agrarians, the “art of living” was not something to be taken for granted. For Ransom, in particular, the concept of nature was defined by a well-developed sense of aesthetics—what he described as the “arts of peace.” Those “arts of peace” were employed in adapting oneself to one’s environment. The whole enterprise of agrarianism, for Ransom, began and ended with his belief that the industrializing South was losing a way of life that gave rise to the capacity and ability to enjoy life aesthetically. In a letter to Allen Tate in April 1927, Ransom relayed the importance art and aesthetics held for him: “I subordinate always art to the aesthetic of life; its function is to initiate us into the aesthetic life, it is not for us the final end.”⁸⁹ For the Agrarians, culture was not abstract. It was “the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition.”⁹⁰ That definite social tradition, for the Agrarians, was embodied in the agrarianism of the Old South. As Albert Way put it: “these scholars cast the dichotomy between nature and culture in terms of the conflict between agrarian and industrial-based societies.” He concedes that the Agrarians romanticized rural life, but observed that “the connections between people and the land go a long way toward shaping ideas about the world, and these ideas, in turn, shape what we do with the world.”⁹¹

As the Agrarians saw it, the “life aesthetic” was available only to those who had a proper attitude toward nature: “...that rare and simple attitude which we call the love of nature. And that means the love of anything for itself.”⁹² Appreciating nature was possible in an agrarian society because it was built on the right values which helped one

⁸⁹ *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom* (April 3 and 13, 1927), 173.

⁹⁰ *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand*, xlv.

⁹¹ Way, “A World Properly Put Together,” 37.

⁹² John Crowe Ransom, “Classical and Romantic,” *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 8 (September 14, 1929), 127.

understand that the purpose of life was not to acquire, but to contemplate. This belief leads us to the third dialectic the Agrarians employed to distinguish an agrarian from an industrial society. An agrarian society promoted an *appreciation* of nature while an industrial society promoted the *use* of nature. The agrarian view of nature was aesthetic; the industrial view was scientific. Instead of “disinterested observation,” industrialism encouraged only the use of nature: “Science is pragmatic and bent only in using nature. Scientific knowledge is no more than the uses of nature.”⁹³ And that use was destructive: “...we fix upon the horse-power that is stored in the waterfall, the heat that is stored in the forest, the protection for the skin that is stored in the fox’s fur. These are all destructive fixations...”⁹⁴

The worship of science, the Agrarians held, follows one of industrialism’s most closely held values: the belief in the unqualified good of progress. In “The South Defends Its Heritage,” Ransom crystallizes succinctly the dangers of placing one’s faith in the concept of progress: “The American progressive principle was like a ball rolling down the hill with an increasing momentum; and by 1890 or 1900 it was clear to any intelligent Southerner that it was a principle of boundless aggression against nature that could hardly offer much hospitality to a society devoted to the arts of peace.”⁹⁵ The Southern society in Ransom’s essay differed sharply from that of the New South advocates, tireless promoters of industry and commercial interests in the South since the end of the Civil War. Richard H. Edmonds, one of the foremost New South spokesmen, wrote in 1888 that “the easy-going days of the South have passed away, never to return...The South has learned that ‘time is money.’” Mark Twain described this New South type in his *Life on*

⁹³ Ransom, “Classical and Romantic,” 127.

⁹⁴ Ransom, *God Without Thunder*, 136.

⁹⁵ Ransom, “The South Defends Its Heritage,” 114.

the Mississippi, published in 1883: “Brisk men, energetic of movement and speech; the dollar their god, how to get it their religion.” The author of an 1885 manual instructing Southerners on the new ways pointed out “the commercial value of the Ten Commandments” and that social calls could be “paying investments.” For teachers, he had this vision of the future:

The educator of the future will teach his pupils what will pay best. He will teach them the art of turning one’s brains into money. He will not teach dead languages, obsolete formulas, and bric-a-brac sciences...which are never used in the ordinary transactions of the forum, the office, the shop, or the farm.⁹⁶

“Progressivists”—the Agrarians’ term for their contemporary New South advocates who were often the target for their arguments—continued to promote these views. It was the rampant utilitarian attitude inherent in industrialism—the uncritical worship of applied science as the engine for progress, where progress was cast as material gain—that the Agrarians felt amplified the ill effects of industrialism on nature. They believed that those values which lay beneath industrialism would have profound, deleterious effects on the South. As Worster points out in his discussion of the third level at which environmental history proceeds:

People are continually constructing cognitive maps of the world around them, defining what a resource is, determining which sorts of behavior may be environmentally degrading and ought to be prohibited, and generally choosing the ends to which nature is put. Such patterns of human perception, ideology, and value have often been highly consequential, moving with all the power of great sheets of glacial ice, grinding and pushing, reorganizing and recreating the surface of the planet.⁹⁷

As intellectuals, the Agrarians understood the power of ideas and, through *I’ll Take My Stand*, sought to use those ideas to impede the encroaching glacier. Their words may have turned out, ultimately, to be impotent weapons against the industrialism

⁹⁶ Quoted in *Origins of the New South*, 153-154.

⁹⁷ Worster, “Transformations of the Earth,” 1091.

impinging on the South, but they were prescient in pointing out the dangers of an unbridled industrialism. Like Worster's "great sheets of glacial ice," the values underlying industrialism have had a powerful impact on society and, especially, on the environment. The scale and pace of that impact in producing environmental degradation—a by-product of efforts to feed consumerism in the 20th century—are unprecedented in human history, as John McNeil has masterfully demonstrated in his book, *Something New Under the Sun*.⁹⁸ In his review of *I'll Take My Stand* in 1931, Arthur Krock noted that the Agrarians were "but Cassandra predicting the dismal fates in store."⁹⁹ The Agrarians would come to be seen as prophets, but would suffer Cassandra's fate: they would predict the future to an incredulous audience. An audience composed of those in sympathy with the tenets of environmentalism might not have been so incredulous.

Some might look at the Agrarians as engaged in a second "Lost Cause," but that may be too dismissive. If one ponders the state of affairs for the South in 1930, one can glimpse a point in history where multiple futures for the South were possible. Donald Davidson related the importance of their struggle to him in 1959:

To me, personally, the most important thing is that we were willing to wrestle with difficult, very serious matters; that we felt, somehow, that we inescapably must, and could, grapple with the questions before us, as if our lives depended on it, and would be cowards not to try; that we all felt great joy; *elation* in having a chance to get into the fight—in *making* a chance, if we didn't *have* one.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ John McNeil, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

⁹⁹ Arthur Krock, "Industrialism and the Agrarian Tradition in the South," *New York Times Book Review* (January 4, 1931), 3.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in *The Making and Meaning of I'll Take My Stand*, 267. Emphasis in the original.

Tate anticipated the derision that their ideas would produce, but viewed their struggle from the critic's perspective:

At the outset, of course, the question of "lost causes" would come up...The trouble is that Americans are afraid of any idea of which the immediate fruition in action is not clear. Any coherent point of view, whether it have (sic) any chance of practical success or not, becomes a valuable instrument of criticism. The chief virtue of such a stand is to make contemporary abuses stand forth for what they are...No cause is lost so long as it can sustain a few people in the formulation of truths."¹⁰¹

Ransom, in the vocabulary of his dualistic aesthetic framework, wrote to Tate about the need for devotion to a cause:

...Orientalism is the attempt to confront the pure Objectivity of the world, while Occidentalism is the attempt to subjectify and possess the world. The one is mere Nihilism which...will curl up and quit without even trying; the other is pure Will and Rotarian Optimism which does not admit defeat, does not recognize tragedy, and fools itself like a kid with its toys when it contemplates its apparent successes. What we require as intelligences is the conflict of the two principles. We have to be devoted and even scarred in a cause, and yet even then admit the presumptuousness of it.¹⁰²

Years later Tate wrote Davidson about a review that appeared in *The New Republic* by Ransom of T. S. Eliot's *Collected Poems*. The review prompted Tate's introspection on his Agrarian beliefs. Ransom and Tate had long disagreed regarding the merits of Eliot's poetry, "But," as Tate wrote, "there was one extremely good point:"

He alluded to our old views of the late twenties when we were rebelling against modernism, and pointed out that we never got much further than Nostalgia because no historic faith came into consideration. I think there's a great deal in that. We were trying to find a religion in the secular, historical experience as such, particularly in the Old South.

¹⁰¹ *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (February 18, 1929), 224.

¹⁰² *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom* (Spring 1927), 164.

I would now go further than John and say we were idolaters. But it is better to be an idolater than to worship nothing, and as far as our old religion went I still believe in it.¹⁰³

At the time *I'll Take My Stand* was published, 75% of Southerners were still engaged in agriculture. This means that there was, in fact, a choice. It was not so much a return to the land that was required. What the Agrarians were advocating was a careful consideration—*choosing*—whether the South should embrace the values that permeated a life lived in an industrial society or those inherent in its agrarian tradition. As the Agrarians set out in their “Statement of Principles,” if they recognized the inherent danger to the South of embracing industrialism, would they not be cowards for failing to defend a superior way of life against the industrial glacier? The specific articulation of that superior way of life, the southern tradition, would have to wait for Richard Weaver, a Southern Agrarian disciple, to make manifest in his book, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*.

¹⁰³ Allen Tate to Donald Davidson, January 14, 1953, in Donald Davidson Papers, Box 14, Folder 7, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

CHAPTER 3

Richard Weaver and the Southern Tradition

Richard Weaver once described himself as an “Agrarian in exile.” His importance to this study lies in the part he played in developing neo-Agrarian thought. The latter became associated with traditionalist conservatism characterized by skepticism of centralized government, espousal of Judeo Christian principles, and the contention that the restoration of piety was paramount, especially piety toward nature.¹ This “right” attitude toward nature has been described by John Bliese, author of *The Greening of Conservative America*, as “a solid basis for environmental protection and conservation of natural resources.”² Weaver became part of a nascent conservative movement in the United States in the 1950s led by William F. Buckley. He believed that the South represented the last bastion of humanist virtues—“*the last non-materialist civilization in the Western World.*”³ Extending Agrarian arguments, he extolled the Southern Tradition as an antidote to the evils of modernism. This chapter will trace the influence of the Agrarians on Weaver, show how he extended Agrarianism, and how, as a southern conservative, he expressed views of nature that are compatible with contemporary environmentalism.

Weaver’s historical significance is based on his influence on the conservative movement in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s. He is recognized as one of

¹ Quoted in *The Politics of Rhetoric: Richard M. Weaver and the Conservative Tradition*, Bernard K. Duffy and Martin Jacobi (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 5.

² John R. E. Bliese, “Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature,” *Modern Age* (Spring, 2007), 102.

³ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. by George Core and M. E. Bradford (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 44. Emphasis in the original.

the leading figures who contributed to building the foundation for an intellectual conservative movement after World War II.⁴ His conservative status is largely based on his book, *Ideas Have Consequences*, published in 1948. George Nash wrote that the “outraged response to it [*Ideas Have Consequences*] suggests its true significance: probably more than any other book in the early postwar years, *Ideas Have Consequences* starkly revealed the chasm dividing the intellectual Right and Left.”⁵ Willmoore Kendall’s review of *Ideas Have Consequences* in 1949 gave voice to the chasm. He wrote that “Mr. Weaver rarely calls his real enemy, the more or less typical American liberal, by name...” He goes on to exhort Weaver to “confine the discussion to the major issues...because if we can win the major engagements we can send out some of our less talented combatants to mop up.” He ends by endorsing Weaver to lead conservatives: “Mr. Weaver has one vote for the captaincy of the anti-liberal team.”⁶

Weaver’s influence on traditional conservatism continues to the present. In 1970, Frank Meyer described *Ideas Have Consequences* as the “fons et origo [source and origin] of the contemporary American conservative movement.”⁷ Henry Regnery wrote in 1975 that “*Ideas Have Consequences*, nearly thirty years after its publication, is still in print, is still being read, and still has much to say to us...”⁸ A 1986 review of *Ideas Have*

⁴ According to George Nash, two other leading figures in the American conservative intellectual movement were F.A. Hayek who wrote *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944, and Russell Kirk who wrote *The Conservative Mind* in 1953. McDonald asserted that the “publication of three books in close succession, Richard Weaver’s *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948), Peter Viereck’s *Conservatism Revisited* (1949), and [Russell] Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind* (1953), marked the beginning of the shift in emphasis of American conservatism away from the atomistic individualism of the libertarians toward a deeper appreciation of man’s social nature. See especially Chapter 2, “The Revolt Against the Masses,” in George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American Since 1945* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996, 3rd edition) and W. Wesley McDonald, *Russell Kirk and the Age of Ideology* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 29-30.

⁵ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in American Since 1945*, 35.

⁶ Willmoore Kendall, “Book Reviews,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February, 1949), 260-261.

⁷ Frank Meyer, “Richard M. Weaver: An Appreciation,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 14 (Summer-Fall, 1970), 243.

⁸ Henry Regnery, “The Age of Liberalism,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring 1975), 121.

Consequences in the *Christian Science Monitor* contended that, given ideas like the “Global Village” and the ascendancy of a visual mass media, “Weaver’s analysis is even more important” and that “Richard Weaver should be required reading in the Global Village.”⁹ Simon Francis described Weaver as one of the “Beautiful Losers” in an introduction entitled “Ideas and No Consequences.” Beautiful Losers were “Old Right” conservatives who assumed “that it was only a matter of time before their own beliefs would creep up on the ideas of the Left, slit their throats in the dark, and stage an intellectual and cultural coup d’état, after which truth would reign.”¹⁰ Eugene Genovese, who is generally considered a Marxist scholar, wrote in *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* in 1996 that he found that *Ideas Have Consequences* “eerily echoed...both ‘Marx’s *Capital* and Lenin’s *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.’”¹¹ Finally, in 2005, Jeffrey Hart, in *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, quoted a Weaver essay published in *National Review* to illustrate that “Richard Weaver had the capability of handling intricate but important topics with ease, making him nearly unique in weekly journalism.”¹² Hart’s conclusion was that “[T]he passage of fifty years has rendered Weaver’s...words only more urgent.”¹³

As a regular writer for publications such as *National Review* and *Modern Age*, Weaver was an opinion leader for the Right. But that position does not necessarily translate into influence on contemporary conservative politicians. As a traditionalist

⁹ D’Evelyn, “The Power and Purpose of Language,” 23.

¹⁰ Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 2.

¹¹ Young, *Richard M. Weaver 1910-1963*, 104-105.

¹² Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and its Times* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2005), 59.

¹³ Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind*, 60.

conservative, Weaver's influence is best seen in his articulation of a foundation for conservatism in an age when progressive thought and New Deal politics were firmly in control of American politics. However, Austin Bramwell, in an article in *The American Conservative*, makes the point that, although the Right has become such a potent force in American politics today, its "intellectual challenge to the Left has diminished."¹⁴ He goes on to argue that young conservatives now "inherit" their conservative ideas through "generously funded seminars and think-tank internships, they study the canon of conservative thought: *The Road to Serfdom, Ideas Have Consequences, Capitalism and Freedom, The Conservative Mind...*" This conservative canon—written before 1970—"defines the ideology they are charged with advancing."¹⁵ So Weaver remains an influential conservative figure even for young conservatives today.

Weaver was born in North Carolina in 1910, spent the next 34 years in the South, and died in Chicago in 1963. He entered the University of Kentucky in 1927 where, by his third year, he had been convinced that "the future was with science, liberalism, and equalitarianism..."¹⁶ A committed socialist upon his graduation in 1932, he joined the American Socialist Party and served as the secretary of the local party. He actively campaigned for Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party candidate for President in that same year. As he described it, he quickly became disillusioned with the Left after these "first practical" steps.¹⁷ Weaver began to have doubts regarding liberalism and socialism as he began his study for a Master's Degree in English Literature at Vanderbilt. There he

¹⁴ Austin Bramwell, "Defining Conservatism Down," *The American Conservative* (August 29, 2005), 1. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from http://www.amconmag.com/2005/2005_08_29/print/coverprint.html.

¹⁵ Bramwell, "Defining Conservatism Down," 2.

¹⁶ Richard M. Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," *Modern Age*, 6 (Winter 1958-59), 22.

¹⁷ Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," 22.

studied under John Crowe Ransom, who directed his Master's program, and Donald Davidson.

