

POLSCI 109D, Special Topics: Conservatism, From Burke to Bannon
Summer 2019

May 28 – July 5
12 noon - 1:59 pm.
Dwinelle 145

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Office hours: Monday, 2 – 4 pm; Weds, 2 – 4 pm

Other times by appointment.

What is conservatism? Is it distinct from liberalism—that is, is conservatism a body of ideas contrary to liberalism, or is it a branch of liberalism? In other words, is conservatism in fact an “*ism*”? What are the fundamental differences between conservative and liberal perspectives today? Is conservatism the most significant challenge to the liberal idea today, or its erstwhile ally?

This course will explore these and related questions, such as the range of conservative perspectives on human nature, authority, religion, social change and progress, science and technology, race and ethnicity, economics and markets, equality, individual rights, the State and civil society, and ethics. The first half of the course will explore the philosophical, historical, and trans-Atlantic roots of conservative philosophy and social thought before turning to the specifically American variants of conservatism. The subdivisions of modern conservatism—libertarianism, traditional/“paleo,” neoconservatism, religious conservatism, etc.—will be defined and contrasted with each other.

The second half of the course will transition to contemporary issues of social policy, the debates over economics, “neoliberalism,” equality, race, sex, class, national identity, immigration, and social justice. Ultimately the course is about what it means to be a free human being, and what are the requirements and institutions of a free society that support a free human being.

Required course reading:

Reading packet/handouts (RP), posted to bCourses.

Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Donald Trump*

[Other readings TBA]

Recommended **optional** background books:

Russell Kirk, *Concise Guide to Conservatism* and *The Conservative Mind, From Burke to Eliot*; George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*; Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History*; Gregory Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution*. Roger Scruton, *Conservatism: An Invitation*. For another very good general critique of conservatism, see Albert O. Hirshman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*.

Course requirements/grading:

1. Class attendance (5%)
2. Periodic in-class quizzes. (15%)
3. Mid-term examination/multiple choice/short answer essay. (30%)
4. Final exam/multiple choice/short answer essay. (50%)

Week 1: “Achieving Disagreement”: The Ideological Landscape Today

Lecture 1: Conservatism and Its Enemies

This lecture, paying homage to the famous theme of Karl Popper (“The Open Society and Its Enemies”) looks to define and situate conservatism in terms of what rival ideologies it opposes. Is conservatism distinct from liberalism—that is, is conservatism a body of ideas contrary to liberalism, or is it a branch of liberalism? In other words, is conservatism in fact an “ism”? What are the fundamental differences between conservative and liberal perspectives today? Is conservatism the most significant challenge to the liberal idea today, or its erstwhile ally? What are the leading attacks on conservatism today?

Required readings: Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, Introduction; Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions*, chapter 2 “Constrained and Unconstrained Visions”; Isaiah Berlin, “The Two Concepts of Liberty” (RP);

Lecture 2: Varieties of Conservative Experience, or, “Conservative Fight Club”

Just as William James sought to outline categories of varying religious experience, this lecture looks at the various ways conservatism and conservative ideas come into view. A complete inventory of varying right-of-center expressions reveals considerable diversity—and disagreement!—between

libertarians, traditionalists, religious, “neo”-conservatives, populist, and even “postmodern” conservatism. Can they all fit inside one big tent?

Required readings: Russell Kirk, “Libertarians: The Chirping Sectaries;” F.A. Hayek, “Why I Am Not a Conservative”; and Irving Kristol, “The Neoconservative Persuasion.” (RP) Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, ch. 1.

Optional recommended readings: Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Introduction; Norman Podhoretz, “Neoconservatism: A Eulogy” (bCourses)

Lecture 3: What Are the Central Controversies Between Left and Right?

The central questions: human nature; the problems of moral reasoning, the status of reason, revelation, and tradition; the meaning and application of equality; the problems of political calculation and action; the potential and limits of politics and human institutions.

Required readings: Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative”; Samuel Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology” (RP); Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, ch. 2.

Friday section, June 31:

Viewing of Jonathan Haidt’s TED talk, “The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives”:

http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind.html

Optional: Take Haidt’s “Moral Foundations Quiz” at YourMorals.Org. (Registration is required, but personal data is confidential.)

