Introduction

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 23 April 2025
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SEMINAR AIMS AND APPROACH

- Contemporary relevance: success of right-wing political parties and politicians
- Understand conservatism *through the lens of philosophy*
- No focus on policy, political strategy, political psychology, etc.
- Some historical thinkers (Burke, Oakeshott, Schmitt), but mostly the approach is systematic

CAN WE DEFINE CONSERVATISM?

- As with any ideology, there are competing accounts of what conservatism is; this is nothing special
- But it has often been claimed that conservatism *cannot* be helpfully defined (e.g.: conservatism is merely 'reactionary')
- A complication inherent to conservatism itself: anti-rationalism (scepticism about our ability to present a rationally ordered account of desirable society)
- The seminar's approach: no attempt to 'define' conservatism, instead we focus on various conservative themes and topics

DISTINCTIONS

- Conservatism versus liberalism/libertarianism
- Conservatism versus 'right' or 'far-right'
- Conservatism versus traditionalism

SEMINAR STRUCTURE

23.04.	1	Introduction
30.04.	2	Conservatism and libertarianism
07.05.	3	Perversity and futility
14.05.	4	Value conservatism
21.05.	5	Burke's conservatism
28.05.	6	Oakeshott's anti-rationalism
04.06.	7	Patriotism
11.06.	8	Anti-egalitarianism
18.06.	9	Hierarchy, meritocracy, and elitism
25.06.		No course (Wittgenstein lectures)
02.07.	10	Schmitt: friends and enemies
09.07.	11	The contemporary critique of liberalism
16.07.	12	Catholic conservatism
23.07.	13	The contemporary far right

We can adjust the seminar plan as we go; we will talk about this roughly half-way through the semester

ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

To gain credit points, you must

- read all required literature (on ELearning)
- write eight **reading reflections** on the ELearning platform; format: ungraded, around 200 words
- (voluntary) write a **session summary**; format: ungraded, around 2 pages, counts as three reading reflections
- give a **presentation** with a short essay (around 2,000 words), OR write a long essay (around 4,000 words); graded

INITIAL QUESTIONS

1. What do I find particularly interesting with respect to conservatism, especially philosophically?
2. Which topics or thinkers would I particularly want to tackle in this seminar?
3. Do I have any aims or expectations for this seminar?

ROGERS: THREE DEFINITIONS OF CONSERVATISM

Rogers rejects three definitions of conservatism:

1. *Dispositional Conservatism*. The (pre-intellectual) disposition to conserve things and institutions as they are.
2. *Empirical Conservatism.* An opposition to radical, sudden change, based on scepticism about our ability to rationally plan society.
3. *Metaphysical Conservatism.* Belief in a transcendent order which should structure our society and guide political action.

There are various problems with these definitions:

1. Dispositional C. is vague, and not a uniquely conservative disposition
2. Both dispositional and empirical C. fail to distinguish good from bad institutions and changes
3. Not all forms of conservatism are metaphysical

ROGERS: DEFINING CONSERVATISM

> 'Philosophical conservatism … seeks to 1) conserve and promote the human good, 2) subject to the limits of human nature, 3) from within a society's existing tradition(s).' (2025, p. 3)

A difference to dispositional and empirical C.: conservatism *identifies* the human good. The conservative is also an optimist: extant institutions are, more or less, good.

The conservative rejects *neutrality* concerning the human good, a central tenet of liberalism. Moreover, C. does not prioritise autonomy—it does not see (high) value in mere choice. Nonetheless, there will be limits to state interference in individual life.

Conservatism is a *sceptical* doctrine, as it mistrusts abstract and rationalistic proposals for social change. Instead, it claims, social changes have to prove themselves 'in practice'.

Any political thinking should start from within our traditions ('embeddedness'). The conservative rejects that philosophical *theories* should guide political decision-making.

We should evaluate institutions not against abstract or utopian ideals, but by the actual performance of their functions.

QUESTIONS

1. Does Rogers' account help us to avoid the problems with the three initial definitions of conservatism?
2. Is Rogers' definition of conservatism informative—i.e., does it help us to distinguish conservatism from other views?
3. Rogers' account predicts very few to no concrete policy positions which can be ascribed to conservatism. Is this a strength or weakness?

Conservatism and Libertarianism

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 30 April 2025
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BACKGROUND

Politically, there is often an alliance between conservatives and classical/free-market liberals (or libertarians). Both tend to oppose socialism (esp. during the Cold War), the (expansion of) the welfare state, unions, and favour lower taxes.

But what are the *philosophical* differences between conservatism and liberalism? And what position should the conservative take towards free-market capitalism?

HAYEK, 'WHY I AM NOT A CONSERVATIVE' (1960)

Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) was one of the most important economists and liberal philosophers of the 20th century. *Constitution of Liberty* (1960) is one of his main works. This text appears as an appendix to it.

1. Hayek defines conservatism as an 'attitude of opposition to drastic change' (519). One ' decisive' objection to conservatism is that 'it cannot offer an alternative to the direction in which we are moving' (520). Conservatives only apply the 'brakes'; but the more important question is: where should we move towards?

DISCUSSION. Is this a fair description of Kirk's position?

2. Conservatism always stands opposed to existing tendencies—in this case, socialism. Liberalism, by contrast, 'wants to go elsewhere' (521). For example, where the government obstructs the 'spontaneous change', the liberal proposes that government control should be removed in 'a thorough sweeping-away' (521).

DISCUSSION. Hayek voices a typical critique of conservatism—that it has no normative principles of its own to offer. Is this a fair criticism? Would Hayek's criticism also apply to other forms of conservatism?

3. Conservatives appreciate the value of 'spontaneously grown institutions' (522). But the conservative lacks the confidence to allow spontaneous change in society to run its course. Instead, the conservative wrongly insists that change should not be 'too rapid', 'supervised', and 'orderly' (522); they mistakenly think that order must come from authority (523).

DISCUSSION. Hayek makes an interesting consistency objection. If the conservative values 'organic', 'natural' change, and organic, natural change happens rapidly, should the conservative not welcome it?

The conservative has no principled objection to governmental power, as long as it is in the right hands; by contrast, the liberal is committed to something like the harm principle, which embraces liberty (at least) as long as one does not affect others. The conservative lacks moral principles which would allow a society in which people have different ends (522-3).

Instead, the conservative believes 'that in any society there are recognizably superior persons' 'who should have a greater influence on public affairs than others' (523)

DISCUSSION. But why must the conservative believe this?

Conservatives are often opposed to democracy (525). But Hayek objects that the ultimate problem is not democracy, but unlimited government (525).

4. Liberalism welcomes new knowledge, seeing that novelty is the 'essence of human achievement' (526). By contrast,, conservatism often lapses into anti-intellectual 'obscurantism' (526), opposing the growth of knowledge only because of unwanted implications of new knowledge.

DISCUSSION. How powerful is this objection? Does it point to a deep problem in conservatism?

Conservatives are also hostile to internationalism; but ideas 'respect no boundaries' (527). Nationalism can lead to conservatism (527) and imperialism, as nationalists thinks other people inferior (527).

5. Liberalism occupies a 'midway position' between conservative 'mysticism' and socialist 'crude rationalism' (528). The liberal shares the conservative's 'distrust of reason' (528); 'in some respects the liberal is fundamentally a skeptic' (528).