Although he was an avowed socialist at the time that he came under the Agrarians' influence, even contributing combat boots to the partisans fighting the Civil War in Spain, doubts nagged at his convictions.¹⁸ He found himself drawn to his Vanderbilt professors in a way that he did not experience with his fellow socialists. He later relayed that "I could not like the members of the movement as *persons*. They seemed dry, insistent people, of shallow objectives..." The Agrarians, in contrast, were much more to his liking: "It began to dawn upon me uneasily that perhaps the right way to judge a movement was by the persons who made it up rather than by its rationalistic perfection and by the promises it held." He found the "intellectual maturity and personal charm of the Agrarians...very unsettling..." and, though he disagreed with their doctrine, he "liked them all as persons."¹⁹ He later completed the conversion to conservatism, an experience he chronicled in his essay, "Up from Liberalism," after he had left Vanderbilt and the Agrarians.

He had taken a post teaching at Texas A&M in 1937 where he "encountered a rampant philistinism, abetted by technology, large-scale organization, and a complacent acceptance of success as the goal of life."²⁰ After three years at Texas A&M he decided to leave "the uncongenial job and went off to start my education over..."²¹ The place he chose to restart his education was Louisiana State University, where he had aspirations of studying with the Agrarian Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, another Vanderbilt

¹⁸ Fred Douglas Young, *Richard M. Weaver 1910-1963: A Life of the Mind* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 63.

¹⁹ Weaver, "Up From Liberalism," 22.

²⁰ Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," 24.

²¹ Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," 24.

alumnus. His application for a graduate fellowship at LSU makes clear his intentions: “My travels have made me a Southern nationalist rather than an internationalist, and I now want to do an important piece of research in the history of my section.”²² That important piece of research was his doctoral dissertation completed in 1943, *The Confederate South, 1865-1910;[sic] a Study in the Survival of a Mind and a Culture*.²³ Weaver used Southern voices as articulated in letters, diaries, essays, military memoirs, fiction, and reminiscences to reveal the mind of a defeated people in the post-bellum South. He mined the same primary sources that later historians of the South would use, for example, journals like *De Bow’s Review*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, and *Southern Quarterly Review*. He included writings from figures like Mary Chestnut, Augusta Jane Evans, James Henry Hammond, John Calhoun, Harriet Martineau, and Albert Taylor Bledsoe. He also included a chapter on post-bellum literature featuring both interpretations of literary “apologists” like Thomas Nelson Page and “critical realists” like George W. Cable. This work laid the foundation for his intellectual thought and reflects that, as a scholar, Weaver rarely used secondary sources.²⁴

In the acknowledgement of his dissertation, Richard Weaver thanked John Crowe Ransom “for first awakening his interest in ‘the Lost Cause.’” The dedication to his dissertation read: “To John Crowe Ransom subtle doctor.” He also wrote that he was indebted to Robert Penn Warren “for steady encouragement and fruitful suggestions.”²⁵ His words reflect the role the Agrarians played in forming the intellectual foundation of

²² Quoted in Ted J. Smith, III, “How *Ideas Have Consequences* Came to be Written,” *Steps Toward Restoration: The Consequences of Richard Weaver’s Ideas*, Ted J. Smith, III, ed. (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1998), 12.

²³ “Examination and Thesis Report,” Richard Malcolm Weaver, Box 6, Dissertation, in Richard M. Weaver Papers, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

²⁴ Young, *Richard M. Weaver 1910-1963*, 65.

²⁵ Dissertation of Richard M. Weaver, Box 6, Folder 11 in Richard M. Weaver Papers, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

his work. In a letter to a friend in 1945, Weaver announced that his dissertation would be published by the University of North Carolina Press, but he was disappointed when it was rejected in 1946 after the director of the press, William T. Couch, moved to the University of Chicago Press. Thus, an important source that reflects the influence of the Agrarians on Weaver's thought was left unpublished until 1968, five years after his death.²⁶ In his review of *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, Paul C. Nagel noted the strong overtones of Agrarianism: "In this new book we have a posthumous publication which is best described as a postscript to the story of the Agrarians."²⁷

Weaver begins *The Southern Tradition at Bay* by defining tradition as a recognizable pattern of belief and behavior transmitted from one generation to the next. The Southern Tradition, according to Weaver, had a "four fold root." First, there was the theme of order. The Southern Tradition sprang from a feudal theory of society that had a rigid social caste system where each caste occupied a particular place and understood that place. The feudal society was derivative of Europe but also an original product of organic growth in America. Relations between castes were informed by a sense of obligation and duty. One result of this hierarchical system was the existence of a self-conscious aristocratic class. This takes us to the second theme. Honor, embodied in a code of chivalry, was the guiding principle of conduct for the aristocratic class. This ethic was manifested as a spirit the foundation of which was "to speak the truth, to succor the helpless, and never to turn back from an enemy."²⁸ Weaver's third theme was the ancient concept of the gentleman, which presupposed a stable social order and a system of class

²⁶ Ted J. Smith, III, "How *Ideas Have Consequences* Came to be Written," 16-18.

²⁷ Paul C. Nagel, review of "The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (August, 1969), 395.

²⁸ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, George Core and M. E. Bradford, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989), 44.

education to promote virtue and instill “magnificence, magnanimity, and liberality.”²⁹ Finally, the South practiced an “older religiousness.” Weaver’s roots of the Southern Tradition are derivative of the Southern values outlined in *I’ll Take My Stand* and other Agrarian writings. Ransom’s “Reconstructed but Unregenerate” and his other similar essays argued for the European link to the Old South as well as the ordered society where *noblesse oblige* was practiced by the gentleman. Ransom’s *God Without Thunder* extolled the virtues of religious orthodoxy.

The subject of the South and the Southern Tradition was a lifelong preoccupation for Weaver. One author has written that throughout his career, Weaver was trying to explain the South to non-Southerners.³⁰ Beyond *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, Weaver returned to the subject throughout his career. His first essay, “The Older Religiousness in the South,” was published in 1943. In 1944, he published two essays, “The South and the Revolution of Nihilism” and “Albert Taylor Bledsoe.” In 1945, he published “Southern Chivalry and Total War” and in 1948 he published “Lee the Philosopher.” In the 1950s, he wrote five essays on Southern topics including two specifically about the Agrarians, “Agrarianism in Exile” and “The Tennessee Agrarians.” Donald Davidson provided nine typewritten pages of notes and a three-page letter to Weaver on “Agrarianism in Exile” in response to Weaver’s request for review of a draft of the article.³¹ In all, Weaver published fourteen essays on themes related to the South and the Southern Tradition.³²

²⁹ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 31-32.

³⁰ John R. E. Bliese, “Richard M. Weaver: Conservative Rhetorician,” *Modern Age* Vol. 21 (Fall 1977), 377.

³¹ Donald Davidson to Richard Weaver, March 25, 1949, in Richard M. Weaver papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Vanderbilt University – Special Collections & University Archives.

³² For a compilation of Weaver’s Southern essays see *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, George M. Curtis, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987).

Throughout his life, returning again and again to Southern topics, he remained consistent in his fundamental arguments.³³

Mark Malvasi summarized the fundamental arguments of *The Southern Tradition at Bay*. In his analysis, Malvasi maintained that, for Weaver, the South stood as a remedy to modernism: “The sense of obligation, humility, honor, and faith embodied in the southern tradition offered the most complete image of a Christian community in the modern world and thus held out the only humane promise of sparing Western civilization a cataclysmic end.”³⁴ Malvasi wrote that *The Southern Tradition at Bay* represented Weaver’s effort to systematically reevaluate the southern intellectual tradition, and claimed that Weaver was the first scholar to make such an attempt.³⁵ Weaver posited that the South and its tradition stood alone in offering an alternative vision to the modern forces of rationalism, positivism, and science. Based on their religiosity—for Weaver, belief governed by dogma—Southerners resisted materialism and remained unconvinced that the purpose of life was the acquisition of wealth. Weaver’s vanquished preachers, soldiers, politicians, novelists, diarists, and Southern women amplified this dictum. And they knew better than to expect limitless progress in human affairs. Their history had taught them the folly of such a worldview.

The dissertation represented Weaver’s efforts to tie together the disparate strands of influence of his Agrarian mentors—the cultural critiques embodied in the interpretations of religion and myth by John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate to Donald

³³ Young, *Richard M. Weaver 1910-1963*, 77.

³⁴ Mark G. Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South: The Agrarian Thought of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 232.

³⁵ Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South*, 225.

Davidson's Southern sectionalism.³⁶ The South, in Weaver's telling, continued to reflect values from feudal times. The modern world, in contrast, reflected values that led to the anonymity and irresponsibility of the mass man, the preeminence of materialism that reduced man to consumer, the erosion of morals and the collapse of community, and the rampant skepticism that destroyed religious orthodoxy.³⁷

A number of scholars have written about the influence of the Agrarians on the intellectual development of Weaver. Malvasi referred to Weaver as "a defender of the faith" who liberated the southern tradition from critics keen to debase it, and who clarified and elaborated the Agrarians' original ideas.³⁸ M. E. Bradford posited that Weaver identified with Agrarian thought through *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, as well as the essays specifically about the Agrarians. According to Bradford, Weaver's assertion that the tradition of the South was a powerful cultural model to be imitated by modern society had its lineage in Agrarian thought. Bradford wrote that just "[a] brief glance" at the Agrarians "should leave few doubts" among those who read both Weaver and the Agrarians that "a connection exists." He goes on to list the essays Weaver wrote that he considered closest to the Agrarians. Among those he listed were "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy," "The South and the American Union," "The Southern Tradition," and "The Regime of the South." Bradford asserted that only a Southerner schooled by the Nashville Agrarians would write such essays. He described Weaver's emphases on roots, memory, regionalism, immutable human differences, and "the right of a regime to protect itself" as reflecting the influence of the Agrarians. The "common denominator" for Weaver and the

³⁶ Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 157-158.

³⁷ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 157.

³⁸ Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South*, 224.

Agrarians was their revulsion of atomistic individualism run amok and “therefore of the arrangements (economic, political, pedagogical, and aesthetic)” that create such rampant individualism.³⁹

Michael Kreyling wrote about Ransom’s influence on Weaver in *Inventing Southern Literature*. He alluded to Ransom’s *God Without Thunder* and his Agrarian essays as pivotal to Weaver’s conversion from liberalism.⁴⁰ Weaver himself wrote about the influence that Ransom had on him while a student at Vanderbilt University. Weaver described Ransom’s powers as a teacher in a somewhat mystical light in “Up From Liberalism:”

Of the large number of students who have felt his influence, I doubt whether any could tell how he worked his effects. If one judged solely by outward motions and immediate results, he seems neither to work very hard at teaching nor to achieve much success. But he had the gift of dropping live seeds into minds. Long after the date of a lecture—a week, a month, a year—you would find some remark of his troubling you with its pregnancy, and you would set about your own reflections upon it, often wishing that you had the master at hand to give another piece of insight.⁴¹

Weaver went on to relate “[t]he idea of Ransom’s which chiefly took possession of me at this time was that of the ‘unorthodox defense of orthodoxy.’” He would later write that *God Without Thunder* was the “profoundest of books to come out of the Agrarian movement.”⁴² Weaver also related the Agrarian ideas that were beginning to influence him: “I felt a powerful pull in the direction of the Agrarian ideal of the individual in

³⁹ M. E. Bradford, “The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver: Beginnings and Completions,” *Modern Age*, 14 (Summer-Fall, 1970), 253.

⁴⁰ Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 23.

⁴¹ Weaver, “Up from Liberalism,” 23.

⁴² Richard M. Weaver, “Agrarianism in Exile,” *Sewanee Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1950), 592.

contact with the rhythms of nature, of the small-property holding, and of the society of pluralistic organization.”⁴³

Paul Murphy also argued that Weaver’s thought was “deeply” influenced by Ransom, especially his “philosophical musings on religion and poetry.” He pointed to Ransom’s “philosophical bent” as shaping Weaver’s thought using “The Revolt Against Humanism,” Weaver’s master’s thesis written under Ransom, as evidence. Murphy claimed that Weaver’s critique “relied heavily on Ransom’s own philosophical proclivities.” In the thesis, Weaver argued that “art did not teach simple moral lessons; it illuminated deep sources of value in human experience.”⁴⁴ It is easy to see the source of such a statement as the writings of the Fugitive-Agrarians. Murphy also used Weaver’s acclaim of *God Without Thunder* to demonstrate its sway on him. Of Ransom’s book, Weaver had written: “To say...that this is one of the most original books written by an American is almost to underpraise it.” Murphy asserted that Ransom’s view of myth in religion was especially influential on Weaver.⁴⁵

“Agrarianism in Exile,” Murphy wrote, “displays the influence of Ransom and Tate in both their Agrarian and post-Agrarian, New Critical phases.” The influence is demonstrated, in part, by Weaver’s acceptance of Tate’s view of Agrarianism as a type of Christian humanism. Pointing to Ransom’s idea in *God Without Thunder* that myth represented “ultimate truth,” he quoted Weaver’s contention that “man requires some conception of the absolute to maintain his humanity.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Weaver, “Up from Liberalism,” 23.

⁴⁴ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 155.

⁴⁵ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 156.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 168.

Weaver maintained the importance of orthodox religion to the South and in this, too, he followed Ransom and Tate. Louis Rubin touched upon the idea of the centrality of religion to the South in his study of southern literature (1865-1920). Rubin wrote that the southern attitude was “basically religious in nature.” Kreyling suggested that this was a view emphasized by both Ransom and Tate in *I’ll Take My Stand* and reiterated by Weaver.⁴⁷ For Weaver, “religiosity” was less about going to church and more about accepting a body of religious dogma. In Weaver’s 1952 essay, “Aspect of the Southern Philosophy,” he described the Southerner’s religiosity as based upon “not a neat set of moralities but a deep and even frightening intuition of man’s radical dependence in this world.”⁴⁸

Murphy traced the influence of Tate on Weaver’s conception of “religiosity,” citing Tate’s belief that religion is rational in the sense that it is a product of the mind, but also is based on “an elemental perception of the pure flux of nature.”⁴⁹ Murphy contended that Weaver, influenced by Tate’s understanding of religion, “believed that ‘experience,’ the modernist notion of the flux of pure sensation, was the source of all value.” Following in the intellectual footsteps of the Agrarians, Weaver saw in Agrarianism a defense of Christianity.⁵⁰

Kreyling contended that Weaver “imitated his elders,” Ransom and Tate. As evidence, he cited Weaver’s essay “The Older Religiousness in the South,” as reflecting the “strong influence” of Ransom’s *God Without Thunder* and Tate’s *I’ll Take My Stand*

⁴⁷ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 68.

⁴⁸ Richard Weaver, “Aspects of the Southern Philosophy,” in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, George M. Curits, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 6.

⁴⁹ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 164.

⁵⁰ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 147.

essay, "Remarks on the Southern Religion."⁵¹ One can see the imitation that Kreyling referenced in Weaver's essay. Ransom's discussion of myth versus science is used by Weaver to argue the rationale for the Southerner's religiosity:

It seems an inescapable inference that in the sphere of religion the Southerner has always been hostile to the spirit of inquiry. He felt that a religion which is intellectual only is no religion. His was a natural piety, expressing itself in uncritical belief and in the experience of conversion, not in an ambition to perfect a system, or to tidy up a world doomed to remain forever deceptive, changeful, and evil. For him a moral science made up of postulates and deductions and taking no cognizance of the inscrutable designs of Providence and the ineluctable tragedies of private lives was no substitute.⁵²

He then argued that the Southern people's way of thinking about religion was dogmatic: "...it was a simple acceptance of a body of belief, an innocence of protest and schism by which religion was left one of the unquestioned and unquestionable supports of the general settlement under which men live...[W]hat [the average Southerner] recognized was the acknowledgement, the submissiveness of the will, and that general respect for order, natural and institutional, which is piety." For the Southerner, religion possessed the "character of divine revelation."⁵³ Weaver claimed that "all classes in the South" viewed religion as a sentiment. Weaver's discussion of religious sects made clear that for him, the South was Protestant. Religion was not the basis for social reform, but "a great conservative agent..."⁵⁴ He wrote, "...the Southerner clung stubbornly to the belief

⁵¹ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 28-29.

⁵² Richard Weaver, "The Older Religiousness in the South," in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, George M. Curits, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 148.

⁵³ Weaver, "The Older Religiousness of the South," 135-136.

