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CONSERVATISM PAST AND PRESENT

A Philosophical Introduction

TRISTAN J. ROGERS

Tristan J. Rogers' *Conservatism, Past and Present* is an important contribution. Against the widespread neglect of conservative thought in the academy, Rogers shows that there is a serious tradition of conservative political philosophy—with which responsible political philosophers must engage—by tracing conservative themes in the thought of major thinkers within the Western intellectual tradition, including Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas, Hume, Burke, Hegel, Tocqueville, and so on. Drawing on this tradition, Rogers articulates and defends a position he calls "philosophical conservatism," which he deploys to advance conservative views on contemporary political debates, demonstrating the continued appeal of conservative thought.

Dr. David McPherson, *Professor of Philosophy at the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education, University of Florida, U.S.A.*

Conservatism
Past and Present

In *Conservatism, Past and Present: A Philosophical Introduction*, Tristan J. Rogers argues that philosophical conservatism is a coherent and compelling set of historically rooted ideas about conserving and promoting the human good. Part I, "Conservatism Past," presents a history of conservative ideas, exploring themes, such as the search for wisdom, the limits of philosophy, reform in preference to revolution, the relationship between authority and freedom, and liberty as a living tradition. Major figures include Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Edmund Burke, G.W.F. Hegel, and Roger Scruton. Part II, "Conservatism Present," applies philosophical conservatism to contemporary conservative politics, focusing on issues such as nationalism, populism, the family, education, and responsibility.

Rogers shows that conservatism has been defined differently at different times: as a loose set of connected ideas reacting against the French Revolution; as a kind of disposition or instinct in favor of the status quo; and more recently as any ideas opposed to the political left. But he also allows a set of questions to guide his argument for conservatism's merits: What is conservatism? Is it a coherent and attractive philosophy? What are conservatives for? And how is today's conservatism related to its past? In his answers, Rogers paints a compelling and coherent picture of an aligned and attractive set of ideas.

Dr. Tristan J. Rogers teaches Logic and Latin at Donum Dei Classical Academy in San Francisco, CA. He has also taught philosophy at Santa Clara University, the University of Colorado Boulder, and the University of California, Davis. He is the author of *The Authority of Virtue: Institutions and Character in the Good Society* (2020).

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Tristan J. Rogers

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Designed cover image: “The Harvesters”, Rogers Fund, 1919.

First published 2025
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

ISBN: 978-1-032-13952-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-032-13950-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-23163-9 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003231639

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For Aeliana and Aurélia

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Preface

This book is the result of two forces, the first intellectual and the second personal.

First, the conservative ideas explored here grew out of my work in "virtue politics," that is, an approach to political philosophy that, like "virtue ethics," takes virtue (or character) as its central concept. In my first book, *The Authority of Virtue: Institutions and Character in the Good Society* (Routledge, 2020), I argued that good institutions depend upon good characters, and vice versa, such that liberal and conservative viewpoints may each contribute, in due proportion, to promote the common good.

Second, despite its philosophical provenance, I noticed that the conservative viewpoint I had lately come to adopt was scarcely present, much less influential in the philosophy profession. According to Shields and Dunn Sr. (2016), 4–8 percent of professors in the humanities identify as conservatives, and a more recent study by Peters et al. (2020) identified approximately 6 percent of philosophers as having "right-leaning" or "very right-leaning" views.

In April 2019, I wrote an essay for the online magazine *Quillette* titled "The Dearth of Conservatives in Academic Philosophy," lamenting this situation, while arguing, on grounds familiar to admirers of John Stuart Mill, that there are good epistemic reasons for the conservative viewpoint to be not just present, but vigorously defended in philosophical debate. Despite the self-congratulatory attitude of philosophers, the status quo looked to be a raw powerplay rather than a decisive victory for liberalism in the marketplace of ideas.

The essay did not have much of an impact, either positively or negatively. I remained employed (even if precariously), and rather than reflect on the lack of ideological diversity in the profession, philosophers continued to obsess over the latest diversity worries, whether of race, gender, sex, disability, or class, and so on. Setting aside the sociology, part of the problem, I realized, is that there isn't a good understanding of conservative

ideas among philosophers. Conservative philosophers are not part of the undergraduate or graduate curricula (except some libertarians), and there are few conservative faculty members to mentor the next generation of scholars. The existing bias, in other words, is self-perpetuating.

An opportunity to remedy the situation came in Fall 2020 when I put together a book proposal for Routledge titled *Why It's OK to Be a Conservative*. The pitch for the *Why It's OK* series notes that while "[p]hilosophers often build arguments for unpopular positions . . . What philosophers have done less often is to offer compelling arguments for widespread and established human behavior." Given that roughly half of the population is conservative, it seemed like an easy case to make. The proposal did not move forward for the series. But Andrew Beck, the series editor, encouraged me to pursue a more ambitious project that included a history of conservatism, as well as a discussion of conservatism in the present. Thus was born *Conservatism, Past and Present: A Philosophical Introduction*. My task now was to argue that it is not just "OK" to be a conservative, it is positively good.

The book itself is part introductory text, part monograph. While it assumes some familiarity with philosophy, at say an undergraduate level, no familiarity with conservatism is presumed. I have also tried to avoid, where possible, the tedium characteristic of academic writing. It is a "philosophical" introduction in the sense of taking a philosophical approach to understanding what conservatism is. Given the conservative emphasis on tradition and history, it was natural to explore conservative ideas in the history of philosophy. This has the additional advantage of demonstrating the intellectual bona fides of conservatism, given its association with some of the great philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, David Hume, and G.W.F. Hegel. Meanwhile, other conservative thinkers, like Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott, for instance, should arguably occupy a more prominent place in the philosophy canon.

Although I am myself a conservative philosopher, I make little claim to originality for the ideas presented here. The view I develop, "philosophical conservatism," is an original synthesis of conservative themes found in most (or all) of the great conservative thinkers we will survey. I have additionally tried to show the relevance of this tradition, and the urgency with which we must rediscover it, so that we may conserve and improve our own societies.

None of the material in this book has been previously published. But I have benefited from presenting some of it at conferences and workshops, including the International Social Philosophy Conference in San Francisco; the Virtue Forum at the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing at the University of Oklahoma; the Mountain-Plains Philosophy Conference at Utah State University; the Center for Values and Social Policy at the University of Colorado Boulder; the American Philosophical Association

Pacific Division Meeting in Vancouver; the Heterodox Workshop in Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of Colorado Boulder; the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting in Montreal; and the Humanities Brown Bag Speaker Series at Santa Clara University. Thank you to the commentators, fellow speakers, and audiences.

Most of the research for the book was conducted in 2021–2 at the Benson Center for the Study of Western Civilization at the University of Colorado Boulder. Thank you to the staff of the Center, and especially my colleagues, Daniel Jacobson, Alan Kahan, Taylor Jaworski, Shilo Brooks, Alex Priou, and Paul Diduch. I was also fortunate to teach a course in the Philosophy Department on the main themes and authors of the book. Thank you to the students of my Social and Political Philosophy course. After my family returned to California, I spent 2022–3 teaching at Santa Clara University. Thank you to the faculty, staff, and students for a rewarding experience that greatly improved this book. Most of the book was written at the Los Gatos Public Library and Café Dio across the street. Thank you to the staff and employees for creating a friendly and conducive writing atmosphere.