DISCUSSION. This is an interesting and somewhat surprising characterisation of liberalism. What would it mean that liberalism is 'fundamentally sceptic'? Why does this not apply to conservatism?

(6-8. Hayek finishes with some reflections on his dissatisfaction with the term 'liberalism'.)

KIRK, 'CHIRPING SECTARIES' (1981)

Russell Kirk (1918-1994) was a highly influential American conservative. His most famous work is *The Conservative Mind* (1953). Kirk opposed the alliance between conservatives and free-market libertarians; the 'fusionist' had previously attacked Kirk.

1. Conservatives and libertarians share an opposition to collectivism and the absolute state; beyond this, they share 'nothing'.

Kirk accuses J. S. Mill to have been swayed by Harriet Mill's 'humanitarian abstractions' (345); Mill lacks knowledge of 'human nature' (i.e., what Mill accused Bentham of). Mill attempts to state 'one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society'.

Kirk objects, with Stephen, that any attempt to state one such principle cannot 'describe human behaviour, and certainly cannot govern it' (346). Instead, liberty is only valuable in certain contexts and at certain times; experience and custom have to teach us when its value obtains.

Kirk also accuses libertarians of 'neoterism, the lust for novelty' (347) and an attendant embrace of 'eccentricity'. The libertarian values 'licentious freedom'—liberty without restraint, the desire to 'eliminate all limits'. Kirk thinks this is a destructive impulse, which society should not indulge.

DISCUSSION. Contrast this with Hayek who stresses the importance of organic change. But is it fair to accuse Hayek of 'lust for novelty'? And what about Hayek's objection that conservatism lead to anti-intellectualism?

2. Libertarians are 'metaphysically mad' (349):

1 Libertarians do not acknowledge a 'transcendent moral order'. In this respect, they are to be classified with the utilitarians and Marxists.

DISCUSSION. Compare this to Hayek's remark that liberalism is 'fundamentally sceptical'. But Hayek also claims that liberals need not be religious sceptics. How is this compatible?

2 Libertarians prioritise individual liberty over social order, but this is nonsensical, as the former relies on the latter.

DISCUSSION. This seems to ascribe a rather self-defeating position to the libertarian. Must the libertarian really believe this?

3 Libertarians believe the 'cement of society' is self-interest, but instead it is community.

4 Libertarians think that human nature is good and pursue utopia; but the conservative knows that human nature is bad and pursuit of utopia impossible and dangerous.

DISCUSSION. Does this charge apply to Hayek?

5 Libertarians consider the state to be the enemy, while conservatives recognise it, with Hobbes, as a necessary restraint of our passions.

6 Libertarians think the world revolves around them, but the conservative thinks of themselves as 'a pilgrim in a realm of mystery and wonder, where duty, discipline, and sacrifice are required' (350).

DISCUSSION. Is this just a kick under the table, or can this objection also be made more philosophically serious?

Futility and Perversity

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 7 May 2025
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BACKGROUND

Marshall: three waves of historical battles over rights

1. *civil* rights (18th century): freedom of speech and religion, the rule of law, etc.
2. *political* rights (19th century): universal suffrage, democracy, political participation, etc.
3. *social and economic* rights (20th century): welfare state, public provision of goods, etc.

For each of these waves, there was conservative backlash. Hirschman aims to show that one can find rhetorical similarities in the 'rhetoric of reaction' across history. These are:

1. *the perversity thesis:* 'any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy' (7); 'everything backfires' (12)
2. *the futility thesis:* attempts at social transformation will have no long-term effects; the deep structures of society remain unchanged
3. *the jeopardy thesis*: 'the cost of the proposed change or reform is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment' (7)

Hirschman notes that these rhetorical arguments are not exclusive to conservatism.

THE PERVERSITY THESIS (CH. 2)

Hirschman claims that the 'structure of the [perversity] argument is admirably simple, whereas the claim being made is rather extreme' (11). The argument is a way to avoid tackling the matter head-on (19).

He traces one origin of the perversity argument to **Burke**'s writings against the French revolution (13). The argument might also have religious roots, suggesting the futility of humans meddling with divine providence (16-7).

The French reactionary **de Maistre** stated one of the most extreme versions of the perversity thesis: the harder the French revolutionaries tried, the more divine providence asserted itself (18-9).

With respect to opposition to the welfare state, Hirschman aims to show that many economists use versions of the perversity thesis, through the thesis of self-calibrating markets where government intervention can only be harmful. E.g., Milton Friedman against minimum wage laws (27-8).

Another typical argument against the welfare state is that it induces laziness (29); instead of remedying poverty, it plunges people deeper into it. While this argument fell out of favour in England in the 19th century, it was revitalised in the United States in the 20th century (33-5).

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Hirschman suggests that '(1) the perverse effect is widely appealed to by reactionary thought, and (2) it is unlikely to exist "out there" to anything like the extent that is claimed' (35).

There is something odd in the way the defenders of the perversity thesis feel smug about the certainty of perverse effects (36); after all, the thesis of unintended consequences was meant to introduce humility into the social sciences (36-7).

Hirschman speculates that the perversity argument has religious or mythical roots in the idea that human 'hubris' must be punished (37); this idea was then secularised (38).

THE FUTILITY THESIS (CH. 3)

The futility thesis claims that any attempt at change is doomed to fail, as the 'deep' structures of society remain unchanged. The rhetorical effect of the futility thesis is to make the defender of change to look particularly 'humiliated' and 'demoralized' (45); it highlights their naiveté (58).

Applied to the three waves: 1. **Tocqueville** argued that the French Revolution had no significant effect, or that all significant changes predated the revolution (46-50).

2. The Italian 'elite theorists' **Mosca** and **Pareto** argued that the extension of the right to vote would have no significant effects, as society would always be divided hierarchically, even in socialism; democratic representation is 'a lie' (51-8). Relatedly, Pareto claimed that it would be futile to attempt to change the distribution of income in society (56-7).

3. With respect to the welfare state, the futility thesis claims that welfare payments will never actually reach the (deserving) poor (61-2). **Stigler** (and later **Friedman**) claimed that the welfare state mostly benefitted the middle class, and overall amounted to redistribution from poor to rich (63-5). Empirical claims along these lines have been made concerning unemployment benefits (66-7) and housing policy (68-9).

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Defenders of the futility thesis like to state their claims as laws of nature (70-71) and pointing towards an unchangeable social order. This sets the futility thesis apart from the perversity thesis, which sees social order as volatile (72). This gives the two theses different ideological flavours:

> … the perverse effect has an affinity to myth and religion and to the belief in direct supernatural intervention in human affairs, whereas the futility argument is more tied to the subsequent belief in the authority of Science and particularly to the nineteenth-century aspiration to construct a social science with laws as solid as those that were then believed to rule the physical universe. (73)

Moreover, the futility thesis entails that political institutions should do nothing (75-6). Defenders of the perversity thesis see the proponents of social changes as well-intentioned but misguided (76); but to the defender of the futility thesis, defenders of change seem 'cunning schemers and nasty hypocrites' (77).

Generally, futility is 'proclaimed too soon' (78). Indeed, the futility thesis can be self-fulfilling, as it weakens commitment to change (78); in this sense, Mosca and Pareto can be seen as having contributed to the rise of fascism in Italy (78).

