

Conservative Political Thought

Whitman College, Spring 2010
Tues 7pm – 10pm
Maxey Hall 108

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Course Description

This course seeks to make sense of contemporary American conservatism in terms of its historical and theoretical antecedents and in terms of its central tensions, problems and ideological commitments. We begin with some of the foundational texts of modern political thought—texts which have had a very important influence on the development of both liberalism and conservatism (and liberal conservatism). We will then turn to the contemporary history of conservatism in America: we will explore the self-conscious development of conservatism as a political ideology in the 1950s and 1960s, the challenge presented to traditionalist conservatism by libertarianism and then the political project of reconciliation that played out in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. We will then turn to the strains of conservatism that have since the 1980s: 'values' conservatism and neo-conservatism. We will explore the relationships between these newer notions of conservatism and the traditionalist and libertarian strains. An on-going theme for the course will be the exploration of the relationships and tensions among these schools of thought.

Required Books

The following books are available for purchase from the Whitman College Bookstore or from a variety of online vendors. If you choose to buy your books online rather than from the bookstore, please be certain to purchase the editions listed below.

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Penguin Classics, 1982
Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, Hackett, 1980
Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford University Press, 2009
Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, University Of Chicago Press, 2007.
Gregory Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930: A Reader*, NYU Press, 2003

In addition to these required books, a great number of additional readings will be available for download from Cleo. You *must* print out these readings and bring them to class for discussion!

The internet is a marvelous resource for the curious mind. The following websites are rich with material for those interested in conservatism and conservative political movements:

The Cato Institute <http://www.cato.org>
The Heritage Foundation <http://www.heritage.org/>
The American Enterprise Institute <http://www.aei.org/home>
The Christian Coalition <http://www.cc.org/>
Focus on the Family Political Action <http://www.citizenlink.org/>
The American Conservative Union <http://www.conservative.org/>

(There are, of course, many more.)

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (30%)

Because this course is a seminar, it is my expectation that each student will come to class each day having done the reading and be present, ready and willing to engage with the texts and in discussion with the class. In this instance, “participation” is evaluated according to quality of participation as well as quantity. Good classroom citizenship counts!

As a part of your participation grade, each student will be responsible for **leading discussion** twice throughout the course of the semester. In pairs, you will prepare a class plan which should include a one or two paragraph summary of what you take to be important and interesting in the text under discussion (and which should operate as a frame for the class discussion), goals for the class period and a list of discussion questions with which to engage your classmates during the class period. The plan must be emailed to me and to the class by 5pm on the afternoon prior to your presentation.

You might find it helpful to visit my office on the day that you will lead discussion in order to discuss your plan and ideas with me.

Discussion questions and class exercises should seek to dig into the text at hand and to push the class to evaluate the ideas within the text both critically and normatively. In particular, you should focus on what seems complicated and controversial, the implications of the ideas under discussion, and the relationship of the text to other texts we have read throughout the semester.

You are welcome to run the class as you see fit: whole class discussions, focused group discussions, debates, brief brain-storming or writing activities, interpretive dance, sustained and close reading of particular passages are all acceptable means of leading class discussion. Your ultimate goal should be to engage your classmates in an interesting and productive discussion about the texts and their problems; how you go about engaging your classmates is up to you. Remember, good discussion questions do not have simple or easy answers!

You will be evaluated according to the quality and incisiveness of your class plan as well as your performance as you lead discussion. I will evaluate your presentation on the basis of your preparedness, your critical understanding of the texts, your ability to identify important questions and issues within the texts, the quality of discussion that emerges from your prompts and your success in engaging and re-engaging your classmates in productive conversation.

Although the primary responsibility for class discussion will lay with the discussion leaders, discussion leaders are merely facilitators of class discussion, not lecturers before whom everyone else may abdicate responsibility. *All* students are expected to be prepared to participate in the discussion and to assist the discussion leaders with questions, arguments and problems.

At the close of each class period, I will meet with discussion leaders for a ‘de-briefing’ and evaluation.

Written Assignments (70%)

You will write three analytical essays over the course of the semester. Essays 1 and 2 will be 5-7 pages long and will each be worth 20% of your final grade. Essay 3 will be 6-8 pages long and will be worth 30%. I will expect to see improvement over the course of the semester, as well as an effort to incorporate my suggestions and comments about previous papers into your later essays.

