**POLITICAL IDEAS (POL 202)**

**COURSE ASSIGNMENT**

**Research Question:** What is Conservatism?

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**INTRODUCTION**

Conservatism, a general social and political state of mind that is averse to rapid change and innovation, strives for balance and order, avoids extremes and a seeking a return to "the way things were" in a society.

Originally, Conservatism arose as a reaction against the Age of Enlightenment (a time in the 18th century were the thought and letters in Europe and the American colonies were believed to be newly enlightened by reason, science, and a respect for humanity). It advocates belief in faith over reason, tradition over free inquiry, hierarchy over equality, collective values over individualism, and divine or natural law over secular law, all in an aim to bolster stability and continuity. At a given time in a given society, conservatism emphasizes the merits of the status quo and endorses the prevailing distribution of power, wealth, and social standing.

It is worthy of note however, that the meaning of this idea is tied to whatever is considered “traditional” in a society, therefore there are no single set of policies that could be used to universally define it.

**THE ROOTS/DEVELOPMENTS OF CONSERVATISM**

Conservatism is a long-standing idea and has plenty roots and antiquities from people’s literature, political parties, social movements, etc. For instance, from a political scope, it could be traced back to the 19th century works of [François-René de Chateaubriand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois-Ren%C3%A9_de_Chateaubriand) of in the pre-French Revolution times. Although from this context it was mainly about right-wing politics, now, this idea could have plenty connotations as the idea of what is “traditional” is, again, purely subjective. (*Roy*,2008)

Conservatism also received its classic formulation in the works of the British statesman, Edmund Burke, notably his *Reflections On the Revolution in France* (1790), in which he rejected the principles of the French Revolution and presented a comprehensive philosophy of society and politics. Burke viewed society as an organic whole, with individuals performing various roles and functions. In this society a natural elite—by virtue of birth, wealth, and education—is supposed to provide the leadership. Burke rejected the principles of equality, popular representation, and popular sovereignty. He was particularly anxious to avoid wide differences—extreme wealth on the one hand and poverty on the other. He also rejected the universal franchise and majority rule. However, he advocated for order, balance, and cooperation in society; restraints on government; and, above all, the supremacy of law—natural, divine, and customary. Burke did allow for limited governmental controls calculated to avoid malfunctions and frictions among the various groups and to moderate economic strife and competition. (*PhilosophyBasics*,2019)

THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS

 Conservative ideas (though not yet called that) emerged in the [Tory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tory) Movement around the 17th century. Toryism supported a hierarchical society with a monarch who ruled by right and opposed the idea that sovereignty is derived from the people and rejected the authority of parliament and freedom of religion (*Britannica*,2020). Furthermore, British conservative doctrine and the Conservative Party that evolved after the mid-19th century. Gradual extension of the franchise, social legislation, and better cooperation between the poor and the rich became part of the conservative tradition.In the 20th century, the Conservative Party accepted and even initiated economic controls by the state and broadened the social responsibility of the state in matters of health, education, and economic security.

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THE AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENTS

Unlike England and the European continent, the main currents of American political thought converged throughout the 19th century into a broad consensus that incorporated economic individualism and constitutional democracy with powerful restraints on the government. This had little in common with the conservative doctrines of Edmund Burke; it was in fact closer to liberalism, with the principles of individual freedom and equality taken as self-evident. Thus, the major characteristics of American conservatism emerged as economic individualism, social Darwinism, and nationalism.

After World War II, there was another conservative movement in the United States. An entire generation began to live under a liberal consensus, based on expanding government controls and welfare measures, that crystallized into a dogma and was taken for granted. The conservatives as a whole and their most vocal wing—called the New Right—challenged liberalism vigorously, calling for a return to basic individualistic values in the economy and society. They successfully urged more limited growth of domestic spending, a strong defense posture, and a more explicitly anti-Communist foreign policy. Although they met with less success in efforts to outlaw abortion, legalize prayer in public schools, and enact New Right positions on other social, religious, and family issues, they continued their efforts in these directions throughout the 1980s.(*Arcdigital,*2020)

**FORMS OF CONSERVATISM**

Conservatism no takes many forms and perspectives, views which are apparent in our everyday lives, sometimes without us even knowing. Some of these views are: Libertarian conservatism, Fiscal conservatism, Traditional conservatism, Social conservatism and Religious conservatism. Each of these numerous forms has an important and unique element which is important to note.

There are however, two prominent forms of this idea which are; Liberal Conservatism and Social Conservatism.

On one hand, Libertarians believe that individuals and individual liberty are the keys to a free society and that these rights are inalienable regardless of where you are on a map. They expatiate on the need for a free market economy. Issues like drug prohibition and prostitution have only to do with the individuals taking part and therefore should fall under criminal behavior since no individual is being deprived of life, liberty, or property through force. Libertarians do not believe in “victimless crime” like conservatives do since libertarian principles are based on voluntary cooperation and consent (*Remso*,2019)**.** Additionally, libertarians are more strident about issues such as gun control compared to conservatives, who claim to support the Second Amendment. On issues such as the [recent bump stock ban by the Trump administration](https://thelibertarianrepublic.com/trump-administration-to-officially-ban-bump-stocks-report-says/), libertarians were firmly against this infringement upon gun rights since the right to own a weapon for self-defense is inalienable, and therefore shall not be infringed.

On the other hand, Social conservatives, much like progressives, believe that principally believes that government should play the ultimate role of supporting or facilitating traditional values (such as religion) in a society and without laws enforced by the state and dictating the thoughts and actions of individuals, society would fall into social chaos.

However, history shows that governments around the world have done more to harm individuals living peacefully than any other thing in the world. During the Civil Rights era, establishment Democrats, as well as southern conservatives, upheld arcane institutions such as the Jim Crow laws which limited the rights of African-Americans and people of color in order to maintain a false sense of cultural and social tranquility (*DailySignal*,2020).Ultimately, whether it is individual liberty or economic freedom, libertarians live a consistent set of values based on individual freedom which conservatives believe they uphold but are far too willing to compromise in the name of safety.

**A MORE CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING (NEO-CONSERVATISM)**

Birthed in the  [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States)  during the 1960s among [liberal hawks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_hawk), Neo-conservatism is a [political movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_movement) that points to the idea of spreading tenets like democracy, human freedom, egalitarian values to many parts of the world including [peace through strength](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_through_strength) (by means of military force), and are known for promoting capitalism and for [political radicalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_radicalism). Irving Kristol distinguished three specific aspects of neo-conservatism from previous types of conservatism: Neo-conservatives had a forward-looking attitude from their liberal heritage, rather than the reactionary and dour attitude of previous conservatives; they had an ameliorative attitude, proposing alternate reforms rather than simply attacking social liberal reforms; and they took philosophical ideas and ideologies very seriously. (*TheNewRepublic,*2019)

**CONCLUSION**

Conservatism is a philosophy, not an ideology. It is the collective wisdom of conservatives such as Nigel Evans, Russell Kirk, Barry Goldwater, William Buckley, and Abraham Lincoln, who when asked what conservatism is replied, “Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried?” Conservatism stands on the solid rock of the American Founding and Western civilization. Its overriding principle is “ordered liberty,” which conservatives everywhere are determined to preserve and protect for this generation and generations to come.

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