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COURSE CODE: POL 202

COURSE TITLE: POLITICAL IDEAS

TOPIC: WHAT IS CONSERVATISM

Introduction:

The main aim of the assignment is to enable us know what Conservatism is, the different forms of conservatism, its functions and aspect it focuses on. After which we will proceed to learning more about its history and origin.

Content:

Definition of conservatism

History of conservatism

Forms of conservatism

Conclusion

Reference.

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".

 Conservatism and its modernizing, anti-traditionalist rivals, liberalism and socialism, are the most influential political philosophies and ideologies of the post-Enlightenment era. Conservatives criticize their rivals for making a utopian exaggeration of the power of theoretical reason, and of human perfectibility. Conservative prescriptions are based on what they regard as experience rather than reason; for them, the ideal and the practical are inseparable. Most commentators regard conservatism as a modern political philosophy, even though it exhibits the standpoint of paternalism or authority, rather than freedom. As John Gray writes, while liberalism is the dominant political theory of the modern age, conservatism, despite appealing to tradition, is also a response to the challenges of modernity. The roots of all three standpoints “may be traced back to the crises of seventeenth-century England, but they crystallized into definite traditions of thought and practice only after the French Revolution”.

It is contested both what conservatism is, and what it could or ought to be both among the public and politicians, and among the philosophers and political theorists that this article focuses on. Popularly, “conservative” is a generic term for “right-wing viewpoint occupying the political spectrum between liberalism and fascism”. Philosophical commentators offer a more distinctive characterization. Many treat it as a standpoint that is skeptical of abstract reasoning in politics, and that appeals instead to living tradition, allowing for the possibility of limited political reform. On this view, conservatism is neither dogmatic reaction, nor the right wing radicalism of Margaret Thatcher or contemporary American “neo-conservatives”. Other commentators, however, contrast this “pragmatic conservatism” with a universalist “rational conservatism” that is not skeptical of reason, and that regards a community with a hierarchy of authority as most conducive to human well being .

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 OF CONSERVATISM:

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.

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 defense 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 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 favor more personal and economic freedom.

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.

Fiscal conservatism:

Fiscal conservatism is the economic philosophy of prudence in government spending and debt. In his Reflections on the Revolution in France, Edmund Burke argued that a government does not have the right to run up large debts and then throw the burden on the taxpayer

Religious conservatism:

Religious conservatism principally apply the teachings of particular religions to politics, sometimes by merely proclaiming the value of those teachings, at other times by having those teachings influence laws.

In most democracies, political conservatism seeks to uphold traditional family structures and social values. Religious conservatives typically oppose abortion, LGBT behavior (or, in certain cases, identity), drug use, and sexual activity outside of marriage. In some cases, conservative values are grounded in religious beliefs, and conservatives seek to increase the role of religion in public life.

Development of Western conservatism (United Kingdom)

In Great Britain, conservative ideas (though not yet called that) emerged in the Tory movement during the Restoration period (1660– 1688). Toryism supported a hierarchical society with a monarch who ruled by divine right. Tories opposed the idea that sovereignty derived from the people and rejected the authority of parliament and freedom of religion. Robert Filmer’s Patriarchy or the Natural Power of Kings (published posthumously in 1680, but written before the English Civil War of 1642–1651) became accepted as the statement of their doctrine. However, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 destroyed this principle to some degree by establishing a constitutional government in England, leading to the hegemony of the Tory-opposed Whig ideology. Faced with defeat, the Tories reformed their movement, now holding that sovereignty was vested in the three estates of Crown, Lords and Commons rather than solely in the Crown. Toryism became marginalized during the long period of Whig ascendancy in the 18th century.

Conservatives typically see Richard Hooker (1554–1600) as the founding father of conservatism, along with the Marques of Halifax (1633–1695), David Hume (1711–1776) and Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Halifax promoted pragmatism in government whilst Hume argued against political rationalism and utopianism. Burke served as the private secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham and as official pamphleteer to the Rockingham branch of the Whig party. Together with the Tories, they were the conservatives in the late 18th century United Kingdom. Burke's views were a mixture of liberal and conservative. He supported the American Revolution of 1765–1783, but abhorred the violence of the French Revolution (1789–1799). He accepted the liberal ideals of private property and the economics of Adam Smith (1723–1790), but thought that economics should remain subordinate to the conservative social ethic, that capitalism should be subordinate to the medieval social tradition and that the business class should be subordinate to aristocracy. He insisted on standards of honor derived from the medieval aristocratic tradition and saw the aristocracy as the nation's natural leaders. That meant limits on the powers of the Crown, since he found the institutions of Parliament to be better informed than commissions appointed by the executive. He favored an established church, but allowed for a degree of religious toleration. Burke justified the social order on the basis of tradition: tradition represented the wisdom of the species and he valued community and social harmony over social reforms. Burke was a leading theorist in his day, finding extreme idealism (either Tory or Whig) an endangerment to broader liberties and (like Hume) rejecting abstract reason as an unsound guide for political theory. Despite their influence on future conservative thought, none of these early contributors were explicitly involved in Tory politics. Hooker lived in the 16th century, long before the advent of tourism, whilst Hume was an apolitical philosopher and Halifax similarly politically independent. Burke described himself as a Whig.

Modern conservatism in different countries

While conservatism has been seen as an appeal to traditional, hierarchical society, some writers such as Samuel P. Huntington see it as situational. Under this definition, conservatives are seen as defending the established institutions of their time.

UNITED STATE

The meaning of "conservatism" in the United States has little in common with the way the word is used elsewhere. As Ribuffo (2011) notes, "what Americans now call conservatism much of the world calls liberalism or neoliberalism". Since the 1950s, conservatism in the United States has been chiefly associated with the Republican Party. However, during the era of segregation, many Southern Democrats were conservatives and they played a key role in the conservative coalition that largely controlled domestic policy in Congress from 1937 to 1963. The conservative Democrats continued to have influence in the US politics until 1994's Republican Revolution, when the American South shifted from solid Democrat to solid Republican, while maintaining its conservative values.

Russia

Under Vladimir Putin, the dominant leader since 1999, Russia has promoted explicitly conservative policies in social, cultural and political matters, both at home and abroad. Putin has attacked globalism and economic liberalism. Russian conservatism is unique in some respects as it supports Economic intervention with a mixed economy, with a strong nationalist sentiment and social conservatism with its views being largely populist. Russian conservatism as a result opposes libertarian ideals such as the aforementioned concept of economic liberalism found in other conservative movements around the world. Putin has as a result promoted new think tanks that bring together like-minded intellectuals and writers. For example, the Izborsky Club, founded in 2012 by Aleksandr Prokhanov, stresses Russian nationalism, the restoration of Russia's historical greatness and systematic opposition to liberal ideas and policies.

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