

**AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT**  
**American University**  
**School of Public Affairs**  
**Department of Government**

GOVT-326-001  
Mondays 17:30-20:00  
WARD 204

Professor David Azerrad  
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Mondays 17:00-17:30; 20:00-20:30 (Ward 307)

This course traces the development of American conservative political thought in the past century with a view to understanding the major strands that comprise American conservatism: constitutional conservatism, traditional conservatism, libertarianism & classical liberalism, neoconservatism, social conservatism, and paleoconservatism. In the course of doing so, the course will introduce students to the writings of leading conservative thinkers and examine the major fault lines in the American conservative movement.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Identify and explain the major intellectual strands that comprise American conservatism.
2. Compare and contrast the philosophical foundations of each of the major strands of conservative thought.
3. Understand the major fault lines in the American conservative movement.

### **Required Texts**

There are no required texts for this class. All the readings will be distributed at least one week prior to class and also posted on Blackboard. Students who have to miss a class can pick up a copy of the readings in my box in my office.

I strongly recommend you not bring a computer to class and work off of the printed readings. Studies show that taking notes by hand helps you retain information much more effectively than simply transcribing classroom discussion on your laptop.

### **Course Grading**

- Attendance, Participation, and Weekly Quizzes (10%)
- Midterm (25%)
- Essay (25%)
- Final Exam (40%)

The grade ranges are defined as follows:

A= unusual excellence (A- 90-92; A 93-100)  
B= work distinctly above average (B- 80-82; B 83-86, B+ 87-89)  
C= work of average quality (C- 70-72; C 73-76; C+ 77-79)

D= below average work, the lowest passing mark (D 60-69)  
F= Failure, no course Credit (59 and below)

### **Attendance, Participation, and Reading Quizzes**

Please turn off your cell phone before coming to class (i.e. don't just silence them).

I will take roll call each class promptly before we begin. Please be on time. If you are late 3 times, that will count as an absence.

The course will include quizzes based on the week's reading. These will take about 5 minutes and be administered promptly at the beginning of class. If you do the readings carefully, you will have no trouble with these (for how to read carefully, see the hand-out "How to Read"). **Expect one every week.**

### **Absence Policy**

Attendance is crucial. This is a small class which benefits from the contributions of all students and much of the learning will derive from our discussion. If you need to miss a class, please notify me ahead of time. Repeated absences will affect your final grade.

### **Exams**

There will be one **midterm (March 6)** and one **final exam** that will be held during the regularly scheduled exam period for this class (**on May 8**). Both exams will be cumulative of material covered to the date of the exam and will require you to demonstrate your knowledge of the texts and issues covered in class. The format will be short answer and essay questions.

### **Essay**

You will write one 2,500-3,000 word essay either on a topic of your choice that I will have approved or on one of the topics I will assign. **The essay is due on April 17.** If you wish, you may submit a draft of the essay to me by March 27 (but no later) and I will gladly offer suggestions on how to improve it.

### **Contact Info and Office Hours**

The best way to contact me is via email. I typically will respond within 24 hours. If you would like to meet in person, I am available during office hours. We can also try to schedule a time to meet or to speak over the phone during the week.

### **Academic Integrity (<http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>)**

All students are required to follow the University's Academic Integrity Code. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the standards and

requirements of the University's Academic Code of Conduct. Violations of the Code of Conduct will not be tolerated and will be reported immediately. Please see me with any questions on the Academic Integrity Code.

**Emergency Preparedness (<http://www.american.edu/emergency/>)**

In an emergency, AU will use the communication tools the university has at its disposal in as timely a manner as possible using *AU Alerts*. These messages will provide information on what is happening, what to do, and links to available additional information. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. Our communication tools include text and email alerts, the university's home page, Facebook, and Twitter, the general information line 202-885-1100, indoor yellow AlertUs emergency beacon boxes and outdoor speakers located throughout campus. You can customize whether you receive alerts as e-mail and/or text messages. Add additional work or home phone numbers and e-mail addresses so AU Alerts reach you no matter where you are when an emergency occurs.

