



The Center for
SOCIAL LEADERSHIP

Beyond Liberal & Conservative

Independents, Postmodernism, & How to *Really* Understand the Issues

Oliver DeMille

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About The Center for Social Leadership

The Center for Social Leadership (CSL) is a think tank and action organization dedicated to building [social leaders](#) for the 21st Century.

Humanity is experiencing dramatic changes. Traditional leadership is broken. Conventional human organization based on hierarchies and formal authority is outdated. Human consciousness is evolving. Technology has transformed the way we interact and enhanced our ability to have impact—for good or ill. The Center for Social Leadership was formed to steer these changes to improve the health of society, preserve freedom, and ensure peace and prosperity for humanity. A new vision of leadership is needed. Not the old, hierarchical, positional, authoritative, privileged-elite leadership, but a new democratic, action-determined, service-oriented leadership. Through this social leadership mankind can achieve unprecedented happiness and fulfillment.

Learn more and engage with CSL by [reading our e-book](#) and joining our mailing list at www.TheSocialLeader.com.

“It’s not about someone doing everything. It’s about everyone doing something.”



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If you want to understand and profit from the political, economic and cultural forces at play in today's world, you must understand two things: 1) the evolution of pre-modernism, modernism and post-modernism, and 2) how independents view and are shaping the world.

Armed with this understanding you'll be able to see through the superficial and misleading "liberal versus conservative" debate portrayed by the media. Furthermore, you'll be able to harness our current societal transformations to your advantage.

The most fundamental question in the Great Debate of how society should be organized is ["Who \(or what\) will save us?"](#) Pre-modernism, modernism, and post-modernism all have different answers.

Pre-Modernism & Modernism

Modernism is defined in many ways. One of the most enlightening is discovered by comparing modernism to the pre-modern and post-modern worlds.

In a nutshell, pre-modern societies believed that some supernatural being or at least super-powerful entity would save mankind. Man is flawed and weak (so the narrative went), and if we are to be saved it must come from something greater than man. The three main branches of this view—one God, many gods, and shamanic energy powers—all agreed on the

basics. For example: man needs saving, he can't save himself, a higher power must save us, and we should therefore live in a way that pleases or avails us of the benefits of the higher power. That's a simple version of pre-modernism.

Modernism began when societies changed these assumptions. The modern era adopted the following beliefs: man needs saving, he can't save himself and it seems no godlike power is inclined to step up (for whatever reason), so man must build institutions which can save him. In short, modernism rests on the belief that man-made institutions can and should save us.

The early modernists built on their pre-modern religious roots and turned to churches as the institutions most likely to fix the world's problems. Those who were dissatisfied or impatient with this solution turned to governments as the answer. If there are any problems in the world, according to this view, government should fix them. If a government won't fix a problem or allows any suffering, it is bad and should be reformed or replaced. If a government tries but can't fix problems, it is too weak and must be given more power.

After all, we humans like our higher powers incredibly strong and always benevolent.



Government v. Markets

A third major branch of modernism arose when governments repeatedly failed to solve the world's problems. This school of thought believed that big business was the answer. Huge, powerful businesses, as [Keynes](#) argued, reach a size where they care less about profit and more about taking care of their employees and society in general. This view has business provide insurance, benefits and other perks to help the people live happily. It tends to ignore small business and even large "greedy" businesses, and instead promote more power to the biggest corporations.

In recent years we've witnessed the debates between all three branches of modernism, from faith-based initiatives (church as central institution) to health care reform (government as central institution) to executive bonuses (corporation as central institution). But since the media usually couches all these and many other issues in "Conservative *versus* Liberal" terms, few people realize what is actually going on in these controversies.

The church-as-savior belief lost most of its influence in the last century, leaving governments and businesses to jockey for first place in this race to be the central institution helping mankind. Many participated in this debate: [Marx](#), [Darwin](#), [Bastiat](#), [Nietzsche](#), [Freud](#), [C.S. Lewis](#), [Andrew Carnegie](#), [Ayn Rand](#), [Solzhenitsyn](#), [Keynes](#), [Kinsey](#), [Milton Friedman](#), [Mao Tse-tung](#), [Reagan](#), [Clinton](#), [Bush](#), [Obama](#), several Popes, [Bill Gates](#), [Warren Buffett](#) and others.