Personally, I would like to thank David McPherson and Brandon Warmke for their friendship and mentorship over the last few years. I don't think I would have either started or completed this project without them. Thank you to Scott LaBarge, Peter Minowitz, Christopher Kulp, and Jeff Steele at Santa Clara University for their friendship and guidance, and Meilin Chinn for granting me use of her office. For their inspiration, encouragement, and/or valuable comments, thank you to Julia Annas, Jonathan Anomaly, Sarale Ben Asher, Edward Brooks, Jason Byas, Sean Cordell, Jennifer Frey, Pablo Gilabert, Ross Gilmore, Bill Glod, Shelby T. Hanna, Kyle Hodge, Stanislaus Husi, Hrishikesh Joshi, John Kekes, Connor Kianpour, Annette Kirk, Brian Kogelmann, Ben Laurence, Santiago Mejia, Fred Miller Jr., Dan Moller, Samuel Murray, Jan Narveson, Amalia Amaya Navarro, Katharina Nieswandt, Jeremy Reid, Gregory Robson, Daniel C. Russell, David Schmidtz, Wes Siscoe, Nancy Snow, Christine Sypnowich, Justin Tosi, Oliver Traldi, Kevin Vallier, Michael Vazquez, and Steve Wall.

I have been blessed with great students over the years. Jenna Shaikh and Colin Burt participated in an informal reading group over Zoom at the earliest stages of the project, and Colin later served as my research assistant. Thank you to you both. At Santa Clara, I was fortunate to meet Rob Wohl, who I learned had authored a paper on Joseph de Maistre. He subsequently became my research assistant in the later stages of the project. Thank you, Rob, and best wishes for your future studies at Oxford. Finally, thank you to my encouraging and patient editor, Andrew Beck, and the hardworking staff at Routledge, including the anonymous reviewers of the proposal and manuscript.

A major theme of this book is gratitude for the sources of a good life, what the Romans called *pietas* (piety). Traditionally, these are your family, your country, and the creator, God. I have been blessed by all three. Thank you to Fr. Paul Mariani, S.J., Fr. Gregory Kimm, Fr. Seth Kupo, and Michael Lomas for their spiritual guidance. *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. I am additionally grateful to have become an American citizen while writing this book. Truly, I don't think I could have the life I lead in any other country. None of this would be possible without the love and support of my parents. Thank you to Vivienne and Nicolay, and Angela and David. Finally, thank you to my wife, Schirin, and our two children, who have given me the greatest gift in the world: they made me a husband and father.

T.J.R.
Los Gatos, California
July 2024

Introduction
Philosophical Conservatism

Imagine you are the beneficiary of a great inheritance. It includes not only large sums of money and lucrative investments, but also real estate. Suppose further that you are already reasonably well off yourself, and so the money and investments will not change your life dramatically. The real estate, however, has been in the family for years. The money and investments might have changed your material circumstances, but the property is part of who you are, your identity. Unfortunately, due to years of neglect, the property has fallen into disrepair, imposing heavy burdens on you, financial and otherwise. But fortunately, it occupies a desirable location and thus could be easily sold. What should you do?

Now imagine instead that you have inherited not real estate, but a good society. While few are lucky enough to come into the first inheritance, many people are net beneficiaries of the second, arguably much greater inheritance. Today, denizens of liberal, democratic, and capitalist societies enjoy a bounty that is the envy of the world. But like our imagined inheritance, despite its many enviable qualities, our societies are in a state of disrepair and decline. And the choice of what to do about this is consequential, not just for us, but for future generations.

Conservatives like Edmund Burke view society as "an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity."[1] Conservatism is, in part, the desire to conserve and pass on the inherited gift of a good society. We see this desire fiercely at work in recent conservative politics that has largely defined itself in opposition to the excesses of liberalism that destabilize society, such as lax attitudes about national borders, indifference to local economies, and a censorious but ultimately permissive morality. In response, conservatives have increasingly rallied around nationalist, populist, and traditionalist politicians who promise to stand athwart the march of liberalism yelling "Stop!"[2]

But what are conservatives *for*? An impulse does not make a doctrine. What's more, despite recent electoral successes, few people really understand what conservatism is. Conservatives, we have observed, want

DOI: 10.4324/9781003231639-1

to conserve society as an inheritance to be passed to future generations. What is this inheritance? And what purchase does it have on us in the present? Amidst the din of social justice discourse on the political left, what is the alternative conservative vision of the good society? To answer such questions, we need a philosophy of conservatism, or as I will call it in this book, *philosophical conservatism*.

Philosophers largely share John Stuart Mill's prejudice: "The Conservatives . . . [are] the stupidest party."[3] Some go further: "There is, in fact, as far as I can see," Gordon Graham writes, "no way in which conservative ideology of the sort I have described can avoid connivance with evil."[4] Similarly, Ted Honderich, in his critical study of conservatism, concludes that "selfishness is the rationale of their politics, and they have no other rationale. They stand without the support, the legitimation, of any recognizably moral principle."[5] Conservatism, according to these philosophers, is evil *because* it is stupid.

Although a caricature, these philosophers' criticism stems from two genuine conservative doctrines. First, conservatives are suspicious of philosophical theorizing about politics. Second, as an alternative to philosophical theorizing, conservatives defer to custom, tradition, and established authority. Naturally, then, given the injustices found in every society, a conservative, who is stubbornly opposed to theory-driven change, can look like an anti-intellectual defender of injustice. And yet conservatives do not oppose change. "A state without the means of some change," Burke proclaims, "is without the means of its conservation."[6] There must be, therefore, implicit in the conservative outlook, some way of distinguishing good from bad change.[7] For as Aristotle observes, "everyone seeks not what is traditional but what is good."[8]

Philosophical conservatism is the search for change that promotes the human good *within* the traditional. A philosophical conservative seeks to conserve and promote the good expressed in the wisdom of tradition, understood as the constituents of human happiness and political arrangements that have historically and empirically proven conducive to human happiness.[9] In this sense, conservatives embrace the root of philosophy as the love of wisdom. But the love of wisdom requires more than an abstract commitment to reason; the true love of wisdom requires gratitude for our intellectual inheritance: the wisdom of tradition.

"In a revolutionary epoch," Russell Kirk writes, "sometimes men taste every novelty, sicken of them all, and return to ancient principles so long disused that they seem refreshingly hearty when they are rediscovered."[10] Our first task, then, in Part I of this book, will be to explore conservative ideas in the history of philosophy from antiquity to the 20th century. This will enable us to better understand, both what conservatism is and

the present state of conservative politics, which, in Part II, is the second task of this book. Meanwhile, in this introductory chapter, we consider three attempts to define conservatism as 1) a disposition, 2) an empirical approach to social and political change, and 3) a metaphysical commitment to an objective moral order. We will see that, on their own, none of these definitions are philosophically satisfying, since they either do not provide a criterion of value by which to assess social and political change, or supply one that exceeds our moral and epistemic limits.

