CONSERVATISM

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CONSERVATISM'S FOURTH PHASE (1980–THE PRESENT): HYPER-LIBERALISM AND THE HARD RIGHT

PREFACE

To survive, let alone flourish, liberal democracy needs the right's support. It needs, that is, conservatives who accept liberal and democratic ground rules. Yet conservatism began life as an enemy of liberalism and never fully abandoned its reservations about democracy. Conservatism endured in modern politics by cooperating with liberalism and soon learned how to prevail in democracy. Liberal democracy of the kind that thrived in Western Europe and the United States after 1945 grew from that historic compromise by the right. When, as now, the right hesitates or denies its support, liberal democracy's health is at risk.

With the left in retreat, both intellectually and in party terms, the right commands politics at present. But which right is that? Is it the broadly liberal conservatism that underpinned liberal democracy's post-1945 successes or an illiberal hard right claiming to speak for "the people"?

By saying what liberal democracy is and why for all its flaws and vulnerabilities it matters, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (2nd ed., 2018) aimed to show what we risk losing. *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition* is the other half of the story. It describes the right's present contest with itself in the light of the past.

Conservatives from the start have quarreled with each other as well as with liberalism and democracy. Should they compromise with their historical opponents, or resist? Should the fight be primarily in party politics over power and government, or in intellectual and cultural life? Those questions for conservatives have never gone away. A chaos of voices has often made it hard to say what, if anything, conservatives stand for. At the same time, the very fierceness and endurance of the contest suggests that all sides have believed that there existed something tangible worth fighting for.

Conservatism's history is told here in four periods, given artificially sharp dates for clarity: frontal resistance to liberal modernity (1830–1880); adaptation, compromise, and catastrophe (1880–1945); political

command and intellectual recovery (1945–1980); and the contest for supremacy between liberal conservatism and the hard right (1980 to the present).

In each of the four periods, a party-political narrative ("Parties and Politicians") is followed by a characterization of conservative thought at the time ("Ideas and Thinkers"). The first recounts the "endless adventure of governing men"—more lately, governing women—as parties of the right form, split, and re-form in a running conservative renegotiation with liberalism and democracy. The second describes the public appeals, defenses, and philosophical vindications by writers, journalists, speechwriters, and thinkers working in the conservative tradition. As their words multiplied, a conservative outlook emerged, loose and tangled to be sure, but recognizable and, roughly speaking, continuous. Its particular content changed over time, but its broad character stayed the same.

Conservatives throughout were guided by a wise angel and by a worldly angel. In the perplexing rush of modern change, they have spoken to a universal human desire for familiarity and stability—for tomorrow to be like today. As defenders of order and property, however, conservatives overcame their hesitations and soon spoke up for capitalism and its demands—the great servant of material progress that restlessly turns society, lives, and outlooks upside down.

Conservatives, that is, have forever faced two ways. They promise stability and upheaval, continuity and disruption. By temperament, they swing from confidence in their record and pride in their creed to fear that success will be snatched away and that their beliefs are widely ignored. Puzzling as it sounds, conservatives have largely created and learned to dominate a liberal modern world in which they cannot feel at home.

The focus is on four countries: France, Britain, Germany, and the United States. That choice may look like chauvinism. The excuse is that liberal democracy is a framework of politics with distinctive values on which those four countries, despite obvious differences or provincialism, all converged in the twentieth century, especially after 1945. There is nothing eternal about liberal democracy. Many shrewd and

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PART I

Conservatism's Forerunners

1

Critics of Revolution

i. The Hard Authority of Punishment and the Soft Authority of Custom: Maistre and Burke

Conservatism, like liberalism, has no Decalogue, no College for the Propagation of the Faith, no founding Declaration of Independence, and no doctrinal compendium to match the Marx-Engels Standard Edition. Into that gap, at the end of the nineteenth century, when conservatives were hunting for an intellectual tradition, the writings of Edmund Burke (1729–97) on the French Revolution were rediscovered as a rich and ever-giving second best. Burke's themes—the authority of tradition, the folly of political intellectuals who ignored tradition, and the organic but vulnerable character of society—were singled out as dialectical weaponry.

Burke's writings gave conservatism in retrospect, particularly conservatism in Britain and the United States, a tone of balance, openness to facts, and all-round moderation that stood out in contrast to the blind zeal of conservatism in France and Germany. The works of Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), a Savoyard lawyer and exile from the French Revolution, were commonly cited to illustrate the extreme, unbridled character of the continental right. Burke bequeathed to Anglo-American conservatism a tone of enlightened good sense and worldly-wise competence. Maistre became the Counter-Enlightenment forerunner of right-wing authoritarians and fascists. This contrast sees too much of the early twentieth century in the late eighteenth. It relies on selective editing and neglects telling elements that the thinkers shared. Maistre was never going to sit well in conservatism's front parlor but belongs in the household as much as Burke.

roots of custom were for Burke obscure. Neither could be argued with and made to yield up a standpoint of criticism for the rules they had generated. Without "ancient opinions and rules of life," Burke wrote, "we have no compass to govern us" and no longer know "to what port to steer." Try as they might, intellectualists in politics could not escape that difficulty. So each claimed.

Neither God's providence nor custom, however, could be relied on alone for social order. Both Maistre and Burke thought a common faith guided and sustained by an established church was also needed. Each recognized the usefulness of religion as a social expedient. Burke made the point soothingly: "The consecration of the state by a state religious establishment is necessary also to operate with a wholesome awe upon free citizens." In a letter in 1815, Maistre declared much the same about faith's utility in terms cynical enough to shock a secularist: "If I were an atheist and a sovereign, . . . I would declare the Pope infallible . . . for the establishment and the safety in my states."

After the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the first conservatives asked themselves whether the turmoil, suffering, and criminal excess had been due to liberty or to its perversion. Burke mildly and Maistre savagely had blamed modern liberty, that is, liberty understood in the wrong way. It was plain to Burke that, once freed from custom and good sense, people were capable of the worst follies and crimes. Maistre thought the same once people were freed from God and his earthly ministers. The foe for Burke was unrestricted, goalless dissent; for Maistre, satanically proud disobedience. For both, mistaken liberty led morally to bewilderment, politically to revolution, breakdown, and counterrevolution. Whether for Burke in this world or for Maistre in a next world, disruptive modern liberty made human life not better, but worse.

Maistre's and Burke's ideas ran side by side into the tradition of conservative thought that was later labelled anti-rationalist. They did not merge. Burke proscribed political reasoning that judged customary arrangements by insecure external standards. He trusted to common morality and social habit that doing without critical reason of the unwanted kind could yet be reasonable. Maistre proscribed reasoning in politics

as such, celebrating instead faith and obedience. The less reasonable anti-reason could be, particularly the more offensive to Enlightened opinion, the more Maistre relished the shock.

In this regard, Burke was more open. In politics, he allowed for faction, argument, and disagreement. He spoke loudly against disrupters who sought to leap out of the frame of common assumptions that made argument possible. That aspect in Burke pointed to eventual accommodation slso with liberal diversity. Burke insisted on the need for shared customs and a common faith within a unified society, without which, argument risked slipping into intellectual warfare.

Maistre, by contrast, wanted from politics authority and obedience. His anti-rationalist legacy passed to authoritarian, illiberal conservatism. The legacy runs to Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel, Carl Schmitt, and latter-day right-wing populists. The authority each appealed to varied: for Maistre, the Pope; for Maurras, a French monarch; for Sorel, the disaffected working class; for Schmitt, a temporary dictator; for present-day right-wing populists, "the people," understood as excluding those with views populists dislike as well as elites whom populists of like background seek to replace.

What each of these thinkers wanted from authority was an argument-ender that would cut off debate and silence disagreement. They wanted something that, in the liberal view, would shut down politics itself, because politics to liberals meant unending dispute in a diverse society. The liberal side of Burkeanism could eventually come to terms with that picture of politics as argument. To the Maistrian side, the liberal picture was wrong in whole and part. No reconciliation was possible. Maistre has appealed to the rejectionist element in conservatism and to its authoritarian fringe, as well as to cultural anti-moderns like Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, and their descendants, who relished his mocking disdain.

Unlike Burke, who saw them from the safety of Westminster, revolution and war made Maistre an exile. In 1792, French troops occupied Savoy, part of a dynastic kingdom that included Piedmont and Sardinia. As judge and senator, Maistre feared himself a marked man and fled. Years of wandering began in Switzerland and Italy. After Napoleon

Bonaparte's victories, when Austria ceded its Italian territories to France, the Savoy court decamped to Sardinia. Maistre followed, picturing the rest of his life as that of "an oyster stuck to a rock." In 1802, he was sent to Russia as an envoy. His job was to plead for money and status on behalf of a crown without a kingdom. The Russians had more pressing worries but approved a small subsidy. Many small countries or minor powers were tinder that reignited war after moments of exhaustion in the long European conflict (1792–1815)—Sweden, Canada, Portugal, and the Romanian lands. Sardinia was too small to bother with. Once they grasped how little their island kingdom counted, Maistre's employers in Cagliari cut his pay and told him to shorten his dispatches. Often Maistre ate his servant's soup. In such conditions, Maistre wrote his best-remembered works.

At evening by the Neva River, in the *Petersburg Dialogues* (published posthumously in 1821), a worldly senator, a Catholic nobleman, and a count argue out the problem of evil: how to reconcile belief in an omnicompetent, well-meaning God with the fact of human suffering. Maistre's younger brother, Xavier, an army officer and author of a satire on the Grand Tour, *Journey around My Room* (1794), may have written the descriptive prelude, on the charm of Russian summer nights, which lulls readers for the sustained dialectical skirmish to follow. With more wit and oratory than close argument, the count, speaking for Maistre, puts forth the old Christian answer that human suffering, even undeserved suffering, had its place in an inscrutable divine plan. For God's justice, though perfect, was slow. In human eyes, the innocent suffer and malefactors go free. It may not look it, but on God's plan every ill was compensated for and every crime punished, so long as time was allowed. As a rationale for a moral economics of retributive and compensatory justice, such argument was never going to win adepts in the early nineteenth century, when philosophers were commonly looking for a naturalistic, post-theological grounding to morality. The *Dialogues* contain also Maistre's sallies against Francis Bacon's mechanistic world picture and John Locke's empiricist account of the mind, English thinkers he wished had thought more like Burke.

