

## For all the Right Reasons

C. A. McIntosh  
*Cornell University*

It is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced. It is comparatively easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds that everything proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, “Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?” he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, “Why, there is that bookcase...and the coals in the coal-scuttle...and pianos...and policemen.” The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible.<sup>1</sup>

—G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Like the case for civilization, the case for an overall political philosophy is complex, not least because it must encompass so much, but also because its believer tends to be entirely convinced. Thus in this chapter, I offer not so much a case for as a *sketch* of a political philosophy shared by many on the right. If nothing else, I hope to show that there is a stable philosophy underlying popular right-wing thought today, as opposed to a mere location on a shifting political spectrum. At the highest level of abstraction, that philosophy has two essential claims: first, that the freedom of the individual and the power of government are inversely proportional; second, due respect for persons requires that the optimum relationship is some maximal degree of liberty given some minimal degree of government. Zooming in, classical liberalism, libertarianism, paleo-conservatism, and other right-wing political philosophies each argue for their own optimum. So while my own sketch below doesn't represent everyone on the right, it does represent a dominant breed: traditional American conservatives—and this for two reasons. First, I am an American who believes in traditional conservatism. But more importantly, though the roots of the right reach deep into the past, I believe it came to full bloom in the American experiment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

That is not to say that America, then or ever, has perfectly embodied that philosophy. But it is precisely a commitment to that philosophy, upon which America was founded, that serves as the basis of hope for progress. Real progress is made not by destroying the imperfect and replacing it with something new and

untried, but by building on the foundations of the tried and true. And that is what conservatism is all about: conserving the tried and true—*not* a blind allegiance to the past or maintaining the status quo.

## I.

We begin with what may seem obvious: all human beings, regardless of contingencies of race, sex, and class are intrinsically valuable. We have immeasurable dignity and worth just because of what we are by nature, and so ought always be treated as ends and never as mere means. But this wasn't always obvious. It was largely Christianity that bequeathed to us this idea.<sup>3</sup> Early Christians put into practice the doctrine that humans are created in the image of God, following Jesus' example and admonition to love thy neighbor by rescuing abandoned Roman infants; defending the unborn; caring for widows, the homeless and poor; befriending social outcasts; elevating the status of women; ending gladiatorial blood sport; establishing charities, hospitals, orphanages, schools; and more.<sup>4</sup> The West—nay, the *world*—is forever indebted to what was then a little religious movement, which sowed the seeds that eventually grew into robust declarations of universal human rights. Conservatives today carry on this tradition of cherishing and protecting human life, defensively by opposing the injustices of abortion, euthanasia, and terrorism, and offensively by advocating the justness of capital punishment and circumspect warfare.<sup>5</sup> Whether the belief that humans are intrinsically valuable can ultimately be justified apart from a theistic framework, I cannot argue here. Suffice it to say that were it not for the recognition that we are intrinsically valuable, I see no grounds for perhaps the most politically revolutionary claim ever made: that we have natural rights.<sup>6</sup>

Natural rights are like moral sanctions to perform certain actions and pursue certain activities. Chief among them, as identified by their most famous expositors, are the right to life and the means of preserving it, the exercise of liberty, private ownership of justly acquired property, the fruits of one's own labor, the pursuit of happiness, family-making and inheritance, freedom of expression, and the practice of religion. The guarantor of these rights is not a social entity like a contract or government, but the objective reality of our very nature as rational animals. A slave, for example, has the natural right to be free even if there is for him no such civil right recognized by the law of the land. His status as a slave is artificial; his status as a human being is not.

Saying these rights are objective is not to say that they cannot be restrained or trumped. Your right to liberty, for example, does not imply that you are free to murder me. That is because my right to life generates in you a moral duty not to violate it. Supposing you do, your right to life gets trumped as I defend my own. As is often said, liberty is not unrestrained license. Liberty is the freedom to flourish within boundaries prescribed by a just moral and social order. Conservatives call this 'ordered liberty.'