Philosophical conservatism, by contrast, 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). These three themes, which we will go on to explore in the history of conservative thought, correspond to three virtues. Conserving the good is premised upon *gratitude*. Promoting the good, subject to the limits of human nature, moral and epistemic, is premised upon *humility*. Finally, seeking change within tradition is premised upon *justice*.

What emerges from the historical discussion is a living tradition of conservatism. Conservatism present, as we will see, has starting points not dissimilar to conservatism past. In other words, there is an enduring conservative tradition that remains both relevant and compelling. Gratitude, humility, and justice require us to recommit ourselves to the nation, the local community, the family, and the means through which these good things are passed on to future generations. Thus, in Part II of this book, we will discuss the issues of nationalism, populism, the family, education, and responsibility.

What is Conservatism?

It is a thankless task to define conservatism. This is partly because, as J.G.A. Pocock observes, "too many minds have been trying to 'conserve' too many things for too many reasons."[11] Attempts to define conservatism narrowly, for instance, as the defense of a specific set of institutions, run into this problem. As such, some conservatives even resist the demand that their doctrine be capable of precise philosophical definition. Roger Scruton, for instance, writes of his colleague, Maurice Cowling, who told him that "[t]o try to encapsulate [conservatism] in a philosophy was the kind of quaint project that *Americans* might undertake," whereas, in Cowling's view, "[c]onservatism . . . is a political practice, the legacy of a long tradition of pragmatic decision-making and high-toned contempt for human folly."[12]

Cowling's conservatism fits well with what Edmund Neill calls "dispositional conservatism."[13] Samuel Huntington formulated the classic

statement of dispositional conservatism as "that system of ideas employed to justify any established social order, no matter where or when it exists, against any fundamental challenge to its nature or being, no matter from what quarter."[14] According to Huntington, conservatism is not a doctrine, much less an ideology, but rather the psychological disposition to resist change and uphold the status quo. Liberalism and socialism are ideologies that threaten the status quo; conservatism is the rejection of such ideologies because of the threat they pose to the status quo.

Dispositional conservatism identifies something important in the conservative mind, which resists change, not on intellectual grounds, but from a felt threat to the things we collectively (and individually) cherish. This disposition to conserve good things forms the psychological foundation for the virtue of gratitude: we should appreciate and value the good things that we have, never taking them for granted. Further, dispositional conservatism allows for the diversity and flexibility of conservative thought in different times and places. But while it avoids the flaw in narrow definitions of conservatism, dispositional conservatism is too broad. It is consistent, for instance, with the defense of *any* institutions that happen to be found in the status quo of *any* society. It also rules out the possibility of counter-revolutionary action on behalf of traditionally conservative causes.

More importantly, for our purposes, dispositional conservatism is philosophically limited. As we will see, the disposition to find good in the status quo worth conserving—gratitude for the existing good—is an important conservative propensity, indeed, it is a virtue. But the disposition to conserve by itself cannot give us a criterion of value, of what is *worthy* of conserving, that is, of what we have reason to appreciate and be grateful for.

A second type of conservatism is what Scruton calls "empirical conservatism," which is sometimes also called "skeptical conservatism."[15] As we will explore in Chapter 3, empirical conservatism dates to the Enlightenment, most prominently in Burke's impassioned critique of the French Revolution. Empirical conservatism takes an incremental approach to change, preferring the slow pace of evolutionary change from within, to radical change from without, that is, *reform* in preference to *revolution*. Whereas revolution seeks to overthrow the existing political order, reform seeks to (improve and) conserve it. For Michael Oakeshott, the preference for this sort of change grows out of the conservative disposition, which is "warm and positive in respect of enjoyment, and correspondingly cool and critical in respect of change and innovation."[16] Empirical conservatism is additionally skeptical of 1) our epistemic ability to improve society according to a rational plan, and 2) our moral capacity for living according to such a plan. Whereas dispositional conservatism yields the virtue of gratitude, empirical conservatism upholds and affirms the virtue of humility.

Empirical conservatism lies at the core of the conservative tradition, which, as I present in Chapters 1 and 2, is built from sources ancient and Christian. Unlike dispositional conservatism, empirical conservatism plausibly implies a set of concrete political stances tied to the existing institutions and political histories of Western societies, for instance, support for the rule of law, democracy, and individual rights. In this sense, empirical conservatism fits Robert Nisbet's understanding of conservatism as an ideology in the sense of "any reasonably coherent body of moral, economic, social and cultural ideas that has a solid and well known reference to politics and political power."[17]

One defect in empirical conservatism, however, is that it lacks a clearly articulated criterion of value by which to distinguish good from bad change. This was Graham's earlier criticism of a conservatism that cannot "avoid connivance with evil." One might argue, for instance, that change, however incremental, cautious, and evolutionary, will not necessarily mitigate (or remove) existing evils from society, at least not without an unconservative, Whiggish view of history. Empirical conservatism also appears to lack grounds to support the sometimes drastic changes that would return a society to the status quo ante, thus removing any radical outgrowths.

Russell Kirk expresses a third type of conservatism, which we may term "metaphysical conservatism," in his partial account of conservatism as the belief that "there exists a transcendent moral order, to which we ought to try to conform the ways of society."[18] Scruton has also sometimes appealed to metaphysical conservatism understood as "the belief in sacred things and the desire to defend them against desecration."[19] This moral order of sacred things can take theological form, grounded in belief in God, or non-theological form, grounded in natural law, aesthetic value, or something else. Whereas the empirical conservative finds fault with the liberal progressive's cavalier attitude toward change, the metaphysical conservative decries progressives' willingness to depart from (and sometimes desecrate) the moral order.

Metaphysical conservatism implies a belief in hierarchy, a sacred order of being that ought to structure society and inform political action. Indeed, this is its chief virtue, since it supplies the criterion of value that dispositional and empirical conservatism apparently lack. Social and political change is good, according to metaphysical conservatism, when it preserves or moves us closer to the objective moral order, and bad when it destroys or takes us further away from it. But metaphysical conservatism is not without problems of its own. As Jerry Z. Muller explains: "[a] the notion that human institutions should reflect some transcendent order predates conservatism, [b] is shared by a variety of nonconservative religious ideologies, and [c] is contested by some of the most significant and influential conservative thinkers."[20] Of most significance is c), for there is a tension

between metaphysical conservatism's injunction to conform society to the objective moral order and empirical conservatism's skepticism about human reason, which may not deny the existence of such an order, but does question our ability to know and apply it.

Muller's preferred term for metaphysical conservatism is "orthodoxy," and he distinguishes it from conservatism properly understood. "What makes social and political arguments *conservative* as opposed to *orthodox*," according to Muller, "is that the critique of liberal or progressive arguments takes place on the enlightened grounds of the search for human happiness, based on the use of reason."[21] Thus, Muller invokes *human happiness* as conservatism's criterion of value, which, while not always explicit, is plausibly implicit in conservative thinkers such as Burke and Oakeshott. Significantly, human happiness is also currency in the moral and political thought of the ancient and Christian philosophers we will study.