⁵⁴ Weaver, "The Older Religiousness of the South," 141.

that a certain portion of life must remain inscrutable” and that “reason cannot here be a standard of interpretation.”⁵⁵

Referring to the “conservative religionist” of New England, in contrast to the Southern religionist, Weaver wrote that “[I]nstead of insisting upon a simple grammar of assent, which a proper regard for the mysteries would dictate, they conceived it their duty to explore principles, and when they had completed the exploration, they came out, not with a secured faith, but with an ethical philosophy, which illuminated much, but which had none of the binding power of the older creed.” He alluded to Tate’s “Religion and the Old South” essay from *I’ll Take My Stand*, pointing out Tate’s argument that the “Southerner desired above all else in religion... a fine set of images to contemplate... The contemplation of these images was in itself a discipline in virtue, which had the effect of building up in him an inner restraint.”⁵⁶

Weaver's argument about the orthodoxy of religion in the South led to a discussion of the attitude toward nature which he claimed such a religious orientation would produce. This argument echoes Ransom’s ideas in *God Without Thunder*:

Man cannot live under a settled dispensation if the postulates of his existence must be continually revised in accordance with knowledge furnished by a nature filled with contingencies. Nature is a vast unknown; in the science of nature there are constantly appearing emergents which, if allowed to affect spiritual and moral verities, would destroy them by rendering them dubious, tentative, and conflicting. It is therefore imperative in the eyes of the older religionists that man have for guidance in this life a body of knowledge to which the ‘facts’ of natural discovery are either subordinate or irrelevant. This body is the ‘rock of ages,’ firm in the vast sea of human passion and error. Moral truth is not something which can be altered every time science widens its field of induction. If moral

⁵⁵ Weaver, “The Older Religiousness of the South,” 138.

⁵⁶ Weaver, “The Older Religiousness in the South,” 136-137, 141.

philosophy must wait upon natural philosophy, all moral judgments become temporary, relative, and lacking in those sanctions which alone make them effective.⁵⁷

Weaver used the Scopes trial to point out the difference in religious faith of the North (specifically, Emerson's New England) and the South: "In the present century, when publicity attending the theory of evolution forced the issue, there was widespread amazement that legislatures representing sovereign states were prepared to vote revealed knowledge precedence over natural, for such, in a broad way of viewing the matter, is the significance of the anti-evolution laws. This could not have surprised anyone who knew the tradition, for in the South there had never been any impeachment of 'the Word,' and science had not usurped the seats of the prophets."⁵⁸ The Southern Tradition, in Weaver's view, distinguished the South from the rest of the country. And a foundational tenet of that tradition was a literal, fundamental faith in God. A faith that could not be shaken by the rationalism of science.

Weaver's work throughout his career extended the Agrarian enterprise. Genovese wrote that Weaver provided Agrarianism "its most comprehensive theoretical formulation after the Second World War."⁵⁹ M. E. Bradford has argued that Weaver brought to completion the work of the Agrarians. This accomplishment was realized by delineating the Agrarians' positions in terms of the first principles which shaped them and by offering a metaphysical system as a context for understanding Agrarianism.⁶⁰ Like the Agrarians' complaint that the artist was a stranger in his native land, Weaver wrote about the absence of any serious work in philosophy in the South: "Candor compels its

⁵⁷ Weaver, "The Older Religiousness in the South," 142.

⁵⁸ Weaver, "The Older Religiousness in the South," 143.

⁵⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 6.

⁶⁰ Bradford, "The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver," 150-151.

sons to admit that the South, despite its great contributions to the founding of the American republic, has never done much thinking of the purely speculative kind.”⁶¹ In *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, Weaver had argued that the South was “right,” but, lacking a philosophical system, it was in the position of being “right without realizing the grounds of its rightness.”⁶² This lack of a positive metaphysics, in Weaver’s view, left the South unable to respond rationally to the corrosive affect of modernism on its traditions.⁶³ In “Agrarianism in Exile,” Weaver referred to H. L. Mencken’s provocative essay, “Sahara of the Bozart,” that had disparaged the South, and stated that Mencken “could have made a better case than he did by pointing to its philosophical barrenness...” Weaver bemoaned the dearth of “analytical writing” and the “pitifully small” departments of philosophy among Southern universities. For Weaver, “[t]he bane of Southern writing has been an infatuation with surfaces.” He went on to claim that Agrarianism offered “not just a sociology, but an aesthetic, an ethic, and perhaps also a metaphysic.”⁶⁴

In *Ideas Have Consequences*, arguably Weaver’s best-known work, he asserted that culture was a philosophical system rather than social customs or practices. Weaver focused on philosophy over economics, and argued that the alienation of modern man was the result of the secularism, egalitarianism, and atomism fomented by the liberalism of the post-Enlightenment tradition.⁶⁵ This assertion marked a different approach to ideas about culture and the South than those held by his mentor. Weaver’s thought travelled

⁶¹ Richard Weaver, “Agrarianism in Exile,” *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, George M. Curtis, III and James J. Thompson, Jr., eds. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 35.

⁶² Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 388.

⁶³ Lawrence J. Prelli, “Ideas Have Consequences as a Masterwork of Rhetoric,” *Steps Toward Restoration: The Consequences of Richard Weaver’s Ideas*, Ted J. Smith III, ed. (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1998), 127.

⁶⁴ Weaver, “Agrarianism in Exile,” 593, 601.

⁶⁵ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 166.

from the sophistication of Ransom's view to the more deeply held Southern identification of Donald Davidson. For Weaver, Southernness came to represent a deep source of values.⁶⁶ Paul Murphy has described this turn in Weaver's approach as a "neo-Agrarian position" that was crucial in altering the tenets of Agrarian thought. According to Murphy, "Weaver reinterpreted Agrarianism as a nonparticularist conservatism fundamentally concerned with issues of value."⁶⁷ For the Agrarians, the South was important for the concrete example it served to illuminate a superior way of life. For Weaver, the importance of the South was in its representation of a superior set of cultural values, "a set of myths that functioned to maintain social order and provide an agreeable way of life."⁶⁸ Kreyling asserted that neo-Agrarians sought to create a specific "southern cultural meaning" that valued "ethics over science... 'ancient virtues' over 'modern gains.'" He attributed this line of thought to Ransom and Tate, but argued it had been "refined" by Weaver.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 156.

⁶⁷ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 166. The Agrarians had long separated physically and intellectually by the time Weaver was reimagining Agrarianism. John Crowe Ransom, over a period of some ten years, had moved away from his view of Agrarianism. On June 8, 1937, Ransom wrote to Edwin Mims, chair of the English Department at Vanderbilt, that he had contributed "all I had to those movements [regionalism and agrarianism], and I have of late gone almost entirely into pure literary work. My group does not need me; in fact we are not an organized aggressive group anyway." Ransom repudiated the Agrarian position in a 1945 essay published in the *Kenyon Review* in a review of two essays that concerned whether religion or art could impact "the unhappy human condition that has arisen under the modern economy." Thomas Daniel Young, *Gentleman in a Dustcoat: A Biography of John Crowe Ransom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 264. Ransom wrote that the specialization of labor in the modern economy was not reversible. One must accept the modern circumstances, for "without consenting to division of labor, and hence modern society, we should have not only no effective science, invention, and scholarship, but nothing to speak of in art." Quoted in Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 88. Donald Davidson wrote to Allen Tate on October 3, 1945 that Ransom's "recanting from his Agrarian principles" was "a nasty sort of injury to his old friends." Ransom's "silence on anything but purely aesthetic issues" had already "severed his connections with his old friends" and that Ransom "had implicitly chosen a new alignment." He went on to write: "I deplore that, and have long since grieved over it much..." *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), 344.

⁶⁸ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 158.

⁶⁹ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 61.

Although he saw the South and the Southern Tradition as the last bastion of non-materialist values in the Western World, Weaver also diverged from the Agrarians in universalizing Southern values. Many of his essays dealt with the subject of the South, though his most famous writings, including *Ideas Have Consequences*, never mentioned the South. In these works he sought to establish Southern values as universal ideals—permanent values—and did so by taking them out of the context of the South. In this way, according to Murphy, Weaver “minimized the southernness” of Agrarianism.⁷⁰

Weaver played a decisive role in the American conservative movement of the 1950s by forging neo-Agrarianism as a strain of traditionalist conservatism. Murphy argued that the Agrarians’ attack on industrialism was replaced by “a traditionalist conservatism oriented around the image of the South as synecdoche for Christian orthodoxy and a patriarchal social order.”⁷¹ Weaver fashioned a political philosophy based on what he called social bond individualism, that is, the idea that an individual exists only in the context of a community. Murphy claimed that Weaver’s work reflected his effort to integrate divergent inclinations within Agrarian thought. It was an attempt to fill the gulf represented on one side by Donald Davidson’s “romantic southernism” and on the other side by Ransom’s and Tate’s “astringent intellectualism.”⁷² Kreyling placed Weaver in a lineage of southern conservatism: “From the...Twelve Southerners in the

⁷⁰ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 168. Others have also asserted that Weaver universalized Southern values beyond the South. See, for example, George Core and M. E. Bradford, “Preface” to Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), 10 and Lawrence J. Prelli, “Ideas Have Consequences as a Master Work of Rhetoric,” *Steps Toward Restoration*, 129.

⁷¹ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 255.

⁷² Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 150, 152.

late 1920s to Weaver's work in the 1940s and 1950s, the genealogy of a conservative southern intellectual and literary history runs true."⁷³

Weaver was actively engaged in the nascent American conservative movement of the 1950s. He was a contributor to William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *National Review* from its inception and continued to publish in that conservative journal until his death. He also was an early contributor for *Modern Age* where he served as an editorial adviser and associate editor. With his University of Chicago colleagues, Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, he served as editorial adviser to the *New Individualist Review* begun by Hayek's students in 1961.⁷⁴

Weaver's brand of conservatism was based on the primacy of Christian values; social order asserted through tradition, shared values, and moral strictures; and limited central government. Murphy argued that Weaver and other neo-Agrarians worked within a conservative coalition in part to resist the influence and values of a liberal nation. They saw the South as a bulwark of social order and morality.⁷⁵ In *Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*, Eugene Genovese pointed to Weaver as an apostle for what he called southern conservatism. He asserted that the characteristics of a southern conservatism reveal convictions that emanate from natural law which leads to a view that issues are fundamentally religious and moral: "It frankly accepts variety and mystery in nature and social relations..."⁷⁶ According to Genovese, there are particular perspectives that the southern conservative offers:

...opposition to finance capitalism and...the attempt to substitute the market for society itself; opposition

⁷³ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 31.

⁷⁴ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 167-168.

⁷⁵ Murphy, *The Rebuke of History*, 273.

⁷⁶ Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, 22.

to...radical individualism...support for broad property ownership and a market economy subject to socially determined moral restraints; adherence to a Christian individualism that condemns personal license and demands submission to a moral consensus rooted in elementary piety; and an insistence that every people must develop its own genius, based upon its special history, and must reject siren calls to an internationalism...that would eradicate local and national cultures and standards of personal conduct by reducing morals and all else to commodities.⁷⁷

There is also at least one intransigent problem for southern conservatives: the issue of race. Genovese believed that the issue of segregation was a “moral and political quagmire” from which southern conservatives struggled to extricate themselves. Although they did not violate principle, according to Genovese, they nonetheless misapprehended the place of blacks in the South. Black Southerners, Genovese claimed, were not “an unwelcome foreign presence” but “of the marrow.”⁷⁸

Weaver viewed segregation as a requirement for an ordered society in the South. Throughout his life, Weaver maintained a staunch defense of the Southern Tradition and especially the historic Southern order. As M. E. Bradford wrote, that defense led Weaver to “a dangerous public support of the South’s position in racial matters.”⁷⁹ Where Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren changed their views of segregation in the South, Weaver, like Donald Davidson, remained convinced that integration threatened the surviving Southern order. However, where Davidson was a vocal proponent of segregation, Weaver was a more nuanced critic of those who advocated for desegregation.

Weaver was cunning in his writings about race. For example, in his essay, “Life Without Prejudice,” Weaver used his interpretation of prejudice—a word pregnant with

⁷⁷ Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, 98.

⁷⁸ Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, 72.

⁷⁹ Bradford, “The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver,” 254.

meaning in 1957—to represent the view that prejudice was justified in that distinctions in society were necessary. However, he never explicitly linked his arguments to race or racial segregation in the South. In fact he never mentioned the issue of race or segregation at all.⁸⁰ Michael Kreyling criticized Weaver’s equally clever approach in the use of charged words like “integration” and “segregation” in his essay, “The Image of Culture,” in *Visions of Order*. Kreyling asserted that Weaver was using an accepted and understood code to depict a racist point of view: “Weaver is doing the rhetorician’s equivalent of flying a Confederate battle flag on his pickup truck.” Only his more “urbane verbal skill” separated Weaver from more overtly racist writers.⁸¹ Similarly, Nagel quoted *The Southern Tradition* to make the point that Weaver thought blacks were inferior and needed to be controlled: “...the impulse of the South’s segregation came from a ‘natural reverence for intellect and virtue’ so that ‘those of duller mental and moral sensibility’ could safely be controlled by a society cognizant of the evils inherent in the featureless mass.”⁸²

For the Agrarians and Weaver, the South and their version of the Southern Tradition represented the proper values that human communities should share. Those values were nonmaterialist, rooted in the past, based on an ordered society, and grounded in Christian religious belief. Several authors have noted that the Agrarians’ warnings about the impact of industrialism were prescient. Malvasi pointed to the Agrarians’ recognition of the “obvious” problem of unrelenting progress that had become evident at the close of the 20th century: “...they decried the mounting pressure for economic growth

⁸⁰ Richard M. Weaver, “Life Without Prejudice,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1957), 4.

⁸¹ Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, 178.

⁸² Nagel, review of *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 396.

and material prosperity even at the cost of political stability, social order, and nature.”⁸³ Genovese called the Agrarians “premature environmentalists” and cited “the rape of the environment” as a “leading theme” in *I’ll Take My Stand*. He wrote that the successors of the Agrarians, conservatives like Weaver, continued to denounce “the rape of nature by soulless economic systems.”⁸⁴ He then argued that in the Agrarians’ critique of the “capitalist exploitation of man and nature, lay a Christian world view.” To make this point, he quoted Allen Tate’s observations regarding slavery in the South:

The South, afflicted with the curse of slavery—a curse like that of Original Sin, for which no single person is responsible—had to be destroyed, the good along with the evil. The old order had a great deal of good, one of the “goods” being the result of the evil; for slavery itself entailed a certain responsibility which the capitalist employer in free societies did not need to exercise if it was not his will to do so...

The evil of slavery was twofold, for the “peculiar Institution” not only used human beings for a purpose for which God had not intended them; it made possible for the white man to misuse and exploit nature itself for his own power and glory.⁸⁵

Bradford wrote in 1970, a period of rising awareness about the devastating effects of industrialism on the environment, that “it is more or less difficult to write off Agrarian alarm concerning such aggression against nature at least more difficult than at any other time in the last four decades.” He went on to articulate the Agrarians’ view of nature as being “based on the assumption that external nature was *for* man’s use and keeping, to be

⁸³ Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South*, 151.

⁸⁴ Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, 13.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, 13-14.

cooperated with, not controlled (and certainly not remade into a refuge from peculiarly human responsibilities).”⁸⁶

In 2007, John Bliese, a conservative scholar, explicitly linked Weaver to environmentalism and, using Weaver’s writings, exhorted conservatives to adopt Weaver’s conception of piety toward nature as a foundation for conservatives to be environmentalists. Following Weaver’s example, “conservatives would be at the forefront of environmental protection: acting as careful stewards of the earth, preserving nature and the full range of God’s creatures, assuring all of us a healthy and unpolluted country.”⁸⁷ In his essay, “Richard Weaver and Piety Toward Nature,” Bliese cites Weaver’s conception of piety as the foundation for the right kind of conservative thinking about the environment.⁸⁸ He used Weaver’s essay, “The Southern Tradition,” which includes a description of the regional differences between North and South inherent in the contrast between attitudes toward nature. The importance of this difference, according to Weaver, “is a matter so basic to one’s outlook or philosophy of life that we often tend to overlook it.” In explicating the difference, Weaver, according to Bliese, gave the “most concise and complete statement” on his concept of piety:

The Southerner tends to look upon nature as something which is given and something which is finally inscrutable. This is equivalent to saying that he looks upon it as the creation of a Creator. There follows from this attitude an important deduction, which is that man has a duty of veneration toward nature and the natural. Nature is not something to be fought, conquered, and changed according to any human whims. To some extent, of course, it has to be used. But what man should seek in regard to nature is not a complete dominion but a *modus vivendi*—that is, a

⁸⁶ Bradford, “The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver,” 250-251.