The Current Debate



Most recently, [Ralph Nader](#) has argued that the only solution to our current problems is for the super-rich to use their influence and power to reduce corporate power in the world and let governments save us. Government offers the most hope to mankind, this view argues, and corporations are the problem. Greedy corporations caused the economic downturn, according to this view.

In contrast, the famous [Shell Oil Global Scenarios](#) have made a case that government cannot and will not solve truly global problems like energy, environment, transportation, economic ups and downs, communication and education. Their solution is for corporations with experience planning across borders to be given the power to make and follow a “blueprint” for global success. Leaving it to governments would cause a mad “scramble” toward more war, poverty,

depression and suffering, according to this view.

After all, the corporations say, when the economy fell it hurt most companies and nearly all governments. Only the biggest corporations remained strong—*so they should govern us!*

Both sides (“Government Should Fix It” and “Big Business as Savior”) see the other as a dangerous utopian scheme. Consider, for example, the issue of health care (or energy policy, unemployment, boosting the economy, or any other

national issue). Most officials and media personnel see the debates as political, between conservatives and liberals. To a certain extent—votes in Congress—this is true. But the real debate is much deeper and broader than politics.

It is about who we are as human beings and where we're headed as a society. While there are still some supporters of pre-modern or modern views, governments and businesses have so far failed to deliver heaven on earth or even ideal society.

The End of Conservative *versus* Liberal

For most people today, neither of these institutions are the answer. When conservatives talk about faith-based initiatives or Republicans tout trickle-down economics, most people are skeptical. Likewise when liberals emphasize anti-corporate measures or Democrats roll out the latest government program. The result of this growing skepticism characterizes the [rise of the independents](#).



A few independents are anti-government and a few are anti-corporation, but the large majority just want government to do its job, do it well, and stop trying to do everything else. While there is heated debate over what, exactly, is the government's job, most independents would settle for good national security, good schools, fiscal responsibility, social equity, and a high-opportunity economy. While the Left hopes to create a good

economy through government programs and the Right through big business initiatives, most independents want both—along with less regulation on small business.

But this tectonic shift in American society is much bigger than politics. Most Americans, and indeed many around the world, have lost faith in modernism itself, in the promise that big, powerful, man-made institutions—be they church, government or corporation—can solve our problems. Indeed, there is a growing sentiment that most big institutions tend to increase the world's problems.

Business, church and government all have a place in society, the independents say, but none are the “higher” powers we once hoped for.

Postmodernism and Independents

Enter post-modernism. While nearly every person who writes about postmodernism defines it differently, one thing is clear: The fastest growing worldview is not modernism. That is, postmodernists are of many stripes, but they don't believe that government or business will save us. Period. And they are the new majority.

Independents are likely to read and champion ideas from both Milton Friedman and Ralph Nader, vote for both Barack Obama and Arnold Schwarzenegger, and quote both Ted Kennedy and Ronald Reagan. Neither liberals nor

conservatives understand them.

What is the cause of this social/cultural/political earthquake? At least part of it is that independents no longer have a basic faith in the infallibility or fundamental goodness of government or the market. They see a role for both, and feel that both must be limited.

The New Majority



But the biggest shift of all may be that postmodernists and independents have a new faith: “We must save ourselves, at least as far as this world is concerned.” On one extreme, this means becoming truly self-made, like an Ayn Rand hero, building yourself and your family at the expense of all others. At another extreme, it includes those who still believe God will save us, but feel that we must live in a way that we deserve to be saved—or at least become worthy to live in a God-made world.

Most postmodernists adopt neither of these—believing instead that we should become our best selves and help the people around us in the process.