Philosophical Conservatism

Philosophical conservatism shares Muller's idea that conservatism is about the search for human happiness. Philosophical conservatism begins in the ancient Greek tradition of philosophy as the search for wisdom, understood as the pursuit of happiness within a political community oriented toward the human good. It is this search for wisdom—the *seeking* after the good—that disposes conservatives to be grateful for the existing good.

Built into this tradition is the Socratic idea that our knowledge is tragically incomplete, and that (human) wisdom begins with an acceptance of our moral frailty and epistemic ignorance.[22] But being humble about our ability to promote the good need not mean abandoning the responsibility to make improvements that, at the same time conserve, which is to say reform in preference to revolution. The way to do so, as we will see, is by tailoring efforts to improve society to the moral norms and standards of tradition. We should look for justice in tradition, not utopia. Philosophical conservatism, thus understood, promises to bring together dispositional conservatism, in its gratitude for the existing good, skeptical conservatism, in its humility before the monumental task of promoting the good, and metaphysical conservatism, in its search after a just moral order.

The Search for Wisdom

Philosophy in the Socratic spirit acknowledges the limits of human reason. The real disagreement between conservatives and their Enlightenment liberal counterparts is the extent to which the search for happiness *can* be

based on the use of reason. As Burke warned, "what would become of the World if the Practice of all moral Duties, and the Foundations of Society, rested upon having their Reasons made clear and demonstrative to every individual?"[23] Even Aristotle, who famously defines a human being as the rational animal, counsels, "[n]ot every problem, nor every thesis, should be examined . . . For people who are puzzled to know whether one ought to honor the gods and love one's parents or not need castigation."[24] Some things are off limits. Philosophical conservatism is accordingly skeptical of the idea that philosophy should shine a light on everything. Wisdom counsels otherwise.

David Hume, an empirical conservative, shares this approach to philosophy. According to Donald Livingston, Hume's skeptical excursions in philosophy ultimately lead him to abandon "the autonomy principle," which is the idea that "it is philosophically irrational to accept any standard, principle, custom, or tradition of common life unless it has withstood the fires of critical philosophical reflection."[25] As Hume's skeptical conclusions in the first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature* demonstrate, this can only lead to absurdity, melancholy, or delirium.[26] Hume's alternative approach, as Livingston explains, is that "philosophy must begin *within* the frame-work of common life . . . The principles and maxims of common life are internal to our thinking and cannot be abandoned without abandoning thought itself."[27] Thus, philosophy, while never abandoned as a mode of critical reflection, must take place within the shared point of view of our common life, where revisionary moral judgments arise out of already accepted, but not fully articulated, realized, or fully understood beliefs and practices.

Hume's approach goes back to Aristotle's method of the *endoxa* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[28] The *endoxa* are reputable opinions that serve as the starting point for ethical reflection, and from which we derive ethical conclusions about the good life and the virtues. Like Hume, Aristotle's purpose is not critical or destructive, but conservative and ameliorative. Philosophical examination of the *endoxa* is intended to conserve what truth they contain, while bringing greater truth to light. As such, Aristotle writes, "[i]t is reasonable for each group [of views about happiness] not to be completely wrong, but to be correct on one point at least, or *even on most points*."[29] According to Martha Nussbaum, Aristotle aims to "save the appearances," so that philosophy does not alienate us from the daily certainties of common life, certainties which nevertheless initiate philosophical interest and curiosity.[30] On the contrary, as Nussbaum explains, "[w]e need philosophy to show us the way back to the ordinary and to make it an object of interest and pleasure, rather than contempt and evasion."[31] "Be a philosopher," Hume urges, "but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man."[32]

Philosophy in this mode helps us feel "at home" in the world. David McPherson has recently developed this idea in what he calls "existential conservatism."[33] Fundamentally a response to the problem of "cosmodicy," i.e., whether a human life is worth living in a world of evil and suffering, existential conservatism is "an existential stance – i.e. an orientation towards the given – that seeks to discover, appreciate, affirm, and conserve what is good in the world *as it is* or *as given*."[34] Since what is given includes both the natural state of the world and the social, cultural, and political furnishings of one's society, existential conservatism is predisposed to political conservatism. Social and political change should primarily manage threats to the existing good, rather than create a *system* that aims to repair the defects in society or the world itself. Preparatory to this sort of reform, McPherson observes, is a feeling of *gratitude* for the good that exists, "which in turn best enables one to improve the status quo where improvement is needed and desirable."[35] Ultimately, like philosophical conservatism, McPherson's existential conservatism is dispositional, empirical in its approach to change, and oriented toward conserving and promoting the existing good.

How should we understand this good? As Aristotle observes at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, philosophical reflection on how to live suggests an ordering of goods, where happiness (*eudaimonia*) is the highest.[36] When I step back and reflect on why I pursue various courses of action, I arrive at the idea that I do such things for the sake of happiness, that is, for the sake of a good life. Happiness, in Aristotle's sense, is a way of making sense of my life as a whole.[37] But while there is a consensus about happiness as the name for the highest good, Aristotle notes that we disagree about substantive views of happiness, and this is a potential source of ethical conflict and confusion. Yet the fact of disagreement about happiness does not lead Aristotle to moral relativism. On the contrary, disagreement about happiness is an opportunity to search for wisdom together.

This search for wisdom begins within the life and society we find ourselves in, including what we know pre-theoretically in terms of received moral beliefs, customs, and traditions. This is a major conservative theme in what follows: the idea that ethical thinking is always socially and culturally embedded, *not* autonomous.[38] This is why Aristotle emphasizes that "we need to have been brought up in fine habits if we are to be adequate students of fine and just things, and of political questions generally."[39] From our embedded perspectives, we realize and reflect on the fact that we exist in a world of role-relationships (e.g., son, father, employee, citizen, etc.) that prescribe actions according to socially-mediated moral understandings, what the Hegelian F.H. Bradley calls "My Station and Its Duties."[40] But, as Bradley observes, while the normative force of these duties is apparent to, and often unquestioned by, the ordinary person, further reflection

on the imperfections inherent in the institutions of social life reveals that we cannot fully identify ourselves with such roles: "You can not confine a man to his station and its duties."[41] This implies the necessity and desirability of improvement, toward a higher ethical ideal—an ideal of virtue. We are aware, however dimly, of such an ideal, not yet realized, of who we could be with the proper moral development, in a society oriented to the human good.