⁸⁷ John R. E. Bliese, “Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature,” *Modern Age* Vol. 49, Issue 2 (Spring 2007), 109.

⁸⁸ Bliese, “Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature,” 102.

manner of living together, a coming to terms with something that was here before our time and will be here after it. The important corollary of this doctrine, it seems to me, is that man is not the lord of creation, with an omnipotent will, but a part of creation, with limitations, who ought to observe a decent humility in the face of the inscrutable.⁸⁹

Bliese connected Weaver's call for humility to the environmental historian Donald Worster's prescription for conserving the environment expressed in his book, *The Wealth of Nature*. According to Worster, in order to conserve our "evolutionary heritage," we must "learn humility in the presence of an achievement that overshadows all our technology, all our wealth, all our ingenuity, and all our human aspirations."⁹⁰ Bliese contended that, like Weaver, Worster concluded that the creation of a non-materialist worldview was paramount to protecting the environment.

For Weaver, the world was not human-centered or "man-dominated," as he contended most moderns viewed it. Its foundation was instead the Christian belief that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."⁹¹ This grounding in Christian faith connects Weaver to contemporary evangelical beliefs as demonstrated in Christian-based environmental organizations such as the Evangelical Environmental Network, EarthCare, Earth ministry, and Target Earth. These organizations espouse the belief that "biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems."⁹² Their approach to environmental problems is the promotion of humans as faithful stewards of the earth. This approach is embodied in the concept of "creation care." The principles of creation care include the acknowledgement that the earth was created by a Creator, that God gave

⁸⁹ Quoted in Bliese, "Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature," 102-103.

⁹⁰ Bliese, "Richard Weaver and Piety Towards Nature," 108.

⁹¹ Psalm 24:1 quoted in Bliese, "Richard Weaver and Piety Toward Nature," 103.

⁹² "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," Evangelical Environmental Network. Retrieved on April 9, 2011 from <http://www.creationcare.org/blank.php?id=39>.

humans dominion over his creation as well as the responsibility to care for it, and that human stewardship is perverted by sin when human actions cause damage to the creation.

The National Association of Evangelicals' "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" reflects these spiritual relationships in its message that "[W]e affirm that God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part. We are not the owners of creation, but its stewards, summoned by God to 'watch over and care for it (Gen. 2:15).'"⁹³ Other evangelical statements on the environment reflect this view as well, and that view mirrors Weaver's conception of piety. For Weaver, human conduct toward nature should reflect piety and humility rather than aggression and domination. Given that nature was created by God, it is fundamentally good. Like Weaver, contemporary green evangelicals consider harming the environment—God's creation—a sin. Green evangelical assumptions about the relations of nature, man, and God have much in common with the ideas espoused by Weaver.

Richard Weaver extended the ideas of the Agrarians and universalized their message beyond the region of the South. In forging a neo-Agrarianism, he became part of a conservative movement that laid the foundation for a traditionalist conservative political philosophy. In his most famous work, *Ideas Have Consequences*, he catalogued the many ills of modern society and offered prescriptions for recovering the values, sentiments, and aesthetic sensibilities that would, he believed, enable modern man to set right his relations to the past, to others, and to nature.

⁹³ "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility," National Association of Evangelicals, 11. Retrieved on April 9, 2011 from <http://www.nae.net/government-affairs/for-the-health-of-the-nation/>.

CHAPTER 4

Richard Weaver the Conservative and Aldo Leopold the Conservationist

Richard Weaver's thought represented a neo-Agrarianism that became associated with a traditionalist conservatism based on the preeminence of the local community over centralized government, the espousal of a Christian orthodoxy, and the importance of a well-ordered society. Weaver was convinced that recovering a sense of piety toward the past, other people, and nature was critical to correcting man's orientation to the world. In this chapter, the ideas of Weaver, the conservative, will be compared to those of Aldo Leopold, a writer and wild life manager who is celebrated by environmentalists. There is a surprising congruency in their efforts to articulate the proper relationship of humans to nature in response to a society that they perceived as increasingly fragmented, technologically driven, and spiritually bankrupt. It is striking how Leopold and Weaver, from very different backgrounds, converged in important ways in their thinking about nature.

The works for which they are best known—Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* and Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*—were published in 1948 and 1949 respectively. Because the works under consideration were written in the 1930s and 1940s, we see contemporaneous figures expressing similar views, but only one of them—Leopold—has been the subject of environmental historians. Richard Weaver's attitudes toward the land and nature are often overlooked when people today think about his role in modern

political thought, and yet he propounded a theory of nature that can be called environmentalist in the tradition of Leopold, who is widely accepted as a core environmentalist thinker.

I contend, however, that Richard Weaver's views about the relationship of humans to nature deserve serious attention from environmental historians and environmentalists. Ultimately, Weaver and Leopold shared elements of a vision concerning the relationship between humans and nature that is predicated on a primal disposition of reverence and humility. Such a vision could be construed as a foundation for an environmental conservatism. For Weaver, the vision was most stridently expressed in his first and most famous book, *Ideas Have Consequences*.

Weaver conceived the origins of *Ideas Have Consequences* in the fall of 1945.¹ He wrote later that the book was "about the dissolution of the West...based not on analogy but on deduction." Given the discovery of the Nazis' death camps and the recent bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one can understand Weaver's disillusionment and pessimism. He related in "Up from Liberalism" the thinking that led to the writing of his most influential work:

I recall sitting in my office at Ingleside Hall at the University of Chicago one Fall morning in 1945 and wondering whether it would not be possible to deduce, from fundamental causes, the fallacies of modern life and thinking that had produced this holocaust and would insure others. In about twenty minutes I jotted down a series of chapter headings, and this was the inception of a book entitled *Ideas Have Consequences*.²

¹ Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

² Richard M. Weaver, "Up from Liberalism," *Modern Age*, 6 (Winter, 1958-59), 30.

The “fallacies of modern life and thinking” were the consequences of “unintelligent choice.” Weaver traced the beginning of the decline of civilization back to William of Occam who “propounded the fateful doctrine of nominalism, which denies that universals have a real existence.” Nominalism called into question whether “there is a truth higher than, and independent of, man...” Weaver contended that the answer to this question, which ultimately determines one’s view of nature, brings about the “practical result...to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the senses.” This changes man’s view of reality so that all of which is “true” about culture is reduced to empirical terms.³

After defining the terms of his argument in the introduction, Weaver moves on to document the ill effects on modern society of the wrong turn taken in the fourteenth century. He relates the loss of man’s “metaphysical dream”—one’s innate sense of the “immanent nature of reality” on which he builds his worldview—as producing improperly disposed sentiments. Such wrong sentiments increase “maleficence,” and the culture that emanates from such wrong sentiments will promote a worldview that is misguided and artificial. Weaver decried the rampant egalitarianism in society and the resulting loss of distinction and hierarchy. This produces a society organized around “capacities to consume” and produces “economic man, whose destiny is mere activity.”⁴

He follows by outlining the problem which surfaces when a society has science and technology as its highest authorities. Fragmentation, according to Weaver, is the result of specialization—an obsession with the parts of the whole. Under such conditions, the means absorb completely and man loses sight of the ends. Weaver then documents

³ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 3.

⁴ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 18-19, 37, 51.

the resulting egotism—for Weaver another form of fragmentation—that leads to nihilism and self-absorption that comes about when man makes “a separate self the measure of value” and withdraws from the community. If egotism is rampant and the modern is withdrawing from the community, what can reconcile authority and individual will? According to Weaver, it is a “wonderful machine, which we shall call the Great Stereopticon”—that is, the mass media including advertising. Even before the advent of television’s power Weaver wrote about mass media’s role as the “ideal servant of progress” which projects “selected pictures of life in the hope that what is seen will be imitated... We are told the time to laugh and the time to cry, and signs are not wanting that the audience grows ever more responsive to its cues.” Weaver then goes on to compare modern man to a petulant child, another manifestation of the downward descent of modern culture. He describes the spoiled child as one “who has been given the notion that progress is automatic, and hence he is not prepared to understand impediments; and the right to pursue happiness he has not unnaturally translated into a right to have happiness...” A spoiled child, naturally enough, does not understand duty and obligation nor that work and discipline are required to attain the rewards of the material world. Needless to say, the spoiled child has no sense of a spiritual or non-materialist world.⁵

Weaver outlines his prescription for the sick modern world in the last three chapters of the book. First, he promotes the idea of the right of private property, which Weaver distinguishes as a physical place and not other forms of capital, as a condition of restoring right sentiments. Then, he advances the position that having “power of language is to have control over things” and that “words in common human practice express something transcending the moment.” For Weaver then, speech is the “vehicle of order.”

⁵ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 70, 93, 96, 114.

By employing the language art of dialectic, the modern will be compelled to “see limitation and contradiction, the two things about which the philosophy of progress leaves him most confused.” Finally, he shares his view that to restore civilization modern man must recover the virtue of piety toward three things: “nature, our neighbors—by which I mean all other people—and the past.”⁶

There was a good deal of interest in *Ideas Have Consequences* when it was first published, as evidenced by over 100 reviews. Those reviews appearing in regional newspapers, religious magazines, and conservative publications were favorable, while those in liberal publications tended to be harshly critical.⁷ The originality of Weaver’s ideas and analysis were commended by Reinhold Niebuhr and John Crowe Ransom.⁸ Paul Tillich called it “brilliantly written, daring and radical...It will shock, and philosophical shock is the beginning of wisdom.”⁹ Eliseo Vivas in *The Kenyon Review* also called it radical: “How radical and how valid his rejection [of the ‘modern world’] is the reader owes it to himself to find out by reading every page of this book...” Vivas regarded *Ideas Have Consequences* as an important book. The book’s “value—and that, I must repeat is very high—consists in the impassioned lucidity with which Weaver throws light on the moral illness of a stupid society that does not know itself to be dying.”¹⁰

Charles Frankel, who wrote a review for *The Nation*, was somewhat less enthusiastic: “Mr. Weaver makes agreement [with the book’s arguments] difficult.

⁶ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 148, 172.

⁷ Ted J. Smith III, “How *Ideas Have Consequences* Came to be Written,” *Steps Toward Restoration: The Consequences of Richard Weaver’s Ideas*, Ted J. Smith III, ed. (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1998), 25

⁸ Thomas D’Evelyn, “The Power and Purpose of Language,” *Christian Science Monitor* (June 11, 1986), 23.

⁹ Fred Douglas Young, *Richard M. Weaver 1910-1963: A Life of the Mind* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 104.

¹⁰ Eliseo Vivas, “Historian and Moralist,” *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring 1948), 348-349.

Although he asks us to be humble in the face of our failures, Mr. Weaver's tone is anything but humble." He went on to call the book "merely trivial, if not self-contradictory" and summed up his critique by writing, "[I]n short, Mr. Weaver has delivered himself of a solemn tautology."¹¹ The harshest criticism came from Howard Mumford Jones in the *New York Times Book Review*. He called Weaver's writing "irresponsible because...his 'deduction' proceeds through a series of sweeping asseverations which may or may not be true, but which the reader cannot check, to conclusions already predetermined in the premise." He writes of opening the book at random to find examples that will fit his critique then acknowledges that "it may be said it is picayunish to fall on a couple of random sentences and to destroy them. But the book is unfortunately compounded of similar asseverations." He points out that Weaver's analysis, which purports to include mankind, actually takes into account only a fraction of the world's population. He concludes the review by suggesting that "one of the most depressing aspects of the tragedy of the West...is the irresponsibility of intellectuals who condemn without comprehension, in the name of an austere intellectualism, the total life of our time."¹²

Weaver apparently felt compelled to respond as he wrote a Letter to the Editor that was published in the March 21, 1948 edition of the *New York Times*. He rebutted Jones' attack on his responsibility as an intellectual: "This raises the question of what determines responsibility. The intimation of the review is that one needs to apply somewhere for a license to discuss the topics covered by my book." The letter ends with Weaver firing back at Jones: "Jones further declares that I am concerned with a small

¹¹ Charles Frankel, "Ideas, Language, and Piety," *The Nation*, Vol. 166, No. 22 (May 29, 1948), 610.

¹² Howard Mumford Jones, "Listing Mankind's 'Wrong Turnings,'" *The New York Times Book Review*, (February 22, 1948), 4, 25.

portion of mankind...Actually the book was written out of concern for the millions over the earth, in bread lines, in bombed homes, in prison camps, whose sufferings, material and spiritual, are traceable to the kind of pragmatism which Jones so egregiously flaunts.”¹³ But Jones’ scathing review may have hurt sales of the book, which sold only 8,000 copies in 1948. By the end of the second printing (30,000 copies) the book sold modestly well for so widely reviewed a book. It went out of print in 1958. A few months later, however, the University of Chicago Press reissued it in paperback and it has remained in print ever since.¹⁴

While Weaver is well known in conservative circles, he is nearly unknown among those who have been inspired by the writings of Aldo Leopold. For environmentalists, Aldo Leopold is an icon, and his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, is widely read to this day. While Weaver was a Southerner, Aldo Leopold was a Midwesterner born into an affluent family in Burlington, Iowa in 1887. He was very much influenced by his father who was a naturalist and avid hunter. Starting as a youngster in Burlington, he studied the natural world around him and began a “life-long practice of recording his observations daily in a journal.”¹⁵ He attended Lawrenceville Preparatory School in New Jersey and then entered Yale University to study forestry in 1905. At that time, Yale was one of the few universities to offer a degree in this new discipline. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Yale and graduated in 1909. He began work for the United States Forest Service as an assistant forester in the Apache National Forest, which had been designated a national forest just one year earlier in what in 1909 was the Arizona

¹³ Richard Weaver, “Editor’s Mail,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1948.

¹⁴ Smith, “How *Ideas Have Consequences* Came to be Written,” 28-29.

¹⁵ Susan L. Flader in “Preface 1994” to *Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 8.

territory. As Curt Meine relates it, Leopold “was a naturalist and hunter who became a forester.”¹⁶ He married Estella Bergere in 1912 and they would eventually have five children.¹⁷

He remained in the Forest Service until 1918 when he left to take a position with the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce. Dissatisfied with the Chamber’s boosterism, he rejoined the Forest Service in 1919 as Assistant District 3 Forester in Charge of Operations. In 1924 he was assigned to the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin.¹⁸ He left the Forest Service in 1928 when the opportunity to perform game surveys was offered by the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers Institute.¹⁹ When the Depression came, funds for the game survey disappeared and Leopold spent 1930-31 writing *Game Management*, a textbook for the emerging discipline which was published by Charles Scribner and Sons in 1933.²⁰ In that same year, Leopold became the first professor of game management in the U.S. when he took a position at the University of Wisconsin. In 1935, Leopold became one of the eight founding members of the Wilderness Society. It was in 1935 that Leopold purchased “the shack” and 120 acres of land which would become the backdrop for his best known work, *A Sand County Almanac*. He died there of a heart attack in 1948 fighting a brush fire.²¹

It was in early 1941 that Leopold began thinking about publishing a series of essays in a book that would reflect the evolution of his own thinking regarding

¹⁶ Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 83.

¹⁷ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 11, 83, 88, 121.

¹⁸ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 225.

¹⁹ Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 21.

²⁰ Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 23.

²¹ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 343, 520.

perceptions of the land, and the meanings and implications of those perceptions.²² He began collaborating with one of his former students, H. Albert Hochbaum, who advised him to reflect in his writing the fact that he had made mistakes and, thus, his thinking had evolved.²³ The draft was completed in September 1943.²⁴ Over the next four years, his manuscript would be rejected four times by Macmillan Company, Knopf (twice), and the University of Minnesota. On December 19, 1947, he sent the manuscript, which he was now calling “Great Possessions,” to the Oxford University Press, and on April 14, 1948 they called Leopold to let him know it had been accepted.²⁵ One week later Leopold died. His son, Luna, and a former student, Joe Hickey, worked with other Leopold family members and students to prepare the manuscript.²⁶ The title was changed to *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*.²⁷

The book is divided into three sections. “Part I, A Sand County Almanac,” provides a monthly chronicle of one year at “the shack” with Leopold sharing sensitive observations of the seasons, the flora and fauna on the land, and the family’s interaction with them. It “tells what my family sees and does at its week-end refuge from too much modernity....” “Part II, Sketches Here and There,” recounts some of Leopold’s own history in his work and recreation across North America from Manitoba to Chihuahua to Illinois, and how those experiences—“gradually and sometimes painfully”—led him to the conclusion that humans are not regarding and treating nature the way it ought to be

²² Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 8. Also see Curt Meine for a chronology of the development of Leopold’s book in “Moving Mountains,” *Correction Lines: Essays on Land, Leopold, and Conservation* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004), 151-153.