The futility thesis has some similarities with socialist arguments of unchanging 'structures' which prohibit superficial attempts at change (79). In their dismissal of all reforms as merely 'masking' unchanged fundamentals, such critics might actually help social changes on (80).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can one find the futility and perversity theses in contemporary conservative rhetoric? Which is more prevalent?
2. Why are the two theses so popular? What is their rhetorical and psychological function? What explains their rhetorical success?
3. How might one counter these rhetorical arguments?
4. Are these faulty types of arguments? What would be required for them to be true?
5. What are the main differences between the futility and perversity thesis? Is Hirschman right that they point to different types of ideological attitude?
6. Are these rhetorical strategies compatible with progressive politics? Are there examples where they are used by progressives?
7. Are there other rhetorical strategies that are typical of conservatism?

Value Conservatism

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 14 May 2025
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CONSERVING VALUE

G. A. Cohen (1941-2009) was a Canadian political philosopher who spent much of his time at All Souls College, Oxford. He was one of the main contributors to analytical Marxism.

Let us start with

> 'STANDARD' VALUING (not Cohen's Terminology). You value something for the amount and type of value it has.

E.g., you value a beautiful picture because of its great beauty; you value money for its instrumental value to get you things.

One might advocate for 'conserving value' with respect to intrinsic value. But Cohen objects that this is like 'conserving energy' (153) and thus 'unconservative'. It sees any value as replaceable by other value; it does not care about the *bearers* of value (155). This is an attitude utilitarians have (154).

The wider view which Cohen wishes to reject claims that

> the bearers of value, as opposed to the value they bear, do not count as such, but matter only because of the value that they bear, and are therefore, in a deep sense, dispensable (155)

DISCUSSION. Could a defender of standard valuing not value conserving things as a rule of thumb? We might also defend the value of things which rare, unique, or old.

CONSERVING THE VALUABLE (SEC. 3)

This is the main claim which Cohen wants to defend, and which he calls 'small-c conservatism' (144):

> PARTICULAR VALUING. You value something because of the particular thing it is (independent from whether you have a special relationship to it).

E.g., in valuing All Souls, you ask what kind of institution it is. You have reason to value it in this way even if you are not a member of All Souls. The example of 'loving a girl like you' versus 'you being the one I want' (154).

DISCUSSION. Cohen seems to apply this central thesis to things, social practices, institutions, and persons. But we might wonder whether the argument equally applies to all of these entities.

One implication: we should preserve valuable things, even if destroying them would allow us to replace them with something of greater value (155). E.g., we should not tear down an old house even if we could replace it with a newer, nicer, prettier (etc.) house. See also the example of the statue (153).

However, wishing for the preservation of particular things does not entail that we do not welcome the new (156), as long as the new does not entail destruction of the old. The example of Hockney and Lippi (156). The claim also does not entail that old things are valuable as such (157), being in existence is already enough.

DISCUSSION. This is slightly surprising. Wouldn't a typical conservative claim be that value partially consists in things being old?

Cohen, in response to an objection from Scanlon, claims that particular valuing is an apt response to at least *some* valuable entities (164-5).

PERSONAL VALUE (SEC. 4)

Cohen also discusses another way how one might value things, although he is more hesitant in defending it (169):

> PERSONAL VALUING. You value something because of the particular relationship you have to it.

DISCUSSION. What is the difference between personal value and the notion of valuing the particular?

Examples: you value All Souls because you are a member of it. In this case, the valued thing need not even have intrinsic value (148). Cohen's pencil eraser (167). Changes in a neighbourhood (167-8).

Personal valuing expresses the necessity to 'belong to something' (168), to a concrete surrounding.

DISCUSSION. Is the idea that our attachment to something bestows value on it? Could this not also be explained in a standard framework—people being attached to things is valuable?

ACCEPTING THE GIVEN AND THE PARADOX OF CHANGE

Cohen also defends

> ACCEPTING THE GIVEN. You should accept some things simply because they are given; they are not 'to be shaped or controlled' (149).

We should reject an attitude that everything can be mastered (149). In the introduction, Cohen speaks of the 'abandonment of striving, of seeking a better state, and instead going with the flow, as do the lilies of the field' (143).

Examples: we should not replace parts of our body unnecessarily with artificial limbs (150); we should be cautious with stem-cell research (151); eliminating envy from people might also not be valuable (152): being capable of envy might be what makes us the particular beings that we are.

DISCUSSION. How does this category connect to the other two?

In 'paradoxes of change' (sec. 6), Cohen also recommends that we should change slowly, for no strategic reasons, and even if we know that change is inevitable (170-1). The example of linguistic change (171).

POLITICAL CONSERVATISM (SEC. 7)

Cohen insists that small-c conservatism is not related to political conservatism, as it does not suggest that we keep injustice, because injustice has no intrinsic value (172). Still, Cohen expresses some hesitance whether justice will always trump conserving the valuable (172).

DISCUSSION. Isn't this a bit quick, especially if there is value in personal valuing? Moreover, often traditions contain both intrinsic value and intrinsic disvalue. Is the idea still applicable then?

Furthermore, keeping valuable things might sometimes require radical changes. The example of tearing down a museum (172).

Cohen thinks that there is a tension between capitalism and small-c conservatism, as capitalism tends to indiscriminately destroy things (173).

DISCUSSION. Is Cohen right that small-c conservatism does not entail political conservatism?

Alternatively, is Cohen's conservatism a rather trivial commitment that has little to do with what is typically labelled conservatism?

Burke's Conservatism

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 21 May 2025
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EDMUND BURKE (1730-1797)

Born in Dublin, educated at Trinity College, Dublin. Wrote on aesthetics and as popular author before being elected to the House of Commons in 1765. *Speech to the Electors at Bristol* (1774). Politically on the Whig side, generally in the opposition. Various policy positions: supported American colonists, Catholic emancipation, criticised conduct of East India Company, generally supported free trade.

Richard Price gives a sermon at the Revolution Society defending human rights and French Revolution. This gives Burke the proximate cause to write *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) which has an immediate impact. Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1791) in response, Thomas Paine *The Rights of Man* (1791). Burke breaks with the Whigs (even close friends), although does not join Tories.

Burke is often thought to be one of the founders of conservatism. Friedrich von Gentz' translation of *Reflections* was hugely influential to conservative thought in Germany.

LIBERTY AND GOVERNMENT

Liberty is good 'abstractly speaking' (84). But this does not mean it is good in all contexts: we should not welcome the liberty of the 'madman' (84). Liberty must be judged by its effects (84), and must be combined with other 'good things' like 'peace and order' (84).

The spirit of liberty leads by 'itself to misrule and excess' and need to be tempered (93). We need a 'sufficient restraint upon [our] passions' (99).

DISCUSSION. What is for Burke the relationship between liberty and government? What role does Burke's emphasis on human weakness play in his thought?

HUMAN RIGHTS

In the *Petition of Right*, rights are not claimed on the basis of abstract principles, 'but as the rights of Englishmen' (91) founded on concrete historical claims. Liberties are claimed 'without any reference whatever to any more general or prior right' (91). Justice has to be settled by law, that is, 'by convention' (98).