The 'ordered' in 'ordered liberty' is both descriptive and prescriptive. There is an objective moral order, and humans cannot flourish individually or collectively in contradiction to it. That order contains norms governing health, gender, sexual

intercourse, marriage, family, non-familial relationships, and all other social arrangements. Each of these, just like anything else, is good only to the extent that it properly expresses its nature and purpose. A good knife is one that cuts well. A good heart is one that pumps blood. Likewise, there is such a thing as a good man, good woman, good sex, good marriage, good family, and so on, delimited by human nature and discovered by reason, experience, and, many believe, divine revelation. As David Oderberg puts it, “the affairs of men—governed as they are by morality—are regulated by an eternal and immutable law to which ‘right reason’ must conform if human agents are to be held to act morally.”<sup>7</sup>

## II.

But, it hardly needs to be said, humans don’t always act morally. We lie, cheat, and steal; we fornicate, victimize, and murder—all to the destruction of others and even ourselves. Why? Answers to this question account for our political differences probably more than anything else. As the conservative sees it, external factors like rough environment, low education, poverty, joblessness, oppression, etc. cannot sufficiently explain our predilection for evil. Nor can the relatively ostensible internal reasons we give, such as selfishness, anger, or hatred. No, a deeper explanation is required.

The cold hard truth, one acknowledged by nearly every keen observer of humanity throughout history, is that the arc of man’s moral nature is long, and it bends not toward justice, but evil. So while we are good to the extent that we act in accordance with our nature, the paradox of the human condition is that there seems to be something in our nature that disposes us to act contrary to it. “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” the prophet Jeremiah said, “Who can understand it?” Evil will always beguile mankind, despite our noblest efforts. This is powerfully conveyed in Christopher Nolan’s film *The Dark Knight* when Batman struggles to understand the Joker. “Criminals aren’t complicated, Alfred” he says. “We just need to figure out what he’s after.” The much wiser Alfred replies, “Perhaps this is a man you don’t fully understand. Some men aren’t looking for anything logical, like money. They can’t be bought, bullied, reasoned or negotiated with. Some men just want to watch the world burn.”

No *just* system of government will ever be capable of eradicating or even significantly controlling human wickedness. This is the fundamental and decisive flaw inherent to all melioristic visions of humanity, such as Marxism and its kin. All attempts to implement such visions, resting on a catastrophically naïve understanding of human nature, have resulted in wild exacerbations of human suffering. “If only it were all so simple!” laments Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in *The Gulag Archipelago*, a soul-numbingly thorough documentation of atrocities committed by the USSR. He continues:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And

who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart? During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place; sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow enough space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various stages, under various circumstances, a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood. But his name doesn't change, and to that name we ascribe the whole lot, good and evil.<sup>8</sup>

Evil can only be eradicated, not by instituting laws or expanding government, but by eradicating ourselves—as the children of all “progressive” revolutions inevitably learn.<sup>9</sup> Any political philosophy that doesn't acknowledge the complexity of human nature or the ineradicability of evil is a total nonstarter.

Despite this, people will continue to sentimentalize utopian nonsense, as John Lennon does in his celebrated song “Imagine.” Lennon recognizes that his imaginary world would have no religion, no countries, no possessions, and, most tellingly, “nothing to kill or die for.” It would, in effect, be Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where a paternalistic government administers a sedative to its citizens and eliminates all sources of potential suffering, such as art, music, books, and meaningful relationships—i.e., humanity itself. If you would not want to live in Huxley's world, let me suggest you value autonomy and authenticity more than social serenity. We ought therefore to guard our liberty with a fierce jealousy against encroachments by the state, however seemingly beneficent or benign, as such encroachments tend to metastasize into malignancy.

### III.

This is not to deny that government should have a substantive role in the body politic. Rather, it is to affirm that its role is somewhere between the “too much” of totalitarianism (order at the expense of liberty) and the “too little” of anarchy (liberty at the expense of order). Hence, the American founders aimed for the Goldilocks ideal of ordered liberty with a constitutional republic: a limited government wherein a majority rules by electing representatives to promote the common good. They were just as concerned about threats to order and liberty from a tyrannical government as from a tyrannical populace, and so, along with Aristotle, were not at all sanguine about a democracy: a government wherein a majority rules by promoting self-interest rather than the common good.

Government promotes the common good insofar as it maintains and defends the conditions necessary for us to flourish by exercising our natural rights. Or, as the opening line of the U.S. Constitution puts it, a “more perfect union” will “establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” It will, in other words, equally enforce laws and administer justice blindly when they're violated, provide access to civil courts that guarantee due process, maintain a military, facilitate the means of commerce by issuing currency, and so on.