²³ Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 4.

²⁴ Meine, “Moving Mountains,” 151.

²⁵ Meine, “Moving Mountains,” 157.

²⁶ According to Curt Meine, Joe Hickey knew the publishing business and contacted family members and others who had been Leopold’s readers and told them, “[W]e must close our ranks and get this book into print.” See Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 524.

²⁷ Meine, “Moving Mountains,” 159.

treated. As Leopold relates it, “[T]hese episodes . . . present a fair sample of the issues that bear the collective label: conservation.” In “Part III, The Upshot,” Leopold shares his philosophy of the proper human-nature relationship in three essays, including “The Land Ethic,” and offers his prescription for the right way for humans to treat the land. Taken as a whole, Leopold hoped that his essays would “weld three concepts:” that land is a community to which humans belong, that as members of that community we must extend a sense of ethics to the land, and that “land yields a cultural harvest.”²⁸

Critical reaction to *A Sand County Almanac* was overwhelmingly positive.²⁹ Most reviewers saw Leopold as a sensitive observer of nature, and it was in that context—the genre of nature writers—that reviewers regarded his work. Joseph Wood Krutch, a noted nature writer himself, lauded Leopold for his “original sensibility” and “humorous awareness of the paradoxes of conservation.”³⁰ Krutch wrote of Leopold that “[N]o one could be less fanatical, more moderate, or more reasonable than Mr. Leopold,” but that Leopold also had the “discouraging suspicion that he was doing no more than fight a rear-guard action.”³¹ Elizabeth Yates described *A Sand County Almanac* as “no sentimental journey but the sincerely experienced and keenly observed recordings of a skilled naturalist.”³² She saw Leopold’s philosophy of conservation as that of “a practical

²⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1990), xviii, xix.

²⁹ I have come upon only one review that could be construed as negative by Virginia Kirkus who described *A Sand County Almanac* as “slight and charming enough,” but that it “would have a very limited appeal to those who enjoy random bits of nature.” She concludes that Leopold’s writing and the nature sketches “do not give one a sense of actually challenging the reader.” Quoted in James F. Carstens, “Book Reviewers’ Recognition of Environmental Ethics in Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*.” Paper presented at the *Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication 2002 Convention*, Science Communication Interest Group. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from <http://www.unc.edu/~carstens/jfcarstens/aejmcleopold.doc>.

³⁰ Joseph Wood Krutch, “Wild Geese—or Television,” *The Nation*, Vol. 169, No. 628 (December 24, 1949), 628.

³¹ Krutch, “Wild Geese—or Television,” 629.

³² Elizabeth Yates, “The Land: With Realism and Poetry,” *Christian Science Monitor (1908-Current file)*; February 6, 1950; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Christian Science Monitor, 18.

man and a poet” and thought the book’s “essential purpose” was to persuade the reader “towards a realization of the delights abounding the world of nature and convincing him of the need for wisdom and practicality in the preservation of that world.”³³ She concludes by describing the book’s influence: “To read this book is...to develop a keener eye and a sharper ear for the world of nature and a greater respect for that land.”³⁴ The review that appeared in *The New York Times* by Hal Borland made some of the same observations as Krutch and Yates, but Borland’s review indicates that he had some sense of the lasting importance of *A Sand County Almanac*. His first sentence likens the book to a “toy glass pistol filled with colored candy” which “turns out to be a .45 automatic fully loaded.”³⁵ The glass pistol represents Leopold’s “poetic approach to the outdoors,” while the fully loaded .45 represents his conservation philosophy. He describes Part I of the book as “nature writing at its best” and Part II as having the “same singing quality as Part I, but it digs deeper. It questions piecemeal conservation policies that merely compromise with or slow down forces of destruction.”³⁶ Part III, though, is “heavy going in some places” because Leopold is dealing with “big questions and opposes popular solutions.”³⁷ He concludes that “[T]his is a trenchant book, full of beauty and vigor and bite” that may not have all the answers, but which reveals why the current, pat answers are wrong.”³⁸

In 1966, *A Sand County Almanac* was re-issued in paperback with an additional section, a new Part III, “A Taste for Country,” that included essays from the 1953

³³ Yates, “The Land: With Realism and Poetry,” 18.

³⁴ Yates, “The Land: With Realism and Poetry,” 18.

³⁵ Hal Borland, “The Land is Good,” *New York Times (1837-Current file)*; July 16, 1950; ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times (1851-2003)*, BR6.

³⁶ Borland, “The Land is Good,” BR6.

³⁷ Borland, “The Land is Good,” BR6.

³⁸ Borland, “The Land is Good,” BR6.

publication, *Round River*.³⁹ Sales of *A Sand County Almanac* up to that time had been about 20,000 copies, but the new edition was met with broad enthusiasm and sales were brisk.⁴⁰ *A Sand County Almanac* has now sold over a million copies.⁴¹ Raymond Dasmann who, in a review of the new edition, described Leopold's writings as classics, pointed out that Leopold's *Game Management* was still in use as a textbook in 1967 when the review was written, and cited the book's tremendous influence. He wrote, "[P]erhaps more than any other single work it has established the professional and scientific base for wildlife conservation."⁴²

Dasmann's review attested to Leopold's enormous influence in the professional world of wildlife conservation. James H. Shaw in his textbook, *Introduction to Wildlife Management*, acknowledges Leopold in the first sentence of his *Preface*.⁴³ He also lists Leopold, along with John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt, as a "notable figure" for his influence in wildlife management.⁴⁴ Knight and Riedel wrote that the success of *A Sand County Almanac* was in its influence on the "way ecologists think." They cited a survey of natural resources managers in which 90% said that Leopold was one of the "three most important sources of information to their professional careers."⁴⁵

³⁹ Carolyn Clugston Leopold and Luna B. Leopold, "Preface to the Enlarged Edition," *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), xiii.

⁴⁰ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 526.

⁴¹ Carstens, "Book Reviewers' Recognition of Environmental Ethics in Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*," 25.

⁴² Raymond F. Dasmann, "*A Sand County Almanac*. With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River," *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (September 1967), 417.

⁴³ James H. Shaw, *Introduction to Wildlife Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985), xiii.

⁴⁴ Shaw, *Introduction to Wildlife Management*, 13. Shaw also lists the publication of Leopold's *Game Management* as one of the "important events in American wildlife management;" lauds Leopold for his work as chair of the Committee on North American Game Policy in 1930 (p. 9); quotes Leopold when discussing ecological values (p. 15); cites Leopold as an early advocate of wilderness (p. 200); and credits Leopold for the development of the concept of the "edge effect" (p. 399).

⁴⁵ Richard L. Knight, and Suzanne Riedel, "Introduction," in Knight and Riedel, eds., *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

Even Boris Zeide, who wrote an essay that was very critical of Leopold's "Land Ethic" in the *Journal of Forestry* in 1998, conceded that "Leopold is the spiritual father of ecosystem management, and his legacy remains at the center of contemporary issues in forestry."⁴⁶

But *A Sand County Almanac* and Leopold's other writings have had influence far beyond wildlife management, forestry, and other natural resource sciences, especially for modern environmentalism. This influence, according to historian Susan Flader, rests with Leopold's achievement of integrating the "scientific basis and conservation imperative" into a "compelling ethic for our time."⁴⁷ Roderick Nash, in his classic work, *Wilderness and The American Mind*, compared Leopold to Thoreau: Leopold "built a philosophy of the importance of wilderness comparable in acuteness and influence to that of Thoreau himself."⁴⁸ *Time* magazine published "A Century of Heroes" in the environmental movement in 2000 and listed Aldo Leopold for his work communicating the ideals of environmentalism.⁴⁹ And the U.S. Congress in 1988 voted to recognize the birth and

⁴⁶ A 50th anniversary retrospective on Leopold's "Land Ethic" in *A Sand County Almanac* featured in the January 1998 issue of *Journal of Forestry* contained an essay critical of Leopold and challenging the basis of his influence by Boris Zeide ("Another Look at Leopold's Land Ethic") followed by a sharp rebuttal from J. Baird Callicott ("A Critical Examination of 'Another Look at Leopold's Land Ethic'"). The debate spilled over into the April 1998 issue where there was a rebuttal of Callicott's article by Zeide and seven other authors, including Curt Meine, weighed in on the debate. The April 1998 issue also included fourteen letters to the editor in response to Zeide's article (8 in the "shocked" category, 3 in agreement, and 3 chiding the *Journal of Forestry* for what one writer called its "Crossfire" approach). This example shows the level of interest and deep feeling still engendered by Leopold's classic work fifty years after its publication. See *Journal of Forestry*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (January 1998) and Vol. 96, No. 4 (April 1998).

⁴⁷ Flader, *Thinking Like a Mountain*, 5.

⁴⁸ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness & The American Mind* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001, fourth edition), 182.

⁴⁹ Frederic Golden, "A Century of Heroes," *Time*, April 26, 2000. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,996752,00.html>.

achievements of Aldo Leopold.⁵⁰ By almost any measure, he was a critical figure in the development of modern environmental thought.

Leopold and Weaver followed different trajectories in their intellectual development. Leopold's intellectual development evolved throughout his life given the knowledge he gained from his practical field experience in a series of positions with the U.S. Forest Service, his work to organize game protection associations in New Mexico and Wisconsin, and his time teaching and doing research as a professor of game management at the University of Wisconsin. *A Sand County Almanac* can be seen as the ultimate expression of his views about the relationship between humans and nature. Weaver's intellectual development was more compact and epiphanic—his views changed over a period of six years when he converted from socialist beliefs to being a disciple of the Agrarians. Both men's intellectual journeys led them to write about the human-nature relationship, the idea of progress, the impact of science, and the resulting specialization in ways that have important similarities. They both couch their arguments using philosophical terms from metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics, and using the language of universals and transcendence to elevate their ideas and confer to them a level of importance and seriousness appropriate to the fundamental aspects of their ideas. Such elevated ideas call for deep reflection that can only take place in the world of the imagination. Both men sought to engage their audiences at the level of their deepest sentiments. Comparing Weaver's and Leopold's views of nature, progress—and its engine science—and the resulting phenomenon of specialization, yields important similarities in their outlooks. Beginning with their views concerning nature, and

⁵⁰ Carstens, "Book Reviewers' Recognition of Environmental Ethics in Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*," 25.

implications of these views as expressed in the works under consideration. Weaver's and Leopold's own words are compared here to reveal important congruencies in their thinking.

Both Weaver and Leopold wrote about the proper disposition of humans toward nature. Weaver's view of the proper human-nature relationship is one controlled by an attitude of piety. Piety should govern man's "attitude toward the totality of the world" which is nature. He introduces discussion of the human-nature relationship by stating that "modern man is a parricide. He has taken up arms against, and he has effectually slain, what former men have regarded with filial veneration [nature]. He has not been conscious of crime but has...regarded his action as a proof of virtue."⁵¹ As Weaver sees it, modern man is impious. His ego will not admit "the right to existence of things not of his own contriving." Weaver expands on this human-nature view:

For centuries now we have been told that our happiness requires an unrelenting assault upon this order [human-nature relationship]; dominion, conquest, triumph—all these names have been used as if it were a military campaign. Somehow the notion has been loosed that nature is hostile to man or that her ways are offensive or slovenly, so that every step of progress is measured by how far we have altered these. Nothing short of a recovery of the ancient virtue of *pietas* can absolve man from this sin.⁵²

For Weaver, piety "is a discipline of the will through respect. It admits the right to exist of things larger than the ego, of things different from the ego." One who shows piety toward nature, then, appreciates it as fundamentally good, ultimately unknowable, and beyond one's control. Nature is not to be manipulated to fulfill one's own narrow desires and appetites. Having piety implies having self-restraint and self-control before

⁵¹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 170.

⁵² Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 171-172.

nature. Piety also acts as a “warning voice that we must think as mortals, that it is not for us either to know all or to control all. It is a recognition of our own limitations... which gives us the protective virtue of humility.”⁵³

In his foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold expressed his view of the proper human-nature relationship. For Leopold, viewing “land as a community to which we belong” is the starting point beyond “land as a community” which is the “basic concept of ecology.” Leopold defines the land to include “soils, waters, plants, and animals,” or collectively, nature.⁵⁴ Viewing humans as belonging to the land or nature is an “extension of ethics,” as ethics define the standards of conduct and moral judgment for a community.⁵⁵ A land ethic would change the role of humans “from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.”⁵⁶ It would not change the fact that humans alter, manage, and use nature, but it would acknowledge the right of nature “to continued existence, and, at least in spots... continued existence in a natural state.”⁵⁷ Like Weaver’s definition of piety as a restraint on one’s own desires, Leopold saw an ethic as “a limitation on freedom.”⁵⁸

Extending ethics to include nature was a novel idea and, as Leopold put it, “an evolutionary possibility.”⁵⁹ But Weaver would most likely have quibbled with the use of the term “ethic” in relating human connection with the land. Weaver viewed ethics in its common usage, that is, in terms of the human community and, thus, urged the attitude of

⁵³ Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, George Core and M.E. Bradford, eds. (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), 32.

⁵⁴ Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Ballantine Press, 1990), 239.

⁵⁵ Leopold, Foreword to *A Sand County Almanac*, xxviii.

⁵⁶ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 240.

⁵⁷ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 124.

⁵⁸ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 238.

⁵⁹ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 239.

piety toward nature while reserving ethics for fellow human beings: “As piety respects the mystery of nature, so ethics, the restraining sentiment which we carry into the world of our fellow beings, respects the reality of personality.”⁶⁰ Weaver held that a proper definition of humans’ relationship to nature was critical in preserving our grip on reality. He put it this way: “Thus we may say of the great material world [nature] that we do not desire it chiefly but that we think it has a place in the order of things which is entitled to respect.”⁶¹ For Weaver, then, the proper relation of humans to nature was one of respectful nonattachment. In this orientation, as with his concept of piety, one can make a connection to contemporary green evangelicals who are concerned that Christians worship the Creator and not creation.⁶²

Weaver’s discussion of the purpose of ethics, however, shows why Leopold sought to bring the relationship of humans and nature into the realm of ethics. Weaver described the purpose of ethics as leading “everyone to a relatively selfless point of view in the world. Above all, it must insist upon the rightness of right and keep in abeyance the crude standard of what will pay.”⁶³ That Leopold advocated a land ethic reflected his concern that the “land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.” He also believed it was a necessary concept in terms of his emerging thoughts about the interconnectedness of the land.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 34.

⁶¹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 175.

⁶² A statement in “An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility” elucidates the concern for Christians of worshipping God rather than nature: “As we embrace our responsibility to care for God’s earth, we reaffirm the important truth that we worship only the Creator and not the creation.” “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility,” National Association of Evangelicals, 11. Retrieved on April 9, 2011 from <http://www.nae.net/government-affairs/for-the-health-of-the-nation/>. Paul wrote in Romans 1:21-25 about those “who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...” Retrieved on April 9, 2011 from <http://wonderofcreation.org/tag/worship/>.

⁶³ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 34.

⁶⁴ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 238.

Leopold, like Weaver, described the human-nature relationship in moral terms. Where Weaver saw assaults on nature as sin, Leopold used Old Testament prophets to make the same point: “Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of the land is not only inexpedient but wrong.”⁶⁵ Where Weaver described humans’ assaults on nature as criminal, Leopold described such deeds as displaying hubris: “We are remodeling the Alhambra with a steam-shovel, and we are proud of our yardage.”⁶⁶ Thus, though they would not necessarily agree on how the other used philosophical terminology, Weaver’s and Leopold’s views of the proper human-nature relationship appear to have significant points of compatibility.