Advocates for human rights can only find government illegitimate and ask for its radical abolition or change (97). Appeal to human rights makes stable government impossible. Human rights 'exist in … a much greater degree of abstract perfection' but this is precisely 'their practical defect' (98). What liberties and restrictions are necessary varies with the circumstances, and would be 'foolish' to think otherwise (99).

It is also pointless to discuss abstract rights to, say, food (99): 'the question is upon the method of procuring and administering' (99). Government is a practical task built on wisdom and experience; 'the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity' (100). 'Metaphysic rights' are useless in this light (100).

DISCUSSION. Does Burke think there are no human rights? What is his main critique of human rights? How we can judge whether conventional rights are appropriate (or unjust)?

HIERARCHY AND PROPERTY

Levellers 'pervert the natural order of things' (95). While power and authority should not be confined by law to specific classes, and while there should be opportunities for talent to rise to the top, it is repugnant to think that everyone should be 'permitted to rule' (95).

Both 'ability' and 'property' must be represented in a state (96); property in particular must be protected against the 'envy' and 'rapacity' of the masses (96).

We have equal rights, but not a right to equal amounts (98). Family property is a way to tame individual weaknesses (96): 'it grafts benevolence even upon avarice' (96). Burke seems to claim that holding land through one's family guarantees being invested in the long-term future of one's country. This is in contrast to 'monied interest' [112] of whom Burke is highly sceptical.

DISCUSSION. What is Burke's defence of social hierarchy? In which precise sense does he think there is hierarchy? Is his defence of hierarchy convincing?

CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL VOLUNTARISM

Political voluntarism claims that government is, or should be, the upshot of human choices. Burke associates voluntarism with social contract doctrine, rationalism, and indirectly the French Revolution. Burke claims that voluntarism is false and has harmful effects.

Burke criticises and inverts the language of social contract at various points. Defenders of the social contract believe that there is a compact that binds the magistrate, but not them (107); their attachment to their country remains fleeting (107-8). The state, however, is not a limited compact. Instead it is an (involuntary) 'partnership' (110). (Note that Burke also opposes arguments for absolute monarchy or the monarch's God-given right to rule.)

In a famous passage, Burke writes:

> [government] becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born. Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. (110)

DISCUSSION. What could a defender of social contract theory reply? What alternative justification for the state does Burke have to offer?

GRADUAL CHANGE

Even the Glorious Revolution was only meant to preserve 'ancient indisputable laws and liberties' (90). The British form of government is 'an inheritance from our forefathers' (90). Nonetheless, this inheritance 'furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement' (92). Indeed, 'a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation' (87).

Burke also endorses a principle of **legitimate expectations**: If 'men are encouraged to go into a certain mode of life by the existing laws' then it would be 'unjust … to offer a sudden violence to their minds and their feelings' (114), in particular through confiscations of property.

DISCUSSION. How far do people's legitimate expectations go? When can we ignore them? Does Burke's aversion to gradual change apply in all contexts?

SOCIAL MANNERS AND RELIGION

Burke praises medieval chivalry (103). It subdued passions, made 'power gentle', and produced a 'noble equality' (104) amongst men. The loss of social manners reduces people to animals (104). Law must now be supported 'by their own terrors' (104) (i.e., the threat of punishments).

> There ought to be a system of manners in every nation which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely. (105)

Religion 'is the basis of civil society' and 'the source of all good' (108). Man is 'by his constitution a religious animal'. If religious doctrine is found faulty, the recourse is not to atheism, but to a refinement of doctrine.

In short, Burke believes that both manners and religion pay important roles in guaranteeing social order; these pre-date commercial society, and are threatened by the rationalism he associates with the French revolution.

DISCUSSION. Is Burke's argument for religion an argument from good consequences? But wouldn't that be an argument of the wrong kind?

PREJUDICE

We should not easily cast away prejudice, i.e., 'untaught feelings' (106). We do not trust our own private reason, which is limited (107). Prejudice gives our actions constancy and makes us ready to act, providing us with a kind of second nature (107).

Defenders of reason, by contrast, are overconfident, and their commitments are fleeting and inconstant (107-8).

DISCUSSION. What is 'prejudice' in Burke's sense? What are its advantages? How is it better or different to 'private reason'?

Oakeshott's Anti-Rationalism

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 28 May 2025
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RATIONALISM (SEC. 1)

Background. 'Rationalism in Politics' was originally published in 1947, then re-published in an essay collection in 1962. The immediate context of the essay is thus likely the post-war Labour government (1945-1950) and its ambitious reform programme.

Basics. The rationalist 'stands for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of "reason"' (1). The rationalist is sceptical of existing opinion but optimistic in the powers of his own reason (1-2). For the rationalist, 'nothing is of value merely because it exists' (4).

Two further characteristics: the '**politics of perfection**' and the '**politics of uniformity**' (5). The rationalist strives for the 'best' solution, not the 'best in the circumstances'; and there is one best solution that fits all circumstances (5-6).

DISCUSSION. Why would a focus on reason require perfectionism or the idea that there are universal solutions?

Examples of the 'progeny [i.e. offspring] of Rationalism':

> The project of the so-called Re-union of the Christian Churches, of open diplomacy, of a single tax, of a civil service whose members 'have no qualifications other than their personal abilities', of a self-consciously planned society, the Beveridge Report, the Education Act of 1944, Federalism, Nationalism, Votes for Women, the Catering Wages Act, the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the World State (of H. G. Wells or anyone else), and the revival of Gaelic as the official language of Eire (6-7)

DISCUSSION. This seems a rather curious list of examples. In what way are they all examples of rationalism?

TWO TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE (SEC. 2)

Oakeshott claims that the error of rationalism can be traced back to claiming that only technical knowledge is knowledge (11). Rationalism amounts to the 'sovereignty of technique' (11).

> **Technical Knowledge/Technique**. Can be formulated precisely, can be formulated in terms of (written) rules and propositions, can be taught and 'deliberately learned'. Much of it can be 'applied mechanically' (10).
>
> **Practical Knowledge**. Exists 'only in use', cannot be formulated in terms of rules, cannot be taught (directly) but 'only imparted and acquired' (11).

Oakeshott claims that 'every concrete human activity' involves both types of knowledge (8), including the arts, sciences, and religion (8-9). The two types of knowledge cannot be separated, especially not in politics (9).

DISCUSSION. What would examples of the relevant types of knowledge be in those activities? Does Oakeshott overplay the distinction between the two types of knowledge?

Certainty. Rationalists prefer technical knowledge because it promises certainty (11), whereas practical knowledge has the 'appearance of imprecision and consequently of uncertainty' (10). Technique needs nothing 'external' to it, which makes it use reassuring.

ORIGINS AND SPREAD OF RATIONALISM (SECS. 3 & 4)

Origins. Oakeshott traces rationalism to Bacon and Descartes, both of whom (in his reading) aim to find 'an infallible method whose application is mechanical and universal' (16) that provides certainty. Pascal as an early critic of rationalism (19-20).

Reasons for Popularity. Oakeshott speculates that rationalism correlates with atheism: 'a beneficient and infallible technique replaced a benificient and infallible God' (18). He also makes 'an age over-impressed with its own accomplishments' responsible (18).

DISCUSSION. Are these convincing hypotheses for the popularity of rationalism?