Two main checks prevent the government in charge of these tasks from becoming too powerful. First, due respect is given to citizens' natural rights to life, liberty, and free expression that allows them to criticize their government and, if necessary, take up arms against it. With the power of the pen in one hand and the power of the gun in the other, a citizenry so-armed, who would prefer death to the loss of liberty, is a redoubtable bulwark against a Hobbesian Leviathan.<sup>10</sup> Of course, with these freedoms come risks of abuse. But as ol' Ben Franklin said, "those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety." Second, the government is structured so as to prevent centralization of power. All tasks are divided among separate branches of a central government, each with their own internal checks and balances, to which individual states (akin to little countries with their own constitutions) voluntarily submit. States themselves are in turn decentralized, being made up of separate counties, townships, cities, etc.

This second check (federalism) is an implementation of the organizing principle of subsidiarity—deference first to the authority at the lowest level of jurisdiction—which is essential to the just ordering of society at every level, all the way down to the family.<sup>11</sup> Just governance occurs from the bottom up, beginning with the lowest and closest sphere of authority. Only when a problem is unmanageable at a given level is it appropriate for a higher one to get involved; otherwise, there is overreach of power. Very rarely should the state reach all the way down into the family, save for the necessary evil of collecting taxes. There is excellent reason for so-ordering government and civil society: the closer someone is to a situation the more likely they are to know just what is needed, and the further one is, the less likely. This is why conservatives feel deep apprehension when the power of the federal government is called upon to address social ills. There are very few ills that cannot be more competently and effectively handled locally through private charity, volunteering, community-building efforts, and simply being a good neighbor.<sup>12</sup> These more personal, intimate initiatives at the ground level breed compassion, friendliness, personal responsibility, and gratitude rather than the resentment, entitlement, and potential corruption bred by impersonal aid doled from above.<sup>13</sup> Besides, tinkering at the top almost always results in unforeseen consequences at lower levels. Minimum wage laws, affirmative action policies, and welfare assistance are all perfect examples of well-intentioned violations of subsidiarity that have harmed more than they've helped.<sup>14</sup>

Notice that the lowest level of authority mentioned above is the family, not the individual. Conservatives understand that while man is no mere cog in a machine run from the top down via the ideas and desires of a powerful leader or state, neither is he an "ethical atom" free to determine himself from the bottom up via his own ideas and desires.<sup>15</sup> The *family* is the most basic unit in society, and so premium is placed on what is good for the family, not necessarily the individual. And what is good for the family is, first and foremost, the institution of marriage as the permanent union between one man and woman with child-begetting potential.<sup>16</sup> Not only as a matter of objective moral norms *ought* children be raised in stable two-parent homes, those that are fare better statistically on every

measure of health and success.<sup>17</sup> The state, therefore, has an interest in recognizing and protecting the traditional institution of marriage, as it is the primary means of producing wholesome citizens who both preserve the state's existence and determine its moral fabric.

The chief objection to the legal recognition of same-sex marriage, therefore, isn't based on a prudish morality or religious conviction, but a conception of marriage and family essential to the state's promotion of the common good. Hence, the demand for "marriage equality" is absurd because homosexual couples are not equal with heterosexual couples in the only respect that matters to the state: their capability of producing new citizens.<sup>18</sup> Such incommensurability makes the notion of equality in this context not only incoherent but also unjust by treating unequals as if they were equal.

Same-sex marriage is not the only social injustice wrought in the nebulous name of "equality". There are the seemingly endless tantrums thrown by the illegitimate brainchild of Marx and Foucault: intersectional identity politics, including the modern feminist, LGBTQ+, and Black Lives Matter movements, whose child-like view of the world cannot transcend the simplistic polarities of oppressors and oppressed, victimizers and victims. Because virtue and moral responsibility on this scheme are shifted from individuals to groups, it is necessary to vilify whole classes of people as nefariously perpetuating "systems" or "structures" of social and economic inequality. The reality is, there are only two senses in which all people are equal: in the eyes of God (in dignity and worth) and in the eyes of the law (in legal standing as citizens). And the good news is that everyone, regardless of race, sex, or class, in post-Civil Rights America is already equal in these two senses.<sup>19</sup>