Weaver’s conception of piety and Leopold’s conception of a land ethic reflect a shared sense of the need to show humility in the face of nature’s mysteries. In *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold writes of his wonder at nature’s ways and intimates that such wonder comes from nature’s ultimate inscrutability. He says of migrating geese: “If I could understand the thunderous debates that precede and follow these daily excursions to corn, I might soon learn the reason for the prairie-bias. But I cannot, and I am well content that it should remain a mystery. What a dull world if we knew all about geese!”⁶⁷ Since the mysteries of nature provide for rich experiences that invoke wonder, Leopold views nature’s inscrutable qualities as fortuitous. “It is fortunate, perhaps, that no matter how intently one studies the hundred little dramas of the woods and meadows, one can never learn all of the salient facts about any one of them.”⁶⁸ Weaver, too, acknowledges man’s inability to comprehend completely nature’s ways, but, instead of eliciting wonder

⁶⁵ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 239.

⁶⁶ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 263

⁶⁷ Leopold, “March” in *A Sand County Almanac*, 22.

⁶⁸ Leopold, “April” in *A Sand County Almanac*, 34.

and gratification—what Weaver would describe as the proper human sentiments toward nature, he also lamented that such a condition leaves modern man in a state of vexation. In *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver says: “Instead of feeling grateful that some things are past his discovering...he is vexed and promises himself that one day the last Arcanum will be forced to yield its secret.”⁶⁹ This is modern man again acting impiously toward nature.

Where Leopold the devotee of nature expressed wonder at its inscrutability, Leopold the scientist expressed the pragmatic view that nature could not be fully comprehended. He reflected on the average citizen’s view that science understood all the complexities of nature and disputed that notion: “The ordinary citizen today assumes that science knows what makes the community clock tick; the scientist is equally sure that he does not. He knows that the biotic mechanism is so complex that its workings may never be fully understood.”⁷⁰ Some scientists believed that, having some partial understanding of a part of the biota, it was only a matter of time before nature would be forced to yield her secrets about the whole, but Leopold disputed that notion as well: “The assumption no longer holds good; the process of finding out added new questions faster than new answers. The function of species is largely inscrutable, and may remain so.”⁷¹ In discussing the impact of man-made changes on the land community and, specifically, unexplained changes in population cycles of animals, Leopold pointed out the lack of understanding of any one phenomenon or the relations among phenomena: “To assert a causal relation would imply that we understand the mechanism. As a matter of fact, the

⁶⁹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 183.

⁷⁰ Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” 240-241.

⁷¹ Aldo Leopold, “A Biotic View of Land” in *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays*, Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 267.

land mechanism is too complex to be understood, and probably always will be.”⁷² Like Leopold, Weaver asserted that the order of nature could not be completely understood by man. He put it this way: “It is a matter of elementary observation that nature reflects some kind of order...which, even after atomic fission, defies our effort at total comprehension. The wise student of her still says modestly with the soothsayer in *Antony and Cleopatra*, ‘In nature’s infinite books of secrecy a little I can read.’”⁷³

Given the acknowledgement that nature was not completely knowable, both Weaver and Leopold cautioned restraint, modesty, and humility before nature. They both wrote about the proper human-nature relationship, which they both saw clearly as lacking in the modern age. In the conviction that nature should serve mankind, Weaver raised again the issue of man’s impiety and the proper disposition to nature as one of humility. He said, “...but this service [of nature to man] is impious for...it violates the belief that creation of nature is fundamentally good, that the ultimate reason for its laws is a mystery...Obviously a degree of humility is required to accept this view.”⁷⁴ Leopold, too, spoke about an improper relationship of humans to nature. He said, “[L]and, to the average citizen, is still something to be tamed, rather than something to be understood, loved, and lived with. Resources are still regarded as separate entities, indeed, as commodities, rather than our cohabitants in the land-community.”⁷⁵ Like Weaver, Leopold called for humility toward nature. In explaining the philosophy of the Wilderness Society, he said, “[T]he Wilderness Society is, philosophically, a disclaimer of the biotic arrogance of *homo americanus*. It is one of the focal points of a new

⁷² Aldo Leopold, “Conservation: In Whole or in Part?” *The River of the Mother of God*, 315.

⁷³ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 172.

⁷⁴ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 171-172.

⁷⁵ Leopold, “Conservation: In Whole or in Part?” *The Rivers of the Mother of God*, 311.

attitude—an intelligent humility toward man’s place in nature.”⁷⁶ Both Weaver and Leopold believed that man’s actions toward nature, informed by modesty and humility, would involve caution and restraint. Weaver admonished that since man “does not fully comprehend his creation, it is to be hoped that he will exercise caution in the appropriation of efficient means,”⁷⁷ while Leopold advised restraint, pointing to the “rule of thumb” of ecological conservation, that although “land must of course be modified...it should be modified as gently and as little as possible.”⁷⁸

Weaver explained the reason for prudence in attempts to renovate nature when he said, “[W]e get increasing evidence under the regime of science that to meddle with small parts of a machine of whose total design and purpose we are ignorant produces evil consequences...Triumphs against the natural order of living exact unforeseen payments.”⁷⁹ Depicting nature as a machine with interconnected small parts not to be separately manipulated is strikingly similar to the ecological view that Leopold espoused. In describing conservation as a state of health in the land-organism, Leopold said, “[H]ealth expresses the cooperation of the interdependent parts: soil, water, plants, animals, and people...As far as we know, the state of health depends on the retention in each part of the full gamut of species and materials comprising its evolutionary equipment.”⁸⁰ Leopold also described the earth as an indivisible whole: “...we realize the indivisibility of the earth—its soil, mountains, rivers, forests, climate, plants, and animals...”⁸¹ Weaver expressed what might be described today as a “systems” view of

⁷⁶ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 345.

⁷⁷ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 184.

⁷⁸ Leopold, “Conservation: In Whole or in Part?” *The River of the Mother of God*, 315.

⁷⁹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 172-173.

⁸⁰ Leopold, “Land Use and Democracy,” *The River of the Mother of God*, 300.

⁸¹ Leopold, “Some Fundamentals of Conservation in the Southwest,” 95. According to Susan Flader, this unpublished essay from 1923 represented Leopold’s first attempt to articulate a conservation philosophy by

the earth when he warned that “[O]ur planet is falling victim to a rigorism,” by which he meant the application of technology, “so that what is done in any remote corner affects—nay, menaces—the whole.”⁸² Weaver’s and Leopold’s positions on the need for caution and restraint in seeking to improve nature are based on their beliefs that the parts that make up the whole of nature are interdependent and, therefore, care must be given because altering one part without understanding its impact on the whole could lead to grave consequences.

Modern man’s belief in the righteousness and inevitability of progress provides another point of comparison between the thought of Weaver and Leopold. Both scorned human attempts to improve upon nature. To the modern man, such improvements were proof of his achievements, signs of progress. Leopold described such a person as “mechanized man...proud of his progress in cleaning up the landscape on which, willy nilly, he must live out his days.”⁸³ Weaver spoke of the concept of progress to the average man as his metaphysic: “The average man of the present age has a metaphysic in the form of a conception known as ‘progress’...he wants some measure for purposeful activity...since his metaphysic calls only for magnitude and number, since it is becoming without a goal...It is a system of quantitative comparison. Its effect therefore has been...to produce economic man, whose destiny is mere activity.”⁸⁴

Weaver also assailed the “apostles of modernism” who “usually begin their retort with catalogues of modern achievement.” But for Weaver, “[I]t will not suffice to point

analyzing the ecological problems he encountered in the Southwest and assessing the economic impact. His conclusion was that conservation was a moral issue. See “A Note on the Text from Susan Flader” at the “From Leopold’s Desk” page at the Aldo Leopold Foundation Web site. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from <http://www.aldoleopold.org/about/outlook/winter2008/fundamentals.shtml>.

⁸² Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 173.

⁸³ Leopold, “July,” in *A Sand County Almanac*, 50.

⁸⁴ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 51.

out the inventions and processes of our century unless it can be shown that they are something other than a splendid efflorescence of decay.”⁸⁵ Both men understood that they were in the minority when it came to questioning automatic progress. As Leopold related, “[W]e of the minority see a law of diminishing returns in progress; our opponents do not.” Weaver viewed the idea of progress in the modern age as a dogma. He put it this way: “We have been led to believe that man’s chief task is the conquest of nature, including of course space and time. Mere advances in mechanical power, and especially superior mobility, have been greeted as steps in an automatic progress. The thought was plausible enough to find wide acceptance, so that now it is a dogma...”⁸⁶ Like arrogantly manipulating nature to meet human needs, Weaver and Leopold viewed conceptions of progress in their culture as a disturbing “god term.”⁸⁷ Leopold sarcastically offered a remedy for the universal belief that material progress was an unquestioned good. He suggested setting up “within the economic Juggernaut certain new cogs and wheels whereby the residual love of nature, even in Rotarians, may be made to recreate at least a fraction of those values which their love of ‘progress’ is destroying.”⁸⁸ Both Leopold and Weaver viewed progress as detrimental and they both warned about its destructiveness. Leopold said, “...our bigger-and-better society is now like a hypochondriac, so obsessed with its own economic health as to have lost the capacity to remain healthy.”⁸⁹ Weaver put it more directly: “The mere notion of infinite progress is destructive. If the goal recedes forever, one point is no nearer it than the last. All we can do is compare

⁸⁵ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 12.

⁸⁶ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 30.

⁸⁷ Weaver used this expression explicitly to express his “ultimate terms” used in contemporary rhetoric. A god term is one “about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate.” Weaver believed that the “god term of contemporary Americans is ‘progress.’” See John Bliese, “Richard M. Weaver: Conservative Rhetorician,” *Modern Age* Vol. 21 (Fall, 1977), 381.

⁸⁸ Leopold, “Game and Wildlife Conservation,” *The River of the Mother of God*, 166.

⁸⁹ Leopold, “Foreword to A Sand County Almanac,” xix.

meaninglessly yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”⁹⁰ Both men understood progress was almost universally hailed as good in American culture and they both pointed out the fallacy of such a notion and its destructive potential. To attack progress, however, meant attacking its engine in the modern age—science.

Science as the modern engine of change was regarded with skepticism, even alarm, by both Weaver and Leopold. Examining their writing, a similarity in this viewpoint is apparent, as is their concern about the potential destructive power of science. Weaver clearly saw science as one of the key actors in the modern age. He regarded it as a “false messiah” and described it as the “most powerful force of corruption in our age.” He used dramatic language to relate its sins. He wrote that the “attitude of science...has encouraged warfare between man and nature; a fanatical warfare, in which...we seek the total overthrow of an opponent. But nature is not an opponent...it is the matrix of our being, and as such scientists we are parricides...the peril in these conquests [is] a *hubris* leading to vainglory, egotism, impatience, a feeling that man can dispense with all restraints.”⁹¹

How did science become a messiah? Weaver explained that it was because of the modern penchant for materialism. Moderns were too entangled with the material world, and “since man proposed now not to go beyond the world, it was proper that he should regard as his highest intellectual vocation methods of interpreting data supplied by the senses...man needed only to reason correctly upon evidence from nature...Thus it is not the mysterious fact of the world’s existence which interests the new man but explanations of how the world works. This is the rational basis for modern science, whose

⁹⁰ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 51.

⁹¹ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 32. Emphasis in the original.

systemization of phenomena is...a means to dominion.” And given the modern’s abdication of the non-material world,

...science was hypostatized: a great machine appeared to have been set in motion which needed only operation to produce a civilization beyond present conception...The painful truth is now beginning to emerge that a flourishing technology may make civilization more rather than less difficult of attainment. It leads to mobilization of external forces; it creates enormous concentrations of irresponsible power; through an inexorable standardization it destroys refinement and individuality.⁹²

From Weaver, the cultural critic, such stark depictions of science as a corrupting influence, with an enormous destructive capacity, are not surprising. One would expect Weaver the humanist to question the premise that science serves humanity as an unadulterated good. Of his experience teaching at Texas A&M he said, “I was here forced to see that the lion of applied science and the lamb of humanities were not going to lie down together in peace, but that the lion was going to devour the lamb unless there was a very stern keeper of order.”⁹³ From Leopold the scientist, however, one might expect a more favorable view. Leopold, though, had his own doubts about science.

In an address to the Wildlife Society in 1940, Leopold expressed his reservations about science providing unquestioned progress. In “The State of the Profession,” he said, “[M]oreover, some of us entertain heresies and doubts. We doubt whether science can claim the credit for bigger and better tools, comforts, and securities without also claiming the credit for bigger and better erosions, denudations, and pollutions. We doubt whether the good life flows automatically from the good invention.”⁹⁴ Leopold called for reform in his plea that the objectives of science must be rewritten. He told the Wildlife Society

⁹² Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 30.

⁹³ Weaver, “Up from Liberalism,” 24.

⁹⁴ Leopold, “The State of the Profession,” *The River of the Mother of God*, 276.

audience, “[O]ur job is to harmonize the increasing kit of scientific tools and the increasing recklessness in using them with the shrinking biotas to which they are applied. In the nature of things we are mediators and moderators, and unless we can help rewrite the objectives of science our job is predestined to failure.”⁹⁵ In an address to the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology in 1946, Leopold was critical of the human obsession with what he termed “power-science.” The guide to development in science, according to Leopold, was “cosmic arrogance.”⁹⁶ He characterized science as a race for power: “Time was when the aim of science was to understand the world, and to learn how man may live in harmony with it. If I read Darwin right, he was more concerned with understanding than with power. But science, as now decanted for public consumption, is mainly a race for power. Science has no respect for the land as a community of organisms, no concept of man as a fellow passenger in the odyssey of evolution.”⁹⁷

Beyond the potential for misuse of scientific power, Weaver and Leopold both noted the by-product of science—specialization—as another damaging result of the ascendancy of science in the modern world. Weaver noted that “science makes an ideal of specialization” which ultimately threatens man’s soul. The scientist, Weaver tells us, “...clings...to his discovered facts, hoping that salvation lies in what can be objectively verified.”⁹⁸ Leopold also spoke about the scientist, his discovered facts, and the instrumentality of science. He said the “great moral contribution of science” is “objectivity, or the scientific point of view. This means doubting everything except facts: it means hewing to the facts, let the chips fall where they may. One of the facts hewn to

⁹⁵ Leopold, “The State of the Profession,” 277.

⁹⁶ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 482.

⁹⁷ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 483.

⁹⁸ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 57.

by science is that every river needs more people, and all people need more inventions, and hence more science; the good life depends on the indefinite extension of this chain of logic. That the good life on any river may likewise depend on the perception of its music, and the preservation of some music to perceive, is a form of doubt not yet entertained by science.”⁹⁹

Specialization and a preoccupation with facts—with a selected part of the whole reality—led to what Weaver called “fragmentation.” And an obsession with parts has grave consequences, one of which is fanaticism. As Weaver relates it, “...fanaticism has been properly described as redoubling one’s effort after one’s aim has been forgotten...” The myth of science and its handmaiden technology, Weaver tells us, is the “conclusion that because a thing can be done, it must be done.” This leads to a state where the “means absorb completely” and the ends become invisible:

...an idea grows that ends must wait upon the discovery of means. Hence proceeds a fanatical interest in the properties of matter...which involves escape, substitution, and the under-current of anxiety which comes of knowing that the real issue has not been met.¹⁰⁰

With no ends in sight to offer purpose, there is no reality beyond matter. In such a material world, there is no place for religion as a source of guiding ends. Thus, “...we can better recognize the peril in which science and technology have placed our souls.”¹⁰¹ Weaver concludes, “...we find ourselves looking upon the specialist as a man possessed of an evil spirit.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Leopold, “Chihuahua and Sonora,” in *A Sand County Almanac*, 163.

¹⁰⁰ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 60.

¹⁰² Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 68.

Leopold was also a scientist and one can infer that he did not believe he was possessed of an evil spirit, but he experienced the fragmentation which Weaver conveyed. Early in his career with the Forest Service, Leopold wrote a long letter to his fellow foresters back in Carson National Forest while convalescing from a bout of nephritis. His extended recovery gave him time to think about his work as a supervisor. His words offer a case example of Weaver's view of fragmentation. The problem as Leopold saw it was that the details of routine administration kept the forester involved in what Weaver would call "mere activity" and prevented him from seeing his ultimate goal. As Leopold told his colleagues, "[W]e ride in a thicket. We grapple with difficulties; we are in a maze of routine. Letters, circulars, reports, and special cases beset our path... We ride—but are we getting anywhere?" As Meine described the situation in Leopold's biography, "the means were overwhelming the ends."¹⁰³

To Leopold, a grave consequence of specialization was that it allowed the abdication of responsibility. He put it this way: "We classify ourselves into vocations, each of which either wields some particular tool, sells it, or repairs it, or sharpens it, or dispenses advice on how to do so; by such division of labors we avoid responsibility for the misuse of any tool save our own."¹⁰⁴ He was also critical of professors in universities who get absorbed in their own specialty. Using the metaphor of an orchestra, he noted how each professor selects only one instrument to study, eschews the study of any other, and is "restrained by an ironbound taboo which decrees that the construction of instruments is the domain of science, while the detection of harmony is the domain of

¹⁰³ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 126.