Spread. Rationalism then invaded other 'departments of life' (20), in particular politics, where it is now absolutely dominant. He is pessimistic that this dominance will soon be overcome (29).

Hayek's position instantiates the rationalist prejudice (21), because it is still formulated as a 'doctrine'. Other rationalists in politics are Locke, Bentham, Godwin, and Marx and Engels (25-6). The constitution-making in the early United States is a prime examples of a 'natural and unsophisticated rationalism' in action (27).

DISCUSSION. It is rather surprising to see Hayek classified as a rationalist. Given that the American colonists needed to make a new constitution, how could they have avoided rationalism?

Rationalism and Science. The relationship between science and rationalism is complicated, because science also rests on practical knowledge (8-9). Oakeshott rejects an easy diagnosis of the spread of rationalism due to science (29); if scientists spread rationalism, then they do so 'in spite of [their] science'.

DISCUSSION. Is this a plausible hypothesis of how scientists help the spread of rationalism in politics?

THE HARMS OF RATIONALISM (SEC. 5)

Rationalists in politics have thrown out traditional knowledge; so even if they attempt to return to practical knowledge now, it is too late (30-31).

Inability to Correct Errors. The rationalist can only 'replace one rationalist project in which he has failed by another' (32).

Assault on Education. Over time, a rationalist society will only allow education of a broadly rationalist nature (32-3). Apprenticeships are replaced by technical schools (34).

DISCUSSION. Is this an apt critique of contemporary education?

Assault on Morality. Rationalism is aligned with a deficient vision of morality:

> The morality of the Rationalist is the morality of the self conscious pursuit of moral ideals, and the appropriate form of moral education is by precept, by the presentation and explanation of moral principles. (35)

But this reduces morality to technique; and it unshackles morality from the 'unself-conscious moral tradition of an aristocracy' (35). But moral ideals make no sense when unshackled from a living tradition (35-6). For example, rationalist thinking destroys 'parental authority' (36).

DISCUSSION. What is the alternative picture that Oakeshott might have in mind? In which sense are moral ideals a 'sediment' (36)?

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Oakeshott's rationalist seems to be a rather extreme character. Is this a charitable depiction of any real-world politician or political movement? Or should we understand it more like an 'ideal type' that is not necessarily found fully in reality?
2. What is the relationship between rationalism and utopianism? Marx and Engels reject utopian socialism; does this affect their classification as rationalists?
3. Rationalism stands to reason as scientism stands to science. So Oakeshott, by opposing rationalism, does not necessarily oppose reason, even in its 'technical' form. But what space does his own position leave for reason?
4. Oakeshott describes the flaws of rationalism. But what would a non-rationalist approach to politics look like? What role would there be for social science, e.g., economics?
5. Oakeshott expresses pessimism about our ability to return to a pre-rationalist mode of conducting politics. He also seems to think that much of practical knowledge about politics is already lost. Is it even feasible, then, to abandon rationalism?
6. The conservative party and conservative thought are also infected by rationalism, according to Oakeshott. How does this express itself?
7. What is the relationship between Oakeshott's anti-rationalism and Burkean traditionalism, and conservatism more widely? Put differently: Would a focus on practical knowledge entail aversion to change, and why?

Patriotism

Conservatism, University of Bayreuth, 11 June 2025
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MACINTYRE, 'IS PATRIOTISM A VIRTUE?'

I. Patriotism is to be distinguished from (1) supporting one's country because it instantiates or defends abstract values (e.g., justice, culture, civilisation), and (2) a 'mindless loyalty' that does not pay attention to the 'characteristics and merits and achievements of one's own nation' (287).

Patriotism rests on an ineliminable particular relationship (288), comparable to the relationship to one's family or partner.

DISCUSSION. What are morally relevant differences between the relationship to one's country and other close relationships?

II. By contrast, morality seems us to require to be impartial, and to disregard contingent facts such as the place of our birth. Thus, 'the moral standpoint and the patriotic standpoint are systematically incompatible' (288).

One might advocate for a 'liberal' patriotism, which is constrained by the demands of morality. Such a position, however, yields no interestingly 'patriotic' results in the case of (1) zero-sum conflicts over scarce resources, and (2) conflicts over differing visions about the right way to live.

DISCUSSION. What is MacIntyre's objection to constrained forms of patriotism? What could be said in favour of such a position?

While there are different ways to fill in the standpoint of impartial morality (Kantian, utilitarian, contractualist), they share five characteristics (290): (1) morality is constituted by rules everyone can assent to, (2) morality itself is impartial between competing interests, (3) and neutral between competing accounts of the good life, (4) the 'units' of morality are individuals, who are considered equally important, and (5) the moral standpoint is the same for all agents.

III. On an alternative picture, we learn morality within a particular culture and context (291), which gives the moral rules a particular meaning. The defender of liberality morality might reply that these rules are only valid insofar as they cohere with universal principles. MacIntyre responds:

1. I can only apprehend the rules of morality in some 'socially specific and particularised form' (292).
2. The justification of moral rules does not rest on abstract moral goods, but 'particularised' goods that I enjoy within a community. Without it, these goods make no sense.
3. It is only within a moral community that I become a moral agent (292). Without that community, I would have no reason to be moral (292).

If these claims are true, then patriotism is a central and unavoidable virtue (293).

DISCUSSION. Does MacIntyre's position here point to a through-going relativism? Why would I have no reason to be moral without a moral community? Why would the relevant moral community be my country, rather than my family or immediate surroundings?

IV. TM (Defender of traditional morality). To occupy the impartial point of view of modern morality, I need to strip myself of all social roles and attachments; I must be a 'citizen of nowhere' (294). But what justifies these abstractions?

MM (Defender of modern morality). The good of 'emancipating freedom' provides the justification. We must be able to detach ourselves

from all our commitments; by contrast, patriotism rules out 'rational criticism' (294). This makes patriotism irrational (294-5).

TM. There are some things that are exempt from criticism in patriotism; but substantial criticism is possible amongst patriots. E.g., one can be deeply opposed to one's country rulers. The example of Adam von Trott (295-6).

MM. This is too optimistic; patriotism is a permanent 'source of moral danger' (297).

DISCUSSION. What are the dangers of patriotism?

TM. But maybe impartial morality is also dangerous in an analogous way. If impartial morality has its way, we will lose all connection to our particular moral communities (297). This would obliterate something central to moral life.

DISCUSSION. What, if anything, is lost within a liberal morality? What goods can we no longer enjoy?

It should be noted that patriotism requires a genuine community, which is not yet overlaid by concerns of self-interest (298). The analogy of the family governed by self-interest. The example of a loyal army (298-9).

V. MacIntyre ends on a seemingly pessimistic note: modern morality seems to have carried the day (299). MacIntyre refashions the contrast between the two types of morality in terms of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität* (300). Both in the French and American revolutions, the two were identified: the cause of one's own nation was considered to be universal. We can now diagnose this as incoherent, MacIntyre suggests.

NUSSBAUM, 'PATRIOTISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM'

I. National pride is dangerous. Even if we serve patriotic causes, doing so serves 'moral ideals of justice and equality'. A better view is to have a 'primary allegiance to the community of human beings in the entire world'.

