

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Hallowed Secularism

The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian
Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly
Excellence and Professor of Law

9-27-2018

September 27, 2018: Abortion and Climate Change

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism>



Part of the [Constitutional Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Philosophy Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2018). September 27, 2018: Abortion and Climate Change. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1194>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Collective Works of Bruce Ledewitz, Adrian Van Kaam C.S.Sp. Endowed Chair in Scholarly Excellence and Professor of Law at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hallowed Secularism by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact beharyr@duq.edu.

Title: Abortion and Climate Change

Date: 2018-09-28T00:10:00.002-04:00

9/27/2018—Richard John Neuhaus wrote *The Naked Public Square* in 1984. He presciently foresaw the secular future and he worried about the effect of a valueless secularism on American society. Later, in 1990, Neuhaus would found the journal *First Things*.

Neuhaus came to speak at Duquesne University some years ago and he talked about his break with liberalism. He had been a liberal Protestant, but ended up a conservative Roman Catholic.

He said he felt betrayed by liberalism over abortion. He expected liberalism to champion the unborn as the latest population vulnerable to oppression. He praised liberalism's defense of equal rights, especially in the area of race, and could not understand why this traditional understanding would not be extended to the unborn.

If it would not be, there must be something wrong with liberalism.

It was a compelling story. And it made me wonder where the equivalent conservative turned liberal story is? Conservative thought has failed humanity in the realm of climate change. Climate change is a catastrophic turning point in human history. It is not a specific evil, but it is a specific threat. Conservatism has blocked all efforts to deal with the problem. Indeed, in the name of denial of the threat, conservatism has undermined the notion of truth itself, pursuing ungrounded skepticism that now undermines all rationality in politics. This last movement is known as the death of truth, or the post-truth age.

In terms of skepticism, conservatism has plenty of company in the postmodernism of the left. But climate change is uniquely the responsibility of the right, because the phenomenon is a predictable consequence of a market failure that conservatism, as the market driven force in American public life, had a responsibility to publicize and fix.

The market failure was simply that of the tragedy of the commons. Because no one owns the climate, people abused it even though doing so was in no one's long term interest. If industry had had to pay for changing the climate, there would not have been enough money to do so. A stable climate is much more profitable for everyone. But, since no one did own the climate, the market acted as if changing the climate was cost free. Actually, the costs of a warming Earth are enormous.

Why did this happen? Simple greed overwhelmed principle. There never was any actual explanation or defense. Global warming that robs South Sea people of their territory and others of their livelihoods and property, is a kind of theft. Heavy carbon users in places like America and China are stealing from those who are the most exposed to the effects of climate change.

Free market theorists should have been the first to insist that a carbon price was needed to mimic the effect of a private property regime in the climate. But the conservatives I know just put their heads in the sand and allowed the carbon extraction industries to take over the Republican Party and the right generally.

In this way, conservatism failed its most significant test, just as liberalism did in the issue of abortion. Neuhaus, who died in 2009, should have seen this. He should have talked about it. I don't believe he ever did.