Of more political moment were Maistre's critique of the Revolution and his constitutional thinking found in the earlier works, *Considerations on France* (1796–97) and *The Generative Principle of Constitutions and Other Human Institutions* (1814). The Revolutionary Terror was God's punishment for Enlightenment denial of faith. Once purged in blood, France merited salvation and was duly rescued by the European allies from Napoleonic captivity. The Enlightenment took a callow view of humanity's preoccupations and capacities that ignored its irrationality and violence, as well as its need for sacrifice, obedience, and submission. There were no presocial humans, but neither was humankind one society. There was no "man in general," only particular men belonging to one of many national types.

Maistre took his predecessors' lessons and drove them to the limit. With David Hume he agreed that feeling, not reason, underlay political obligation, yet what Maistre meant was not worldly prudence and sensible habit, as with Hume, but human self-abnegation and the solidarity of collective guilt. Burke noted that some obligations were not chosen. Maistre insisted that none of our deeper obligations were chosen. Endurance in a human institution was evidence of divine—that is, ungraspable—origin and whatever the human mind could not grasp should not be touched. A state did not win credit by support from an established church; rather, the state itself should make itself sacrosanct. Nations did not have constitutions, let alone write them. Habits, manners, and norms constituted a nation. The most authoritative law was unwritten law. There was no humankind, only the French, Spanish, English, and Russians. Politically, Maistre, following Burke, claimed to reject ideal constructions but insisted that theocracy was the best form of government. Social order was unachievable without an undivided, sovereign power submitted to unquestionably in a latter-day equivalent of religious awe. Institutions could not survive if they were subject to impious doubt: "If you wish to conserve all, consecrate all." Obedience to authority, whether from faith or fear, must be blind and unquestioning, at the risk, otherwise, of anarchy. Maistre's shadeless picture of politics and society was too stark ever to serve as conservatism's official portrait. His overblackened picture of unregenerate, undependable

humankind was still a conservative one. It stood out against the liberal picture, which allowed for human improvability and progress. That liberals could and often did oversweeten their picture in no way erased the contrast.

Readers who come to Burke's works for the first time are struck by their rhetorical power, fertility of metaphor, and subtlety of argumentative suggestion. They are also struck that many or most of the contemporary traditions that Burke was defending as essential to the well-being of society—a dominant landed interest, limited suffrage, an authoritative national church—are long gone. Indeed, they were going or had gone by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by which time conservatives, particularly those in Britain, began to rediscover a forgotten Burke and adopt him as their intellectual godfather. Scared by the Paris Commune (1871) and prodded by Taine's counter-revolutionary history of modern France, conservatives revived Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) as the nearest thing to a founding text. Grand as it is, the work raises a second puzzle, which is, how, for all its literary brilliance, an occasional and in ways polemical work should have earned its high place in conservative thought.

Burke's topical attack on the French Revolution took aim at intellectuals in politics and at the holders of public debt. Burke's "political men of letters" had come to the fore as shapers of public opinion for a growing and demanding readership. The state's creditors had sought profits in lending against the security of nationalized church lands. Intellectuals, tied to no particular class or interest, were prone to indeterminate ideals and callow impracticality. Self-seeking creditors, often foreigners, were anonymous and without stake in France's institutions. Both intellectuals and financiers were given to experiment and innovation, with unpredictable but, as Burke also insisted, reliably grim results. The intellectuals were unflightworthy "aeronauts," both foolhardy and out of touch. Their carping undermined the twin guardians of social "manners" and public faith on which a decent commercial society depended: an open, economically productive aristocracy and a tutelary church. Right or not on those requirements for a decent commercial society, Burke recognized the indecent kind, well aware of what the

them on slave ships, schooling for slave children, Sundays off, and lashes limited to thirteen at a time. Burke was for religious liberty but spoke against extending it to Unitarian dissenters, who denied the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

The scholar's Burke has been freed in recent decades from his reputational jail as the French Revolution's scold. For most conservatives, he remains the author of the *Reflections*. Without them, people would say what Burke said of Bolingbroke, the Tory butt of his *Vindication*, "Who reads *him* today?" France made and shaped the conservative Burke in reverse**.** On a visit to Paris in 1773, he marveled at the eighteen-year-old dauphiness but found the godless levity of his intellectual hosts offensive. In May and June 1789, Burke greeted the French upheavals as a "wonderful spectacle." By late summer, when the king's party was in retreat, he turned hostile, provoked partly by the enthusiasm of British radicals. It took his rhetorical skill to balance the jarring claims that Britain should mortally fear a revolution to which, in its stolidity, it was immune.

The authentic, scholar's Burke says too much to be politically useful. "The only specimen of Burke is all that he wrote," Hazlitt quipped in 1807. The first task in creating a useable Burke was accordingly to cherry pick. Burke's copiousness was here an asset, and noticed early. No politician of whatever party, Thomas Moore wrote in 1825, finds himself in "any situation for which he could not select some golden sentence from Burke" to strengthen his argument or "adorn it by fancy."

A second task was to purge the Burkean critique of exaggeration. Maistre's exaggerations were naked and cried out to be scoffed at. Burke's were more suggestive and insinuating: the Terror was as good as fated in 1789, radicals are all revolutionaries, social criticism of any kind is either folly or betrayal, and reform reliably overruns and defeats itself. Although Burke hinted more than stated, exaggeration of that kind became a heady part of what the American political scholar Albert O. Hirschman aptly called "the rhetoric of reaction."

A third task was to rescue Burkeanism from the defense of the undefendable: not simply from the vain defense of what Britain's right-wing Whigs were seeking to preserve from the 1770s through the 1790s, but

from the vain defense of any passing and unstable status quo. The task was to find in Burke's writing answers to the question that recurs for conservatives in capitalist modernity: in an ever-shifting society, where there is never dependable ground underfoot, what can and must be rescued?

Rather than as a guide to the kinds of policy to follow or the types of institution to protect, Burkeanism was accordingly recast so as to offer higher-order, reusable advice in changing circumstances. The advice focused on the prudent management of unavoidable change in order to limit its social disruptiveness. Less was said about the hard part of identifying which values had to be defended. Burkeanism of this second-order kind is rightly thought of as a historically relative Utilitarianism, cast in negative terms: minimize disruption according to what the standards of the day find disruptive.

The distinctive maxims of that higher-order Burkeanism turned on tradition, ignorance, and the vital but vulnerable character of human sociability. By "tradition" was meant norms or institutions handed down from past generations that people at present had a duty to uphold and pass on in good shape. However opaque their origin, the endurance of traditions was first-pass evidence of their legitimacy: "That which might be wrong in the beginning is consecrated by time and becomes lawful." If a tradition was in question, the burden of proof was on its questioner, not the other way around.

Humans' knowledge of themselves and, second, their society was imperfect. Not only were they complex by nature, society itself was growing complex. Prudence called on them not to pretend to know more about either than they did know. It enjoined against making a habit of faultfinding in society and then hunting for cures to overdrawn ills that sped change and often made things worse. Faultfinding suffered typical flaws: it relied on "abstract" claims and it invoked maxims that worked in some places but not in others.

The word "abstract" is both a multipurpose philosophical term of art and a rhetorical term of abuse. Borrowing in his early philosophical writing from Locke, Burke had distinguished three sorts of abstract idea: natural kinds (*trees*, *sheep*, *humans*), properties (*colors*, *shapes*), and

"mixed" ideas such as *virtue, vice, honor, law*, which matched nothing in the natural world but which brought to mind past experiences of virtuous or vicious actions, or previous encounters with, say, soldiers and magistrates. The circularity of reasoning—how might the past action be recognized as, for example, an instance of virtue?—was not convincingly answered by Burke.

In his political writing, "abstraction" became more loosely a term of criticism for the kinds of reasoning that Burke objected to in politics. One was to propose innovative arrangements that had to be talked of in "abstract" terms. Like "virtue," for example, terms for innovative arrangements were innocently abstract in corresponding to nothing in nature. Unlike "virtue," such terms were also culpably abstract. Because they were new, they evoked no past experiences. When an innovation of the suspect kind was spoken of, nothing graspable came to mind. Innovative talk was for Burke a kind of nonsense.

Exporting maxims from where they worked to where they did not work was the second kind of reasoning Burke proscribed. Morals and norms that served all humanity were at their most general, but their specific forms varied locally. They had all grown over time, surviving only because they suited where they grew. Uprooting them in hope they would flourish elsewhere was folly; institutions fitted their nations and were not readily copied. Efforts to speed or reverse social change were equally futile. Revolution and reaction were mirror faults.

Burke's prime exhibit of abstraction was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). In the declaration, the mistake of France's intellectual men of letters was not that there were no rights—there were rights wherever there was law, and there was law wherever there was society. Those particular rights; however, had all grown up locally in civil society, as tended by an emergent law of the land. There were no uprootable, transportable rights; that is, there were no universal rights. Rights were common to a society, not to humankind.

Reform, in sum, must step away from past practice. Innovation ignored that precept and hence was bound to fail. To the fictive young French correspondent to whom Burke imagined himself writing in *Reflections* he said that France's unwritten constitution had indeed fallen

into disrepair but that it had not been necessary to tear down the building and find a new site. Instead, "you might have repaired those walls, you might have built on those old foundations."

The melancholy modern record of obstinate resistance to wholesale, imposed reform followed by brutal counterresistance might seem to speak in Burke's favor, yet his case against innovative reform relies on an unsupported, backward-looking assumption. A modern society's judgment of whether reform is with or against the grain is seldom clear or conclusive. It is not that modern society, morally speaking, is cross-grained. Even in modernity, there can be a shared core of political morality. The trouble is that in liberal modernity how shared morality is to be applied and adjudged in given cases will always be open to argument. One group's perilous innovation will be another's prudent repair. Simply declaring a harmony of proper morality and custom's lessons does not make that argument go away.

Together the bad habit of abstraction and foolish trust in innovation amounted for Burke to what has here been called intellectualism in politics. It was a fair and useful target for conservatives, who nevertheless soon had to explain how a liberal weakness for intellectualism differed from their own growing reliance on intellectuals, beginning with men like Burke. Despite a professed indifference to ideas, conservatives in time found their own political men of letters. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as will soon be seen, was an early conservative who called for a "clerisy" of brains that, instead of dreaming up possible futures, would identify and promote the upkeep of national traditions.