Often, patriotism is advocated as a source of national unity, to transcend racial and ethnic boundaries. But why not go beyond this, focussing on what we share as rational and mutually dependent humans? Indeed, ultimately nationalism and 'ethnocentric particularism' share the same disdain for universal ideals.

DISCUSSION. What would MacIntyre respond to this view? Most people do not identify in any strong sense with humanity at large. Is Nussbaum's position realistic?

Nussbaum wishes to argue for 'cosmopolitan education'.

II. Three arguments from the Stoics for cosmopolitan education.

1. The study of humanity at large is good for self-knowledge
2. Local allegiance is harmful
3. The cosmopolitan stance is intrinsically valuable

This does not entail that we do not have local identifications; but we should strive to pull as many people as possible into our inner moral circle.

III. Nussbaum offers four arguments.

1. Through cosmopolitan education, we learn more about ourselves. A standard error is to think that one's own beliefs and way of life are 'neutral and natural'. Cosmopolitan education disabuses one of this fact. E.g., we can see different ways the family could be structured.

2. We make headway solving problems that require international cooperation. Cosmopolitan education requires the necessary background competence to solve global collective action problems.

3. We recognize moral obligations to the rest of the world that are real, and that otherwise would go unrecognized. Impartial morality entails that we have duties to humanity at large. This is compatible with giving some special preference to people close at home.

4. We make a consistent and coherent argument based on distinctions we are really prepared to defend. Defenders of patriotism often appeal to national values. But national borders are morally arbitrary. So, for example, if democracy matters locally, then it should also matter globally.

DISCUSSION. Would these arguments, when taken together, convince a defender of patriotism like MacIntyre? The first two arguments also seem to be of an instrumental nature. Are these arguments of the wrong type for cosmopolitanism? Do arguments 3 and 4 presuppose the truth of cosmopolitanism?

IV. Cosmopolitanism can be 'lonely business'. In particular, 'patriotism is full of colour and intensity and passion, whereas cosmopolitanism seems to have a hard time gripping the imagination'. But maybe there is a happy ending for cosmopolitanism.

GENERAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between patriotism and nationalism?
2. Does the fact that the country of our birth is arbitrary morally matter? How does it affect justifications of patriotism?
3. How far does MacIntyre wish to go in his defence of patriotism? Should I support my country in the pursuit of unjust aims?
4. Does MacIntyre overplay the importance of community in moral development? What if we come to think that morality is universal as part of our moral development?
5. Is there a way to make patriotism and a more universal morality compatible with each other? What might such a position look like?

Anti-Egalitarianism

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THE BASIC ARGUMENT AGAINST (146-7)

Claim. Each person owes each person equal respect and concern.

Steinhoff. This is not true: the example of the daughter and the rapist. Steinhoff also offers an interesting critique from degrees:

> why should degrees not matter, that is, why should everyone up to the point of the extreme moral corruption of a murderer, for example, enjoy equal respect and concern or equal moral status, irrespective of whether he is infinitesimally close to such extreme moral corruption or infinitely far away from it? (147)

DISCUSSION. This is an often-repeated objection to basic equality. The objection is: if we are different in natural features, why should we be equal in moral features? What might an egalitarian respond?

POGGE AND DWORKIN (147-9)

Claim I (Pogge). We can be partial in our private life towards our family and friends, but we need to be impartial when it comes to the design of political institutions.

Steinhoff. Even when designing political institutions are we allowed to be partial.

Claim II (Dworkin). Government must treat people with equal concern and respect.

Steinhoff. The same objections apply as to Pogge.

INITIAL EQUAL RESPECT AND CONCERN (151)

Claim. We initially owe people the same amount of respect and concern.

Steinhoff. That is not true; mothers can prefer their own children, even ab initio. Perhaps this again only applies to the design of political institutions? Steinhoff responds that we cannot expect people to "switch partiality on and off like a bedside lamp" (151).

DISCUSSION. This is an interesting critique. If we have a 'split-level' view mixing partiality and impartiality, does this lead to a kind of schizophrenia?

EQUAL RIGHTS (151-5)

Claim I. People have the same moral rights, and this gives them equal moral standing.

Steinhoff. But people do not have the same rights; e.g., people have varying 'special' rights and obligations (152).

DISCUSSION. Compare the claims 'everyone has the same rights' and 'there are rights that everyone has'. Steinhoff criticises, in a sense, that the second claim does not entail the latter. What are 'special' rights?

Claim II. Everyone has the same human rights.

Steinhoff. If everyone has the same rights, they must be inalienable. But rights are very often alienable. At any right, if this slogan is true, then only with respect to a narrow set of rights. Everyone having the same rights is also compatible with highly inegalitarian specifications of the right, e.g. slavery (154).

Claim III. Everyone is born with the same rights.

Steinhoff. Consider a trade-off case where we can save 9 infants or one infant (due to a genetic feature that makes them need more of a

live-saving medicine). Steinhoff suggests that there is no reason to think that these lives are to be weighed equally (154-5).

DISCUSSION. What might we respond to this case? Could we not also argue that people are still equal on a deeper level in this example?

CHRISTIANO ON MORAL PRINCIPLES (155-6)

Claim. We have equal moral status insofar as the same moral principles apply to us.

Steinhoff. If there are multiple principles, and different principles apply to different entities, this hardly shows that we are equal.

DARWALL'S RECOGNITION RESPECT (156-8)

Claim. While we do not owe everyone the same 'appraisal respect', we owe everything the same 'recognition respect'.

Steinhoff. Even if everyone is owed recognition respect, this has nothing to do with equality in any interesting sense. There are also different types of recognition respect, e.g. recognition as an innocent person. We are not owed the same amount of respect relative to all these types.

DISCUSSION. What is the difference between recognition and appraisal respect?

WALDRON ON LOCKEAN EQUALITY (158-160)

Claim. Waldron invokes Locke's defence of 'basic equality'.

Steinhoff. But Locke only defends a narrow claim, that differences between people does not give some a claim to the subjection of others. This is compatible with inequality. Locke also claims that unjust aggressors have no claim to equal concern (159).

"FOUNDATIONAL" EQUALITY (160-8)

Claim. But even if unequal concern and respect, and unequal rights, are justified on the surface, perhaps we can give a deeper explanation of these inequalities in terms of foundational equality.

Attempt I. Fundamental moral reasons are 'impartial' (Tan in response to Miller).

Steinhoff. To adjudicate this claim, we would first need to know what an impartial standpoint looks like (162); e.g., is excluding animals compatible with impartiality?

DISCUSSION. Steinhoff argues that there is no natural stopping point for defining impartiality. Is this correct? Why could no theory succeed which told us what the correct 'moral circle' and its boundaries are?

Attempt II. Impartiality is decision-making behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance including all humans (163).

Steinhoff. Perhaps such a model deserves the label 'impartiality'. But the decisions made behind such a veil would be 'utterly counterintuitive' (163).

DISCUSSION. What are the supposed shortcomings of reasoning from a veil of ignorance?

Attempt III (Gosepath). Rules are morally justified if they could be accepted by everyone.

Steinhoff. Gosepath refers to a hypothetical level on which we need to justify ourselves to good people as much as Hitler. But it is not clear that the right to justification cannot be forfeited (164-5). Moreover, justification to everyone is impossible, as it gives people a veto right (165); but bad people would not accept rules that constrain them.

