

populist) as effete elitists, unpatriotic spendthrifts—using terms like limousine liberals, latte liberals, tax-and-spend liberals, Hollywood liberals, East Coast liberals, the liberal elite, wishy-washy liberals, and so on. At the same time they have branded conservatives (whose policies favor the economic elite) as populists—again through language, including body language. From Ronald Reagan’s down-home folksiness to George W. Bush’s John Wayne-style “Bubbaisms,” the language, dialects, body language, and narrative forms have been those of rural populists. Their radio talk show hosts—warriors all—have adopted the style of hellfire preachers. But the message is the same: The hated liberals are threatening American culture and values, and have to be fought vigorously and continuously on every front. It is a threat to the very security of the nation, as well as morality, religion, the family, and everything real Americans hold dear. Their positions on wedge issues—guns, babies, taxes, same-sex marriage, the flag, school prayer—reveal the “treachery” of liberals. The wedge issues are not important in themselves, but are vital in what they represent: a strict father attitude to the world.

Without the mutually supportive relationships among the domains of interest—individual, governing, business, and social—conservatism as an overarching moral system cannot flourish. What appears to liberals to be fragmentation and disunity could be a mutually reinforcing structure that is powerful and threatening to progressive values and American democracy.

The prevailing wisdom of progressives, on the other hand, is that ideological divisions are tearing conservatism apart. But we had better consider both possibilities.