Burkeanism's third leading theme was that human sociability was universal and everywhere fragile. In whatever society people found themselves, they grew by nurture and education into a "second nature." Burke wrote of that acquired nature as a "cloak" or "veil" of habits, attitudes, and norms. Superficial but vital, they varied from place to place. Whatever local form they took, they were needed for sociability. They might seem old and worn. They might not meet the taste of social critics. But trying to see through them or tear them away was still dangerous. Changing the material of his metaphor, Burke preferred "the rust of superstition" to bumptious critical "impiety."

Once he was canonized for conservatism, the urge to box and re-box Burke never died. Philosophically, he was packaged as a Lockean contractualist, a Humean moral skeptic, a historically minded relativist, a natural-law theorist, or a rule Utilitarian ("In all moral machinery," Burke wrote, "the results are the best"), perhaps both those last two together, the first in morality, the second in politics. Burke himself advanced no philosophical defense in depth of what he was about politically.

Was Burke conservative or a liberal? Of the historical Burke, the question is anachronistic. There were none of either in Burke's day. Still, the question is not pointless, and for Burkeanism the answer is "both," for the Burke distilled into Burkeanism attracted liberals as well as conservatives. Burke said much that right-wing liberals could agree with. Liberty required order, which required property. Tampering with trade was generally a mistake. Many of our duties were unchosen duties, and people had not only rights to liberty but also due expectations for social order.

Burke, more generally, thought healthy politics should reflect society. Society was diverse and in conflict. Politics, accordingly, required faction and argument, as liberals also believed. Sovereign power, further, was necessary but capturable. Institutions for its exercise had to be arranged so that, in Burke's words, no group or interest should "act as if it were the entire master." Avoiding an "entire master" animated the preconservative James Madison in his thoughts on the United States Constitution. It underlay how the liberal François Guizot thought of sovereignty's exercise as lying beyond the reach of any one interest or faction and as controllable in the end only by morality and law. *That* Burke opened paths of liberal-conservative compromise.

Conservatives, however, had fellow feeling for the less liberal, anticosmopolitan Burke. In international terms, he was a conservative nationalist, an early exponent of geopolitics treated as a conflict of ideologies (England, Burke wrote in 1796, "is in war against a principle") or as a down-to-earth defender of British power concerned with efficient taxes, lively commerce, and a stable empire. The national conservative Burke stressed a common faith and shared allegiances as a framework

Lingering aside in distaste, he described the Restoration *sacre* of the last Bourbon, Charles X, by the archbishop of Reims (1825) at the cathedral where French kings had been crowned since the Middle Ages. The jostling attendance included royalist emigrés as well as veterans of the Revolution and Napoleon who had switched coats in time. Who, Chateaubriand asked, could be taken in by such a spectacle? It was "not a *sacre*," he wrote, "but the representation of one."

A younger son from an old Breton noble family, Chateaubriand was by turns naval cadet, apprentice courtier, American voyager, wounded volunteer in the army of the anti-Jacobin emigrés, London exile, best-selling novelist, Catholic revivalist, Napoleonic envoy turned critic of the emperor, constitutional pamphleteer, founder-editor of *Le Conservateur,* Restoration foreign minister, knight errant for the Bourbon Ultras, liberal critic of those same Ultras, defender of the press, and internal exile from the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe. From that wholly modern muddle of adventure, dissidence, and incompletion, Chateaubriand fashioned an eighteen-hundred-page autobiography that gave shape to the tributaries, diversions, and repetitions that made up his life, the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (1849–50), which ranks with Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* among masterpieces in the unconservative genre of self-invention.

Little of that, though fascinating, would have won Chateaubriand a place in the story of conservatism had he not he passed down to it a repertoire of disavowal for the "empty world" of liberal modernity and a counterpart trust in the "full heart" of faith and loyalty. Chateaubriand was a Romantic among conservatism's anti-rationalist forerunners. He was less philosophical than Burke and, though cross about many things, not as angry as Maistre. As a child of the eighteenth century, he sought to answer disenchantment with reenchantment. Passionate attachments, he urged, counted more in life and politics than prudential reasoning or partisan obedience, a claim he pressed in *Le Génie du Christianisme* (1802), the book that first made his name. Friends saw in him personally a sturdy egotism. Unflatteringly for them, he himself wrote that his strongest emotion was boredom. Many questioned his sincerity,

yet Chateaubriand preached his Romantic gospel of resistance to the emerging world of liberal modernity with a sense of conviction that won converts and imitators.

Politically, he called himself "Republican by nature, monarchist by reason, Bourbonist from honor." Though too skeptical for legitimism, he shared with the Ultras their disgust at watching regicides and Bonapartists land on their feet in the post-1815 Bourbon court. Waiting in an anteroom to see Louis XVIII, as Chateaubriand described the scene in his memoirs, he watched lame Talleyrand, Napoleon's diplomat, shuffle out of an audience with the king helped by Napoleon's police chief, Fouché, and murmured to himself, "Vice supported on the arm of crime." Arbitrary force repelled him, especially by power against defenseless victims. Among the strongest passages in the *Mémoires* is his dry but outraged account of the Duc d'Enghien's execution, with Napoleon's connivance, after a kangaroo trial (1804).

In Chateaubriand's capacity to question almost everything but his own judgment, an ungenerous later French conservative, Maurras, saw a pagan libertarian. Admirers have seen in Chateaubriand's suspicion of power a liberal streak found in the rebel Albert Camus or in the self-described Tory anarchist George Orwell.

Chateaubriand believed in a constitutional monarchy, in representative government constrained by fixed, nondemocratic institutions that were designed to ensure security of property and protect subjects from arbitrary power. He believed also in personal liberties and freedom of the press. He blamed the Revolution on royal dithering and interference, and he supported the Bourbons not from out-of-the-drawer legitimist theory but for the practical and somewhat cross-cutting reason that the dynasty had, broadly speaking, provided good rulers. After 1815 he believed in a "possible Restoration," not in the self-defeating reaction of the Ultras. It was folly, Chateaubriand thought, to bring back old congregations, compensate property losses, restore primogeniture, muzzle the press, and make sacrilege a capital offense. To Louis de Bonald, the author of that last bill (1825), he cried in the chamber, "You reject the norms of our day to return to times we cannot even recognize."

For all that, Chateaubriand could sound like a proto-liberal, which in a limited way he might have been, except for his distance from middle-class life and values.

Chateaubriand shared that suspicion of bourgeois society and what he took for its politics of mutual interest in an article in *Le Conservateur*. It contrasted a "morality of interest" with a "morality of duty." Society could not be governed by violence, only by *séduction*, that is, persuasion. The persuasive force of mutual interest, it might be said, could be stronger than that of duty; for duty rested on "fiction," whereas interest was actual. No, Chateaubriand answered. Interest was fickle and unstable, never by evening what it was in the morning, resting on no more than chance and ever fluid. There existed by contrast an unbreakable chain of duty running from families into society that tied fathers and children, kings and their subjects, into mutual obligations.

Like William Wordsworth in Britain and Adam Müller in Germany, Chateaubriand disliked the commercial society he saw eating away at an earlier, supposedly more natural way of life. The natural life was imagined socially in terms of older habits and institutions, and psychogeographically in terms of the countryside, especially wild countryside. Were that all, Chateaubriand's writing might have gone the way of Étienne Sénancour's *Obermann* and other writers of the day swept up in the Romantic idea of pure nature and tainted society. In addition, he had a hard, knowing eye for worldly affairs and an ambition, however misplaced, to fight at the top of the political game. Some saw in his obsession with Napoleon an unhinged wish to supplant Napoleon. Chateaubriand's Romantic side, which he poured into his novels, imagined America as a Rousseauesque open field, cherished and tended by wise original peoples. His worldly side reminded him how it was. On arrival in Delaware, he was helped on to the dock by a young black woman, to whom he gave a handkerchief, noting to himself how incongruous it was to be greeted in the land of liberty by a slave.

Le Génie du Christianisme caught a moment of religious conciliation. It was published soon after Napoleon's Concordat with the Vatican in 1801 reestablished Roman Catholicism as the primary religion of France and permitted the return of emigré priests. *Le Génie* aimed to reawaken

religious feeling by stressing the aesthetic aspects of Christianity and helped make it acceptable, even fashionable, in intellectual drawing rooms. It contributed to the Catholic revival after 1815, when peace returned, military careers closed, and a religious calling looked again to be a fair alternative among the upper classes.

As a Counter-Enlightenment manifesto for the beauties of the Christian faith, *Le Génie* tied together Romantic longing, contempt for bourgeois worldliness, and Catholic lessons in piety and humility. By rejecting false gods, Christianity had ended our intellectual infancy but compensated us for the loss of childish wonder. By chasing divinities from the woods and returning nature to its solitude, Christianity had given us an object of solace, contemplation, and religious awakening. Worldly busyness and its reductive understanding of life had limits. We needed ritual. Whether classical or Christian, ritual appealed to us in its poetry. Nothing was lovely, winning, or beautiful without an element of mystery. Religion deepened art by pointing us toward ideals that could be intuited, not justified. Last, self-assertive mockery was corrosive and deadening. Among the enemies of Christian piety from the start had been sectarians, sophists, and the frivolous who "destroy everything with laughter." Christianity, into the bargain, had served sound government and blessed the forgiveness of enemies in the cause of national reconciliation.

The topics that moved Chateaubriand and that were widely anthologized from the six-part *Génie* were ruins, oceans, feast days, church bells, and love of nation. That last element, which was foreign to Catholic universalism but not to Gallicanism, belonged indispensably to Chateaubriand's politics of feeling and allegiance. A common religion was one way in which a shared allegiance might heal a divided nation. The nation itself was another. Tapping patriotic feeling to unite a country against its internal foes became a theme for the nineteenth-century right, for use first against liberalism and later against international socialism. Nor for Chateaubriand was the pursuit of French pride mere literary exhortation. As foreign minister he promoted, against British reservations, an invasion of Spain to crush its liberals (1823) and pressed for an alliance with Russia to break up the Ottoman Empire, for a

French foothold in Latin America, and for a "just expansion" of France's frontier along the Rhine. Napoleon III eventually tried all of it, with disastrous results for France and Europe. Charles de Gaulle, an admirer of Chateaubriand's prose, also heard his cry: "I wanted the French to want glory." De Gaulle, however, understood France's limits. By his time, national glory was not on offer. The representation of glory had to serve in its place.