DISCUSSION. What is the problem with hypothetical justification?

Attempt IV (Forst). Everyone has a 'basic right to justification'. One can veto moral rules, but the veto must observe criteria of reciprocity and generality.

Steinhoff. Even if we accept that bad people cannot reject moral norms based on 'reciprocal and general' reasons, it is also true that good people cannot reject immoral norms on that basis (167).

EQUAL MORAL WORTH OR DIGNITY (168-170)

Claim. Every human has equal moral worth.

Steinhoff. But Hitler and Schweitzer do not have the same moral worth. Talking about dignity does not change this point (169). If we want to ground dignity on some scalar property, it is also not clear why everyone should possess equal dignity (170).

DISCUSSION

1. Does Steinhoff merely oppose the rhetoric of equality, or does he have some deeper objection to equality?
2. What is the upshot of his critique? How radical would it be to accept that we are not moral equals?
3. How does Steinhoff's critique of equality connect with conservative positions, such as Burke's or Oakeshott's? Think of the critique of rationalist principles, the idea that we are socially embedded, and that we owe partiality towards our nation.
4. Many conservatives have defended the idea that society naturally tends to produce certain amounts of inequality. Is this compatible with Steinhoff's view?
5. Is a critique of equality an important component in conservatism? Could there be such a thing as an 'egalitarian conservatism'?

Hierarchy, Meritocracy, and Elitism

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SCHUMPETER, "APTITUDE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY" (1927), EXCERPT IN MUELLER

Social Mobility within Social Classes. Let us assume, "for now", that class boundaries are fixed (224). Nonetheless, people's positions within their class constantly shifts. Why?

The Marxist assumes that there is an "objective automatism" by which bigger companies become bigger, eventually eating up the smaller ones (225). While capitalists can be said to be forced to reinvest their profits by the system, how they do so is determined by individual talent.

Indeed, there is an automatism of decline (226): firms which do not innovate and do not use their profits wisely inevitably fail. "Mere husbanding of already existing resources, no matter how painstaking, is always characteristic of a declining position." (227) Innovation requires on a few, "rare" innovators willing to take great risks; lack of capital is rarely an obstacle (227).

Schumpeter is famous for his idea of "creative destruction" as one of the guiding forces behind capitalism. Is this something a conservative should or can welcome?

Schumpeter turns to differences between family business and large corporations (228); the latter reward people with 'social climbing' skills, while this is less prominent in the former. Nonetheless, we can observe a broad phenomenon by which "behavior" and "aptitude" leads to differences in individual outcomes (229).

Schumpeter's judgment of large corporation seems more reserved. This aligns with his judgment in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942) that capitalism will descend into corporatism, and from there gradually transform into a form of quasi-centralised economy.

Social Mobility between Social Classes. While in the short run, the Marxist is right that there are hard-to-overcome class boundaries (229), this is not the case in the long run. There is "constant turnover" in the composition of prominent families:

> Class barriers are always, without exception, surmountable and are, in fact, surmounted, by virtue of the same qualifications and modes of behavior that bring about shifts of family position within the class. (230)

Social classes rise and fall in line with individual qualifications, "to the degree to which families are qualified to solve the problems with which their social environment confronts them" (230). Classes themselves fall and rise in line with their ability to fulfil their social function (230). Schumpeter's own summary:

> The ultimate foundation on which the class phenomenon rests consists of individual differences in aptitude […] with respect to those functions which the environment makes "socially necessary"—in our sense—at any given time […]. The differences, moreover, do not relate to the physical individual, but to the clan or family. (230)

How could we empirically test Schumpeter's claims? It seems we would need to specify a time horizon, and some empirical measure of social mobility. How could this be done?

Aptitude and Moral Worth. However, we must not confuse social position with moral worth or social desirability (230-1). Indeed, we might judge some social achievements in a negative way.

Schumpeter does not make an argument that markets should prevail because they lead to the most morally deserving to be on top. "Aptitude", then, seems to be a morally neutral category. But this then

raises the obvious question whether we should welcome or regret the developments that Schumpeter predicts.

If aptitude is natural or acquired through family position, then it tends to be more socially entrenched. Aptitude only exists with respect to particular social functions; there is no 'aptitude' as such. Differences in aptitude can be assumed to follow a normal distribution.

Mental characteristics, like physical characteristics, are probably inheritable to some degree; but Schumpeter closes by saying that this matter is uncertain. He also mentions that his study is limited to ethnically homogenous groups.

Schumpeter's remarks at the end raise several issues. If aptitude is heritable, what would change in Schumpeter's view? Can Schumpeter's views be expanded to ethnically heterogenous societies?

SANDEL, *TYRANNY OF MERIT* (2020), SUMMARY

Main claim: meritocracy is not the friend of equality (4).

Both that we have talents, and the fact that our talents are socially valued, are morally arbitrary. Thus, we should not think that markets reflect what people merit or deserve. Moreover, people on top engage in "meritocratic hubris", thinking themselves superior. This has negative consequences and deepens social divides. "Levelling the playing field" is not the answer and might even deepen false meritocratic beliefs.

"**The rhetoric of rising**" promotes greater opportunities of social mobility. But such messaging has a bad side, as it also suggests that people who do not make it are flawed in some way. At any rate, meritocracy does not ultimately abolish equality but even demands inequality.

The false promise of meritocracy is particularly visible in the role of universities. Education is *not* generally an engine of social mobility but favours the already rich. People with university degrees are also vastly overrepresented in politics.

Are these structural or contingent problems with universities? Could universities be fixed to address these issues?

This relentless focus on higher education has also eroded appreciation for the "dignity of work". As a solution, Sandel suggests, "pay" and "recognition" need to be brought into better alignment. Such an agenda requires addressing "contribute" justice in addition to "distributive" justice. What might this concretely entail? Sandel writes:

> Taxing financial transactions and reducing payroll taxes would not only make the tax system more progressive, it would express society's judgment that work is more valuable than casino-like speculation. It would reconfigure the economy of esteem by discouraging extractive ways of making money and honoring productive labor. (14)

Is the proposed policy proposal in line with the diagnosed problem? What other policies might follow from an anti-meritocratic stance?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are social classes and elites inevitable? If so, what follows?
2. If the social positions resulting from aptitude are morally neutral, what's the moral argument?
3. What are the alternatives to meritocracy? Are the alternatives worse?
4. Is the problem with meritocracy itself, or with meritocracy how it is currently practiced (or not practiced)?
5. What stance should conservatives take concerning classes, elites, and meritocracy?

Carl Schmitt

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CARL SCHMITT (1888-1985)

Became an influential lawyer during Weimar Germany, criticising its legal order: *Political Theology* (1922), *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (1923), *The Concept of the Political* (1927). Joins the Nazi party and fervently defends Nazi takeover ('Der Führer schützt das Recht', *Deutsche Juristenzeitung*, 1. August 1934).

After the war, turns to questions of international law. Despite being unable to obtain an official position, has a huge influence on legal academia in postwar Germany.

THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL (1927)

1 [The Concept of the State]

Schmitt rejects various definitions of the state, especially those that equate state and politics; 'the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political' (19). If we equate state and politics, and state and society become intertwined, then everything turns out to be political—an obviously unsatisfying result (24).

