

CONSERVATISM

Conservatism



CONSERVATISM

Hoffman and **Graham** ask whether conservatism is “an elusive ideology” and describe some of its internal contradictions.



CONSERVATISM



Life is
precious



...until
it's born



You're free
to speak



...unless you say
something we
don't like.



Smoking a
weed makes
you a criminal



..but stealing
billions gets
you a bonus



We don't want
gov't involved
in health care



...unless it's
health care we
feel entitled too

CONSERVATIVE LOGIC

Don't even try to figure it out.

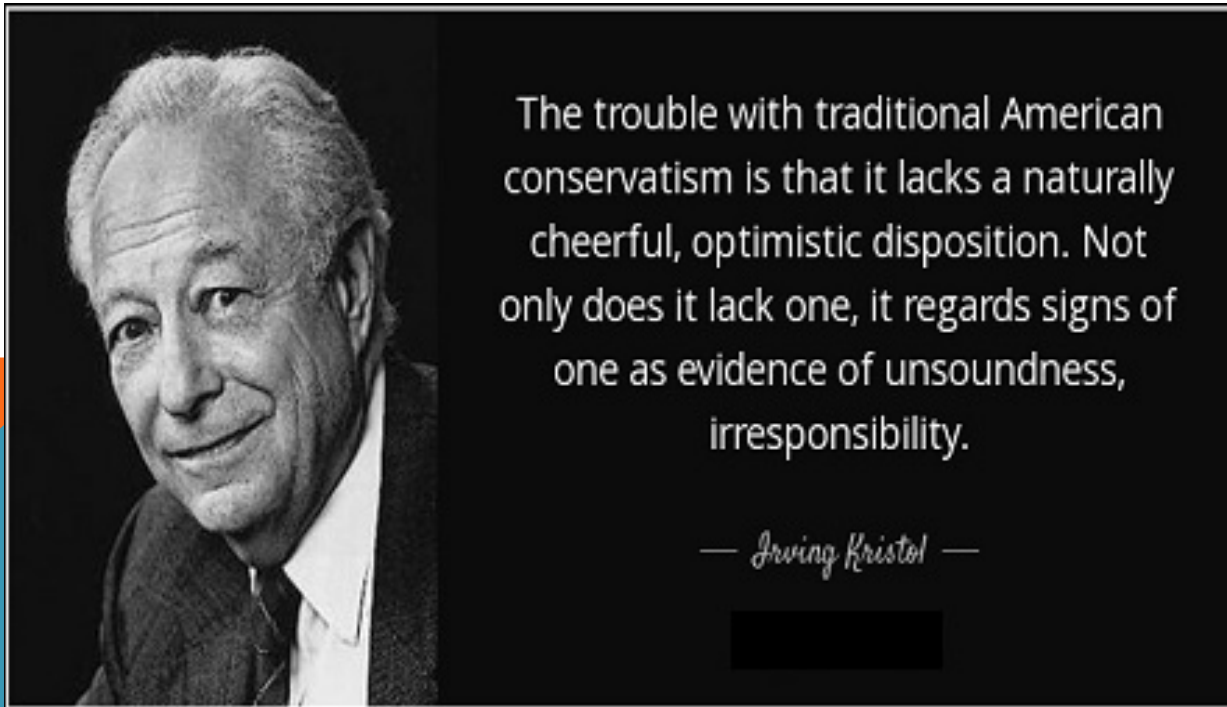
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Why is conservatism difficult to define?

- Conservatism has prospered because it is unwilling to be tied down to a fixed system of ideas.
- Conservatives have a clearer understanding of what they oppose rather than what they are for.
- Conservatives are more inclined to describe their beliefs as an attitude of mind or common sense as opposed to an 'ism' or ideology.
- Conservatism is deeply suspicious of human nature and of grandiose schemes thought by human mind- hence a natural suspicion towards ideology.