Appended to *Génie* were the wildly popular Romantic novellas, *René* and *Atala*, which were written or published earlier. Their antihero, René, is an unhappy young man without a home in society who, unlike Goethe's Werther, rather than kill himself seeks purpose from life in the American woods. These short works counted heavily toward the success of a long book that Chateaubriand made longer by adding doctrine and theology, as if to appease serious Christian thinkers who expected better defenses of faith's claims to truth than his "I wept, so I believed." Chateaubriand's religion of sentiment had limits, but it lit up a problem facing later conservatives looking to Christianity to provide a civic religion that liberal modernity, they believed, was too thin and too divisive on its own to allow for. Félicité de Lamennais, a cofounder of *Le Conservateur*, was one of several nineteenth-century conservative religious thinkers—Wilhelm von Ketteler, John Henry Newman, Charles Hodge, and Orestes Brownson—who, as will be seen, also hoped to reconcile faith and modernity.

Maistre, Burke, and Chateaubriand each handed down to conservatism an intellectual target for use by the right against the left. The target could be thought of as a triangle that might be hit on any one of its sides: an apostasy or denial; a wrong way of thinking; and a suspect kind of thinker. First, revolutionaries denied divine providence (Maistre), custom and tradition (Burke), or enchantment (Chateaubriand). Second, they thought about politics in the wrong way, whether by corrosive "raison individuelle" (Maistre), delusory "pure metaphysical abstraction" (Burke), or the deadening "l'esprit positif" (Chateaubriand). Just what those highly general charges were and whether they were one charge or many were left to conservatives to wrestle later in the twentieth century, when efforts were made to give the idea

daughter of Joseph Haydn's copyist, who without claiming to be faithful made him happy in old age. Romantic conservatives took Gentz for an eighteenth-century leftover, democrats and socialists for a reactionary, and Prussian nationalists for a faithless cosmopolitan. He was little read and soon forgotten. He reads today more like a familiar, realist conservative than his backward-looking contemporaries. As a political intellectual serving the chancelleries of Europe, Gentz's first concern was less with speculating about how power should be exercised than vindicating how it was exercised. He was an early model of a familiar present-day figure, the clever policy intellectual with top degrees circulating between right-wing think tanks, conservative magazines, and political leaders' private offices.

In thinking about revolution, Gentz was an enthusiast for 1789. He followed Kant in taking the National Assembly for legitimate and not, as Burke claimed, a usurpation of royal authority; however, Gentz soon turned against the Revolution. The revolutionaries' mistake was not in having universal, innovative ideals, it was in leaving them general, unanchored, and out of practical reach. Gentz did not mock the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the satirical manner of Justus Möser (1720–94), the north-Saxon critic of market society and Enlightenment princely reform. Nor did Gentz fault the declaration, as Burke had done, for misunderstanding the character of rights. Gentz instead subjected the declaration to an article-by-article critique (1793) for errors of drafting and logic in the manner of a philosophically attuned lawyer. The declaration to his mind was not so much misconceived as ill-done.

Gentz wrote not as a philosopher but as a publicist and political adviser. He understood the role of political intellectuals as laying out simple principles and defending the policies of their political masters in depth. Gentz's essay "On the Balance of Power" (1806) spelled out the guidelines for European peace that served the post-Napoleonic settlements. Within states, locally chosen arrangements, republican or monarchical, should prevail unless they upset continental order. In the German lands—Prussia, Austria, and the other territories of the defunct Holy Roman Empire—politics should promote faith (which fostered obedience) and hold democracy at bay.

A defender of free opinion as an editor in Berlin, Gentz supported its suppression in the press and universities in the climate of reaction after 1815. Public opinion, he wrote, should be formed, not followed. Afraid of Prussian domination, Gentz opposed confederal institutions that might serve to unite Germany as well as Friedrich List's common market. As for nascent socialism, it was to be stifled at birth. Over dinner at the Congress of Aix (1818), Gentz suavely told the cooperativist Robert Owen: "We do not want the mass to become wealthy and independent of us. How could we govern them if they were?"

Gentz's tone and style were at their clearest in *On the State of Europe before and after the French Revolution* (1801), his reply to the case against Britain by Alexandre d'Hauterive, Napoleon's diplomatic aide. Monarchy had not brought eighteenth-century Europe to darkness and poverty, Gentz argued; rather, reforming monarchs across the continent had raised standards of living. War had broken out in 1792 not because of British belligerence, but because the Westphalian system had broken down under the weight of Prussian growth, Russian pressure, and the general growth of trade. British commercial interests had not prejudiced France; the Navigation Acts hindered Britain more than they did its competitors. Britain had not exploited superior naval power; it had fought at sea through the eighteenth century on equal terms. France and Britain were both colonial powers, neither with a clear advantage. Nor did Britain monopolize industry; its products sold widely in Europe because they were better. They were better because Britain had freed itself from false economic doctrines. Gentz was on retainer from the British and writing what he judged served his masters' cause. What strikes the present-day reader is a tone familiar from "realist" conservatism: the coolly factual style; the confident dismissal of radical claims, especially claims about the dismal past; and a presumptive framework of competitive national goals.

Gentz had tried at first to engage in the dispute among German philosophers about the nature and desirability of the French Revolution but soon withdrew, aware that his talents lay elsewhere. The leading philosophers in Germany—Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, J. G. Fichte, and G.W.F. Hegel—were, to begin with, favorable on the whole

about the Revolution. They saw in it, each in their way, hope for social progress and a more reasonable politics. Kant thought that although there was no right to rebellion in general, the French Revolution might prove beneficial if people's enthusiasm turned to civic engagement and support for a constitution. As if to welcome to its cause the author of the anti-tyrannical play *The Robbers*, the French republic made Schiller an honorary citizen (1792). Schiller greeted 1789 as a step for freedom but wondered if people were ready for it, writing to a friend in 1793, "You have to constitute citizens before you can give them a constitution." The Terror shocked even progressive German opinion. The change was evident in Hegel's work, when he looked back in the 1800s. Fichte, who blamed the Terror on the belligerence of France's neighbors, had at first to fight off claims by German reactionaries that he was a Jacobin. But Fichte himself then turned against the Revolution when France (1806–7) turned against Prussia.

Less well-known thinkers who influenced later German conservatives were against revolution from the outset. August Rehberg (1757–1836) was a German Burkean and scholar from Hanover who took the Revolution to be antihistorical. He mistrusted broad, universal principles and faulted the French Revolution for flying against what was locally achievable at that moment in history. A defender of Germany's small states and an opponent of centralism, Rehberg was not against change or reform itself but only change in the wrong hands. With that in mind, he called on Germany's privileged classes to reform themselves. He disapproved of Kant's rationalistic enthusiasm, as he saw it, for 1789. Rehberg took Kant's support for the Revolution as a failure to gauge the gap between universal maxims and their practical achievability. For the political romanticism of his friend Adam Müller (1779–1829), Gentz had little patience. However sharp was Müller's critique of new ways to think of state and society, Gentz took his approach as backward looking. Müller's hopes for preserving Germany's legally privileged classes, its old "estates," and restoring an imagined premodern unity struck Gentz as out of touch. Revolution had to be fought, Gentz insisted, not with nostalgia but with modernity's own weapons.

Hegel is a telling bookend to German reactions to the French Revolution. Like Kant, the liberal Hegel believed that satisfactory arrangements in politics must be reasonable. They must, that is, be intelligible and acceptable to those who must live under them. Those conditions of acceptability and intelligibility need not, however, be the same for everyone at all times. Reason, on Hegel's view, ought not to try to apply itself in isolation from the society in which people found themselves. France's revolutionaries pressed too fast with principles that were too detached from actual circumstances. The Revolution took a wrong turn, left history's "rational" march for freedom, and slipped into violent unreason. The Terror, on that understanding, was a contingent horror, as little part of an intelligible human history, Hegel wrote, as "chopping the head off a cabbage." Instead, in Hegel's superhistory the motor force of history—humanity's urge for freedom—passed in Napoleon's hands from France to Germany, where the old, "irrational" patchwork of the German empire was discarded and political freedom found new expression in Prussian constitutionalism.

After his death, Hegel's heritage divided like the French assembly into right and left. Right Hegelians were on the whole religion-minded conservatives who found in his works a vindication of prevailing arrangements, understood as the achievement of world history's march toward freedom in Prussian constitutionalism. The left Hegelians took from Hegel a tool for the criticism of prevailing arrangements, understood as only the latest stage in an unfinished struggle for recognition by the weak against the strong. In its Marxist variant, left Hegelianism turned world history into a tradition of revolution.

Hegel himself paid little attention to the recent revolution in America. In the early 1820s, the oversight made sense. In his *Philosophy of History* (1822), Hegel took the new country as too fluid and open in its likely futures to say anything world-historical about it. Such philosophical caution had been no constraint on Gentz, the policy intellectual, when thinking of contemporary upheaval and war experienced by peoples across the Atlantic world. Two decades earlier, he had written a spirited essay contrasting the French and American Revolutions, which was published in his *Historical Journal*. Its characteristic brio

caught the eye of the American envoy in Berlin, the young John Quincy Adams, later president and a leading conservative Whig. Adams translated the essay and had it published soon after in the United States (1800). He was glad to welcome an article from "one of the most distinguished political writers in Germany." For Adams, it rescued the American Revolution "from the disgraceful imputation of having proceeded from the same principles as that of France."

iv. Revolution to Prevent Revolution: Madison and Other Americans

The left charged supporters of 1776 who opposed 1789 with inconsistency. The charge was commonplace across the Atlantic world and needed answering by the right. In Europe, it was heard against Burke. In the United States, it was popular among Jeffersonian anti-Federalists. Gentz's answer to the charge was scholastic and lawyerly. As he described them, the American Revolution was defensive; the French, offensive. The Americans were defending established rights that had been injured or abridged by the British. Their aims were fixed and limited. Revolution prompted little resistance from within the colonies; widespread support for independence created a nation. The French Revolution stood in contrast on each point. The revolutionaries usurped power and trampled on rights. They had no aim but set off "in a thousand various directions, continually crossing each other." Far from creating a unified nation, they provoked a mass of resistance and plunged the country into civil war. The good American and the bad French Revolutions became part of conservatism's intellectual armory.