A philosophical conservative maintains that, despite imperfections, the existing institutions of society are good. Indeed, they are our starting point in the search for wisdom. "We have given you birth," Socrates says in the voice of the personified Laws of Athens, "nurtured you, educated you; we have given you and all other citizens a share of all the good things we could."[42] Since the search for wisdom takes place within the institutions of society, and the virtues are developed through, not in opposition to the obligations prescribed by such institutions, the existing institutions of one's society are good. For even in criticism, we implicitly affirm the goodness of our institutions and customs to the extent that they have nourished and passed down the moral standards we reflexively apply to them, sometimes as if they were our own creation. There is no autonomous realm of moral reflection—no Archimedean point—from which to cast ultimate moral judgment on the society that produced us. "[T]o wish to be better than the world," Bradley writes, "is to be already on the threshold of immorality."[43]

But the necessity of conserving the existing good in society does not preclude or obviate the necessity of improvement, that is, of promoting the good. We do not show our gratitude by preventing society from undergoing the necessary changes that allow it to be conserved and cherished into the future. "Conservatism," Scruton writes, "is the philosophy of attachment. We are attached to the things we love, and wish to protect them against decay."[44] To love is to accept the imperfections of the beloved. Only then are we open to the kind of change that conserves because it improves, without mistaking change for perfection itself. This too is part of the search for wisdom, which, properly understood, strikes a balance between guarding against threats to the existing good, while remaining open to the possibilities for beneficial change.

The Limits of Philosophy

An important issue here is the fact of apparently irreconcilable disagreement about the good, or what John Rawls calls "the fact of reasonable pluralism—the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is the normal result of its [a liberal democracy's] culture of free institutions."[45] Liberalism, in some

sense, is the resolve to leave individuals free to pursue their own good in their own way.[46] Must conservatives be committed to using state power to override this basic tenet of liberalism? Jan Narveson, for instance, claims that, when it comes to politics, "one party or the other can be judged to be in the wrong, his way of life defective in some respect. This commitment *defines* the conservative position."[47] If Narveson is right, that would underwrite the charge that conservatism is fundamentally anti-liberal in its attitude toward the limits of state power, leading to the familiar charge of "authoritarianism."

Philosophical conservatism, as we have seen, shares the Socratic outlook on human nature: we must contend with our limits, moral and epistemic. Thus, the task of promoting the human good is itself limited by what is possible. "We are afraid," Burke writes, "to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small."[48] And Hume exclaims, "such is the frailty or perverseness of our nature! it is impossible to keep men, faithfully and unerringly, in the paths of justice."[49]

The conservative disposition limits any effort to promote the good in ways that exceed human nature and the constraints of reality. Beneficial change must begin with (and within) the existing institutions and culture of a society. As such, philosophical conservatism rules out the possibility that promoting the human good should take its lead from an elite class, whether autocratic rulers or political philosophers. But we have also cast doubt on the liberal view, associated with John Stuart Mill, that individuals should be free to pursue their own good in their own way. Is there an alternative?

John Kekes has argued for traditionalism as the middle position between the extremes of a social authority (e.g., the rulers) and individual autonomy (i.e., each person) deciding the human good.[50] Consonant with philosophical conservatism, traditionalism is the view that individual autonomy must be exercised *through* participating in the traditions accepted by one's society. Views of the human good develop out of this interplay between the social authority of existing traditions and the judgment of individuals who develop their autonomy through participation in various traditions. Promoting the human good, therefore, must begin with (and within) a society's existing traditions.

Further, philosophical conservatism does not shy away from Aristotle's view that the purpose of law, in the broadest sense, is to promote the human good. Given the role of upbringing and habits in the development of virtue, we must not neglect the ways in which laws—both written and customary—support a healthy social environment for human flourishing. To be capable of participating in the traditions of one's society requires moral education, which is shaped and directed by the laws of one's society. Whereas "people become hostile to an individual human being, who

opposes their impulses, even if he is correct in opposing them," Aristotle maintains that "law's prescription of what is decent is not burdensome."[51] Law provides the necessary restraints to channel the imperfect tendencies of human nature toward the human good.

Appealing to law as a tool for promoting the human good might seem to reignite the initial concern about the limits of state power. F.A. Hayek, for instance, in his famous essay "Why I'm not a Conservative," writes "[the conservative] has no political principles which enable him to work with people whose moral values differ from his own for a political order in which both can obey their convictions."[52] How can society legislate on behalf of the human good when there are deep moral disagreements about what that good is? Who decides?

Patrick Devlin distinguishes two ways by which the state might legislate morality.[53] The first is the quasi-Platonic view that the rulers decide moral questions, and Devlin rejects this view on the basis that it "is not acceptable to Anglo-American thought. It invests the State with power of determination between good and evil."[54] But, on the second view, favored by Devlin, and consonant with Kekes' traditionalism, the purpose of law in promoting morality is understood as "the guardian of a heritage and not the creation of a system."[55] The moral ideas the legislator serves "are those ideas about right and wrong which are *already accepted* by the society for which he is legislating and which are necessary to preserve its integrity."[56] Devlin observes further that "he [the legislator] will assume that the morals of his society are good and true; if he does not, he should not be playing an active part in government."[57] Therefore, promoting the human good through the organ of the law must be consistent with the moral consensus of a society: "Political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means."[58]

So philosophical conservatism resists the expectation that a philosophical *theory* of the human good must inform politics if we wish to conserve and promote the good. Theories are unnecessary (and indeed, harmful), provided we begin from within the existing moral traditions of our society. This is where the search for wisdom begins. It proceeds on the basis of acknowledging the limits of human nature. Our moral limitations give support to law in place of the primacy of individual moral judgments. Our epistemic limitations, meanwhile, restrict the pool of moral knowledge to "the tried and the true" of our best moral traditions, resisting the philosophical temptation of utopianism.

Change from Within

The alternative to finding justice in utopia is to find it in tradition. "We know," Burke writes, "that *we* have made no discoveries, and we think

that no discoveries are to be made, in morality."[59] Burke's declaration invites vehement protest. Haven't *we* made moral progress? After all, since Burke made that claim in 1790, we have witnessed the abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, equal rights for women, and wide-ranging social welfare reforms, to name just a few instances of moral progress. Is philosophical conservatism compatible with moral progress of this sort? Or is philosophical conservatism inherently *reactionary*? The objection is particularly acute, given that, following Devlin, philosophical conservatism appeals to the public morality of an existing society along with adherence to its law. But if there are serious defects in the public morality and laws of an existing society, conserving and promoting the existing good will have the effect of compounding the injustice therein, rather than ameliorating it.

G.A. Cohen expresses this point of view in defense of what he calls "small-c conservatism."[60] Cohen's conservatism, as he describes it, which coexists cozily with his socialism, is incompatible with political conservatism.[61] "Conservatives like me," Cohen writes, "want to conserve that which has intrinsic value, and injustice lacks intrinsic value."[62] He later criticizes the free market ideology of the British Conservative Party for being willing to sacrifice the conservation of existing good things for the sake of wealth maximization and the consolidation of inequality that results. In this sense, Cohen shares Honderich's criticism that conservatives are driven by selfishness alone, as they lack any genuine moral principles with which to condemn injustices like wealth inequality. Thus, when conservatives abandon philosophical theorizing about politics, they forsake any normative criteria with which to identify and remedy injustice, thus slipping unwittingly into the defense of evil.

