



# The Rhetoric of Reaction

*Albert O. Hirschman*

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## **The Rhetoric of Reaction** Albert O. Hirschman

With engaging wit and subtle irony, Albert Hirschman maps the diffuse and treacherous world of reactionary rhetoric in which conservative public figures, thinkers, and polemicists have been arguing against progressive agendas and reforms for the past two hundred years. He draws his examples from three successive waves of reactive thought that arose in response to the liberal ideas of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, to democratization and the drive toward universal suffrage in the nineteenth century, and to the welfare state in our own century. In each case he identifies three principal arguments invariably used--the theses of perversity, futility, and jeopardy. He illustrates these propositions by citing writers across the centuries from Alexis de Tocqueville to George Stigler, Herbert Spencer to Jay Forrester, Edmund Burke to Charles Murray. Finally, in a lightning turnabout, he shows that progressives are frequently apt to employ closely related rhetorical postures, which are as biased as their reactionary counterparts.

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