In fact, there was not just one American response to the French Revolution but varied, shifting responses. The Americans in Paris—Thomas Jefferson and Gouverneur Morris—offer a telling contrast. Jefferson was the American envoy in Paris (1785–89), sent there the year before to join Benjamin Franklin and John Adams in negotiating commercial and diplomatic treaties with the major powers. When it came, France's revolution excited him. He believed in "the good sense of man" and his

in the need for popular control of government, but he thought peace and prosperity elusive without overall central power and uniform national laws.

"In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men," Madison wrote (*Federalist 51*), "the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions." Such for Madison were the building blocks of a sound constitution. In a letter to Jefferson (October 1787), who was not a delegate, Madison reported his understanding of those auxiliary precautions as they were put together at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. Madison's triple aim was to establish unique national authority, recognize popular sovereignty, and prevent majoritarian tyrannies.

As Madison reported, it was rapidly agreed in Philadelphia to preserve the union. The radical departure was a federal government that "instead of operating on the States should operate without their intervention on the individuals composing them." Sovereign power, that is, was to work directly on citizens, not through states or intermediaries. Federal law would oblige and protect people one by one. Bar that principle, there was no political nation. The federal government must be "energetic" and "stable" enough to do its work, but it must answerable to the people. Terms of office should be limited, and the exercise of power should be in many, not one or a few, hands.

Popular control could not be exercised directly. The judgment of the people had to be filtered and articulated. Madison accepted that in modern states of any size and complexity direct participation, which, in *Federalist 51*, he called "democracy," was neither practical nor desirable. Representation was one of the ways in which popular sovereignty could be contained. Given representation, people did not decide or make laws themselves. They sent delegates to do it for them. Pure, or direct, democracy was in that way avoided. A second way to contain popular sovereignty was articulation. Some kinds of representation did too little to filter or articulate the popular will. A single legislature that controlled

the executive and the judiciary, for example, would do too little. Such an arrangement, soon favored by Jacobinism and the democratic traditions of the socialist left, relied on a false equation of the popular will with the will of the majority. Representative institutions needed to be articulated and complexified to balance the authoritative force of popular will against its commonly inarticulate content.

The American Constitution, as Madison described it to Jefferson, brimmed with articulation. Its powers were divided—into executive, legislative, and judicial. Each had some control over the others, but none had final say in appointments to all. The legislature was divided into the Senate and House, a division that soothed the anxieties of small states that they would be overwhelmed by big ones and the concerns of the rich minority that they would be despoiled by the less rich majority.

The tyranny of majorities was Madison's anxiety. It was vital "to guard one part of society against the injustice of the other part" (*Federalist 51*). Popular government entailed majority decision. There had, all the same, to be ways to prevent majorities from oppressing minorities. A Bill of Rights, added afterward, was one way, but not soon enough for Madison's fellow Virginian, George Mason, to vote against the Constitution before storming home. Madison himself came around to accepting the Bill of Rights. His still stronger hope for containing majorities lay less in constitutional safeguards than in the fact of social diversity. Society was divided and would remain divided. Factions were inevitable and troublesome but equally a source of benefit. A tyrannous majority was indeed the worst despotism to fear, but in a large, diverse republic such tyranny was unlikely.

The new framework was criticized on all sides. French reformers such as Jacques Turgot and the Marquis de Condorcet were disappointed by the creation of a senate and strong president. They believed that representative government required a strong assembly. The Founders, they felt, had missed their chance by mimicking oligarchic British tradition and accepting "Gothic" muddle rather than an intelligible structure transparent in its aims and working.

The Constitution was born in compromise and survived a civil war when compromise broke down only by radically changing itself. It had

relied on the Great Compromise between the small and big states and on a second, "rotten" compromise between the free North and the slaveholding South. In return for empowering the federal government over trade and commerce, the future of slavery was left aside, although slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of apportioning representation.

Legally, the "rotten" compromise between North and South was abandoned with the abolition of slavery and the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, a constitutional passkey for establishing personal and corporate rights in federal and, increasingly, in state law. The passkey became a liberal tool, used first by right-wing liberals to enfranchise business from the claims of labor and later by left-wing liberals to free citizens from the moral interferences of law on their private conduct.

Madison's "harmonious system of mutual frustration," as the historian Richard Hofstadter called it, survived in continuity through many changes. The constitutional debates of 1787–88 fed into the contests of political modernity, giving it new terms and new metaphors. The Constitution itself became a stake in the American version of the contest between liberalism and conservatism. Appointments to its legal guardian, the Supreme Court, were fought over in partisan terms by the White House and Senate. The justices decried the labels, which they said caricatured their work. For the bulk of legal disputes that reached them, the point was fair, but for the rarer but headline cases of deep political division and high constitutional controversy—slavery, business and labor, personal morals, institutional powers—the complaint missed the mark, as a historic record of reliable partisanship along liberal-left and conservative-right lines suggested.

v. What the Critics Left to Conservatism

The critics of the French Revolution handed down to early conservatives a rich store of arguments, metaphors, and rhetorical appeals for use against their first opponents, the liberals of the mid-nineteenth century. Revolution had a wrong picture of society as conflicted and competitive, when society was in fact organic and harmonious.

Revolution had destroyed stability and order, misled by false ideas about the practicability or desirability of change. Society's members did not, in disruptive insolence, question and dictate to society. Rather, society guided and showed them their duties. People were not all "naturally"—that is, presocially—good until society, especially modern competitive society, made them bad, as Rousseau, the spirit of Revolution, had preached. They were not all reliably capable of wise choice and self-government, as the Revolution's book-read but foolish lawyers trusted. People in the main were weak, imperfect, and in need of firm guidance. They could not step away from society and judge it from the outside as philosophical critics of society pretended, for they themselves drew standards of judgment from their own place in society's framework of ranks and stations. Even were they so able, society was too subtle and complex to be assessed by overarching principles, which were inevitably loose and ill-fitting. Society properly understood was the embodiment of tradition, itself a store of knowledge and the foundation of self-understanding.

Such was the legacy of conservatism's forerunners. Denial of social harmony, limits of political reason, and human moral imperfection fostered a ruinous belief in progress: overconfidence in the steady betterment of society and either sentimental faith in people's intrinsic goodness or a naive trust in their improvability. History, like providence, was inscrutable. Society was opaque. People were imperfect and inept at self-direction. On that anti-revolutionary arsenal crafted in the 1790s—anti-individualist, anti-egalitarian, and politically skeptical—conservatism was to draw richly when in the mid-nineteenth century its arguments with liberalism were openly engaged.

2

Character, Outlook, and Labelling of Conservatism

i. Conservatism as a Political Practice

Before the story goes on, some ground needs to be cleared. What is conservatism? What is this a story of? There are no knockdown facts here. The questions find many answers as well as self-defeating claims that they are too difficult to have any answer. The terms in play are tricky, but "what is conservatism?" is not about labels or meanings. The question bears on conservatism's character and its kind, which have to be understood historically.

If you ask what kind of thing conservatism is, you will hear that it is a party-political family, counsel of government, philosophy of society, mouthpiece of the haves, voice of all classes, unexalted picture of humankind, or universal human preference for the steady and familiar against the changeable and strange. Each answer catches some aspect of conservatism. All are partial. Conservatism as understood here is a tradition or practice of politics. As with any practice, that involves three things. Conservatism has a history, it has participants in the practice—politicians, thinkers, backers, voters—and it has an outlook to guide them. Neither who conservatives are nor what they think can be put into a phrase or formula. Its practice is complex, but that is poor reason to stop before the story starts.

Conservatives were not were heard of before the early nineteenth century. Like liberals, their first opponents, conservatives faced new social conditions previously unimagined. Although their social and intellectual roots were old and deep, the scale and pace of change was disorienting. After creeping along for centuries, populations and economies had suddenly exploded in growth. Technical innovation was

altering settled forms of life. Movement from country to town freed people from old authorities and customary ties. People who read and argued about politics were no longer counted in the thousands but hundreds of thousands, soon millions. Money was spent to make things that created yet more money. Capitalist modernity, in short, was turning economic methods, social patterns, and people's outlooks upside down. It enriched and impoverished, empowered and disempowered, shuffled social ranks, created high expectations, and reframed ethical norms. In this exciting, destabilizing new condition of society, politics had to rethink itself. Liberalism and conservatism were born.

Liberals, to schematize, embraced capitalist modernity. Conservatives responded by opposing the liberal embrace. The first liberals welcomed capitalism and critical thought, the twin turbines of modern change. Liberals favored freer markets, moveable labor, and the self-generative force of money. They embraced religious indifference and social and cultural diversity, as well as the constructive power of disagreement. The first conservatives defended closed markets and stable patterns of life while fearing the solvent powers of finance. They stressed social unity, shared faith, and common loyalties. Liberals saw themselves as opening up society, releasing energies, and letting people go. Conservatives saw liberals as breaking up society, spreading disorder, and leaving people bewildered. Liberalism offered experiment and endeavor. Conservatism promised certainty and security. Without having to claim that liberals caused capitalist modernity, conservatives blamed liberals for embracing capitalist modernity. It quickly became for conservatives a liberal modernity.

Conservatives linked liberals with blind encouragement of change, just as liberals linked conservatives with blind resistance to change. By the 1830s, when two Baden liberals began publishing their massive study of contemporary politics, the *Staatslexikon*, liberals were described in it as the "party of movement," conservatives as the "party of resistance or standstill." Conservatives, by implication, were obstructionists. Conservatives turned the imputation around: liberals were destructionists; they stood for disorder and insecurity, whereas conservatives stood for

order and stability. Both in fact were looking for social order but did not think of it in the same way.

Were politics chess, liberals had white; they moved first. Conservatives had black; they countered liberalism's opening moves. In time, the initiative changed hands. Conservatives, who began as anti-moderns, came to master modernity, for the right was in telling ways the stronger contestant. It spoke for the powers of wealth and property—first, land against industry and finance, then for all three, and soon for small property as well as large. Conservatism, in addition, would rely well into the twentieth century on the organs of state and on society's many corps—law, religion, armed forces, universities—which tended to a stand-pat conservatism in the everyday, prepolitical sense of wanting tomorrow to be like today and not forever changing the furniture. Conservatives overcame fears of political democracy and by the early twentieth century were regrouping—in ascending order of coherence, in Germany, France, the United States, and Britain—as formidable electoral powers.