2 [The Autonomy of the Political]

The political must rest on 'its own ultimate distinctions' (26), separate from those of morality, aesthetics, economics, and so forth. The fundamental political distinction is that between friend and enemy (26). It is independent from the distinctions of other domains, such as good and evil, or beautiful and ugly.

DISCUSSION. Does this mean that no moral critique of political categories is possible? Why would this be the case?

3 [The Concept of the Political: The Friend—Enemy Distinction]

The friend—enemy distinction must be understood shorn of metaphors or other concepts. In particular, the enemy is not a 'private adversary whom one hates' (*inimicus*) (28): the enemy is the *collective* 'public enemy' (*hostis*). The political is the 'most intense and extreme antagonism' (29). The state 'decides for itself the friend-enemy distinction' (30).

DISCUSSION. Here and elsewhere, Schmitt seems to say that deciding on one's enemy is an existential decision for which no deeper reasons can be given. The autonomy of the political would also mean that no moral, economics, religious, etc. reasons could fully justify or explain one's choice of enemy. But how, then, is this decision to be made? Schmitt's view also puts a central place on collectives. Why should we?

The idea of the political also entails the possibility of combat 'in its original existential sense' (33)—i.e., fight to the death. This does not mean morally endorsing war, or militarism (33); peace might be the wisest course of action. Nonetheless, we must see war as an inevitable part of the idea of politics. A world without the possibility of war would have no politics (35). While religious, economic, and moral motives might overlay many wars, they need not be; for war, one ultimately only needs the friend—enemy distinction (36).

DISCUSSION. The idea here seems to be that while politics needn't end in war, war is its most radical expression. But even if this is true, why should we put so much weight on the extreme case?

Pacifists who want to wage war 'to end all wars' end up moralising their opponents, which leads to a particularly vicious war in which the enemy is not only defeated but 'utterly destroyed' (36).

6 [The International Order]

The political presupposes the existence of other political entities (53). Humanity cannot wage war because it has no enemy (54). Countries who invoke 'humanity' in fighting a war will tend to deny 'the enemy

the quality of being human' which will entail the 'most extreme inhumanity' (54).

The founding of the League of Nations (or similar organisations) can only mean two things: (i) a silent imperialism in the name of humanity, or (ii) a total depoliticization, amounting to abolishing all states (55). If (i), the League of Nations does not prevent or abolish war, but just allows new forms of it to arise; it is thus 'not a league, but possibly an alliance' (56). If (ii), then such an organisation would merely be an 'interest group' which loses its political character (57).

DISCUSSION. Importantly, Schmitt allows that a global depoliticization would eventually be possible; he seems to criticise merely that an emergence of such an order is highly unlikely. This leaves the normative question open—should we aim for such an international order?

8 [Liberalism's Denial of the Political]

Liberalism has tried to elude the political, but it cannot (69). Liberal individualists are intensely sceptical of collective institutions like the state; but they do not produce a positive theory of 'state, government, and politics' (70).

DISCUSSION. Schmitt associates liberalism with a denial of collective agency, and if the friend—enemy distinction relies on collectivity, then liberalism must miss this distinction; it is perhaps unable to serve as the basis of a collective identity altogether. But is this not an exaggeration of liberal practice and thought?

Liberal thought 'evades or ignores' politics 'in a very systematic fashion'. Instead, it always recurs to the spheres of ethics and economics. For the liberal, the state cannot demand of individuals that they give their life in fighting the public enemy (70-1). The state withers to the function of 'securing the conditions for liberty and eliminating infringements of freedom' (71).

DISCUSSION. A liberal is likely to respond that this merely redescribes their position (though in a hostile way). But what is wrong or mistaken about ignoring the political?

Marxist thought conceptualises world history around the antagonism between capitalists and workers (74). This can be seen as challenging liberalism on its own terrain: the economic sphere is not actually politically neutral (74). Later, liberals also associate ideas of economic progress with moral progress and democracy (75). These linkages now start to disappear; nonetheless, they continue to exert a powerful influence on the political imagination (76).

DISCUSSION. Schmitt describes a process whereby the economic sphere, through the liberal emphasis on it, itself becomes political. Put differently, ignoring the political as an independent category just means that it resurfaces in other spheres. Is this a plausible diagnosis?

DISCUSSION

1. Should *The Concept of the Political* read in a normatively neutral way, or can (and should) it be read in a normative way?
2. Does *The Concept of the Political* make any predictions about politics? Is its underlying account still a plausible critique of contemporary politics (and liberalism)?
3. Is the critique of liberalism convincing? Could there be a liberal collective identity?
4. Is there anything uniquely conservative about Schmitt's ideas? Can Schmitt's account be appropriated within a non-conservative theory?

The Psychology of Conservatism

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BACKGROUND

Adorno et al. (1950) developed the F-scale to measure the 'authoritarian personality'. This research attempts to show that conservatism aligns with psychological imbalances.

Kohlberg (1969) develops a highly cognitive, six-stage model of moral psychology, endorsed later e.g. by Habermas. The highest stage in Kohlberg's model is the 'post-conventional' stage characterised by universal role-taking.

Shweder (1990) argued that there were three main types of moral language: the ethic of autonomy, the ethic of community, and the ethic of divinity.

Jost et al. (2003) see conservatism as a 'motivated social cognition'. For example, conservative attitudes are explained as being based on intolerance of ambiguity and new experiences.

HAIDT'S MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY (MFT)

MFT has several characteristic features:

- It is a *pluralistic theory* (following Shweder): there is not merely one moral foundation, but many (initially five, later amended to six); this stands in contrast to e.g. economic theories of behaviour
- It is based on *evolutionary biology* and aims to show that the moral foundations are (in some weakened sense) *innate*; not innate in the sense of biologically determined, but constraining how the foundations can express themselves
- There is *cultural learning*: moral attitudes develop within groups, which can lead to different emphases and social norms (as allowed within the biological constraints); culture cannot change the foundations, but weight them differently
- It is a version of *social intuitionism* (against Kohlberg): people have strong, immediate, pre-rational intuitive reactions to moral subject matters; rational deliberation comes afterwards (thus, inquiring into political ideologies as sets of rational ideas is methodologically mistaken)
- It is *ideologically neutral* (against Adorno, Jost et al.): it aims to explain differences in political views, but different ideologies are simply explainable in terms of different activated profiles of foundations.

The five (original) foundations, often called 'modules', or analogised with different taste receptors:

- Care/Harm, explained in terms of 'attachment theory': having to care for vulnerable children
- Fairness/Cheating, explained in terms of the evolutionary benefits of 'reciprocal altruism' with strangers
- Loyalty/Betrayal, explained in terms of the advantages of acting in teams
- Authority/Subversion, explained in terms of the advantages of social hierarchy
- Sanctity/Degradation, explained in terms of the 'omnivore's dilemma' and healthy mistrust of pathogens and parasites

Later, a 'Liberty/Oppression' foundation is added. Generally, the list is assembled in an 'ad hoc' not an 'apriori' way.

The theory often distinguishes between 'original triggers' and 'current triggers'. The different modules were originally designed for a particular set of triggers, but their content has now generalised and expanded.

Haidt and others claim that conservatives show more equal sensitivity to all five foundations, while left-wingers/liberals are more sensitive to the first two.