Any other sense of equality is, to use Edmund Burke's apt description, a "monstrous fiction."<sup>20</sup> None of us are, or ever will be, equal in physical or mental ability, talents, or accomplishments. "In performance terms," quips Thomas Sowell, "the same individual is not even equal to himself on different days."<sup>21</sup> Nor are we equal in non-performance terms, as differences in circumstances of birth, social surroundings, inheritance, and sheer luck make clear. Equality of opportunity is just as dubious as equality of outcome. These inequalities are manifest between groups as well as individuals, the roots of which can be any combination of internal causes such as biology, culture, personality and personal decisions; and external causes such as, geography, local environment, and, yes, oppression and privilege. But we cannot simply assume, as so many do, that any instance of inequality is *ipso facto* coextensive with injustice. And even instances that are, apart from straightforward violations of the law, do not obviously justify interventions from the state. Remember, the role of government is not to eradicate all injustices, but merely to safeguard conditions in which people can exercise their natural rights. Think of it this way: as anyone who's played a sport knows, there are innumerable ways a player can be a jerk without violating established rules of the game. A referee is there to enforce the rules, not to convert assholes into honorable men, much less bias the outcome. And if the political experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have proved anything, it's that government crusades against

inequalities have been a road to serfdom, paved with the bodies of untold millions.<sup>22</sup>

#### IV.

By contrast, a *laissez faire* approach, especially with respect to economics, has been a road to the wealth of nations. Heavy regulation is inimical to innovation and redistributive schemes are injurious to incentive. A free market system where people can engage in voluntary transactions of goods and services for the sake of self-improvement may on a superficial level seem selfish, but on a deeper level respects man's competitive drive, the inherent dignity found in work, and the virtue of self-reliance. When left to his own devices to improve his lot in life man is generally successful, and often winds up improving the lives of others in the process. In this way (and others), economic freedom, reflecting the principles of individual freedom, isn't just pragmatically superior to competing economic systems; it is *morally* superior.<sup>23</sup> Free enterprise, for example, is largely responsible for the abolition of slavery in the West.<sup>24</sup> As Russell Kirk has pointed out, free enterprise has "emancipated the mass of men and women from involuntary labor. Until the triumph of modern industry—which went hand-in-hand with the triumph of a free economy—it was possible to obtain leisure only by living upon the labors of others. ... But today, and especially in America, it is possible for everyone to have relatively abundant leisure: this is the fruit of industrial efficiency and a free economy."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, since many national economies and, to a large extent, the global economy has adopted free market principles since the 1970s, global abject poverty rates have fallen a staggering 80%.<sup>26</sup> This isn't because of government assistance programs or foreign aid. Quite the contrary. It's because a relatively uninhibited entrepreneur like Henry Ford or Steve Jobs, "though laboring for his own benefit, actually increases the common good through his private labors."<sup>27</sup> Thus, very little regulation is required, as the free market is guided just fine by what Adam Smith called "the invisible hand": a mysterious force that, through countless ever-changing economic realities and transactions, reliably tracks market value and creates capital out of thin air.<sup>28</sup> Contrary to what critics of free enterprise often assume, economics is not a zero-sum game where if one has more another has less. That myth, though easily discreditable,<sup>29</sup> has proven recalcitrant. The reason, I suspect, is not due merely to confusion about the nature of economics, but the nature of man. In our ignorance, we are easily roused to indignation at economic inequality, and even more easily embrace as our reason a righteous concern for the poor, as opposed to a vain sense of entitlement and envy of the rich.<sup>30</sup>

#### V.

Economic equality, then, like any other sense of equality beyond what we already enjoy before God and the law, is overrated, rivaled perhaps only by the Beatles and "diversity." In fact, diversity *per se*, far from being good, is bad. What's good

is *unity* in diversity. “The English word ‘good,’” Robert Nozick writes, “stems from a root, ‘Ghedh’, meaning ‘to unite, join, fit, to bring together’.”<sup>31</sup> A good painting unites a diversity of form, textures, colors, and tones into a beautiful image. A musical symphony unifies across time a diversity of sounds into a pleasing score. A good novel will tie together various themes, plots, and characters into a meaningful narrative, much like our own lives. But the goodness of these things doesn’t come from their being mere collections of diverse elements, but in the diversity of their elements being united in a way that achieves harmony.

So it is with society. Conservatives believe that a diverse, multicultural, or pluralistic society is good only if there is an underlying unity that promotes social harmony. But what could possibly unite a society of people who are naturally diverse in so many ways? Not race or nationality or any other form of tribalism, but commitment to a *creed*. America, G. K. Chesterton has observed, is the only country founded on a creed, and has justly earned the reputation of being the land of opportunity for those committed to it. Relatively few who have met that commitment with thrift, entrepreneurialism, or just plain hard work have been disappointed.<sup>32</sup> But people with ideologies hostile or indifferent to that creed are like streaks of black paint flung across an otherwise beautifully colored canvass. Granted, that may pass as art to benighted postmodernists, but the rest of us are under no obligation to accept it as such, and for the same reason are under no obligation to accept immigration policies unlikely to contribute to social harmony.