Those triple advantages—the backing of wealth, institutional support, and electoral reach—helped the right prevail at the liberal democratic game. Puzzling as it sounds, conservatism's ultimate reward for compromising with liberal democracy was domination of liberal democracy. Though cast by the left as politicians of the past, the right became the leading force of modern times, as its party-political record in office confirms. After 1914 in the France's Third Republic (1870–1940), Republicans (right-wing liberals) traded office (often in coalition) with Radicals (left-wing liberals), keeping socialists and communists at bay. A similar pattern followed in the Fourth Republic (1944–58). In over sixty years of the French Fifth Republic, the president was on the right in more than thirty-nine, on the left in twenty (and those presidents—François Mitterrand and François Hollande, were of the palest, most center-minded left), with a centrist, Emmanuel Macron, making up the remainder. In Britain, the twentieth century was a "Conservative century" in terms of office. From 1895 to 2020, the Tories governed alone or were the majority party in coalition governments for 81 of

126 years. The right's dominance in the United States was harder to spot. In thirty-one presidential elections (1896–2016), Republicans won seventeen, Democrats fourteen. Republicans controlled the Senate for only fifty-four years, against the Democrats' sixty-eight, and only fifty-two against seventy in the House. On another measure of dominance, Republicans held the White House and both houses of Congress for forty-four years, against forty for the Democrats. That seeming balance masked the fact that a solid white South returned conservative, segregationist Democrats until the 1970s. If control of the national agenda is the test, reform Democrats framed the political argument only for a time after 1913 and then again from the 1930s to the 1960s.

The German right in the twentieth century might seem with little question to fall outside that pattern. Until 1918, conservatives split over reforming or resisting reform to the Wilhelmine Reich. They split again from 1918 to 1933 over support or subversion of modern Germany's first attempt at liberal democracy, the Weimar Republic. Despite brave acts of resistance, the right collapsed and collaborated with Nazism, persuading itself that the bigger fight was against Bolshevism. After the calamity that Germany brought on itself and the world, a liberal-democratic German right was born in the wreckage, led by Christian Democrats. Since the founding of the Federal Republic (1949), the German chancellor was a Christian Democrat in fifty-one of seventy-two years. Was there a single German right? An unbroken, continuous right—no. Nevertheless, when a post-1945 German right re-formed itself, it had German, not imported or imposed, sources to draw on.

The more elections conservatives won and the more they governed, the larger their responsibilities grew. Having opened by opposing liberal modernity, mainstream conservatives came to own it. In representing more and more of modern society, they found themselves more and more on both sides of the conflicts that racked modern society—business's need for innovation against people's longing for stability; the demands of global competition against the nation's common good; the useful fragmentation of knowledge and multiplication of viewpoints against the need for the shared loyalties and common assumptions that make public argument possible. Taken together, those tensions could

be labelled "efficiency against community." In standing for both, the right was soon arguing as much with itself as with rivals to the left.

From the late nineteenth century on, party-political success combined with a high degree of inner-party disruption. A recalcitrant hard right, which refused compromise with liberals or with democracy, was louder at times, softer at others, but always there. It harried the mainstream right in Republican France and Wilhelmine Germany during the 1880s and 1890s. Over Ireland, trade, and empire, it divided Britain's Tories during the 1910s and 1920s). An anti-liberal, segregationist right controlled the US South politically from the 1880s through the 1960s, misshaping modern American conservatism. In Germany, the failures of war and economic depression prompted a right-wing search for alternatives to liberalism and parliamentary democracy during the 1920s and 1930s, with calamitous results. At present, a postindustrial hollowing out in society, a financial crash, failed wars, and geostrategic fears have shaken voters' faith in the conservative claim to prudence and superior understanding. With increasing pace during the 2010s, a broadly liberal-minded center-right found itself on the defensive against a confident, disruptive hard right.

Recalcitrant conservatives—those, that is, who refuse compromise with one or more aspects of liberalism—have come in many varieties. Some have focused on structures and institutions: latter-day monarchists, anti-parliamentarians, corporatists, right-wing populists; some on the nation and its prerogatives: colonialist diehards, go-it-alone unilateralists; some on the character of the national people: anti-immigrants, anti-Semites, Klansmen, Southern resisters to civil rights, white-nation extremists, latter-day dark-web "incels." They tend to vanish to the fringes in democratic liberalism's better times (before 1914; again after 1945). In worse times, 1918–45 and with rapid tempo, now, the recalcitrant right moves in to disrupt and divide a conservative mainstream committed to compromise.

Although liberal democracy is a child of the left, its growth and health have relied on support from the right. As the historian Brian Girvin expressed it in *The Right in the Twentieth Century* (1994), "A democratic right is a necessary condition of democracy." A data-minded

empty promise of progress, license for willfulness, and sentimental attachment to human equality. The critics might be literary, philosophical, or religious. They included poets and writers (Leopardi, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hawthorne), critics (Ruskin, Sainte-Beuve), satirists (Mencken), early Greens (Cobbett, Riehl), and lawyers, philosophers, and historians (Stephen, Bradley, Carlyle, Gierke), as well as religious thinkers (Lamennais, Newman, Ketteler, Hodge, and Brownson). Such critics wrote with the zest of battle in faith that the harms of modernity might yet be held off. As cultural democracy strengthened and cultural authorities declined in the twentieth century, that confidence weakened. Conservative critics grew angry or elegiac. They included writers who championed escape into unthinking action (Drieu, the early Jünger) or retreat to religion or aesthetics in a spirit of noncooperation and withdrawal (Eliot, Scruton, and strands of American Catholic thought).

ii. The Conservative Outlook

The early labels "party of movement" and "party of order" were catchy but misleading. Both liberals and conservatives were looking for order and stability, but they did not think of them alike. Liberals pictured modern order as achievable in a fluid society of self-possessed, mobile, and well-provided-for people. Authority under law in such an order would flow outward from the mutual accommodations of reasonable, live-and-let-live citizens. Authority, though established and effective, would be conditional and open to question.

Conservatives kept to an older picture. Social order for them depended on stable institutions and social hierarchy with settled ranks and familiar duties. Authority on that picture flowed downward through fixed, recognized channels. Conservatives had venerable ideas to draw on. To Plato, authorities should be obeyed because they were wise and in touch with higher truth. To Hobbes, the intellectual godfather of the "realist" right for whom security was the highest social value, authorities were needed as sovereign arbiters to stop people's inborn competitiveness from running out of control. For Hume and Burke, authority was

what people had grown used to obeying and whose origins (in conquest or usurpation) were now thankfully forgotten. Authority, on each account, was absolute in this sense: it was to be obeyed and not forever asked for credentials by tiresome questioners. To be settled—to become "established," to use a favored term—social order required unreflective acceptance, loyalty, and faith, not doubt, critique, and "maybe."

That vertical understanding of authority could be thought of in older ways as religious or military, or in newer pluralistic terms. Conservatives could picture an orderly society as a community of believers under a superior, divine authority; as a military hierarchy of command flowing down from higher to lower units; or as a manifold whole of corporations and associations each with a downward authority, from whole to part, of their own. On that last, newer picture, authority was more than rulers and lawmakers; it included orderly society itself, with its settled customs, norms, and conventions.

Conservatives understood that society was rarely, if ever, perfectly ordered. They recognized the immemorial scourges of famine, war, disease, rebellion, and bad government (wicked princes, greedy oligarchs, angry mobs). They grasped, too, that a settled society was not fixed or frozen but open to gradual change. What they had not expected and what in capitalist modernity the first conservatives faced was something altogether more daunting: a new kind of social order that, as it seemed, continually sowed disorder and insecurity by itself. The perpetual disturbance of capitalist modernity promised a tearing down of established ranks, an overturning of settled patterns of life, and widening disregard for ethical and cultural authority—not once, but again and again.

If conservatives were to persuade others to share their picture of "established" order, the picture would have to be adapted and modernized to retain credit in changing times. Conservatives would have to turn its early lessons from critics of the French Revolution—society's unity, reason's limits, and human imperfection—into a contemporary, counterliberal outlook. First, they had to accept that a conservative outlook was needed. For those who had been used to ruling but no longer ruled, the lesson was painful and difficult to accept.

iii. Conservative and Liberal Outlooks Contrasted

A German historian of conservative thought, Rudolf Vierhaus, nicely summed up the attitude to political ideas of the old ruling classes. For them, he wrote, "social order and political power belonged to the sphere of 'is,' not to that of 'would' and 'should.'" On turning to "woulds" and "shoulds," early conservatives heard and read liberals, then disagreed with them. Each made themselves clearest in opposition to the other. The first conservatives were anti-liberals; the first liberals, anti-conservatives.

To four questions facing any coherent political outlook, conservatives and liberals answered differently. Is society cohesive or conflicted? Are there moral limits to the exercise of power? Does human life improve? Is everyone equal in society or are there superiors and inferiors?

Liberals, to put it in summary terms, took society to be competitive and conflicted. They distrusted power and questioned customary authority. They believed in human progress and social equality, with its requirement of civic respect for all. They had high expectations of political action. Conservatives took society to be harmonious. They respected power and accepted customary authority. They did not believe in progress or in equality. Respect in their eyes was due not to everyone regardless but to merit and excellence.

Gentz's friend, the German Romantic Adam Müller, was an early objector to treating society as competitive and conflicted. Although his attachment to princely rule and estate privileges was nostalgic, his nose for liberal faults was sharp. The flaw in the liberal picture, he judged, was to place people outside society and then try to put them back. People could not, without cost to themselves and to what they were leaving, abandon their society or deny its hold on them. There were never new societies, as if a new society could be winched into history by pulling timeless ideals to earth; there were only ongoing societies with pasts and futures, whose bounds, if they existed, nobody knew. Society, lastly, was not a tool to be used at will for selected purposes, however beneficial or worthwhile, but instead was something of general value on its own terms that could not have a number put to it by how well or badly

society executed particular tasks. Those mistakes about people and society could be called—to use present-day terms—costless exit, timelessness, and instrumental use. Conservatism's opening charge that liberals misunderstood the moral power of the social bond continued to enjoy a late-twentieth-century return in conservative ethical criticism, as well exemplified by the thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Roger Scruton. A parallel charge, that liberalism exaggerated people's desire for autonomy and underplayed their need for authoritative norms, came in post-1945 Germany by Arnold Gehlen and by American neoconservatives.