How might a philosophical conservative meet Cohen's challenge? We have seen that philosophical conservatism appeals to human happiness as its criterion of change. But happiness, as I have described it, is not an abstract ideal against which to evaluate the status quo. Happiness is an *emergent* ideal that manifests in the search for wisdom, consisting in collective moral reflection on our beliefs, institutions, customs, and traditions. The route to knowledge about human happiness is not through abstract metaphysical or philosophical theorizing, but through active participation in the traditions of one's society, "to discover," as Burke puts it, "the latent wisdom which prevails in them."[63] This is part of the process Burke called "prescription," which, as Yuval Levin explains, is "a model of change, but one suited to help us discern the general shape of some permanent underlying principles of justice . . . a kind of rubbing up against the principles of natural justice."[64] In this way, we find our ideas about justice embedded in the institutions that give rise to them. Change that removes injustice, therefore, must come from within the tradition, since, given the limits of human reason, it is our only approximation of true justice.

What has emerged from our discussion so far is something like Plato's ideal from the *Republic* that justice resides in each member of society performing their role and minding their own business.[65] But the fulfillment of social roles must be ordered toward a higher ideal: the happiness of each person and society, that is, the common good. One clear way to identify injustice, then, is to specify the way(s) in which a law or institution fails to secure or promote the happiness of those who are subject to it. Institutions that do not promote human happiness compared to the feasible alternatives are unjust; they fail to promote the common good. In this way, the identification of injustice proceeds by reflecting on the shortcomings of existing institutions by the standard of promoting human happiness.

But the shortcomings of an institution must be measured by the actual performance of this function, not by comparison to defects that would not occur in some imagined alternative institutional arrangement. The mere existence of wealth inequality, for instance, so decried by socialists like Cohen, cannot by itself count as an injustice that ought to be eradicated, since there are no feasible institutions that eliminate wealth inequality (except by making everyone poorer!). But wealth inequality may still be deemed a social-ill inasmuch as the institutions that exacerbate it undermine civic solidarity, which itself can be a hindrance to human happiness and societal health.[66] But even then, this social cost must be traded off against other social-ills. Political wisdom, to the extent that it's possible, consists in making tradeoffs of this sort. Justice and prudence must travel together.

Justice, then, is an emergent ideal, grounded in the function of enabling human happiness. Principles of justice are discovered through the trial and error of human experience, not rationally constructed from philosophical premises. Burke is right that we have made no *moral* discoveries. Morality is a historically evolved social practice. It responds to and builds upon the constantly changing dynamics and needs of human societies that are never accessible to a single person. But what results is not arbitrary or mere accident, since our approximations of justice are grounded in the genuine moral ideal of human happiness. Justice is the result of prudence in attuning human needs to circumstances.

Justice appropriately resembles other abstract ideals such as beauty. Just as an ideal of beauty emerges from our shared traditions of artistic production, so too an ideal of justice emerges from our shared history and institutions. At no point is the ideal fully realized in the object. No work of art, however beautiful, is identical with the ideal of beauty itself. Similarly, no institution or law is identical with the ideal of justice.

Ideals cannot be directly imposed on the world without violence. Rather, an ideal must be approached and approximated *through* practice. In other

words, every ideal requires *mediation* to be grasped by limited human beings. While drawing a parallel between "the good" and "the beautiful" may seem to risk reducing justice to mere taste or preference, like beauty, our sentiments about the nature of justice may yet correspond to something real, even if we only catch a glimpse of it in mediate objects, whether laws, institutions, or persons. So understood, philosophical conservatism calls for a return to the transcendent ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Indeed, it is these very ideals that animate conservative ideas in the history of philosophy and continue to attract ordinary people to conservatism.

Conservatism Past

In the remainder of this chapter, we survey the upcoming terrain. Part I presents an intellectual history of conservative ideas from the ancient world through the 20th century. While not every thinker is a self-identified conservative, and some predate the emergence of conservatism as a distinctly modern political ideology, "Conservatism Past" presents perennial conservative ideas as integral to the ongoing conversation that is the Western philosophical tradition. Unlike most standard histories of conservatism, however, that begin in the modern period (usually with Edmund Burke), we will begin with the two major intellectual sources of conservative thought: ancient and Christian philosophy. This intellectual pre-history of conservatism sets the stage for the birth of modern conservatism, which is a countermovement within the Enlightenment. Thereafter, the story of conservatism, in the 19th and 20th centuries, is one of contending with modernity, especially the ascendence of democratic liberalism and its elevation of liberty and equality as supreme political values.

Chapter 1 locates the birthplace of conservative political thought in the ancient philosophers' search for wisdom. Whereas there is a tendency to see the intellectual activity of philosophy as disconnected from, and potentially hostile to the life and customs of the city, there is a path to wisdom that begins in appreciating and having gratitude for the existing good. We see this in the political thought of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, who see the purpose of politics as cultivating the good life (happiness), subject to constraints, both moral and epistemic, and buttressed by the rule of law. More specifically, Plato demonstrates the folly of utopian political philosophy, Aristotle shows the way to an alternative, more realistic political science, while Cicero puts forward a renewed philosophy of statesmanship.

Chapter 2 follows the ancient conversation about politics and the good life into the Christian world, focusing on the limits of philosophy. Beginning with Saint Augustine, who articulates the definitive conservative understanding of our limited (or "fallen") human nature, we explore

further limits: the nonredemptive nature of politics and the insufficiency of philosophy for living a good life. Alongside gratitude, humility emerges as an important conservative virtue. Humility checks our epistemic ambition to know the good and our moral capacity for living the virtues. This does not, however, consign conservatives to a life of resignation. For, as Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches, by virtue of our rational nature, we can have some grasp of the natural law, which provides a standard for political rule that aims at the common good. And so, gratitude and humility eventually make room for justice.

Chapter 3 turns to the Enlightenment and the beginning of modern conservatism in the political thought of David Hume and Edmund Burke. Although justly known as the father of modern conservatism, Burke continues themes begun by David Hume, such as the importance of custom and habit, skepticism about abstract political reasoning, and a moderate politics, seeking the mean between the extremes of anarchy and despotism. These themes are brought together in the idea that modern conservatism, far from being reactionary against change, seeks change from *within* the character of the existing political order. Hume and Burke advocate reform in preference to revolution. For this reason, we find Hume and Burke warm toward the American Revolution, which was really a reformation of the way Englishmen governed themselves in the New World. The French Revolution, however, at least for Burke who, unlike Hume, lived through it, remains the classic conservative stalking horse, as it destroyed an existing political order.

Chapter 4 follows the fate of modern conservatism into the 19th century. Facing the triumph of democracy and the rise of social liberalism, conservative thinkers like Joseph de Maistre, Alexis de Tocqueville, James Fitzjames Stephen, and G.W.F. Hegel articulate and defend new sources of authority and allegiance. What really drives conservatism, as we learn from these thinkers, is a spirit seeking expression through the laws and institutions of society. This spirit grows out of relations of piety, beginning in the family, extending outward toward the political community, and culminating in obedience to God, all of which require restraints on liberty. Meanwhile the relationships that constitute this social fabric generate roles and responsibilities, premised upon relationships of inequality, within which virtue takes root. None of this is possible, however, unless we embrace the authority of traditional institutions and social arrangements. To the extent that conservatives are in favor of freedom, it must be freedom *through* authority.