Talk of social harmony may seem quaint these days, as the overwhelming message of academics, politicians, news media, entertainment, and culture is that there are virtuous progressives on one side, and right-wing bigots on the other. In actuality, studies show that both progressives and conservatives are motivated by compassion and fairness in their political judgments. The difference is that conservatives’ judgments tend to be more complex, factoring in also concerns of loyalty, respect for tradition and authority, and purity.<sup>33</sup> This may help explain why conservatives are stereotyped as callous; what to others boils down simply to an issue of compassion and fairness is to conservatives tempered by a range of other values. This also helps explain why the conservative tends to look more askance at popular trends and impatient calls for change in the name of “social justice”. He is the ancient talking tree in *The Lord of the Rings* who needs time to consider the complexities of the issue, repeating to the young zealous Hobbits, “don’t be hasty.” And like the growth of a tree, healthy social change takes a long time, as it sprouts from the ground up (one person at a time) after establishing proper roots.

This is why grassroots movements always have more purchase than the social engineering efforts of elites. They spring from practical necessity, not abstract theory. Those interested in real progress, therefore, would do well to patiently build upon the tried and true: the intrinsic value of human life, natural rights, limited government, principles of subsidiarity, the irreducibility of the nuclear family, free enterprise, and unity in diversity. It took centuries for political arrangements to be erected upon these, and such arrangements, albeit imperfect, have proven to be the most just and prosperous in human history, and so worth

conserving, not destroying. Thus a conservative, it has been said, is someone who cautions against tearing down a fence before knowing why it was built in the first place.<sup>34</sup> It may be there, he supposes, for all the right reasons.<sup>35</sup>

## Further Reading

### Classics

I highly recommend Benjamin Wiker's pair of books, the first of which critiques political classics from a conservative perspective, the other surveys classics dear to conservatives:

- Benjamin Wiker, *Ten Books that Screwed Up the World* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2008).  
Benjamin Wiker, *Ten Books Every Conservative Must Read* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2010).

### Contemporary

- Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).  
Arthur Brooks, *The Conservative Heart* (New York: Broadside Books, 2015).  
F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).  
John Kekes, *A Case for Conservatism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).  
Russell Kirk, *The American Cause* (Wilmington: ISI Books, ed. 2009).  
Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (San Francisco: ISC Press, 1990).  
Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).  
Jay W. Richards, *Money, Greed, and God* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).  
Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* (New York: Touchstone, 1999).  
Thomas Sowell, *Wealth, Poverty, and Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

## Endnotes

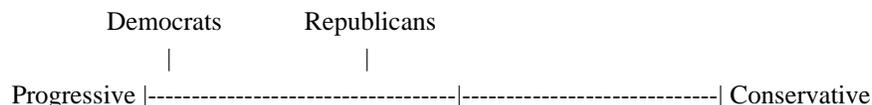
---

<sup>1</sup> In *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* Vol. I, ed. David Dooley (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 287.

<sup>2</sup> The traditional American conservatism to which I refer, as F. A. Hayek plausibly argues (“Why I am Not a Conservative”), was largely inspired by English Whiggism, the ideals of which trace back to Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Alexis de Tocqueville. Contemporary English conservatism, by contrast, is much too cozy with big government to be considered

---

“right” on my spectrum. The terminology is a mess because “right” and “left” can refer to either a political philosophy or location on some political spectrum. So it is important to distinguish between political philosophies and political parties. In America, for example, the Republican Party, or GOP, while certainly further right on the political philosophy spectrum than the Democratic Party, is not reliably conservative. Both parties have shifted philosophically leftward in recent decades. If we contrast “conservative” political philosophy with “progressive” political philosophy, we can illustrate the relationship between party and philosophy as follows:



As you can see, because where a party is located on the spectrum is relative, it is possible to have right-wing and left-wing parties that are both left of center on the political philosophy spectrum (the space between the leftmost and rightmost parties represents the Overton Window—the range of ideas currently accepted in public discourse). It is only by equivocating the relative left/right location of party with the absolute left/right metric of philosophy that people can get away with saying The National Socialist German Workers' Party, like the Republican party in the US, is “right-wing.”

<sup>3</sup> See also David Bentley Hart, “Human Dignity was a Rarity before Christianity,” *Church Life Journal*, October 26, 2017, <http://churchlife.nd.edu/2017/10/26/human-dignity-rarity-before-christianity/>.

