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WHAT IS CONSERVATISM?

Conservatism is a political and social philosophy promoting traditional social institutions in the context of culture and civilization. The central tenets of conservatism include tradition, organic society, hierarchy, authority, and property rights. Conservatives seek to preserve a range of institutions such as religion, parliamentary government, and property rights, with the aim of emphasizing social stability and continuity. The more traditional elements reactionaries oppose modernism and seek a return to "the way things were".

The first established use of the term in a political context originated in 1818 with François-René de Chateaubriand during the period of Bourbon Restoration that sought to roll back the policies of the French Revolution. Historically associated with right-wing politics, the term has since been used to describe a wide range of views. There is no single set of policies regarded as conservative because the meaning of conservatism depends on what is considered traditional in a given place and time. Thus conservatives from different parts of the world each upholding their respective traditions—may disagree on a wide range of issues. Edmund Burke, an 18th-century politician who opposed the French Revolution, but supported the American Revolution, is credited as one of the main theorists of conservatism in Great Britain in the 1790s.

According to Quintin Hogg, the chairman of the British Conservative Party in 1959: "Conservatism is not so much a philosophy as an attitude, a constant force, performing a timeless function in the development of a free society, and corresponding to a deep and permanent requirement of human nature itself".

**Forms**

**Liberal conservatism**

Liberal conservatism incorporates the classical liberal view of minimal government intervention in the economy. Individuals should be free to participate in the market and generate wealth without government interference. However, individuals cannot be thoroughly depended on to act responsibly in other spheres of life, therefore liberal conservatives believe that a strong state is necessary to ensure law and order and social institutions are needed to nurture a sense of duty and responsibility to the nation. Liberal conservatism is a variant of conservatism that is strongly influenced by liberal stances. As these latter two terms have had different meanings over time and across countries, liberal conservatism also has a wide variety of meanings. Historically, the term often referred to the combination of economic liberalism, which champions laissez-faire markets, with the classical conservatism concern for established tradition, respect for authority and religious values. It contrasted itself with classical liberalism, which supported freedom for the individual in both the economic and social spheres.

Over time, the general conservative ideology in many countries adopted economic liberal arguments and the term liberal conservatism was replaced with conservatism. This is also the case in countries where liberal economic ideas have been the tradition such as the United States and are thus considered conservative. In other countries where liberal conservative movements have entered the political mainstream, such as Italy and Spain, the terms liberal and conservative may be synonymous. The liberal conservative tradition in the United States combines the economic individualism of the classical liberals with a Burkean form of conservatism (which has also become part of the American conservative tradition, such as in the writings of Russell Kirk). A secondary meaning for the term liberal conservatism that has developed in Europe is a combination of more modern conservative (less traditionalist) views with those of social liberalism. This has developed as an opposition to the more collectivist views of socialism. Often this involves stressing what are now conservative views of free market economics and belief in individual responsibility, with social liberal views on defence of civil rights, environmentalism and support for a limited welfare state. In continental Europe, this is sometimes also translated into English as social conservatism.

**Conservative liberalism**

Conservative liberalism is a variant of liberalism that combines liberal values and policies with conservative stances. The roots of conservative liberalism are found at the beginning of the history of liberalism. Until the two World Wars, in most European countries the political class was formed by conservative liberals, from Germany to Italy. Events after World War I brought the more radical version of classical liberalism to a more conservative (i.e. more moderate) type of liberalism.

**Libertarian conservatism**

Libertarian conservatism describes certain political ideologies most prominently within the United States which combine libertarian economic issues with aspects of conservatism. Its four main branches are constitutionalism, paleo libertarianism, small government conservatism and Christian libertarianism. They generally differ from paleo conservatives, in that they favour more personal and economic freedom. Agonists such as Samuel Edward Konkin III labelled libertarian conservatism right libertarianism. In contrast to paleo conservatives, libertarian conservatives support strict laissez-faire policies such as free trade, opposition to any national bank and opposition to business regulations. They are vehemently opposed to environmental regulations, corporate welfare, subsidies and other areas of economic intervention. Many conservatives, especially in the United States, believe that the government should not play a major role in regulating business and managing the economy. They typically oppose efforts to charge high tax rates and to redistribute income to assist the poor. Such efforts, they argue, do not properly reward people who have earned their money through hard work.

**National and traditional conservatism**

National conservatism is a political term used primarily in Europe to describe a variant of conservatism which concentrates more on national interests than standard conservatism as well as upholding cultural and ethnic identity, while not being outspokenly nationalist or supporting a far-right approach. In Europe, national conservatives are usually euro sceptics.

National conservatism is heavily oriented towards the traditional family and social stability as well as in favour of limiting immigration. As such, national conservatives can be distinguished from economic conservatives, for whom free market economic policies, deregulation and fiscal conservatism are the main priorities. Some commentators have identified a growing gap between national and economic conservatism: "Most parties of the Right [today] are run by economic conservatives who, in varying degrees, have marginalized social, cultural, and national conservatives". National conservatism is also related to traditionalist conservatism.

Traditionalist conservatism is a political philosophy emphasizing the need for the principles of natural law and transcendent moral order, tradition, hierarchy and organic unity, agrarianism, classicism and high culture as well as the intersecting spheres of loyalty. Some traditionalists have embraced the labels "reactionary" and "counterrevolutionary", defying the stigma that has attached to these terms since the Enlightenment. Having a hierarchical view of society, many traditionalist conservatives, including a few Americans, defend the monarchical political structure as the most natural and beneficial social arrangement.

**Cultural and social conservatism**

Cultural conservatives support the preservation of the heritage of one nation, or of a shared culture that is not defined by national boundaries. The shared culture may be as divergent as Western culture or Chinese culture. In the United States, the term "cultural conservative" may imply a conservative position in the culture war. Cultural conservatives hold fast to traditional ways of thinking even in the face of monumental change. They believe strongly in traditional values and traditional politics and often have an urgent sense of nationalism. Social conservatism is distinct from cultural conservatism, although there are some overlaps. Social conservatives may believe that society is built upon a fragile network of relationships which need to be upheld through duty, traditional values and established institutions and that the government has a role in encouraging or enforcing traditional values or behaviours. A social conservative wants to preserve traditional morality and social mores, often by opposing what they consider radical policies or social engineering. Social change is generally regarded as suspect. A second meaning of the term social conservatism developed in the Nordic countries and continental Europe, where it refers to liberal conservatives supporting modern European welfare states. Social conservatives (in the first meaning of the phrase) in many countries generally favour the anti-abortion position in the abortion controversy and oppose human embryonic stem cell research (particularly if publicly funded); oppose both eugenic and human enhancement (transhumanism) while supporting bio conservatism support a traditional definition of marriage as being one man and one woman; view the nuclear family model as society's foundational unit; oppose expansion of civil marriage and child adoption to couples in same-sex relationships; promote public morality and traditional family values; oppose atheism, especially militant atheism, secularism and the separation of church and state support the prohibition of drugs, prostitution and euthanasia; and support the censorship of pornography and what they consider to be obscenity or indecency. Most conservatives in the United States support the death penalty.