These essays should be interpretative, critical pieces with a strong central argument, plenty of textual evidence and sophisticated analysis. You may consult outside sources, if you choose, but you must be sure to, a. fully cite your sources, and b. carefully distinguish your own ideas from those of your sources. That is, your own ideas about the issues and problems under discussion are the most important element of these essays. I will give you the option of writing on a topic of your choice, or of responding to a prompt written by me.

I expect that all students will hand in their essays on time. Unless you discuss an extension with me in advance and have an excellent reason for asking for an extension, late papers will be penalized by one half-letter grade per day.

Reading Schedule

Jan 19th Introductions

Historical Foundations of Conservatism

Jan 26 Hobbes: Book 1, chs 4, 6, 10-15, Book 2, chs 17-21, 26, 29-31, Book 4, Review and Conclusion

Feb 2 Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*

Feb 9 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, selections TBA

Twentieth Century Conservatism

Feb 16 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (pp. 19-79)
George Santayana, "The Irony of Liberalism" (cleo)

Feb 23 *Intellectual Conservatism*:
Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," "On Being Conservative" (cleo)
Strauss, "What is Liberal Education" (cleo)
Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (excerpts) (cleo)

Feb 26 First Essay Due, Noon.

Mar 2 *The Birth of American Conservatism*
Weaver, "The Quest for Order" (Schneider reader)
Kirk, "The Conservative Mind" (Schneider reader)
Meyer, "A Rebel in Search of Tradition" (Schneider reader)
Kirk, "Cultural Debris: A Mordant Last Word" (cleo)
Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology" (cleo)
Kass, "Regarding Daughters and Sisters" (cleo)

Mar 9 *Libertarian Challenge*
Hayek, "Resurrecting the Abandoned Road" (Schneider reader)
Friedman, "Defining Principles: Capitalism and Freedom" (Schneider reader)
Rothbard, "What is Libertarianism?" (Schneider reader)

3/12 – 3/29 Spring Break

Mar 30 *Popular Libertarianism: Ayn Rand and "Objectivism"*
Film, *The Fountainhead*

'Ayn Rand Excerpts' (cleo)

Apr 6 Undergraduate Conference – No class

Apr 13 *Fusionism & Conservatism as a Political Movement*

Meyer, "A Rebel Finds his Tradition" (Schneider reader)

Buckley, National Review: Statement of Intentions (Schneider reader)

Buckley, National Review: Credenda and Statement of Principles" (Schneider reader)

Kirk: "Libertarians, The Chirping Sectaries" (cleo)

Nisbet, "Uneasy Cousins" (cleo)

Hayek, "Why I am not a Conservative" (Schneider reader)

Goldwater, "The Conscience of a Conservative" (Schneider reader)

April 16 Second Essay Due, noon

Apr 20 '*Values' Conservatism*

Reagan, *Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Schneider reader)

The "Wedge" memo (cleo)

Neuhaus, "Strange New Regime" (cleo)

Scalia, "God's Justice and Ours" (cleo)

Assorted speeches (cleo)

Hedges, "The Christian Right and the Rise of American Fascism"

Apr 27 *Neo-Conservatism*

Mark Gerson, "Introduction" to *Neo-Conservatism* (cleo)

Irving Kristol: "The Adversary Culture of Intellectuals", "The Cultural revolution and the Capitalist Future," "The Coming 'Conservative' Century", "The New Face of American Politics,"

America's 'Exceptional' Conservatism" (cleo)

Irving Kristol, "When Virtue Loses All Her Loveliness" (cleo)

Frances Fukuyama, "The End of History," "The Neoconservative Moment" (cleo)

May 4 *Neo-Conservatism and its Critics*

Project for a New American Century mission statement:

www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm

Donnelly, "The Underpinnings of the Bush Doctrine:" <http://www.aei.org/outlook/15845>

Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations" (cleo)

Francis Fukuyama, "Principles and Prudence," "The Neo-Conservative Legacy" (cleo)

Pat Buchanan, *Where the Right Went Wrong: How Neoconservatives Subverted the Reagan Revolution and Hijacked the Bush Presidency*—selections (cleo)

May 11 *Review and Conclusions*

What's Right: Policy Review Defines the Limits of Conservatism" (Schneider reader)

Paul Gottfried, "Goldbergism: The Lowest (Terminal) Stage Of Conservatism"

<http://vdare.com/gottfried/goldbergism.htm>

May 14 Final Essay Due, Noon