<sup>4</sup> A standard history textbook is worth quoting at length: “It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought with it, for one thing, an altogether new sense of human life. Where the Greeks had demonstrated the powers of the mind, the Christians explored the soul, and they taught that in the sight of God all souls were equal, that every human life was sacrosanct and inviolate, and that all worldly distinctions of greatness, beauty, and brilliancy were in the last analysis superficial. Where the Greeks had identified the beautiful and the good, had thought ugliness to be bad, and had shrunk from disease as an imperfection and from everything misshapen as horrible and repulsive, the Christians resolutely saw a spiritual beauty even in the plainest or most unpleasant exterior and sought out the diseased, the crippled, and the mutilated to give them help. Love, for the ancients, was never quite distinguished from Venus; for the Christians, who held that God was love, it took on deep overtones of sacrifice and compassion. Suffering itself was proclaimed by Christians to be in a way divine, since God himself had suffered on the Cross in human form. A new dignity was thus found for suffering that the world could not cure. At the same time the Christians worked to relieve suffering as none had worked before. They protested against the massacre of prisoners of war, against the mistreatment and degradation of slaves, against the sending of gladiators to kill each other in the arena for another's pleasure. In place of the Greek and pagan self-satisfaction with human accomplishments they taught humility in the face of an almighty Providence, and in place of proud distinctions between high and low, slave and free, civilized and barbarian, they held that all men were brothers because all were children of the same God.” See R. R. Palmer, et al., *A History of Europe in the Modern World* Vol. I: To 1815 (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014), 17. Thanks to Elizabeth McIntosh for bringing this passage to my attention, which she recalled from her high school textbook! For more on Christianity’s influence on the West, see

---

Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2006) and Nick Spencer, *The Evolution of the West: How Christianity has Shaped our Values* (London: SPCK, 2016).

- <sup>5</sup> On all of these topics save terrorism, see David Oderberg, *Applied Ethics: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). On abortion, see Francis Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Robert George and Christopher Tollefsen, *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2nd ed. 2015). On euthanasia, see Arthur Dyck, *Life's Worth: The Case Against Assisted Suicide* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). On capital punishment, see Edward Feser and Joseph Bessette, *By Man Shall His Blood be Shed* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2017). On just warfare, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 2015).
- <sup>6</sup> I am persuaded that only theism has the metaphysical resources to account for the intrinsic value of human persons, and hence only theism provides a sufficient ground for natural rights. For defense, see Stuart Hackett, "The Value Dimension of the Cosmos: A Moral Argument" in *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William Craig (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 149-154. J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei: Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 143-164. C. Stephen Evans, *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142-147. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "On Secular and Theistic Groundings of Human Rights," and "Grounding the Rights we Have as Human Persons" in *Understanding Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chs. 7 and 8, respectively. David Baggett and Jerry Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 4.
- <sup>7</sup> David Oderberg, "Natural Law and Rights Theory," in *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy*, eds. Gerald Gaus and Fred D'Agostino (New York: Routledge, 2013), 376. I should say that there are conservatives who don't think natural law theory is concomitant to conservatism. I can't prove this, but I'd be willing to bet my 23.5-acre farm that the vast majority of people, but especially conservatives, embrace some form of natural law theory. And there is some evidence for this. See, e.g., Deborah Kelemen and Evelyn Rosset, "The Human Function Compunction: Teleological Explanation in Adults," *Cognition* 111, no. 1 (2009), 138-143. But for a more general, philosophical defense of natural law theory, see Robert George, *In Defense of Natural Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and John Finnis *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2011).
- <sup>8</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 168. See also Stephane Courtois, et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), which puts communism's death toll between 85-100 million. To get a more personal sense of how communism wrecked the lives of so many in China, see Jung Chang, *Wild Swans: Three Daughter's of China* (New York: Touchstone, 2003).
- <sup>9</sup> The saying "the revolution devours its own children" became popular during the French Revolution, as many who helped initiate it were in turn destroyed by it.