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Although the word “conservative” suggests an ideology opposed to progress, in fact the authors note that conservatives can actually be “progressive”



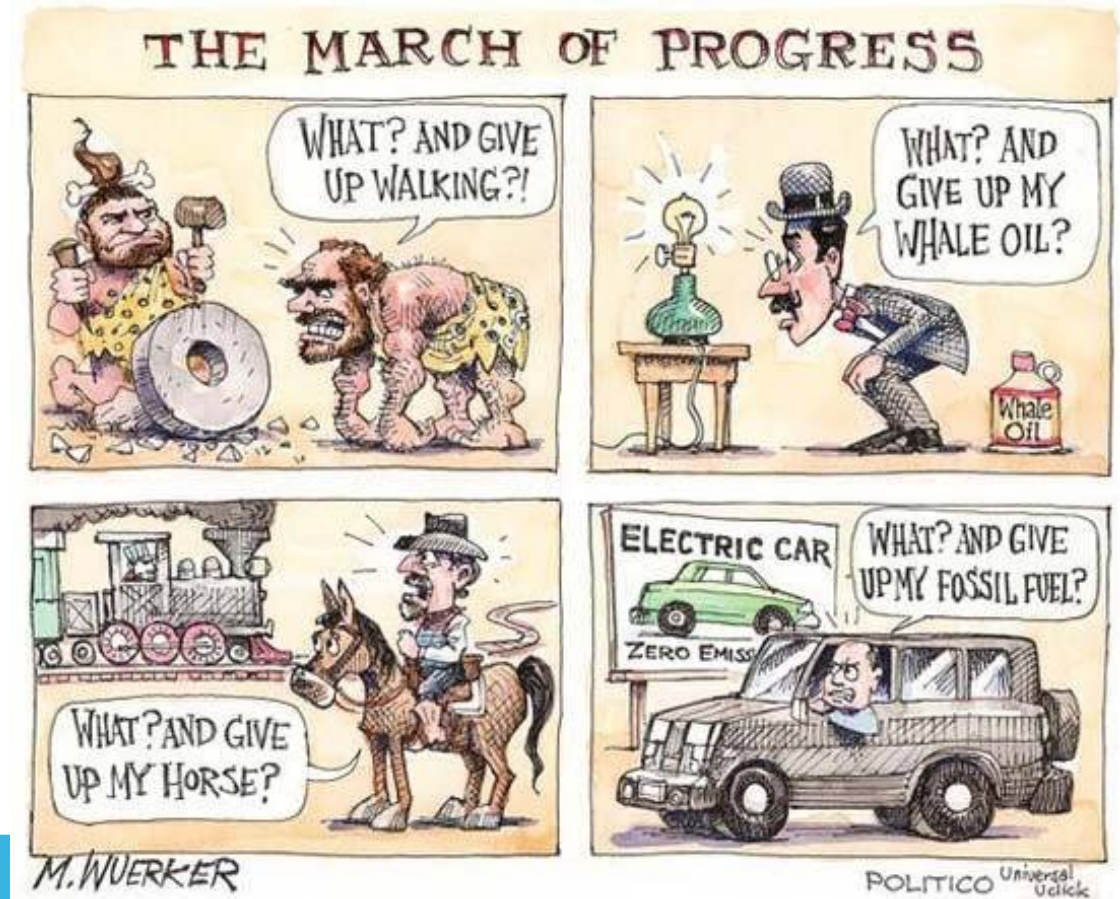
CONSERVATISM

“**CONSERVATISM**
IS NOT AN IDEOLOGY.
CONSERVATISM
IS A WAY OF LIFE
[BASED ON]
HUMAN EXPERIENCE,
KNOWLEDGE,
REASONING,
and Faith.”
-MARK LEVIN

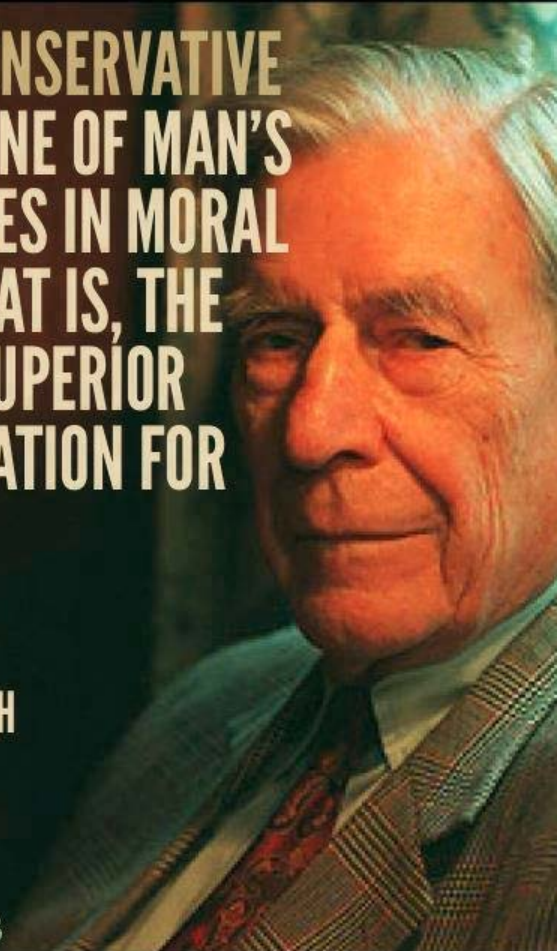
What is
distinctive
about
conservatism
is its *attitude*
toward
progress...