Both conservatives and liberals agreed that authoritative power was needed for social order, but they disagreed on how power was to be legitimized and made authoritative. To conservatives, power once "established," that is, settled and accepted, was just and hence authoritative, although legitimate holders of authority could act unjustly. To liberals, for power to be just it had to be more than obeyed from habit or put up with. It had to be shown to be just. The difference revealed itself, among other ways, in the liberal attachment and conservative hostility to written constitutions. Power for liberals was ever open to "Why must I obey?" "Why should I pay?" and "Why must I conform?" To conservatives, that was backward. Power, in their eyes, became acceptable and established by assuring order. It followed that law, property, and custom, the pillars of social order, were to be respected, not carped at, criticized, and deflected from performing their order-supporting tasks. To a conservative Ultra like Bonald, the leading brain of France's post-Napoleonic restoration, the idea of public argument was itself anathema. With characteristic morgue, Bonald said, "One should only ever assemble people in church or in the army, because there they don't argue; they listen and obey."

A favorite object of conservative mockery, especially from writers and poets, was trust in the achievability of human progress, the third element in the liberal outlook. Musing about the lava-crusted slopes of Etna in his great poem *The Broom* (1836), Giacomo Leopardi taunted: "Etched on these slopes is the magnificent, progressive fate of humankind." In his fable, "Earth's Holocaust" (1844), Nathaniel Hawthorne teased liberals

for their callow preoccupation with novelty. For Charles Baudelaire, progress was "a doctrine of laziness" that childishly pictured history as a cozy train taking everyone to a happier and better destination.

What liberals counted as a better life was questioned. "Commerce has enriched thousands," Coleridge acknowledged. It had been, he wrote, "the cause of the spread of knowledge and science," but he asked, had it "added one particle of moral improvement?" The French historian Hippolyte Taine openly lamented the "causes of modern unhappiness, which puts a leaden sky over our heads." In a celebrated passage from *L'Ancien régime* (1875), he contrasted the bourgeois rat race with the ease and liberty of aristocratic life: "No demanding, early jobs in those days; no furious competition; no ill-defined careers and unbounded vistas. Ranks were clear, ambitions were limited and there was less envy. People were not continually discontent, bitter and preoccupied as they are today. Privilege and favors mattered less when there were no rights. We long to get ahead. They longed to amuse themselves."

Material progress was contrasted unfavorably with the supposed moral emptiness of liberal modernity. Thoughts of the kind continued through the nineteenth century and beyond. Although not directly political, they became ammunition to fire back against liberals when liberals invoked morality in their own political causes. Arthur Schopenhauer's and Søren Kierkegaard's philosophical pessimism was deployable in high-level critiques of liberal progress. Nietzscheanism was on hand to upset liberals with the suggestion that their humanitarian impulses to protect the weak were rooted in envy and resentment. Thinkers in the twentieth century continued to shake their heads at liberal modernity's philosophico-moral failings, whether for its superficiality and inauthenticity (Martin Heidegger, who thought us "too late for the gods, too early for Being") or for its pseudo-critical recklessness (Theodor Adorno, for whom "the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster").

Openly political charges against liberal progress focused on its undue costs and unintended consequences. Even if desirable, broad human progress would not be achievable, conservatives argued. In a pointed study of the right's critique of liberal progress, *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991), the American thinker Albert O. Hirschman suggested that the

Differences of outlook were softened. Liberals, on closer look, did not distrust power as such; they were wary of its arbitrary exercise. As believers in progress, liberals were not aiming to replace one society *by* another society but to remove ills *in* society. They, too, grasped, that duties came with rights. In return, conservatives acknowledged that established power need not be unlimited, immune to question, and able to do as it pleased. They accepted that a settled, unified society might well need topical repair. Conservatives did not deny rights as such. How could they? Security in property depended on them. What conservatives objected to was inflating and devaluing rights by declaratory overextension.

Politically, those bonding spaces allowed for durable alliances, as the party-political narrative will soon show. Intellectually, they made it harder for conservatives to say what made their outlook special or why they came to accept economic liberties but never felt wholly at home with cultural liberties.

A blurring of conservative and liberal outlooks was noticed early on. Moderate conservatives, the German political observer Friedrich Bülau wrote in 1847, were not for no change, and moderate liberals did not call for total change. During the radical upheaval of 1848, the right-wing German liberal David Hansemann told a friend, "What was liberal yesterday is conservative today and former conservatives happily link up with former liberals." In "Intellectual Conservatism" (1856), Walter Bagehot reversed the direction of fit but made the same linkage, writing, "To a great extent every liberal is now a Conservative." These early observers had spotted something new and valuable for conservatives to hold onto, a frame of modern politics that can be called a liberal status quo.

The blurring was clearest in the United States, where the Whigs, who became Republicans, combined liberal and conservative elements from the beginning. Crudely, Whigs were economically liberal as procapitalists, semiliberal on slavery, and conservative in their fear of electoral and cultural democracy. The liberal-conservative cross type was evident also in Europe. A German example was Wilhelm von Kardorff, a landowner-businessman who led the pro-Bismarck Free Conservatives and founded the German industrial federation, and Gustav Stresemann, the leader of

the right-wing liberals in the Weimar Republic. Typical of liberal conservatism in post-1945 France was the pro-market Antoine Pinay, who called himself "Mr. Consumer." He led the Independents, which later fed into the center-right party of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In the United States, until the 1970s, the liberal conservative was easy to spot in the pro-market, culturally open-minded "Rockefeller Republican." A British archetype was the "Wet" Tory Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (1957–63).

v. The Adaptability of Conservative Ideas

An unavoidable question arises at this point. How far are conservative ideas put forward in historically different circumstances two hundred years ago the same ideas conservatives put forward nowadays? If they are not the same, it seems wrong to talk about a conservative outlook common to then and now. And if there is no common outlook, the very idea that there is one tradition or practice here looks mistaken. Coherence here seems to fight with continuity.

Scholars have sought to solve the continuity-coherence problem in various ways. For Karl Mannheim in 1927, conservatism was a principled defense of landed interests and their institutions against destabilizing modern change, but his timebound conservatism risked stalling in the nineteenth century. Samuel Huntington, in contrast, argued in 1957 that conservatism was "situational." Its "essence" was defense of the prevailing order, whatever and whenever. Over time, his conservatives had and did not need to have anything common to think or say. In 1996, Michael Freeden sought to link continuity and change by allowing each their measure. Conservatives then and now have shared a common outlook, on his account, while adapting its particular content to shifting circumstances.

Conservatives have proved adept at restating their outlook, in the way Freeden suggested, to fit the times. The outlook's character, that is, has remained as the content changed. For example, *social unity* among the first conservatives was thought of in "organic" terms as a hierarchy of ranks and estates. Believing them or not, Disraeli was still talking in

such terms at midcentury. The organic metaphor, however, was giving way to the visible facts of class conflict and democracy. Social unity was rethought in terms of people and nation. The people were imagined as a cultural or racial whole, acting together as a nation with an agreed past and common destiny—often imperial—to spread Englishness, Frenchness, or Americanness to the world. After 1945, talk of a unitary "people" was proscribed as totalitarian or racialist, and exclusionary nationalism was treated as dangerous and discredited, but in time, the lessons were forgotten. With the rise of a hard right in the twenty-first century, unitary talk of "the people" returned. Competitive nationalism was taken for good sense. With *social unity*, what did the idea's work throughout those changes was what a united society had little patience for: diversity, divisiveness, and troublemaking.

The *authorities* that conservatives first defended were particular and personal: local squires and judges, clergymen, and teachers, but authority has grown impersonal: the state's legal authority (to have the final say); the market's economic authority (to deny those who cannot pay); society's normative authority (to police ethical and cultural standards).

The idea of *property* was, to begin with, tied for conservatives to particular places and types of owner, above all the landed classes. Defending property blended easily with defending country against towns, farming against industry, gentry against merchants. Later in the nineteenth century, as William Mallock's and William Sumner's writings will illustrate, defending property blended for conservatives with backing bosses against workers and markets against the state. Property is still among the first things conservatives defend, but it has grown diffuse. Owners are no longer a distinctive social kind. Property used to be the visible face of society, fenced in and to be walked past in admiration, envy, or longing. It is now also promissory or virtual. The thought is at least as old as Karl Marx, but capitalism's champion Joseph Schumpeter was alive to the change, writing in 1942 that "by substituting a mere parcel of shares for the walls of and machines in a factory" capitalism "takes the life out of the idea of property." Finance was not the only kind of property to acquire an impersonal, virtual character. Property has

now come to include a diverse, essential portfolio known as "human capital": skills, education, privileged access, and social connections. Through those changes, the idea *property* has kept its role in conservative thought as a stabilizer of society providing people—to use Hegel's term—with "personality," a capacity for effective action in civic life they would otherwise lack.

In weight and reach, the *state* of the 1830s bears little likeness to the state of the twenty-first century. The peacetime state in rich nations then spent well less than 10 percent of its national income, not, as now, 40–60 percent. Taxes were similarly low, and few owed them. Talk of the state then and now is in a way like calling the mail coach and the World-Wide Web "communications." By contrast, conservative concerns about the state's reach and weight are alike. Economic pressures that make the state grow or shrink—war or peace; prosperity or penury—are alike. Then as now states cycled between economic openness to each other and back. Ethically and culturally, conservatives then as now were having arguments of the same character about how far the state should support churches or police speech and personal morals.

The *wisdom of custom and tradition* was gradually detached from endangered or superannuated institutions. It was decoupled also from older beliefs and philosophies. After 1945, the wisdom of custom and tradition was neatly transmuted to fit the times. Custom in politics was rethought as prudence and firmness, undistracted by ideology. Custom in economics was replaced by the supposed self-correcting character of markets. The work done by the idea *custom* remained. It was to debar critical or overblown ideas from politics and state meddling from economics.

vi. "Conservatism," "the Right," and Other Label Troubles

The conservative story involves moderates and radicals, centrists and extremists, the economically minded and the ethically minded, excluders and includers, dividers and uniters. Conservatives have been

pigeonholed as "reactionary," "status-quo," "revolutionary," "ultra," "neo," and "paleo." They have been marshaled according to their primary focus as political, cultural, religious, environmental, and moral conservatives. In the apt phrase of the philosopher Simon Evnine, conservatism is an "endemically contested entity."