- 
- <sup>10</sup> Gun ownership also has the effect of lowering crime rates. See John Lott, *More Guns, Less Crime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2010) and John Lott, *The War on Guns* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2016). That said, regardless of the empirical effects of gun ownership, we have a moral right to own guns. See Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Own a Gun?” *Social Theory and Practice* 29, no. 4 (2003): 297-324; Timothy Hsiao et al., “The Moral Right to Keep and Bear Arms,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2015): 345-363.
- <sup>11</sup> On the importance of robust stratifications of civil society as a buffer between the individual and the state, see Alexis De Tocqueville’s classic, *Democracy in America* and Robert Nisbet’s modern classic *The Quest for Community*.
- <sup>12</sup> “Indeed, as Milton Friedman has pointed out, the period of greatest opposition to the role of government in the economy in the nineteenth century was also a period of unprecedented growth of private philanthropy. It was also a period of private social uplift efforts by volunteers all across America. Such efforts, incidentally, had dramatic effect in reducing crime and other social ills such as alcoholism, so these were hardly ineffectual gestures. Indeed, they were more effective than the more massive government-run programs that began in the 1960s.” See Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, 44. Sowell doesn’t provide a reference, but I believe he is referring to Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. ed., 2002 ), 190ff. One study on the efficacy of government versus private charity found that government absorbs more than 2/3rds of every dollar intended for public assistance programs, whereas private charities absorb 1/3rd or less. See James Edwards, “The Costs of Public Income Redistribution and Private Charity,” *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 3–20.
- <sup>13</sup> The point applies to foreign aid as well. See Hristos Doucouliagos and Martin Paldam, “The Aid Effectiveness Literature: The Sad Results of 40 Years of Research,” *Journal of Economic Surveys* 23, no. 3 (2009): 433-461. Thanks to Jason Brennan for this reference.
- <sup>14</sup> In general, see Christopher Coyne, *Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). On minimum wage laws in particular, see David Neumark and William Wascher, *Minimum Wages* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008) and John Gaski, “Raising the Minimum Wage Is Unethical and Immoral,” *Business and Society Review* 109, no. 2 (2004): 209-224. On affirmative action policies in particular, see Thomas Sowell, *Affirmative Action Around the World: An Empirical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and Richard Sander and Stewart Taylor, *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It’s Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won’t Admit It* (New York: Basic Books, 2012). On welfare programs in particular, see Michael Tanner, *The Poverty of Welfare: Helping Others in Civil Society* (Washington, DC: The Cato Institute, 2003) and Phil Harvey and Lisa Conyers, *The Human Cost of Welfare: How the System Hurts the People It’s Supposed to Help* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2016). For a more historical look at the disastrous consequences of well-intended government assistance programs in the context of America, see Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).
- <sup>15</sup> See Oderberg, “Natural Law and Rights Theory,” 379.
- <sup>16</sup> And, of course, the two shouldn’t be closely related. A sustained defense of this conception of marriage is Sherif Girgis, et al., *What is Marriage: Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012). For more of a sociological than philosophical perspective justifying the traditional institution of marriage, see Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York:

---

Broadway Books, 2000). Notice I say those with “child-begetting potential.” This anticipates the common objection “What about infertile couples?” Technically, all heterosexual infertile couples still have the potential to beget children (which isn’t true of homosexual couples), even though that potential is prevented from being actualized. A testament to this is that medical procedures can often overcome these obstacles. Furthermore, laws are necessarily general and so are not made to cater to particular cases, such as those where a heterosexual couple is infertile. But most importantly, it would be a gross violation of privacy for the state to inquire into the fertility status of its citizens. For a more detailed response to this objection, see Neven Sesardic, “Gay Marriage: The Victory of Bad Arguments and Political Correctness,” *Prolegomena* 6, no. 1 (2007): 5-28.

<sup>17</sup> See the empirical literature discussed in Girgis, et al., *What is Marriage*, ch. 4 and Ryan Anderson, *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2015), ch. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Sadly, studies indicate that same sex households are also not generally equal in their capability of rearing healthy children. See Mark Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research* 41, no. 4 (2012): 752-770. Mark Regnerus, “Parental Same-Sex Relationships, Family Instability, and Subsequent Life Outcomes for Adult Children: Answering Critics of the New Family Structures Study with Additional Analyses,” *Social Science Research* 41, no. 6 (2012): 1367–1377. D. Sullins, “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition,” *British Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science* 7, no. 2 (2015): 99-120. A good synopsis and commentary on Sillins is Regnerus, “New Research on Same-Sex Households Reveals Kids Do Best With Mom and Dad,” *Public Discourse*, Feb 10, 2015, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/02/14417/>.

<sup>19</sup> Well, almost. Abortion rights are a glaring exception, being an example of a legal right women have that men don’t as well as an example of a right (the right to life) unjustly denied of a group of people (the unborn).