Chapter 5 concludes Part I with the maturation of modern conservatism in the 20th century. Conservatives in that century split between those who embraced economic and social liberalism, such as F.A. Hayek and Robert Nozick (otherwise known as libertarians), and those, such as

Michael Oakeshott and Roger Scruton, who remained faithful to the tenets of traditionalist conservatism. As we will see, the split was caused, ironically enough, in part, by the success of liberalism, which transformed the modern world, while successfully defeating geo-political enemies in the rise (and fall) of Nazi totalitarianism and Soviet communism. But that conservatism could adapt to these shifting political circumstances should not cause us to mistake conservatism for liberalism. For even in defense of liberty, conservatives remain on the side of tradition, against abstract political principles.

Conservatism Present

Part II explores current issues in conservative politics through the lens of philosophical conservatism. These issues include nationalism, populism, the family, education, and responsibility. Much of what motivates our discussion is the question why the conservative-libertarian fusion of the 20th century transformed into the populist-nationalist conservatism associated with President Trump and his supporters. As we will see, this new conservatism, to the extent that it reasserts the flourishing of the political community and its people as primary, is continuous with the history and practice of conservatism. Indeed, it was a necessary transformation as the fusionist consensus simply failed to promote public policies that actually conserved (or at least did not destroy) the social, economic, and cultural conditions for good lives.

Part II is prefaced by an interlude chapter that describes the details of what I call "a common moral faith" around which fellow citizens ought to unite, as an alternative to a purely procedural and purportedly neutral liberalism. A united people may not necessarily share the same destination, but they must, at minimum, share the same journey.

Chapter 6 makes a conservative case for nationalism. Unlike the ugly ideological manifestations of nationalism in the 20th century, conservative support for nationalism consists simply in a healthy degree of patriotism—love for one's country—as well as a willingness to put the interests of one's fellow citizens first. In this context, conservatism offers a healthy medium for the emotionally attractive impulse of nationalism to be moderated, controlled, and put toward positive ends. Practically speaking, this explains the urgency of an issue like immigration, as flagrant violations of law go together with a kind of blithe indifference to the domestic costs borne by the legitimate members of a political community. Thus, while a conservative need not oppose immigration in principle, when the opposition is couched in nationalist terms, there is an understandable attraction and appeal to ordinary voters, who see themselves beholden to one another prior to the interests of foreigners.

Chapter 7 turns to the closely related issue of populism. As I will argue, the phenomenon of populism is more a symptom than cause of recent political discontent in democratic countries. Populism is the natural result of the failure by a society's elites to take seriously the concerns of ordinary people. So, while conservatives are generally in favor of the important role of elites in society—indeed they are inevitable—the failure of elites to lead well has put conservatives on the side of the people. A populist conservatism, as I will describe it, rejects hegemonic liberalism, in both its social and economic forms. Populism is, in effect, a tactic wielded by savvy conservative politicians to serve traditional conservative ends, such as the rejection of social liberalism and a concern for the health of domestic economies.

Chapter 8 takes on issues related to the family, which conservatives have always held is the most important social institution. The family imposes restraints on our behavior and shapes us to become functional members of society. But while conservatives have always championed so-called "family values," the fault lines in recent years have broadened and deepened. Having basically lost issues like same-sex marriage, conservatives now find themselves having to defend the very reality of sexual identity, and with it the assumption that the world is not our own making, that nature shapes and constrains the forms of the good life available to us. As this chapter argues, this is why conservatives must redouble the effort to maintain the reality of sexual difference, uphold and value the sanctity of human life, and call for restraint against the liberating forces of the progressive sexual ethic.

Chapter 9 develops a conservative view of education and its role in the good society. Whereas the ancients understood education to have a role in making citizens fit for their type of constitution, modern democratic countries practice a form of what Scruton calls "oikophobia," whereby future citizens are taught to reflexively dislike and disown what is their own: their country, culture, and common history. This finds expression most prominently in efforts to implement "diversity, equity, and inclusion" policies at every level of society. Against these worrying trends, this chapter argues that conservatives should reclaim education for the public, to promote and conserve the precious bodies of knowledge that have made our societies humane and prosperous.

Chapter 10 narrows focus to discuss the relationship between responsibilities and rights. In response to the rise of the welfare state, some versions of 20th century conservatism emphasized individual rights as a bulwark against the growing expanse of the state, or "big government." But conservatism, properly understood, concerns itself not merely with the "size" of government, but whether it is serving well its proper purpose(s). Lying between the overbearing nanny-state of liberalism and the austere nightwatchman state of libertarianism, conservatives advocate a state that

genuinely serves the common good. Accordingly, conservatives emphasize the importance of responsibilities alongside the much more discussed rights guaranteed by governments. The common good is achieved when the members of society and their institutions each perform their proper function.

Looking forward, the concluding chapter considers the future of conservatism. Distinguishing conservatism from a kind of quaint nostalgia, conservatism is recast as a journey undertaken in the here and now, to build a home for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. The conservative future is built *through* the obstacles and challenges in the present. This theme of journeying home is explored through the three virtues of philosophical conservatism: gratitude, humility, and justice premised on a kind of hope.

Coda: Conservatism and Religion

Gratitude seems to have a "to-for" structure, where we are grateful to someone/something for a good bestowed.[67] Humility also seems to imply the existence of someone/something superior. We humble ourselves before a reverent object. It is difficult to describe these attitudes properly without appeal to religious language.[68] For they are essentially virtues of piety. Thus, God is a natural candidate for the object of gratitude and the mode of humility. Socrates, we must not forget, contrasts human wisdom—knowledge of our ignorance—with divine wisdom, and he describes his philosophical mission using the religious language of humble reverence for, and obedience to god(s). In this sense, Socrates embodied the Biblical proverb "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."[69] Thus, by first subordinating the human will to the sacred or divine, we may begin to approach the moral ideal.

In the earthly realm, meanwhile, even though skeptical of metaphysics *in* politics, empirical conservatives like Burke believed that religion was the foundation of society. "We know, and what is better, feel inwardly," Burke writes, "that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort."[70] Not so much an argument for a politically established church, Burke's point is that religion is socially useful because it provides the internal motivation and social support for the manners, mores, and sentiments of a people. Without this motivation and support, the laws are vulnerable to the vagaries of human nature, especially the vices opposed to gratitude and humility: resentment and arrogance. A resentful person sees only the faults in his society, and the arrogant person believes *he* can fix them. So, for Burke and empirical conservatives generally, the belief in a sacred or divine order has a utilitarian justification to the extent that religious belief, whether or not it is metaphysically true, grounds political order in the virtues of what is solid and permanent in human nature.