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...progress must be careful, tentative, respectful of past practices, pragmatic, and go with the grain of human nature.



CONSERVATISM

A portrait of John Kenneth Galbraith, an elderly man with white hair, wearing a suit and tie. The portrait is partially obscured by text on the left side of the image.

'THE MODERN CONSERVATIVE IS ENGAGED IN ONE OF MAN'S OLDEST EXERCISES IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY; THAT IS, THE SEARCH FOR A SUPERIOR MORAL JUSTIFICATION FOR SELFISHNESS.'

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

QUOTABLE LIBERALS

The text notes that cynics would define a conservative as someone who *only* accepts change after its happened.

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**6 Basic
Elements of
Conservatism**



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1. Rejection of “Rationalism”

Any approach to political problems derived from the application of abstract concepts.
“Over-analyzing.”

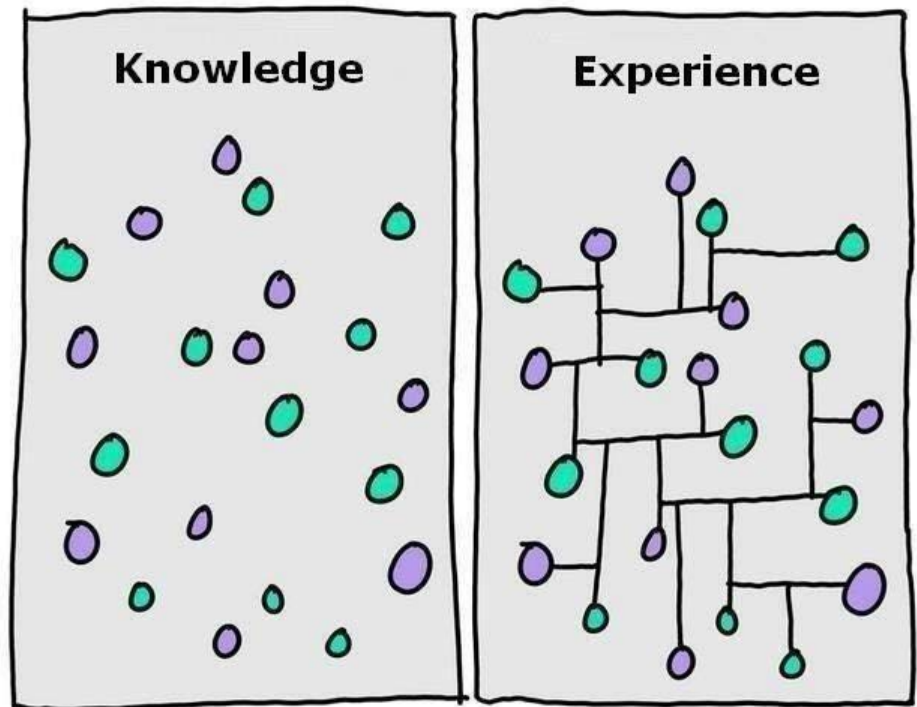


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2. The Importance of “Experience”

Not veneration of the past, but a recognition of the limitations of human reason.