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, ed. 2009), 37.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Sowell, *The Thomas Sowell Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 51. A nice synopsis of Sowell’s work in this area, to which I am indebted, is his *Discrimination and Disparities* (New York: Basic Books, 2018). A powerful satire of the ideal of unbridled “equality” is Kurt Vonnegut’s short story “Harrison Bergeron.”

<sup>22</sup> See Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*. On the devastating effects of Marxist ideology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see references in endnote 8. The lesson should have been learned much sooner. An estimated 40,000 people were killed during the French Revolution waged in the name of “equality,” which, of course, eventually led to the rise of an imperial dictator in Napoléon Bonaparte.

<sup>23</sup> See Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. ed. 2002); Robert Sirico, *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2012); Jason Brennan, *Why Not Capitalism?* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Jason Brennan and Peter Jaworski, *Markets Without Limits: Moral Virtues and Commercial Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> True though this statement is, it needs the proviso, mentioned above, that economic freedom reflects the principles of individual freedom as a natural right, which clearly also greatly

---

contributed to the abolition of slavery. Here David Horowitz is worth quoting: “In its very beginnings, America dedicated itself to the proposition that all men are created equal and were endowed by their Creator with the right to be free. Over the next two generations, America made good on that proposition, though this achievement is regularly slighted by ‘progressives’ because it didn’t take place overnight. The historically accurate view of what happened is this: Black Africans were enslaved by other black Africans and sold at slave markets to Western slavers. America inherited this slave system from the British Empire, and once it was independent, ended the slave trade and almost all slavery in the Northern states within 20 years of its birth. America then risked its survival as a nation and sacrificed 350,000 mostly white Union lives, to end slavery in the South as well. In other words, as far as blacks are concerned, America’s true legacy is not slavery, but freedom.” See his “The Biggest Racial Lie” in *The Washington Times*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/may/25/david-horowitz-america-the-worlds-most-inclusive-n/>.

- <sup>25</sup> Russell Kirk, *The American Cause*, 113. This is a massively condensed and simplified version of themes in his classic *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953).
- <sup>26</sup> Measured using the \$1/day living standard. See Pinkovsky and Sala-i-Martin, “Parametric Estimations of the World Distribution of Income,” *The National Bureau of Economic Research* no. 15433 (2009). See also Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, “Global Extreme Poverty,” *Our World in Data*, March 27, 2017, <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty/>. Further, individuals in freer economies with fewer taxes give more to charity, as found by Charities Aid Foundation’s report “International Comparisons of Charitable Giving,” November, 2006. See discussion in Jay Richards, *Money, Greed, and God*, 123-124.
- <sup>27</sup> Kirk, *The American Cause*, 96.
- <sup>28</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library Ed., 1994), 485.
- <sup>29</sup> See the charming illustration of the “trading game” in Richards, *Money, Greed, and God*, 60ff.
- <sup>30</sup> To paraphrase the great British statesman Margaret Thatcher (second only to Winston Churchill), critics of free enterprise seem to prefer that everyone be poorer provided the rich be less rich.
- <sup>31</sup> Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Princeton: Harvard University Press, 1981), 418.
- <sup>32</sup> Take a look at Alan Elliot’s *A Daily Dose of the American Dream: Stories of Success, Triumph, and Inspiration* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), which has an entry for each day of the year. Beyond anecdotes, the statistics bear this out. As one ages, upward economic mobility is the norm in the U.S. According to one important study that tracked the income mobility of a group of Americans over a period of 16 years, only 5% who began at the bottom quintile of income earners remained there. If these conclusions generalize, this means that only 1% (i.e., 5% of 20%) of the U.S. population who are poor remain so. See discussion in Thomas Sowell, *Wealth, Poverty and Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 326ff.
- <sup>33</sup> See Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), especially chs. 6-8.
- <sup>34</sup> As I began with a Chesterton quote, so I’ll close: “In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; ... There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, ‘I don’t see the use of this;

---

let us clear it away.’ To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: ‘If you don’t see the use of it, I certainly won’t let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.’” From *Why I Am A Catholic* in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* Vol. III, ed. James Thompson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990), 157.

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to Elizabeth McIntosh, William Vallicella, Shawn Isaacs, Steve Norman, Dan Demetriou, Dan Bonevac, Spencer Case, Tully Borland, Ben Arbour, Jannai Shields, Josh and Emily Monroe, and Bob Fischer for their helpful discussion and comments.