Week 2: The First Modern Conservative: Edmund Burke and the Conservative Philosophy of Change

The British statesman Edmund Burke is considered to be the first “modern” conservative, though in some respects he represents an Enlightenment-era adaptation of the true “first conservative,” Aristotle. Burke’s legacy attaches mostly to his strenuous reaction to the radicalism of the French Revolution, but he had a subtle outlook that, *inter alia*, supported the American Revolution, opposed slavery, criticized British colonial rule in India, supported the idea of partisan political

parties, and had a theory of positive change that demonstrate he should not be thought of as a mere “reactionary” against all change.

Lecture 1: The Specter of Revolution: Aristotle & Burke Versus Locke & Paine

Burke’s best-known work is his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which became the template ever since for conservative critiques of radical politics. Burke believed the French Revolution represented something new in human experience. To what extent was he right about this, and to what extent is his critique limited to the peculiar circumstances of 1789 France? The counter-attack of his critic Tom Paine will also be considered.

Required readings: Burke reader (RP), p. 2 -37; Tom Paine, *The Rights of Man*, excerpts (RP).

Lecture 2: Burke on Prudence and Applied Natural Law

What did Burke mean by “prudence”? Can the apparent contradiction between Burke’s attack on “abstract principles” be squared with his embrace of natural law?

Required readings: Burke reader, pp. 38-73; (RP); Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, chs. 3 & 4

Lecture 3: Burke on America and Democratic Institutions & Burke’s Contemporary Apprentices

While Burke was a critic of the French Revolution, he was sympathetic to the political grievances of the American colonists and discretely favorable to the American Revolution. Burke’s kind of conservatism has several modern-day heirs, especially Russell Kirk, Michael Oakeshott, Robert Nisbet, and Roger Scruton.

Readings: Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, ch. 5

Lecture 4: Challenges to the Burkean Inheritance: Postmodernism and Other Contemporary Perspectives

Is “post-modern conservatism” an oxymoron? It depends—on the status of reason, the nature of history, the limits of language, and whether there is an objective basis for subjectivity!

Readings: Michael Oakeshott, “Rationalism in Politics”; Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (excerpts); Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, chapter 4, “Gnosticism—The Nature of Modernity”; Patrick Dineen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (excerpts); Peter Lawler, “Conservative Postmodernism, Postmodern Conservatism,” *Intercollegiate Review*, 2008; Thomas L. Pangle, “American Postmodernism,” chapter 4 from *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age*. (RP.)

Friday sections: Quiz!

Week 3: Conservatism and America

European conservatism was and still is associated with a defense of formal class distinctions and hereditary privilege, while the American political tradition is expressly meritocratic and egalitarian. Does American conservatism differ fundamentally from European conservatism? Second, revolutions are considered radical acts, and as such conservatism is at least skeptical if not opposed to revolutions. Yet the United States began with a revolutionary act, and one of the most conservative organizations in America is the DAR, the “Daughters of the American Revolution.” Hence the key question: Is *American* conservatism distinctive? And if so, how and why?

Lecture 1: Conservatism and “Western Civilization”

In conservatism a strictly “Western” or “Eurocentric” concept? Is it inherently opposed to contemporary understandings of “multiculturalism”? Is the “natural law” tradition the key to understanding this question?

Readings: C.S. Lewis, “The Abolition of Man” and Appendix from *The Abolition of Man* (excerpts); Leo Strauss, “Introduction” and “Natural Right and the Historical Approach,” from *Natural Right and History*.

Lecture 2: America’s Founding Idea

Is America’s Founding (the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) conservative or liberal? Maybe the answer is *Yes*.

Required readings: Declaration of Independence; October 28, 1813; Jefferson Letter to Richard Henry Lee, May 8, 1825; Abraham Lincoln, Speech in Chicago, July 10, 1858; Lincoln, Speech on the *Dred Scott* Decision; Harry V. Jaffa, "What Is Equality? The Declaration of Independence Revisited" (reading packet); Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, chapter 6.

Lecture 3: Conservatism, Equality, and Democracy

All forms of conservatism are opposed to radical egalitarianism and socialism, but is conservatism also opposed to the principle of equality in every form? Does the sympathy conservatism have toward social class distinctions make it inherently hostile to democracy? What are conservative perspectives on human rights? This lecture will review the perspectives of the American Founders, Tocqueville, Russell Kirk, Willmoore Kendall, and Harry V. Jaffa.