**Academic Support (<http://www.american.edu/ocl/asac/>)**

The Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) supports the academic development and educational goals of all American University students and is committed to providing access for individuals with disabilities within the university's diverse community. Location: Mary Graydon Center (MGC), Room 243x3360; [asac@american.edu](mailto:asac@american.edu); M-F: 9am-5pm

## Schedule of Topics and Assignment Due Dates

*Note: readings may change, in which case you will be notified ahead of time.*

### I. Introduction (Weeks 1-2)

#### Introduction

- George H. Nash, "[American Conservatism & the Problem of Populism](#)," *The New Criterion* (2016), pp. 4-14.
- Brian J. Glenn and Steven M. Teles, "Introduction," in *Conservatism and American Political Development* (2009), pp. 12-16 only on "The Evolving Generations of Conservatism."

#### Burke and the Conservative Disposition

- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), selections.
- Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980), "Introduction" and "Chapter One: The Conservative Attitude," pp. 1-16.

*Contrast with:*

- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (1637), excerpt from Part Two.
- John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), excerpts.
- John Rawls, *Justice As Fairness* (2006), "§6. The Idea of the Original Position," pp. 14-18.

### II. The Major Strands of American Conservative Political Thought (Weeks 3-11)

#### (1) Constitutional Conservatism

- National Association for Constitutional Government, Mission Statement, (1917), p. 2, pp. 35-7.
- Sentinels of the Republic, "Statement in Opposition to a Child Labor Amendment to the Federal Constitution" (1922).
- Elihu Root, *Experiments in Government and the Essentials of the Constitution* (1913), pp. 1-40.
- Thomas G. West and Douglas A. Jeffrey, *The Rise and Fall of Constitutional Government in America* (2006), pp. 1-40.
- "Rebuilding Constitutional Government," in The Heritage Foundation's *Solutions 2016*, pp. 140-144.

Recommended: Read the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution of the United States of America*; peruse recent issues of *The Claremont Review of Books*.

#### (2) Agrarianism and Traditional Conservatism

- "[Introduction: A Statement of Principles](#)," in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930).
- Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (1953), selections.

- Russell Kirk, “The Problem of Tradition,” in *Prospects for Conservatives* (1956), pp. 215-234.
- Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (1953), “Chapter Three: “The Problem of Community,” pp. 36-65.
- Rod Dreher, *Crunchy Cons*, “A Crunchy-Con Manifesto,” (pp.1-2); “Chapter One: What are Crunchy Conservatives?” (pp. 4-26); *The Crunchy-Con Political Agenda* (pp. 232-4).

Recommended: Peruse recent issues of *The American Conservative* and *Modern Age*.

### (3) Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism

- Friedrich A. Hayek, “Individualism: True and False,” in *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948), pp. 1–32.
- Friedrich A. Hayek, “[The Use of Knowledge in Society](#),” *American Economic Review* (1945), pp. 519–30.
- John Hospers, “What Libertarianism Is,” in *The Libertarian Alternative* (1974), ed. Tibor Machan, pp. 3-20.
- Murray N. Rothbard, “[Why Be Libertarian?](#)” (1974).
- Murray N. Rothbard, “The Nature of the State” in *The Ethics of Liberty* (1982), pp. 161-174.
- Walter Block, “Libertarianism and Libertinism,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* (1994), pp. 117-128.

Recommended: Peruse recent issues of *Reason*.

### A note on Anti-Communism and Fusionism

- Whittaker Chambers, “Letter to My Children,” in *Witness* (1952).
- William F. Buckley, “[Our Mission Statement](#),” *National Review* (1955).

## \*\*\*MIDTERM (Week 7 - March 6)

### Week 8 (March 13): No Class / Spring Break

### (4) Neoconservatism and Reform Conservatism

- Adam Wolfson, “[Conservatives and Neoconservatives](#),” *The Public Interest* (2004), pp. 32-48.
- Irving Kristol, “American Conservatism: 1945-1995,” in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (2011), pp. 171-179.
- Irving Kristol, “The Neoconservative Persuasion,” in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, pp. 190-194.
- Irving Kristol, “Human Nature and Social Reform,” in *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, pp. 77-80.
- Yuval Levin, “[Beyond the Welfare State](#),” *National Affairs* (2011),

Recommended: Peruse recent issues of *National Affairs*, *The Weekly Standard* and *Commentary*.