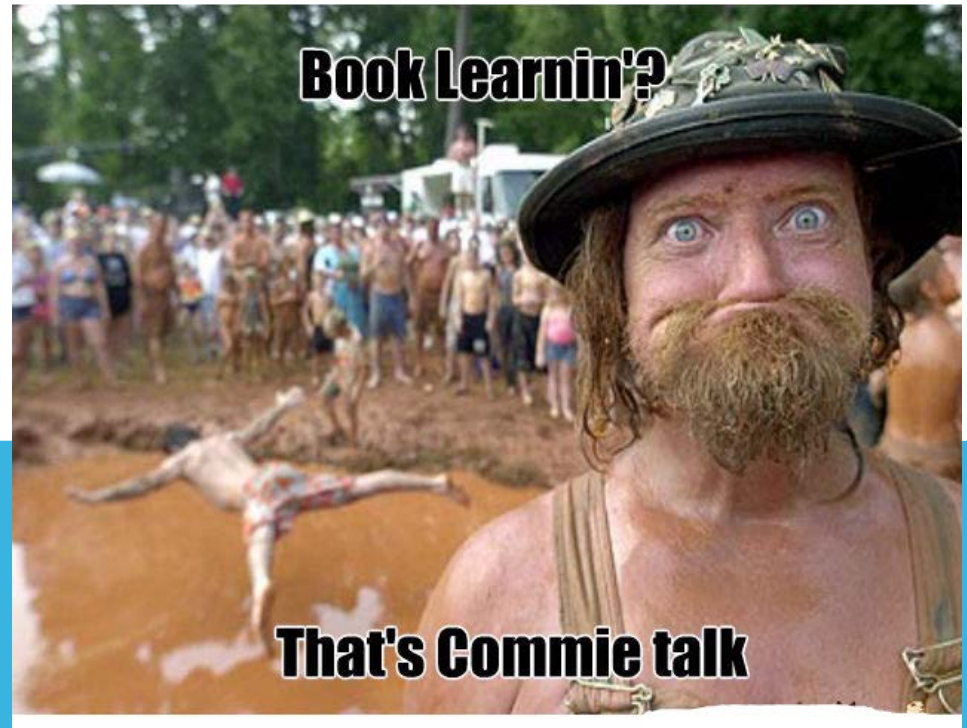
Some change OK,
but not radical
change!



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3. The View of Human Nature

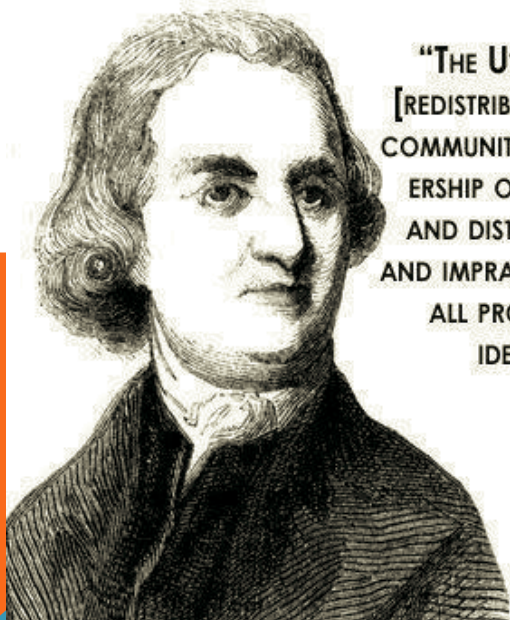
The authors note the marked differences within conservative thought, concerning human behavior, capabilities, and motivation, but suggest there is broad agreement that human beings are limited in their capacity to comprehend the society in which they live.



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4. Rejection of “Visionary Politics”

Visionaries do not recognize the pluralism of everyday life – the fact that individuals have conflicting needs, desires and values.



“THE UTOPIAN SCHEMES OF LEVELING [REDISTRIBUTION OF THE WEALTH] AND A COMMUNITY OF GOODS [CENTRAL OWNERSHIP OF THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION], ARE AS VISIONARY AND IMPRACTICAL AS THOSE WHICH VEST ALL PROPERTY IN THE CROWN. THESE IDEAS ARE ARBITRARY, DESPOTIC, AND, IN OUR GOVERNMENT, UNCONSTITUTIONAL.”

--SAMUEL ADAMS

“At the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows”