Required readings: *The Federalist*, No. 10; Russell Kirk, Willmoore Kendall, "Equality: Commitment or Ideal?"; Harry V. Jaffa, "Equality as a Conservative Principle."

Recommended optional readings: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Part 1, chapter 8, "How Equality Suggests to the Americans the Idea of the Indefinite Perfectibility of Man;" Part 2, chapter 1, "Why Democratic Peoples Show a More Ardent and More Lasting Love for Equality Than for Freedom;" Kurt Vonnegut, "Harrison Bergeron."

Lecture 4: Challenges to the American Founding: Progressivism and Historicism

Woodrow Wilson and other Progressive Era thinkers thought the core ideas of American Founding were obsolete and needed to be abandoned.

Readings:

Woodrow Wilson, "What Is Progress?", "The Study of Administration," and "Leaders of Men;" John Dewey, "Liberalism and Social Action"; Franklin Roosevelt, "Commonwealth Club Address," September 1932; FDR, First Inaugural Address

Friday section: Screen "2081," short film adaptation of "Harrison Bergeron"; mid-term exam.

Week 4: Economic and Social Policy Perspectives (1)

Is it purely a coincidence that Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776? Is there a connection between the principles of a private market economy and the principles of a democratic republic? What are the most important changes in political economy since Adam Smith?

Lecture 1: Conservative Political Economy (Part 1)

What are the basic insights and principles behind the view that market economies are superior to planned economies?

Readings: Leonard Read, "I, Pencil"; Friedrich Hayek, "The Use of Knowledge in Society"; "The Intellectuals and Socialism;" and "The Fatal Conceit"; Henry Hazlitt, *Economics in One Lesson*, chapter 1, "The Lesson." Fredric Bastiat, "The Broken Window Fallacy"; Milton Friedman, "Once Again: Why Socialism Won't Work."; (RP)

Lecture 2: Conservative Political Economy (Part 2)

What is "market failure"? Is there also "government failure"? What are the necessary conditions for effective government regulation or intervention into markets?

Readings: James Buchanan, "Politics Without Romance;" Bruce Yandle, "Bootleggers and Baptists"; Christopher DeMuth, "Our Regulatory State," *National Affairs* (2012); James Q. Wilson, "The Rise of the Bureaucratic State," *The Public Interest* (1975); Ayn Rand, John Galt's speech from *Atlas Shrugged*; Joseph Schumpeter on "creative destruction" from *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*; Deidre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality* (excerpts); Irving Kristol, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism." (RP)

Optional recommended reading: Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*, ch. 7; Whittaker Chambers, "Big Sister Is Watching You" (a review of *Atlas Shrugged*), *National Review* (bCourses).

Lecture 3: Socialism Today, and the Critique of "Neoliberalism"

Today the critique of market economies proceeds under the banner of direct attack not on capitalism or free markets, but something called "neoliberalism." The term as used today is of relative recent vintage

Readings: Daniel Rodgers, "The Uses and Abuses of 'Neoliberalism'"; Taylor Boas & Jordan Gans-Morse, "Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan," from *Studies in Comparative International Development*; Perry Anderson, "The Intransigent Right at the End of the Century." (RP)

Lecture 4: Further to the Question of Equality and Fairness in Political Economy

Are "fairness" and "equality" equivalent concepts?

Readings: Robert E. Lane, "The Fear of Equality," *American Political Science Review*, March 1959; Hayek, "Equality, Value, and Merit," from *The Constitution of Liberty* (1961); Helmut Schoeck, "The Sense of Justice and the Idea of Equality," and "Envy as Tax Collector," chs. 14 & 20 from *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (1966); Daniel Sznycer, et al., "Support for redistribution is shaped by compassion, envy, and self-interest, but not a taste for fairness," PNAS; Jonah Goldberg, "Mr. Piketty's Big Book of Marxiness," *Commentary*, July 2014. (RP)

Week 5: Economic and Social Policy Perspectives (2)

Lecture 1: From Social Science to Social Policy

Once upon a time social science offered the promise of significant understanding that could guide conscious reform efforts through law and policy, if not complete mastery of human nature. How has this worked out? Conservatives tend to be skeptical of social science, yet there are a number of consequential conservative social scientists in recent decades, including Robert Nisbet, Peter Berger (one of the originators of the popular left idea about the "social construction of reality"), Edward Banfield, James Q. Wilson, Samuel Huntington, and Charles Murray.