#### **(6) The Religious Right & Social Conservatism**

- Jerry Falwell, “Future-word: An Agenda for the Eighties,” in *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*, ed. Jerry Falwell (1981), pp. 186-223.
- Richard John Neuhaus, “A Strange New Regime: The Naked Public Square and the Passing of the American Constitutional Order,” *Heritage Foundation Lecture* (1996).
- Michael Novak, “The American Family: An Embattled Institution,” *The Human Life Review* (1980), pp. 40-53.
- David P. Goldman, “Why Nations Die,” in *It’s Not the End of the World, It’s Just the End of You* (2011), pp. 13-24.
- R.R. Reno, “[Homeless](#),” *First Things* (2016), pp. 3-7.

Recommended: Peruse recent issues of *First Things* and *The Human Life Review*.

#### **(7) Paleoconservatism**

- Samuel T. Francis, “Beautiful Losers: The Failure of American Conservatism,” in *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (1993), pp. 222-231.
- Samuel T. Francis, “[The Paleo Persuasion](#),” *The American Conservative* (2002).
- Edward Ashbee, “Politics of Paleoconservatism,” *Culture & Society* (2000), pp. 75-81 only.
- Chilton Williamson, Jr., “Promises to Keep,” in *The Paleoconservatives*, ed. Joseph Scotchie (1999), pp. 97-105.
- Patrick J. Buchanan, *A Republic, Not an Empire* (2002), selections.

Recommended: Peruse recent issues of *Chronicles* and browse the *Unz Review*.

### **III. Critics of Conservatism (Weeks 12-13)**

#### **Conservative Critiques**

- Claes G. Ryn, “[How Conservatives Failed ‘The Culture’](#),” *National Humanities Institute* (2010).
- Jerry Z. Mueller, “Dilemmas of Conservatism,” *Public Interest* (2000), pp. 56-60 in particular.
- Charles Kesler, “What’s Wrong with Conservatism,” [AEI Bradley Lecture](#) (1998).
- R. R. Reno, “[Crisis of Solidarity](#),” *First Things* (2015), pp. 3-5.

#### Reread:

- Dreher, *Crunchy Cons*, “Chapter One: What are Crunchy Conservatives?,” pp. 4-26.

- Kristol, “American Conservatism: 1945-1995,” in *The Neoconservative Persuasion* (2011), pp. 171-179.
- Francis, “Beautiful Losers: The Failure of American Conservatism,” in *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (1993), pp. 222-231.

### **Progressive Critiques**

- Arthur M. Schlesinger, “The New Conservatism: Politics of Nostalgia,” *The Reporter* (1965), pp. 9-12.
- Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (2011), “Introduction,” pp. 3–37.

**\*\*\*ESSAY DUE (Week 13 – April 17)**

## **IV. Populism, Trumpism and the Future of Conservatism (Weeks 14-15)**

### **Populism (and Elitism)**

- Samuel T. Francis, “[From Household to Nation: The Middle American Populism of Pat Buchanan](#),” *Chronicles* (1996), pp. 12-16.
- Samuel P. Huntington, “[Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite](#),” *The National Interest* (2004).
- Angello Codevilla, “America’s Ruling Class — And the Perils of Revolution,” *The American Spectator* (2010), pp. 18-36.
- Charles Murray, “[The New American Divide](#),” *The Wall Street Journal* (2012).

### **Trumpism**

- Donald Trump, “[Inaugural Address](#),” (2017).
- “[Notes on the Origins and Future of Trumpism](#),” *Journal of American Greatness* (2015).
- Joshua Mitchell, “[Donald Trump Does Have Ideas—and We’d Better Pay Attention to Them](#),” *Politico* (2016).
- Charles Kesler, “[Trump and the Conservative Cause](#),” *The Claremont Review of Books* (2016).
- Peter Wehner, “[The Comprehensive Case Against Donald Trump](#),” *Real Clear Politics* (2016).

Reread: Nash, “American Populism & the Problem of Populism,” *The New Criterion* (2016), pp. 4-14.

**\*\*\*FINAL EXAM (Week 16 – May 8)**