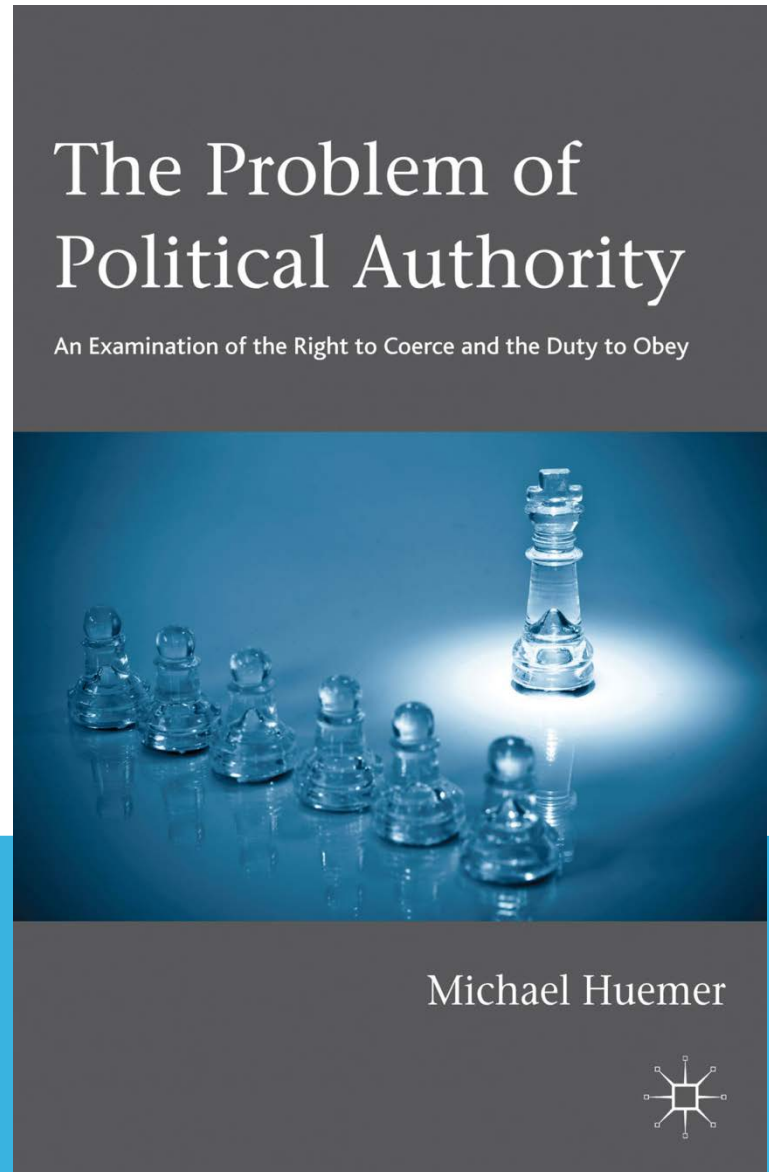
Edmund Burke

Author, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

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6. Suspicion of Authority

Conservatives do not *reject* authority, but are suspicious of it.



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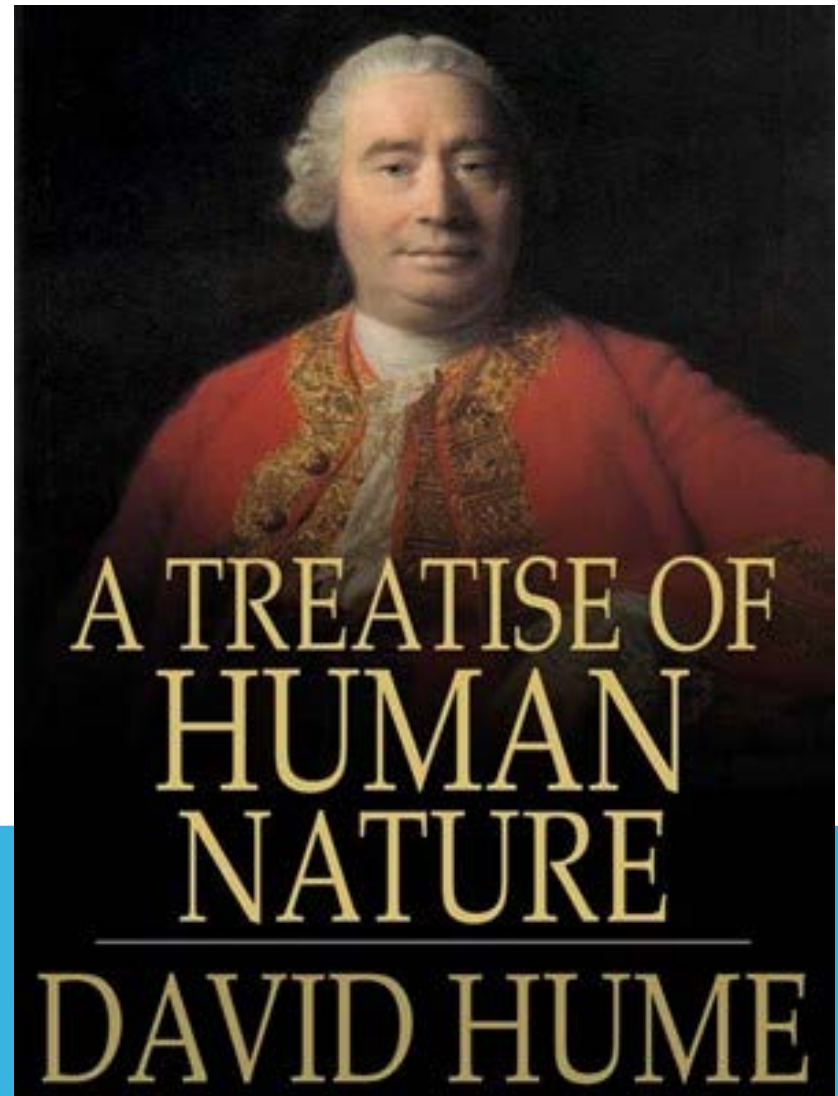
**Classic
Conservative
Thinkers**