¹⁰⁴ Leopold, "November," in *A Sand County Almanac*, 72.

poets.”¹⁰⁵ The result of this specialization and constraint is that the professor is complicit in serving science which in turn serves progress because he has lost sight of the ends being completely absorbed by the means. He described this consequence by extending the metaphorical instrument to represent the despoiled biota. He wrote, “[P]rofessors serve science and science serves progress. It serves progress so well that many of the more intricate instruments are stepped upon and broken in the rush to spread progress to all backward lands. One by one the parts are thus stricken from the songs of songs. If the professor is able to classify each instrument before it is broken, he is well content.”¹⁰⁶ In comparison, Weaver put the situation more harshly. He said of “modern centers of enterprise and of higher learning” that “[T]he scientist, the technician, the scholar, who have left the One for the Many are puffed up with vanity over their ability to describe precisely some minute portion of the world. Men so obsessed with fragments can no more be reasoned with than other psychotics, and hence the observation of Ortega y Gasset that the mere task of saving our civilization demands ‘incalculably subtle powers.’”¹⁰⁷

José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Revolt of the Masses* was an influential source of ideas for both Weaver and Leopold. Written in 1930, it described the “spoiled child” psychology, a malady that Ortega y Gasset asserted affected the bourgeoisie. It was a condition where people, because they lived in an artificial environment, had lost a sense of the hardships of the material world. In his introduction to *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, Weaver explicitly elucidated Ortega y Gasset’s position.:

¹⁰⁵ Leopold, “Chihuahua and Sonora,” in *A Sand County Almanac*, 162.

¹⁰⁶ Leopold, “Chihuahua and Sonora,” 162-163.

¹⁰⁷ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 62.

Their institutionalized world is a product of toil and discipline; of this they are no longer aware. Like the children of rich parents, they have been pampered by the labor and self-denial of those who went before; they begin to think that luxuries, though unearned, are rightfully theirs. They fret when their wishes are not gratified; they turn to cursing and abusing; they look for scapegoats. If the world does not conform to our heart's desire, some *person* is guilty!"¹⁰⁸

Ideas Have Consequences also was influenced by Ortega y Gasset.¹⁰⁹ In fact, Chapter VI, "The Spoiled-Child Psychology," directly engages and extends Ortega y Gasset's "spoiled child" concept. *Revolt of the Masses* also includes a chapter on "The Barbarism of 'Specialisation'" which argues that the ascendancy of science and technology in Europe in the 19th century negatively impacted European culture. Weaver's ideas about fragmentation and obsession in Chapter III of *Ideas Have Consequences* also owe much to Ortega y Gasset's discussion.¹¹⁰

Leopold had also read *The Revolt of the Masses*.¹¹¹ He cited the work in two of his essays published in 1933. In "The Virgin Southwest," Leopold wrote, "The major premise of civilization is that the attainments of one generation shall be available to the next...The changing 'tempo' of the generations, so convincingly described by Ortega [y Gasset] in *The Revolt of the Masses*, consists, perhaps, of fluctuations in their social confidence. Be that as it may, any matter which challenges the validity of the major premise is, ipso facto, a matter of concern to all thoughtful men."¹¹² He again quotes Ortega y Gasset in "The Conservation Ethic" where he wrote about the ultimate issue in

¹⁰⁸ Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 33. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁹ "The Spoiled Child Psychology" in *Ideas Have Consequences* is directly influenced by Ortega y Gasset's "spoiled child" idea. See George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 31-32.

¹¹⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, trans., authorized by Sr. Ortega y Gasset, remains anonymous at the translator's request (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1957), 107.

¹¹¹ Meine, *Aldo Leopold*, 296.

¹¹² Leopold, "The Virgin Southwest," in *The River of the Mother of God*, 173.

conservation: “The ultimate issue...is whether the mass-mind *wants* to extend its powers of comprehending the world in which it lives, or, granted the desire, *has the capacity to do so*. Ortega, in his *Revolt of the Masses*, has pointed the first question with devastating lucidity...I simply affirm that a sufficiently enlightened society, by changing its wants and tolerances, can change the economic factors bearing on land.”¹¹³

In comparing the writings of Weaver and Aldo Leopold, it is apparent that both used language reminiscent of war to describe the human-nature relationship and both advised restraint in human activity toward nature. For Weaver, piety would lead to restraint. For Leopold, it was an extension of ethics to the land and the recognition that humans were part of the land-community. They both viewed nature as ultimately beyond total human comprehension and, because of this view, they pointed to the need for humility before nature and cautioned prudence in attempts to modify it. They also both decried what they witnessed as the uncritical belief that material progress was always good. They viewed the engine of that progress—science—with skepticism bordering on apprehension. And they both wrote that science encouraged specialization and fragmentation which led to the absorption of means over ends, of the parts over the whole, and of the abdication of responsibility for one’s actions.

There is one important difference between Weaver and Leopold regarding their view of human relation to the land. Leopold advised the adoption of a “land ethic” where humans accepted a role as “plain citizen” of the land community. This implies a certain egalitarianism, that is, humans are part of the land community, but are not the masters of it. A “plain citizen” has the same rights as others—no more or no less. Weaver’s view of

¹¹³ Leopold, “The Conservation Ethic,” in *The River of the Mother of God*, 192. Emphasis in the original.

human relation to nature was to appreciate and respect it, but not be too entangled with it. That implies a detachment from it that is not in common with Leopold's land ethic.

Weaver described the right to private property as the "last metaphysical right" that humans possessed. He wrote, "[W]hen we survey the scene to find something which the rancorous leveling wind of utilitarianism has not brought down, we discover one institution...the right of private property."¹¹⁴ He was specific about what was and what was not private property. He sought to state clearly that the private property about which he wrote was not "that kind of property brought into being by finance capitalism."¹¹⁵

Finance capitalism, for Weaver, violated the very idea of private property:

This amendment to the institution to suit the uses of commerce and technology has done more to threaten private property than anything else yet conceived. For the abstract property of stocks and bonds, the legal ownership of enterprises never seen, actually destroy the connection between man and his substance without which metaphysical right becomes meaningless. Property in this sense becomes a fiction useful for exploitation and makes impossible the sanctification of work.¹¹⁶

The property that Weaver saw as the last metaphysical right was identified with the individual. True to the Agrarian ideal, it was "distributive ownership of small properties," specifically "independent farms," "local businesses," and "homes owned by the occupants." These types of property promoted individual responsibility which gave "significance to prerogative over property:" "[S]uch ownership provides a range of volition through which one can be a complete person."¹¹⁷ And this is the key for Weaver: owning private property encourages the development of virtue. One important virtue for

¹¹⁴ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 131.

¹¹⁵ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 132.

¹¹⁶ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 132-133.

¹¹⁷ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 133.

Weaver, especially, was providence, which he defined as foresight. Owning property entailed responsibility and that responsibility could best be met by practicing foresight.

As Weaver wrote:

It is precisely because providence takes into account the nonpresent that it calls for the exercise of reason and imagination. That I reap now the reward of my past industry or sloth, that what I do today will be felt in that future now potential...The ability to cultivate providence...is an opportunity to develop personal worth.¹¹⁸

Weaver points to the houses built in 19th century New England and the South to buttress his argument. These houses were built to last one hundred or one hundred and fifty years. The houses display not only great care in their design and craftsmanship, but also the foresight of their owners since the houses were built with future generations in mind. Weaver admired the virtue of the property owners that built such houses, and he saw them as good models for his own day. This quality that Weaver admired—foresight—was likewise practiced by Leopold in Sand County, Wisconsin. And although Weaver would not see himself or anyone else as a “plain citizen” of the land community, he would have admired Leopold’s stewardship of his own land.

¹¹⁸ Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*, 138.

EPILOGUE

Environmental Conservatism

This thesis has disclosed a previously unforeseen pattern of thought that ought to be incorporated within studies of environmental history. That pattern of thought at first seems incongruous with understandings of environmentalism given its conservative proclivities. What we have is an environmental conservatism that incorporates the values of tradition, myth, Christianity, and poetry. This imaginative perspective countered what is perceived as industrialism's deleterious impacts on human communities and their relationship to the natural world. The story of how a group of Southerners came to write *I'll Take My Stand*, what their message was, how one of their disciples, Richard Weaver, extended their message, and how Weaver and Aldo Leopold, a hero of the environmental movement, shared certain assumptions and key insights is a distinctive manifestation of environmental thought that has largely been overlooked by environmental historians. This new perspective illuminates the values underlying the thought of the Agrarians, Weaver, and Leopold.

The Agrarians' message was that industrialism promoted values that were detrimental to human communities. Adoption of industrialism would lead to alienation, disconnection from nature, and preoccupation with material things. It would mean the loss of religious experience, the arts, amenities, leisure, and, thus, the enjoyment of life. The Agrarians advised Southerners that infinite progress was a fantasy. They cautioned

them to slow down and to preserve their traditional, more leisurely and more limited way of life.¹

Richard Weaver developed a neo-Agrarianism that aligned with traditionalist conservatism. His extensions of Agrarianism included the concept of piety, humility before nature, and the restoration of a non-materialist worldview which, he contended, the traditional South represented. He would later generalize the values reflected in the Southern Tradition to broad Western, Christian values that were most amply reflected in the concept of piety. The virtue of piety, once adopted, would return man to a proper disposition in relation to nature, the past, and other people. Weaver's conception of piety, I have argued, supports a view of an environmental conservatism that entails stewardship of the Earth which acts in ways that reflect respect for and humility before nature. A wise steward would preserve nature and make changes mindfully and holistically—keeping the ends clearly in view.

Weaver and Aldo Leopold shared similar outlooks on nature, progress, and science, and were also influenced by the ideas of a noted 20th century figure, Ortega y Gasset. Comparing their writings, I have shown a connection between the thought of a Southern conservative and a well-known conservationist. Through this analysis, I can extract a pattern of thought that I term “environmental conservatism” that consists of an orientation toward the human-nature relationship that foregrounds the “right” disposition toward nature and corollary values in support of that orientation. That disposition is one of humility toward things “larger than the self” including, especially, nature as creation. This disposition entails values that acknowledge what often is dismissed as merely

¹ Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 154.

“subjective” experience. Those values are accordingly drawn from myth, Christian religion, and poetry. These resources for human value enable a humane way of living in accord with the natural world. As we have seen, this pattern of thought is enacted in criticisms of industrialism, the applied science that supported it, and the materialist values it promoted.

An environmental conservatism based on a historical conservative tradition and reflected in the integration of Weaver’s and Leopold’s views would acknowledge nature as fundamentally good and worthy of respect. The proper relation of humans to nature would entail humility and modesty. It would employ caution and prudence in any attempts to remake or reorder nature. Those attempts would be informed by an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of nature, and a recognition that tinkering with any one part, without a mindfulness of the whole, can have unforeseen and possibly negative consequences. Therefore, human activity toward nature would be characterized by restraint and, when change was justified, humans would employ their tools lightly, mindfully, and carefully. When actions were taken, the ends would be fully in sight with the means placed in proper relation of serving the ends. Such an environmental conservatism would distinguish progress as restoring and maintaining the health of the land-community. It would recognize limits. Science and technology would be servants to such a progress and, like means, would be in proper relation to the ends—healthy land-community restoration and maintenance. In short, humans would be wise stewards of the land-community.

It remains to be seen what the relevance of their shared perspective is to contemporary conservative politics. Although I have shown how their perspectives fit

into an historical conservative tradition, clearly many contemporary conservative politicians would not be sympathetic to this perspective. Frank Murkowski, former Republican senator and former governor of Alaska, serves as an example of such a conservative politician. In 2001, Murkowski, speaking on the floor of the Senate during a debate concerning drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, held up a blank sheet of white cardboard to demonstrate that, in winter, the Refuge contained nothing more than the visual aid he held aloft. He told the Senate, “[I]t’s flat, it’s unattractive, it’s not pristine—this is what it looks like. Don’t be misinformed.” Murkowski lacked what Weaver might describe as the “right sentiments.” A member of the Republican Leadership Council, he espoused Republican principles like less government, lower taxes, and a strong military.² As governor of Alaska, he declared “Ronald Reagan Day” on February 2, 2004 and urged all Alaskans to “honor President Reagan on this day and subsequent yearly anniversaries.”³ The Reagan legacy of limited government and supply-side economics were, apparently, views that resonated with Murkowski. And Murkowski’s view of the environment was resonant with Reagan’s actions as President.

From an environmentalist’s perspective, the Reagan legacy on the environment was decidedly awful. As President, Reagan’s record was characterized by efforts to scale back environmental protections. Reagan’s choice of James Watt as secretary of the Department of Interior and Anne Gorsuch as the head of the EPA caused consternation among environmentalists. As Greg Wetstone of the National Resources Defense Council framed Reagan’s appointments, “[N]ever has America seen two more intensely

² “Frank Murkowski on Principles and Values,” On The Issues: Every Political Leader on Every Issue. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from http://www.issues2000.org/Governor/Frank_Murkowski_Principles_+_Values.htm.

³ “Ronald Reagan Day,” *Press Archive*, State of Alaska, Governor Frank Murkowski. Retrieved on March 14, 2011 from <http://gov.state.ak.us/archive.php?id=766&type=6>.

controversial and blatantly anti-environmental political appointees than Watt and Gorsuch." In Gorsuch's first year at the EPA, regional offices filed 79 percent fewer enforcement cases and the EPA filed 69 percent fewer enforcement cases to the Department of Justice. Gorsuch worked to weaken the pollution standards of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. In 1987, Congress overrode Reagan's veto of a reauthorization of a stronger Clean Water Act. In 2004, David Alberswerth of the Wilderness Society stated that "[T]he Reagan administration adopted an extraordinarily aggressive policy of issuing leases for oil, gas, and coal development on tens of millions of acres of national lands—more than any other administration in history..." It was also during Reagan's presidency that CAFE standards for cars, established under President Jimmy Carter, and funding for renewable energy were rolled back. This latter action "set solar back a decade," Phil Clapp, the president of National Environmental Trust asserted.⁴ A more symbolic and more telling move for Reagan was removing the solar panels from the White House.⁵

The Reagan presidency continues to hold a firm grip on American conservatism. Current Republican politicians from Mitt Romney to Sarah Palin repeatedly invoke his name and claim his conservative mantle in part to establish their core conservative credentials. In fact, such acts are pretty much required for Republican candidates. Reagan's ideology of limited government continues to have a large impact as reflected in the Tea Party movement. If Richard Weaver contributed to the rise of American

⁴ Quoted in Amanda Little, "How Green Was the Gipper?," *Grist* (June 10, 2004). Retrieved on April 10, 2011 from <http://www.grist.org/article/griscom-reagan>.

⁵ Brian Clark Howard, "9 U.S. Presidents with the Worst Environmental Records: Leaving a Legacy of Pollution and Destruction," "Maverick Gone Bad: Ronald Reagan," August 2008. Reagan's administration was deemed the second worst for its environmental record. George W. Bush's administration earned the top spot. Retrieved on April 10, 2011 from <http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/presidents-worst-environmental-records-460808#ixzz1J8qaGbQj>.

conservatism in the 1950s, and if his ideas can be seen as a foundation of an environmental conservatism, an important question must be answered. Why did Weaver's environmental thought have no influence on the American conservative movement which gave rise to Reagan? I would speculate that there are at least three reasons: the time in which Weaver was a voice for traditional conservatism and the environmental concerns during that period, his anti-business views, and his lifelong opposition to racial integration.