“Humanity needs saving, so do your part,” is the growing mantra. If you are in government, do your part and do it well. If you are in business, likewise. Be a great parent, grandparent, doctor, coach, teacher, policeman, nurse, business owner, fireman, mayor, friend. Whatever your role, do it better.

Some postmodern thinkers, like James Redfield (author of [The Celestine Prophecy](#)), promote teams of spiritually-awakened people praying down power from the universe to improve the world. Others, such as intellectual [Ken Wilber](#), suggest learning the truths found in all fields of knowledge and from all cultures and philosophies—and then integrating them together. [Marianne Williamson](#) says to trust our inner greatness and also in miracles, and many recommend manifesting our personal power to build entrepreneurial wealth and use it to help others.

Nearly every nation and industry has its prophets of manifesting success, from [Miguel Ruiz](#) and [Carlos Castaneda](#) to [Anthony Robbins](#), [Brian Tracy](#), [Peter Senge](#), [Ken Blanchard](#), [Paulo Coelho](#), [Guy Kawasaki](#), [Seth Godin](#) or [Steve Jobs](#).

In retrospect, it probably shouldn’t surprise anyone that the “self-help,” “how to,” “new age,” “success,” “skeptical,” “green” and “secularist” genres would eventually impact the philosophy of modernism. All of them share a faith in self over institutions. After all, an unproven belief in government or big business is referred to in both “success” and “skeptical” literature as “the victim mentality.”

Even atheistic secularism is now turning its back on blind faith in big government and big corporations, replacing it with a

“get ahead together” ethic. And the debate between national sovereignty and globalism is being replaced with the growing concept of [glocalism](#)—local sovereignty with widespread economic ties.

The Issue Behind the Issues

Where liberals and conservatives are talking about things like health care reform, insurance companies and needy patients, independents are talking a lot about living healthier lifestyles, [improved community structures](#), [organic foods](#), and fresh water. They want reform, and they want to make healthier choices in their personal lives as well.

Of course, not all independents are postmodernists or “success literature” readers. But few independents now believe that the way to get ahead—personally or nationally—is to turn to government, corporate or other institutional answers. To say it another way: Many independents are postmodernists and don’t even know it yet.

Perhaps surprisingly, most independents want to simultaneously: succeed economically, help others, heal and protect the environment, keep their nation strong, build friendlier relationships with other nations, expand the freedoms of the marketplace, take care of the needy and the sick, and greatly improve schools. They want government to do its part in



this, and corporations too, and they believe that they personally can have a significant positive impact on their little corner of making the world much better.

The media will probably continue to describe health care and other issues in modernist “conservative *versus* liberal” terms. After all, media is a big institution too. But the reality is incredibly powerful: In the 21st century, faith in big institutions is beginning to wane.

Conservatives routinely label independents as “leftists,” and liberals call them “right wing.” The truth is that most independents are centrists, postmodernists and pragmatists. More to the point, while almost everyone else is pointing fingers or turning to government or corporations for leadership, independents are quietly and consistently increasing their personal education, holdings and influence.

How to See What is Really Happening

It remains to be seen how all this will play out, but for years to come the real issue behind the issues will be the rising power of independents, most of whom do not have much faith in big institutions. When they side with a government program, liberals will claim they won with the support of the American people. When independents prefer a market approach, conservatives will claim victory. In reality, however, winning policies will be those that gain the support of independents.

If you want to know the future of any issue, find out how independents view it. And if it appears that a big-institution issue is winning, find out why independents support it—they usually support a certain reform, not the institution behind the reform.

Through all the politics and media reports, if current trends continue, faith in and deep support for big institutions will slowly dwindle. It is unclear exactly what will replace it, but that replacement will be the biggest story of the 21st Century.

About the Author



Oliver DeMille is the founder and former president of [George Wythe University](#), a founding partner of [The Center for Social Leadership](#), and the author of [A Thomas Jefferson Education](#). Presently, he serves as a mentor directing graduate and doctoral programs and devotes a majority of his time to writing. Oliver is a popular keynote speaker, writer and business consultant. He is married to the former Rachel Pinegar. They have eight children.

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