Belief in the ultimate religious foundation of political order further distinguishes liberals and conservatives. Conservatives charge liberals with substituting political ideology for true religion and philosophy, in other words, with substituting politics for God and the love of wisdom. In Humean terms, liberals swap a "religious fanaticism" for a "political fanaticism."[71] For if human beings are not only political animals, but religious animals, then it is not surprising that a decline in traditional religious belief is followed by a corresponding rise in that poor facsimile of religion—ideology. In our age of political tribalism, we see the prescience of Burke, who worried that, in the absence of traditional religious belief (i.e., Christianity), "some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition, might take place of it."[72]

But whatever his personal religious convictions, a philosophical conservative insists that there is no such thing as political salvation. Accepting the limits of politics ultimately leads to what is beyond politics, which is why a conservative is grateful for the existing good and joyful about promoting it—humbly.

Alas, we are getting ahead of ourselves. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."[73] Thus, it is time to visit and inhabit the minds of conservatism's intellectual forebearers. For this is the only way to understand what conservatism is, and therefore what it means to be a conservative today.

Notes

1 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1999 [1790]), p. 121 (emphasis removed).
2 This caricature of conservatism is associated with William F. Buckley.
3 John Stuart Mill, "Considerations on Representative Government," in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998), p. 307, n. 1. For a recent discussion of Mill's theme, initiated by legal philosopher Leslie Green, see https://dailynous.com/2017/09/18/because-they-are-universities.
4 Gordon Graham, *Politics in its Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 188.
5 Ted Honderich, *Conservatism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 238–9.
6 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 108.
7 Andy Hamilton identifies this as an important issue for conservatism in "Conservatism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/conservatism.
8 Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 1269a.
9 While I have not been able to find my term "philosophical conservatism" in common use, Robert Nisbet refers to the "Philosophical Conservatives," by whom he meant Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, René

Chateaubriand, and G.W.F. Hegel. See Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Books, 2014 [1953]), Ch. 2.
10 Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C. Regnery Gateway, 2021 [1953]), p. 10.
11 J.G.A. Pocock, "Introduction," to Edmund Burke, *Reflection on the Revolution in France*, ed. Pocock (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), pp. vii, xlix. Quoted in Jerry Z. Muller (ed.), *Conservatism An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 22–3.
12 Roger Scruton, *Against the Tide: The Best of Roger Scruton's Columns, Commentaries and Criticism*, ed. Mark Dooley (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), p. 4 (emphasis added). As a recently naturalized American citizen, I must confess guilt to Cowling's charge.
13 Edmund Neill, *Conservatism* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2021), pp. 4–6.
14 Samuel Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 51, no. 2 (1957), p. 455.
15 Roger Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. viii.
16 Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991), p. 412.
17 Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. vii.
18 Russell Kirk, "Introduction," to *The Portable Conservative Reader* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1982), p. xv. "Partial" because Kirk adds five further conservative principles, including 1) the principle of social continuity, 2) the principle of prescription, 3) the principle of prudence, 4) the principle of variety, and 5) the principle of imperfectability. See pp. xv–xviii.
19 Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative*, p. viii.
20 Muller, *Conservatism: An Anthology*, p. 4.
21 Muller, *Conservatism: An Anthology*, p. 5 (emphasis original).
22 Plato, *Apology*, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 23a–b.
23 Edmund Burke, "Preface" to the Second Edition of *A Vindication of Natural Society*, in *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*, ed. Muller, p. 68.
24 Aristotle, *Topics*, I.11. I thank Dominic Bailey for alerting me to this reference.
25 Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 23.
26 See e.g., Donald W. Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
27 Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, p. 24 (emphasis original).
28 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 3rd edition (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1999), I.4.
29 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b25 (emphasis added).
30 Martha C. Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances," in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 240–63.
31 Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances," p. 260.
32 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1977), Ch. 1, para. 5.
33 David McPherson, "Existential Conservatism," *Philosophy*, vol. 94 (2019), pp. 383–407.

34 McPherson, "Existential Conservatism," p. 384 (emphasis original).
35 McPherson, "Existential Conservatism," p. 389.
36 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.1.
37 Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Ch. 1.
38 See Julia Annas, "My Station and Its Duties: Ideals and the Social Embeddedness of Virtue," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 102 (2002), pp. 109–23. I explore this idea further in Tristan J. Rogers, "Virtue Ethics and Political Authority," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, vol. 51, no. 2 (Summer 2020): pp. 303–21.
39 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b5.
40 F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Ch. 5.
41 Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 204.
42 Plato, *Crito*, in *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, 51c–d.
43 Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, p. 199.
44 Scruton, *How to Be a Conservative*, p. 29.
45 John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 573.
46 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch. III.
47 Jan Narveson, "Liberal-Conservative: The Real Controversy," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 34 (2000), p. 170 (emphasis added).
48 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 182.
49 David Hume, "Of the Origin of Government," in *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987), p. 38.
50 John Kekes, "What is Conservatism?" *Philosophy*, Vol. 72 (1997), pp. 363–8. Kekes also shares my view that "[t]he fundamental aim of conservatism is to conserve the political arrangements that have shown themselves to be conducive to good lives" (Kekes, "What is Conservatism?," p. 351). For the most recent statement of Kekes' conservatism see John Kekes, *Moderate Conservatism: Reclaiming the Center* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
51 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1180a20.
52 F.A. Hayek, "Why I'm Not a Conservative," in *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 401. I reexamine Hayek's arguments later in Ch. 5.
53 Patrick Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2009 [1965]), Ch. V.
54 Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, p. 89.
55 Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, p. 89.
56 Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, p. 90 (emphasis added).
57 Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, p. 90.
58 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 275. Burke's principle is reflected in a striking claim made by Rosalind Hursthouse: "If a just law, determining a right, cannot, as things stand, be implemented in a particular society, without necessitating that some members of the society act wickedly or wrongly, then it cannot, as things stand, be implemented." Mark LeBar calls this "Hursthouse's Constraint." See Hursthouse, "After Hume's Justice," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 91 (1990–1), p. 242; LeBar, "Virtue and Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 273.
59 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 181 (emphasis original).

60 G.A. Cohen, "Rescuing Conservatism: A Defense of Existing Value," in *Finding Oneself in the Other*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 143–73.
61 Cohen's conservatism is also discussed in McPherson, "Existential Conservatism," pp. 393–9. McPherson argues that Cohen's socialism exists in tension with his conservatism because it is premised on a refusal to accept the so-called injustices inherent in the nature of the world as it is given, i.e., natural and social inequalities.
62 Cohen, "Existential Conservatism," p. 144.
63 Burke, *Reflections*, p. 182.
64 Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 77.
65 We will consider Plato's *Republic* and its relationship to conservatism in the following chapter.
66 We explore this idea further in Ch. 7.
67 David McPherson, *The Virtues of Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 34–40.
68 Cf. Bradley: "Reflection on morality leads us beyond it. It leads us, in short, to see the necessity of a religious point of view." (*Ethical Studies*, p. 314).
69 Proverbs 9:10 (NRSV).
70 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 185.
71 See Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Part II.
72 Burke, *Reflections*, p. 186. I critique such modern superstitions in Ch. 9.
73 Matthew 9:37–38 (NRSV).

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