"The enemy of conservatism," Samuel Huntington wrote, "is not liberalism, but radicalism." Conservatives, it is true, have often complained of radicals on the right. Metternich cried in exasperation that all legitimists could legitimize was revolution. At the beginning of France's Third Republic, Adolphe Thiers rebuked a royalist opponent: "It was necessary to pacify but for fifty years you have angered and no government could become established—you have all served the left more than the conservatives." The error is to think of radicals as political types or of radicalism as a set of ideas. The terms "radical" and "moderate" are not substantive but adverbial. Radicalism and moderation bear on pace, posture, and style, not content. The difference turns on how aims are held and acted on: rigidly or flexibly, zealously or temperately, in attacking thrusts or defensively dug in, bent on annihilating opposition or allowing for compromise, unable to live without conquest or able to survive defeat and failure.

Conservatives can be radical or moderate. It depends on the state of the contest, on the stakes in the contest, and on which party is attacking, which defending. "Conservative" appeals to custom, unity, and even political modesty can take temperate forms: stress on duty to society; "one-nation" conservatism and deprecation of class division; policy gradualism. They can take also intemperate forms: stigmatization of the Other; denial of social diversity and hounding of internal enemies; exclusionary nationalism; tarring of moderate opponents as radicalized and extreme.

When pressed, elements of the right are commonly willing to play as radicals against the majority opinion, the rule of law, or established custom: French anti-republicans from 1870 to 1880); Britain's Tory "ditchers" (over reforming the Lords, in 1910), or the Conservative leader Bonar Law encouraging armed rebellion in the north against Home Rule for Ireland in July 1912—"I can imagine no length of resistance to

vii. Dilemmas for Conservatives

Reflecting on the difficulties of being a conservative, in 1962 Clinton Rossiter called conservatism the "thankless persuasion." The German thinker Niklas Luhmann had something like that in mind, when he wrote—to reverse the order of his crack—that progressives normally end in frustration, whereas conservatives are frustrated to start with. Conservatives began as natural-born rulers who had lost authority, but they rewon it by compromising with the liberals and democrats they had started out opposing. They found themselves in command of a modern world they could not love in their hearts.

The frustration here is not temperamental but political. Conservatives can be grumpy or cheerful in their frustration. It depends on who and when. When the historical dice go against them, grumpy conservatives will say, "I told you so." Cheerful conservatives—in the bonhomous spirit of Hume—will laugh off frustration as what is to be expected from "the politics of imperfection." Treating conservatism as a moral temperament seems, in addition, to be oversensitive to the times. An American political scientist, Herbert McClosky, polled conservatives in 1958 and found them typically "alienated," "submissive," and "somewhat spiritless." A social psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, did the same and in *The Righteous Mind* (2012) found the typical conservative to be in better balance with life's demands than the typical liberal. If so, we might reasonably wonder why conservatives at present can sound so angry. Perhaps the point is that conservatism is a category in politics, not social psychology.

Political conservatism is frustrating because its dilemmas never go away. In appealing to social unity and common faith, are conservatives sincere or cynical? Is their preferred mode of action the valiant stand or the regrettable compromise? Have they principles by which to decide what to keep amid capitalism's creative destruction, or is theirs an improvisational pursuit of what works *here and now*, wherever and whenever that is?

Unity and order in society depend together on a common faith, so many conservatives have thought. Such a faith need not be religious,

but it does have to be serious and strong enough to bind people in unreflecting loyalties. If so, a question arises for conservatives. Should people hold such a faith because it is true or because their believing it is useful for social order? If institutions on which social peace and order depend are to be believed in with due piety and protected from the glare of enlightened criticism, their contingent origins and sometimes self-serving purposes must be veiled with an aura of mystique. Society, that is, needs protecting from that staple of moral satire: unmasking selfish interests behind publicly proclaimed virtues. Unmasking society and civilization itself as practiced by the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) posed for conservatives (and not only conservatives) a graver threat. It could be answered by challenging the unmaskers on the facts, or by agreeing that society and civilization were indeed masks, but necessary masks.

The thought that a wearable orthodoxy, no matter what, was needed for social peace was latent in Richard Hooker's misgivings about Puritan zeal and Catholic doctrinalism that underlay his vindication of the Elizabethan religious settlement. It was explicit in Hobbes's and Spinoza's work. In *De Cive* (1651), Hobbes wrote of the sovereign's duty to keep a firm grip on the universities lest they turn out seditious thinkers who, if clever, would cloud "sound doctrine" on which civil peace depended, or, if stupid, would stir up the ignorant from the common pulpit. Spinoza, who mistrusted clerics and churches, argued in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) that although a person's beliefs were private and could not be controlled from outside, worship in public was a social matter. "If we want to obey God rightly," he wrote in chapter 19, "the external practice of religion must be accommodated to the peace of the republic." The state, that is, should supervise a common faith for the sake of social order. Hooker, Hobbes, and Spinoza were each in their way responding to the troubling, seemingly irreversible fact of confessional diversity. They were confirming in argument what the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Treaties of Westphalia (1648) had politically entrenched: acceptance of religious differences as a historical fact and the end of medieval universalism.

The conservative defense of religion as social bulwark could be sincere. The leader of the Wilhelmine German Conservative Party, Otto von Helldorff, was not playacting when in 1878 in Reichstag debate on Otto von Bismarck's antisocialist laws he endorsed the view that "only a religious view of occupation and work . . . can overcome Social Democracy." Power's use of religion could also be theatrical. Recall Chateaubriand, repelled by the coronation of Charles X and asking himself who could be fooled by such a spectacle. The American scholar Jerry Z. Muller neatly summed up the dilemma in 1997: "The family that prays together may stay together. But members of a family that pray together in order to stay together may eventually find themselves neither praying nor staying."

The list of arrangements conservatives defend or have defended is long. It includes not only the "previous regime" that lingered into the nineteenth century of princely rule, established churches, noble privileges, limited suffrage, and confessional disabilities: conservatives have also stood for plebiscitary authoritarianism, constitutional monarchy, written and unwritten constitutions, centralized and federal states, religious intolerance, and religious liberty. Many institutions that conservatives have sought to keep have buckled, lost authority, or died. Did that make conservatism vain, a heroic failure, a tragicomic posture? Were conservatives like the "gallant cavaliers" in Byron's *Don Juan*, who "fought in vain / For those who knew not to resign or reign"?

Tough-minded, "realist" conservatives have a ready answer. Customs serve social order until they cease to serve. As long as they serve, customs must be upheld. It is foolish to mock or undermine them. Once they weaken under the pressure of historical change, there is no call on conservatives to keep them alive. Customs, along with norms, institutions, authorities, and standards, are not of value in themselves. They are valuable only insofar as they are useful at keeping social peace and sustaining prosperity. Asking a conservative "realist" for a transhistorical standard by which to judge what to keep or let go is vain. Theirs is a historical consequentialism that judges custom by an outcome: is the custom useful in its time?

Conservatives must still apply that test. They must judge when to stop preserving the unpreservable. Their *triage* of custom—let be, let die, or repair—presumably has to rely on more than hunches. Without clear principles, it is not obvious how reasonable judgments are made. Conservatives have often overrated the life chances of institutions they favored, blaming their collapse not on inner flaws but on mischievous interference. Burke judged that the French monarchy and French society were in reparable shape in 1789 if only the lawyers and intellectuals of the Third Estate had not turned the Estates General into a futile row about ideal constitutions. American mid-nineteenth-century conservatives, with Calhoun in the lead, thought that the slave society of the Southern states was sustainable if only the Northern abolitionists had not agitated and interfered. German conservatives in the 1920s, unreconciled to the Weimar Republic, claimed that the Prussian monarchy was savable but for its betrayal by hostile Bolsheviks and timid Social Democrats. A "realist" conservative could reply that the test of conservative judgment lay in the historical record: despite failures of the kind noted, adaptive conservatives, it might be held, had got it more right than wrong when judging when to defend shaken institutions or values and when to bow to unavoidable change. That historical claim, even allowing it were true, would not show the principles, if any, that underlay what, on this defense at any rate, come to look like an astonishing series of canny guesses.

viii. Fighting for a Tradition

Conservatism's story can be told, in the phrase of a British Tory from the 1920s, as "the endless adventure of governing men" (and, lately, women who govern). It involves also sustained, many-sided politico-philosophical argument. Without argument, the story is pointless, as if the adventurers have no idea what they are adventuring for. Without the adventure, arguments and ideas spin on their own without historic content. In four periods given sharp dates for clarity, parallel stories are here told of conservative parties and politicians, together with ideas and thinkers.

Amid destabilizing change, the first conservatives sought order in the prevailing institutions (crown, church, and aristocracy), prevailing legal patterns (ownership and inheritance), or prevailing social forms (deference, faith, and loyalty). Liberal modernity was generous in keeping its dialectical opponent occupied with giants to slay and enemies to oppose: first liberal capitalism, solvent of the previous political order (mid-nineteenth century); then the demands of economic democracy, either in its weaker reformist or stronger socialist forms (late nineteenth and early twentieth century); and, finally, ethical and cultural democracy, an anything-goes normlessness, as conservatives saw it, for which they blamed liberal indulgence and bad philosophy (late twentieth and early twenty-first century). In each period, conservatives have had to reframe and rethink their original commitments, which were inherited from the critics of revolution: social unity, authority of custom, disbelief in progress and equality, limits of political action.

Running through the conservative story is a contrast between political success and intellectual uncertainty. The mainstream right considers itself to have governed and overseen liberal democracy more sensibly than has the left. It claims to have managed better the competing demands of modern society—for innovation and stability, for business efficiency and social equity, for global range and local well-being. If asked what they stand for, conservatives of compromise will point to their long record as the dominant government of liberal democracy and to liberal democracy, for all its flaws, as the least bad of political systems. For the doubters of the right, who question that picture, the mainstream, liberal right is complacent and out of touch. In party politics, for the hard right, the modern liberal status quo is not something to be proud of but something to be overturned. Outside party politics, among the right's ethical and cultural critics, that same status quo is a wrong and ugly way to live.

In the modern flux, what of value should conservatives keep and pass down? Have conservatives an intellectual orthodoxy of their own or simply a set of anti-liberal criticisms and grievances? Is conservatism a substantive tradition with distinctive values or a stylistic tradition of