Readings: Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community & The Twilight of Authority* (excerpts); Edward Banfield, "Policy Science as Metaphysical Madness"; Nathan Glazer, "The Limits of Social Policy," introduction to *The Limits of Social Policy*.

Lecture 2: Wealth, Poverty, Family Policy, and Moral Character

What is the relationship between family structure and social outcomes? What are the causes of family breakdown? What can government do to affect family structure, moral character, and social capital?

Readings: Charles Murray, "Belmont and Fishtown," *The New Criterion*; James Q. Wilson, "The Rediscovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy," *The*

Public Interest (1985) and “Thinking About Character”; Charles Murray, “A Guaranteed Income for Every American?”, *Wall Street Journal*; Robert Putnam, “*E Pluribus Unum*: Diversity and Community in the 21st Century,” *Scandinavian Political Studies*; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Defining Deviancy Down,” *American Scholar*. (RP)

Lecture 3: Discrimination and Disparities

Are all disparities the result of invidious discrimination (i.e., racism, sexism, capitalism, or other “structural” factors)?

Readings: Thomas Sowell, “The Economics of Discrimination”; Kevin Williamson, “The Intellectual Emptiness of ‘White Supremacy,’” *National Review*; Aaron Wildavsky, “The Search for the Oppressed” and “Who Wants What and Why? A Cultural Theory,” from *The Rise of Radical Egalitarianism*; Rob Voigt, et, al., “Language From Police Body Camera Footage Shows Racial Disparities in Officer Respect,” PNAS; Amanda Agan & Sonia Starr, “Ban the Box, Criminal Records, and Statistical Discrimination: A Field Experiment,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*; Jennifer Doleac & Benjamin Hansen, “The Unintended Consequences of ‘Ban the Box’: Statistical Discrimination and Employment Outcomes When Criminal Histories are Hidden,” SSRN. (RP)

Lecture 4: Social Justice, From Rousseau to Rawls and Beyond

How does “social justice” differ from “justice”?

Readings: Hayek, “The Mirage of Social Justice,” from *Law, Legislation and Liberty*; Steven Lukes, “Social Justice: The Hayekian Challenge”; Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*; Charles Krauthammer, “A Grand Compromise,” *Washington Post*; Charles Krauthammer, “Reparations for Black Americans,” *Time*; Glenn Loury, “It Is Futile to Put a Price on Slavery,” *New York Times*; John McWhorter, “Why I Don’t Want Reparations for Slavery,” *LA Times*.

Week 6: The “Culture Wars” and the Present Moment

“Politics is downstream from culture” is an axiom of the late controversial media entrepreneur Andrew Breitbart. The most intense political controversies today are anchored less in economic or traditional interest group policy conflicts than in cultural questions of race, sex, and personal identity, all confounded by “populism.”

Lecture 1: Compassion and Public Policy

Is compassion a virtue?

Readings: Clifford Orwin, "Moist Eyes—From Rousseau to Clinton," *The Public Interest*; Kenneth Minogue, "How Civilizations Fail," *The New Criterion*; Shelby Steele, "The Exhaustion of Liberalism," *Wall Street Journal*; Charles Murray, "Trump's America," *Wall Street Journal*; (RP).

Lecture 2: Nationalism and Populism

The United States and much of Europe are said to be going through a "populist" moment, which is marked by, among other things, a rejection of "ruling elites" and a revival of "nationalism." What's behind this? Is "Trumpism" a thing?

Readings: Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (excerpts); Christopher DeMuth, "Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism," *Claremont Review*; Samuel Huntington, "Who Are We?"; Ramesh Ponnuru and Rich Lowry, "For Love of Country," *National Review*, 2017; Albert Jay Nock, "The Remnant"; Michael Anton, "The Flight 93 Election," *Claremont Review*; Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites* (excerpts) (RP).

Final exam, July 3.

No section on July 5.