Symbols are markers of meaning. They order social reality, providing orientation and understanding to the individual amid the complexity of social life. They capture images of people's innermost dreams and most protected fears. Because symbols are endowed with such meaning, they bring individuals together, solidifying them into a community, a group, or a social movement. It is the power of political symbols that creates social solidarity, a power socially constructed through human belief. Yet part of the potency of symbols rests in the fact that symbols harbor different meanings. Beneath the seeming unity of shared symbols rest disparate beliefs, a multiplicity of meanings.

There are two worlds among women of the New Right, two worlds rooted in different realities. While social conservatives peer out at the world through a religious lens, laissez-faire conservatives look at the world through the lens of liberty. The fundamental values, the basic assumptions regarding human nature, the hopes and fears at the heart of each world are distinct. Yet despite all of the differences the two worlds converge in naming the forces responsible for America's decline. Hence, any discussion of the New Right must not only acknowledge the existence of these two worlds but must also look beneath the political symbols that appear to unite the Right to uncover the meanings underlying these symbols. For while it may appear that the Right shares a common ideology, beneath these shared symbols rest essentially different constructions of social reality. Thus, the New Right speaks a common language devoid of any common meaning.

To understand the multiplicity of meanings of political symbols is to recognize the danger of relying solely on survey results to understand a political ideology. By labeling individuals "conservative" based on their responses to a set of questions, we may overlook important differences in the meaning of such responses. For example, while both social and laissez-faire conservatives might respond to a questionnaire with "strong approval" of law and order to address the rise in youth crime, there are critical differences in the perceived roots and proposed solutions to such an issue. Social conservatives view youth crime as a sign of America's moral decay, as the result of a decline in authority, and as a failure to instill traditional values of honesty, hard work, and respect for others. Laissez-faire conservatives interpret youth crime as a result of restrictions on the free market; minimum-wage legislation, they argue, restricts jobs for the young, leading to teenage unemployment and consequently to crime. Further, government handouts inculcate youth with the ethic that "you can get something for nothing," which destroys individual initiative and sanctions criminal activities. Consequently, while social conservatives look to the moral realm to address crime by youth, laissez-faire conservatives seek economic solutions to cure America of this ill.

Understanding these subuniverses of meaning among those who are grouped together under the common label of "conservative" or "right-wing" is as important as understanding how conservatives are distinct from liberals. Such knowledge not only reveals a fuller spectrum of the variations of political belief but also points to areas of potential conflict between the two worlds, raising questions about the future of the conservative movement.

The two worlds of the New Right are not simply dissimilar; they are fundamentally incompatible. There are three basic areas of tension between social and laissez-faire conservatism. Yet a "myth of common meaning" (as it is called by Charles Elder and Roger Cobb in *The Political Uses of Symbols*) sustains the unity of the two worlds. Until the underlying content meaning of these shared symbols is exposed, revealing the chasm within the Right, common meaning will be assumed. Thus far, the political leaders of the New Right have been successful in wedding together the coalition of groups that elected and reelected Ronald Reagan. Yet, given the deep division of ideology and interest beneath this seeming unity, what is the possibility of divorce? What is the future of the New Right?

The first area of tension between the two worlds centers on different beliefs regarding the individual and society.
For social conservatives, man is fallen, sinful, a creature of unlimited passions and desires. There is a deterministic strain to the social conservative view of human nature; skeptical of man's ability to "pull himself up by the bootstraps," social conservatives believe that human perfection will only be achieved in the next world. In this world it is society's role to leash man's appetites, to tame human nature. Acting as a force of integration, society brings the individual under the moral authority of God, the church, and the family, thereby restraining man's instincts and curbing individual self-interest. Only through such integration does man attain his civilized state as a moral being. If a world of balance and integration is the ideal, what social conservatives fear, above all, is anomie, social chaos. Without binding moral values and obedience to God's laws, individual passions are unleashed, the foundation of social cohesion disintegrates, and anarchy reigns.

While social conservatives view the religious realm as primary and focus on man as a moral being, laissez-faire conservatives place primary importance on the marketplace, with humans as self-interested actors. This is not to say that laissez-faire conservatives are irreligious; rather, religious belief does not play the central role for laissez-faire conservatives that it does for social conservatives.

In stark contrast to the social conservative view of human nature, laissez-faire conservatives praise human potential, believing that humans are best left on their own, unrestricted by imposing constraints. By placing ultimate faith in individual initiative and free will, laissez-faire conservatives adhere to a voluntaristic view of human nature, taking pride in the human capacity for self-improvement. Rather than viewing humans as beings of unlimited appetites that require moral restraint, laissez-faire conservatives view humans as autonomous beings, capable of critical thought and independent action. Consequently, society is viewed as the aggregate of individual action in which the marketplace—rather than God or moral authority—creates social harmony out of individual interest. The ideal society preserves liberty, allowing the individual unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, which thereby yields the greatest productivity and the maximum freedom. What laissez-faire conservatives fear, above all, is the loss of individual freedoms, the imposition of collectivism, and ultimately the slavery of the totalitarian state.

While the laissez-faire conservative dreams of a world in which the individual is freed from the external constraints of authority and thereby attains total autonomy, such a vision is anarchic to the social conservative. The free individual of the laissez-faire conservative world is the masterless man feared by social conservatives.

By placing the individual on center stage, and by stressing autonomy and free will, the laissez-faire conservative perspective comes perilously close to the Secular Humanist model abhorred by social conservatives. In fact, the libertarian dictum of total freedom of action, barring the use of force or fraud, parallels the very slogan of the 1960s that social conservatives condemn: "Do your own thing as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else." Social conservatives view such "pure liberty" as defiance of divine law, which results in social disintegration. Humanists are accused of being selfish and narcissistic, of viewing life merely in terms of gratification of the ego. Yet this charge of "Me-Firstism" could just as well be made about laissez-faire conservatives. New Right leader Howard Phillips, quoted in Andrew H. Merton's Enemies of Choice, adds to this in his remark: "The liberals believe that the state is God. The libertarians believe that Man is God. And the conservatives, at least those to whose doctrines I subscribe, believe that God is God."

Another New Right spokesman, Thomas Fleming, commenting in The New Right Papers, edited by Robert W. Whitaker, on the difference between what he terms "true conservatives and false conservatives," condemns the "Natural Rights craze of false conservatives," according to which "I am entitled to everything I can lay my hands on"; he renounces John Locke's doctrine of individual rights, "inasmuch as society is composed not of individuals, but families." Further, this author's criticism of "false conservatives" erupts into overt hostility against the basic tenets of laissez-faire conservative belief:

The typical Northern capitalist... is a strong defender of what he likes to call Free Enterprise, by which he too often means a government-encouraged monopoly or oligopoly of business interests. He stands up for America against the menace of Soviet Communism... although he is not averse to turning a profit from trading with countries "behind the Iron Curtain."... Religion, he is heard to argue, is a very good thing, so long as it is not contaminated by fanaticism... It is obvious to anyone that many capitalist "Conservatives" are nothing better than nineteenth century liberals with a hangover. Their libertarian ideas of freedom, expressed almost always in economic terms, are tempered only by the recognition that it takes force to keep the discontented masses in their place. However, when a Southerner calls himself a conservative, he is usually thinking of a way of life, of a social and moral order for which the people of the 1860s went to war. He is more dis-