Weaver's influence on the nascent conservative movement occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s before his death in 1963. During that time, he voiced his views in conservative instruments like *Modern Age* and the *National Review*. The period of Weaver's influence coincided with what the historian Samuel Hays has called the first stage of evolution of environmental action. That stage, from 1957 to 1972, revolved around issues regarding recreation and wilderness, and national politics reflected that orientation through legislation that addressed protection for wilderness areas such as the Wilderness Act of 1964.⁶ Such legislation granted the federal government broad powers to protect wilderness areas including assuming control of large tracts of land and regulating the uses—both business and recreational—of those lands. The prominent conservative, Barry Goldwater, was one of just twelve senators who voted against the Wilderness Act in part because of concerns that federal oversight would lock up large tracts of land and prevent use of the land's resources.⁷ Historian Adam Rome has called the federal government's assumption of the responsibility for environmental protection

⁶ Samuel P. Hays, "From Conservation to Environment: Environmental Policies in the United States since World War Two," *Environmental Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (1982), 25. Hays argued that the first of three stages in the evolution of environmental action took place from 1957 to 1968.

⁷ Brian Allen Drake, "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Senator Barry Goldwater and the Environmental Management State," *Environmental History*, Vol. 15, Issue 4 (October 2010), 596.

and the power to act the “environment management state.”⁸ The assumption of control of wilderness areas by the federal government would have been counter to what Weaver believed in as a Southern conservative. His suspicion of the state and belief in local control and limited government makes it difficult to envision Weaver supporting expanding the power and reach of the federal government. Given Weaver’s skepticism of centralized government, it is difficult to see how he would have supported actions that would grant the federal government authority to purchase and then to dictate the purposes for which large tracts of land should be used. Thus, in the first stage of environmental evolution, Weaver’s anti-state sentiments would not have been compatible with the direction of environmentalism.

Weaver’s skepticism of centralized authority encompassed not only government but corporations as well. Like the Agrarians and Leopold who derided Chambers of Commerce, Weaver, too, was dubious about business. Standard conservative arguments against environmentalism usually indict its call for government regulation as anti-business and assert that regulation impedes economic growth. Since Weaver stressed the need for a nonmaterialist society, his concern was not about creating a climate that promoted prosperity. His stance regarding big business and finance capital was expressed in *Ideas Have Consequences* in the chapter, “The Last Metaphysical Right.” For Weaver, the last metaphysical right was the right to own private property. In the chapter he pointed to finance capitalism as the greatest threat to private property because it destroyed the connection between “man and his substance.” It was also a threat because the “aggregation of vast properties under anonymous ownership is a constant invitation to

⁸ Brian Allen Drake, “The Skeptical Environmentalist,” 590.

further state direction of our lives and fortunes.” This was the case because it was relatively easy to transfer control to the state given the vastness and integration of such properties. But it was not only the state, in Weaver’s view, that was the root of the threat. Business, too, “develops a bureaucracy which can be quite easily merged with that of government.” Business was also not shy about asking the government for assistance.

Weaver asserted:

[L]arge business organizations, moreover, have seldom been backward about petitioning the government for assistance, since their claim for independence rests upon desire for profit rather than upon principle or honor. Big business and the rationalization of industry thus abet the evils we seek to overcome. Ownership through stock makes the property an autonomous unit, devoted to abstract ends, and the stockholder’s area of responsibility is narrowed in the same way as is that of the specialized worker. Respecters of private property are really obligated to oppose much that is done today in the name of private enterprise, for corporate organization and monopoly are the very means whereby property is casting aside its privacy.⁹

Weaver’s view of big business and finance capital would not have resonated with the likes of Ronald Reagan nor, more recently, Texas Congressman Joe Barton, famous for his apology to British Petroleum’s then CEO Tony Hayward. For conservatives who favor free enterprise, the market, and unfettered capitalism, Weaver’s message would have no influence.

The issue of Weaver’s position on race has served to marginalize him. It is quite difficult to come to terms with his lifelong opposition to integration in the South. Weaver rested his arguments concerning race on the principle that a well-ordered society demanded hierarchy. No two people were born equal. Throughout his life, Weaver

⁹ Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1.

maintained a staunch defense of the historic Southern order which included, however cleverly he couched his arguments, a commitment to racial segregation.

In “Life Without Prejudice,” he argued that those who would use the word “prejudice” as a flail sought to “dissolve...society altogether” through an assault on “all traditional distinctions, whether economic, moral, social, or aesthetic...”¹⁰ In Weaver’s view, communities generated “a shared sentiment, a oneness, and a loyalty through selective differentiation of the persons who make them up.” His well-working society echoed the image the late 19th-century New South advocate Henry Grady sought to project for Northern audiences: “A society is a structure with many levels, offices, and roles, and the reason we feel grateful to the idea of society is that one man’s filling his role makes it possible for another to fill his role...”¹¹ For Weaver, “society exists in and through its variegation and multiplicity, and when we speak of a society’s ‘breaking down,’ we mean exactly a confusing of these roles, a loss of differentiation, and a consequent waning of the feeling of loyalty.”¹² The fundamental issue for Weaver was “the right of an individual or a society to hold a belief which, though unreasoned, is uncontradicted.”¹³ Throughout the entire essay the issue of race or the system of segregation is never explicitly identified, but Weaver’s well-ordered communities where each person knows and accepts his place is clearly the segregated South.

A more famous, or perhaps infamous, essay was published in 1957 in the *National Review* where Weaver wrote that “Integration” and “Communization” were “closely synonymous.” He went on to add: “It does not take many steps to get from the

¹⁰ Richard M. Weaver, “Life Without Prejudice,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 1957), 4.

¹¹ Weaver, “Life Without Prejudice,” 5.

¹² Weaver, “Life Without Prejudice,” 5.

¹³ Weaver, “Life Without Prejudice,” 9.

`integrating' of facilities to the `communizing' of facilities, if the impulse is there.”¹⁴

Richard Weaver’s racist baggage would have posed a barrier to overt influence on a conservative like Ronald Reagan. Although Reagan deployed a successful “Southern strategy” in his 1980 campaign that some have found racist, he was careful to emphasize his belief in “states rights” in his appearance in the South. That coded message provided needed cover.¹⁵ Race was among the reasons that cost M. E. Bradford his opportunity to chair the National Endowment for the Humanities during Reagan’s first term as President when it was circulated that Bradford had supported George Wallace in 1972.

Ronald Reagan and Senator Murkowski would probably be more attuned to the brand of conservative environmentalism of Dunn and Kinney, authors of *Conservative Environmentalism*. Their pro-business cost-benefit analysis might have more traction than an environmental conservatism based on Weaver’s and Leopold’s views.¹⁶

Murkowski, particularly, represents the type of conservative who is deaf to the traditional conservatism of Weaver, Russell Kirk, William F. Buckley, Frank Meyer, and other “beautiful losers.”¹⁷ But some conservatives criticize modern conservative politicians for “blindly supporting whatever ‘business interests’ take on environmental issues.” These conservatives believe that “...the traditionalist conservative is opposed to the ‘business mentality’ that sees getting and spending as the ultimate goals of society.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Richard M. Weaver, “Integration Is Communization,” *In Defense of Tradition: Collected Shorter Writings of Richard M. Weaver 1929-1963*, Ted J. Smith III, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 557.

¹⁵ Bob Herbert, “Righting Reagan’s Wrongs,” [Op-Ed], *The New York Times*, November 13, 2007. Retrieved on April 24, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/13/opinion/13herbert.html>.

¹⁶ James R. Dunn and John E. Kinney, *Conservative Environmentalism: Reassessing Means, Redefining End* (Westport, CT and London: Quorum Books, 1996).

¹⁷ Samuel T. Francis, *Beautiful Losers* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 18.

¹⁸ John R. E. Bliese, “Richard M. Weaver, Russell Kirk, and the Environment,” *Modern Age*, Vol. 38, Issue 2 (1996), 148-149.

Perhaps conservatives who hold deeper sentiments and spiritual beliefs about the world and their relation to it—conservatives like evangelical Christians—would be more likely adherents to the ideas of Weaver and Leopold. I posit that one possible implication of the study of the history of Weaver’s and Leopold’s ideas might disclose an environmental framework that would resonate with self-identified conservatives. Organizations like Republicans for Environmental Protection (REP) and ConservAmerica may provide working examples of the practice of environmental conservatism as I have described it. Both evangelical Christians associated with groups like the Evangelical Environmental Network, Earth Ministry, Target Earth, and EarthCare, and Republicans associated with the REP and the Property & Environment Research Center (PERC), approach environmental issues from the acknowledgement of their duty and obligation to protect the environment through stewardship of the Earth. The concept of stewardship itself is a conservative mindset. In the traditional sense, stewards do not own what they maintain and protect. They are caretakers for a period of time, but then pass along the duties and obligations to the next generation.

REP states that their core values are “conservation and environmental stewardship.” The group, incorporated in 1996 by “three middle-class women,” argues “*Conservation is Conservative*™,” an assertion trademarked by ConservAmerica.¹⁹ They believe that fundamental rudiments of conservatism support their assertion. Barry Goldwater became an honorary member of REP in 1996.²⁰ The group points to conservatives throughout history, including Goldwater, Edmund Burke and Theodore Roosevelt, and uses quotations to buttress their claim. Among those they quote is Richard

¹⁹ ConservAmerica, “Building a conservative constituency for conservation” Web site. Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://www.conservationisconservative.org/>.

²⁰ Brian Allen Drake, “The Skeptical Environmentalist,” 604.

Weaver, one of the “very founders of modern conservatism.” The REP appears to be a group practicing environmental conservatism.

In the recent budget battles between the GOP and the Obama administration, David Jenkins, vice president for government and political affairs for REP took a dim view of GOP demands for policy riders that would weaken the EPA. He bemoaned the dearth of “stewardship-minded conservatives” in the Republican Party, saying that “[T]rue conservatives should realize that fiscal stewardship and environmental stewardship are two sides of the same coin. Both are required to fulfill our responsibility to future generations.” Jim DiPeso, also with REP, called on John Boehner, current Speaker of the House, to “rediscover true conservatism, take charge, throw out the anti-environmental riders, and negotiate a budget agreement that will keep the government open and take a stand for responsible fiscal and environmental stewardship.”²¹

Evangelical Christians aligned with Christian organizations like the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and similar groups may represent another manifestation of an environmental conservatism. Their approach differs from the REP in that their actions are motivated by the belief that care for the environment is grounded in biblical scripture. Evangelical leaders concerned with creation care met in June 1994 to study what role Christians had in protecting “the world that God created.” The result of their work was a declaration, *An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, which almost 500 evangelical leaders signed. The first statement in the declaration asserts that belief in the bible is critical to solving environmental problems: “As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have

²¹ Press release from Republicans for Environmental Protection, “GOP Leaders Held Hostage by Anti-Environmental Radicals,” April 7, 2011. Retrieved on April 10, 2011 from http://www.rep.org/opinions/press_releases/release11-4-7.html.

degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.”²² The principles of biblical faith include “a transcendent, yet immanent, loving Creator God created and cares for creation; humans, created in the image of God, are called to care for creation...” Their work is focused on educating and mobilizing Christians through their congregations and communities to engage national and international policies that “affect our ability to preach the Gospel, protect life, and care for God’s creation.”²³ They look upon their work as a ministry of creation care. The Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) is another manifestation of this work.²⁴

Both Republican and Evangelical organizations must contend with the dissonance associated with conservative organizations espousing “liberal” views. For example, the ECI’s call to action concerning global climate revealed fissures in conservative thinking about environmental issues.²⁵ On the ECI Frequently Asked Questions Web site, one of the questions posed was “[D]oes addressing climate change mean we’re becoming

²² EarthCare, “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation and The Sandy Cove Covenant,” *An EarthCare Resource Guide* (Chattanooga: EarthCare, Inc., January 2008). Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from www.earthcareonline.org/evangelical_declaration.pdf.

²³ Evangelical Environmental Network Web site. Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://creationcare.org/>.

²⁴ Evangelical concern about environmental issues is likely to grow with the emergence of a younger, “greener” generation of evangelical leaders. See Lawrence J. Prelli and Terri S. Winters, “Rhetorical Features of Green Evangelicalism,” *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2009), 224-243.

²⁵ The *New York Times* reported on February 8, 2006 that some evangelical leaders tried to stop the ECI’s action and have organized an opposition group, Interfaith Stewardship Alliance. Two prominent evangelical leaders, the Reverend Ted Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), and the Reverend Richard Cizik, NAE’s Washington lobbyist, were not signatories because of pressure from leaders of the Religious Right including the “Republican Party-aligned Institute on Religion and Democracy” which asked the NAE to not question the Bush Administration’s environmental policies. Other prominent evangelical leaders, including James Dobson, Charles Colson, and the Reverend Richard Land, signed a letter sent to the NAE urging the organization not to release a statement supporting the ECI statement. See Laurie Goodstein, “Evangelical Leaders Join Global Warming Initiative,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2006. Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/06/us/06evangelical.html>; Chuck Currie, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” “God is still speaking,” blog, Retrieved on May 2, 2006 from http://chuckcurrie.blogs.com/chuck_currie/2006/02/climate_change_.html; and Karen Breslau and Martha Brant, “God’s Green Soldiers: A new call to combat global warming triggers soul-searching and controversy among evangelicals,” *Newsweek* (February 13, 2006). Retrieved on August 8, 2011 from <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-141811173.html>.

liberals?” Another question was “[A]re we working with environmentalists?” These queries demonstrate that the organizers of ECI anticipate that evangelical Christians may have something of an identity crisis—how can one be conservative and hold views compatible with liberals and environmentalists? EEN also sees it necessary to respond to the paradox of being a Christian and an environmentalist. The EEN Web site contains a response to the “myth” that “DEEP DOWN THIS IS ALL ABOUT A POLITICAL AGENDA.”²⁶ In a *Washington Post* article in 2005, an interview revealed that an evangelical minister preferred the term “creation care” because “environmentalism” meant “liberals, secularists, and Democrats” to “conservative Christians.”²⁷

The REP contends with the same concern conservatives have about being associated with “liberal” causes. Their Web site seeks to debunk this “persistent myth” that is “perpetuated by the media, liberals and many self-professed ‘conservatives,’” and set the record straight:

The misperception stems from the fact that the GOP establishment has lost sight of these values (largely due to the influence of corporate lobbies and political leaders beholden to them for campaign support) and from the willingness of populist Democrats to embrace environmental protection. The result has been a polarizing battle that is not at all about the advance of conservative principles, but rather the advance of special interest political agendas.²⁸

²⁶ Scott Sabin, “The Myths of Christian Environmentalism,” July 12, 2010, *Evangelical Environmental Network Blog*. Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://prayerforcreationcare.creationcare.org/view.php?id=65>.

²⁷ Blaine Harden, “The Greening of Evangelicals: Christian Right Turns, Sometimes Warily, to Environmentalism,” *The Washington Post* (February 6, 2005). Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A1491-2005Feb5.html>.

²⁸ “Why Conservation is Conservative™,” Republications for Environmental Protection. Retrieved on April 23, 2011 from <http://www.rep.org/quotes.html>.

Articulating the historical roots of an environmental conservatism could offer evangelicals, Republicans, and other conservatives the possibility of being environmentalists without being liberals.

One final implication for this study is that a reliance on ecology or any other science as the basis for doing environmental history risks concealing or ignoring important and trenchant criticisms directly related to concerns about humanity's place in nature. Those concerns are matters of value, experience, and intellection, and are irreducible to the findings of experimental or observational science. If, as the historian Donald Worster proposes, ecology should be the foundation for environmental history, than science frames the discussion, and I would assert that such a framing limits the discussion. In that framing, where do concepts like values get considered? How does science account for or inform the "art of living?" Where does faith fit in? The Agrarians, Weaver, and, to some extent, Leopold believed that more humane living is achieved through community life based on an inherited tradition that seeks accommodation with nature rather than mastery of it. From this belief, one might ask the question, "What can science tell us about 'the art of living?'" I would argue that historians should not cede the terms of discussion solely to technocratic and economic perspectives. Those perspectives may fail to acknowledge the importance of the quality of life in organic communities. A return to John Crowe Ransom's description of the farmer's relationship to the land will exemplify the power of a perspective that engages human values and imagination:

He identifies himself with a spot of ground, and this ground carries a good deal of meaning; it defines itself for him as nature. He would till it not too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmic consciousness. A man

can contemplate and explore, respect and love, an object as substantial as a farm or a native providence. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love, a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of “nature resources,” a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer’s farm. It means the dehumanization of his life.²⁹

And such a perspective is germane to environmental history as the relationship of human values to nature is a critical part of the story.

²⁹ John Crowe Ransom, “Reconstructed But Unregenerate,” *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 19-20.

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