Trans-Atlantic Conservatism since World War II

(An Upper-Level Undergraduate Seminar)

Contact Information

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Course Description

This seminar focuses on the history of conservative thought in Europe and the United States since World War II. After a period of relative neglect, the field is currently exploding, though comparative studies are few. The purpose of this seminar will be to bring together the historiography on European and American conservatism, and probe the question of the relation between anti-communism and the rise of a variety of conservative movements on both sides of the Atlantic after World War II. Questions addressed will include: What is conservatism? What traditions do conservatives "conserve"? Is conservatism populist or elitist, democratic or aristocratic? Is religion compatible with conservatism? Throughout, our focus will be on whether in the postwar years it is possible to consider conservatism a trans-Atlantic political ideology that in some meaningful sense defined itself in opposition to the perceived core tenets of the communist worldview. No prior knowledge of European or American history or political theory is required; all that is needed is a willingness to engage in an open-minded and non-biased form with the core texts of the postwar conservative movement.

Course Policies

This seminar will be successful only if all of its members actively participate in class each week. Students are expected to read all assigned texts, and take part in discussion with honesty and respect. To facilitate discussion, students will be asked to pre-circulate three to five discussion questions, which reflect critical engagement with course material, by 5pm on the night before class. The pre-circulation of discussion questions is graded separately from participation.

In addition to participating by pre-circulating questions and taking active part in class discussion, students are expected to complete two short papers (each 4-6 pages long), one research paper (of c.12 pages) and one oral presentation (of 15-20 minutes). To help students improve their writing and research skills, they will be asked to pre-circulate an outline of their second short paper, and a draft of their research paper. Details about these assignments will be distributed three weeks prior to the due dates, which are listed
on the syllabus.

Grade Breakdown

Overall, grades in the seminar will be assigned as follows:

Weekly participation 30%
Discussion questions 10%
Short paper outline 5%
Short papers 20%
Draft of final paper 5%
Final paper 20%
Oral presentation 10%

Lateness Policy

Late papers will be marked down one grade step for each day late (i.e., A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). Extensions will be granted only if requested one week in advance of the deadline, and if the reasons for which they are being requested is valid. Absenteeism or lateness to class will be deducted from the participation grade.

Academic Integrity

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate.

However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. Furthermore, if you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must acknowledge this assistance.

If you have any questions about citation format or academic integrity policies, please contact me.

Course Material

Most of the course material will be made available via iSites or at Widener. Please check iSites regularly for any course updates.
Course Outline

**Week 1  Theorizing Conservatism**

*Introductory Readings*


Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy*, edited by Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher F. Zurn (2009), 63-86.


**Week 2  The Origins of Conservatism and Anticommunism in Europe**

*Primary Sources*

Karl Mannheim, “Conservative Thought” (1925), as reprinted in *From Karl Mannheim*

Pope Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937)

*Secondary Sources*


Kathy Olmstead, "Duce Envy: American Conservatives and Fascism in the 1930s" (forthcoming, 2012)

**Week 3  Opposition to the New Deal and the Origins of the American Conservative Movement**

*Primary Sources*

Select posters and pamphlets from the Associated Farmers lobby
1938 Father Coughlin sermon

Secondary Sources


**Week 4**  
**Religion and the Postwar Reinvention of Trans-Atlantic Conservative Thought**

Possible Guest Seminar Participant (on Skype): Samuel Goldman

Primary Sources

Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948), excerpts

Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (1953), Introduction, chaps 1 and 3


Secondary Sources


**Week 5**  
**European Emigrants, the United States, and the Origins of Second-Wave Christian Democracy**

Primary Sources

Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy* (1942/3), ch.1

Alcide De Gasperi et al., *The Code of Camaldoli* (1943), entire

Select OSS pamphlets on Christianity and Democracy, distributed in Europe and Latin America
Secondary Sources


**Week 6  The United States, European Reconstruction and the Rise of Conservative Democracies**

*Primary Sources*

Pius XII, "Christmas Sermon" (1944)

Alcide De Gasperi, *The Word to the Christian Democrats* (1944)

Select letters between Harry Truman, Myron Taylor and Pope Pius XII

*Secondary Sources*


**Week 7  Transnational Anticommunism and the Birth of the Cold War**

*Primary Sources*


Vyshinsky speech to the UN General Assembly (September 1947), in ibid., 126-8.


*Secondary Sources*


**Week 8  Anti-Totalitarianism and the Cold War Academy**

Possible guests on Skype: Ron Robin discussing Nathan Leites, or Peter Mandler on Margaret Mead

*Primary Sources*

Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (1951), chap. 1

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), chap. 4

*Secondary Sources*


**Week 9  The Cultural Cold War: Promoting Non-Communist Ways of Life**

*Primary Sources*

Select Marshall Plan films exported throughout Europe, 1948-51

Select posters and Vatican-funded films from 1948 elections in Italy

*Secondary Sources*


**Week 10**  **The Free Market against State Planning**

*Primary Sources*

Friedrich Hayek, “The Uses of Knowledge in Society” (Sep. 1945), and “Individualism: True and False” (Dec. 1945) in *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948; collected essays from 1935-1947)

Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), selections

*Secondary Sources*


**Week 11**  **Libertarianism and Neoliberalism vs. Soviet-Style Collectivism**

*Primary Sources*


*Secondary Sources*


**Week 12**  **Neoconservatism in Europe and the Americas**

*Primary Sources*


*Secondary Sources*

Justin Vaïsse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (2010), Introduction and ch.1

Jan-Werner Müller, Dirk Van Laak and Jerry Muller, "German Conservatism: From Technocratic Conservatism to the New Right," in *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (2003), introduction {8 pgs}


**Week 13  Concluding Thoughts**

*Student presentations*

*Primary Sources*

Silvio Berlusconi, *Una storia italiana* (translated selections)

Select tea party posters on state socialism

*Secondary Sources*