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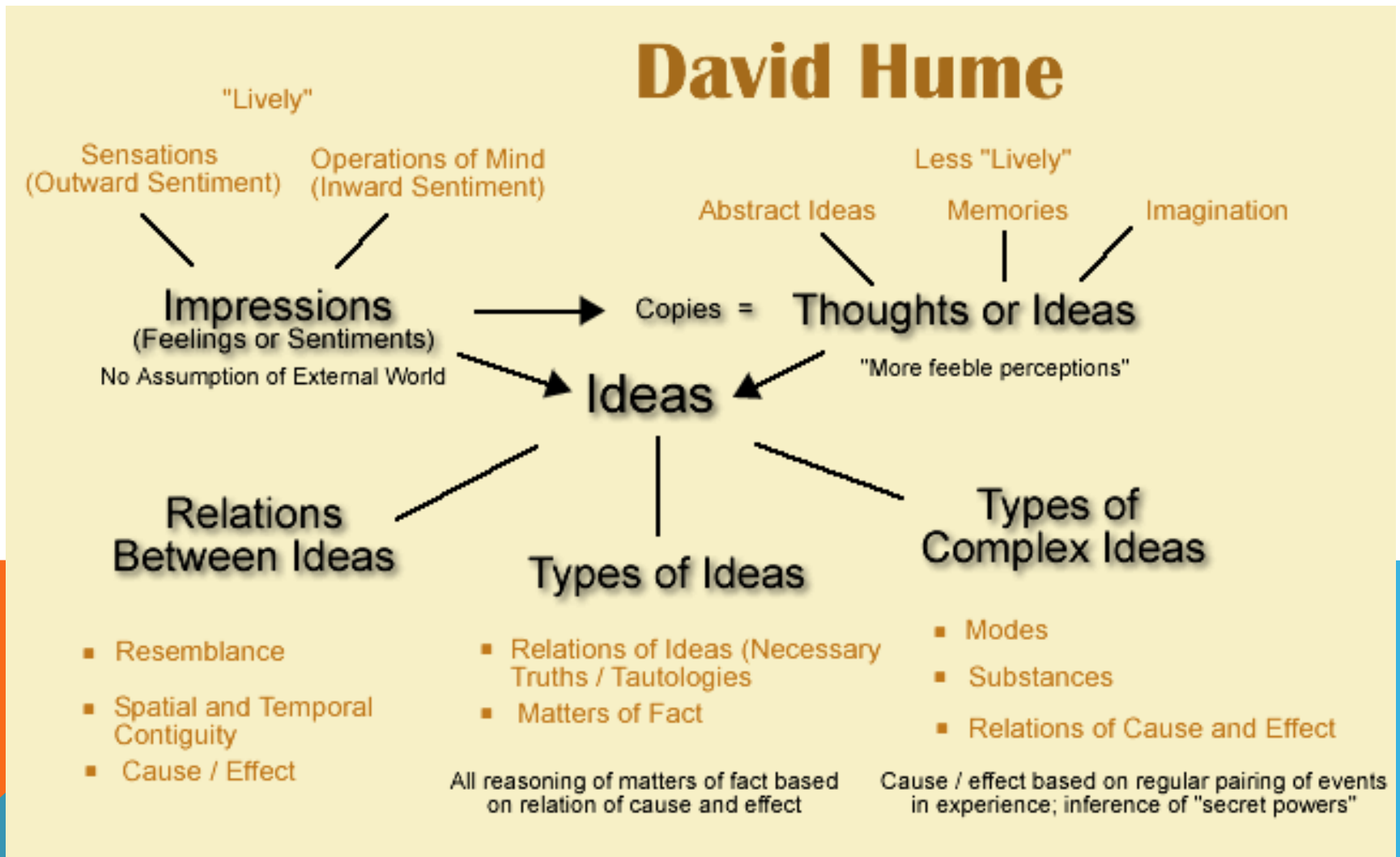
David Hume
(1711-1776)

Described by the authors as the first major thinker to offer a philosophical defense of conservatism.



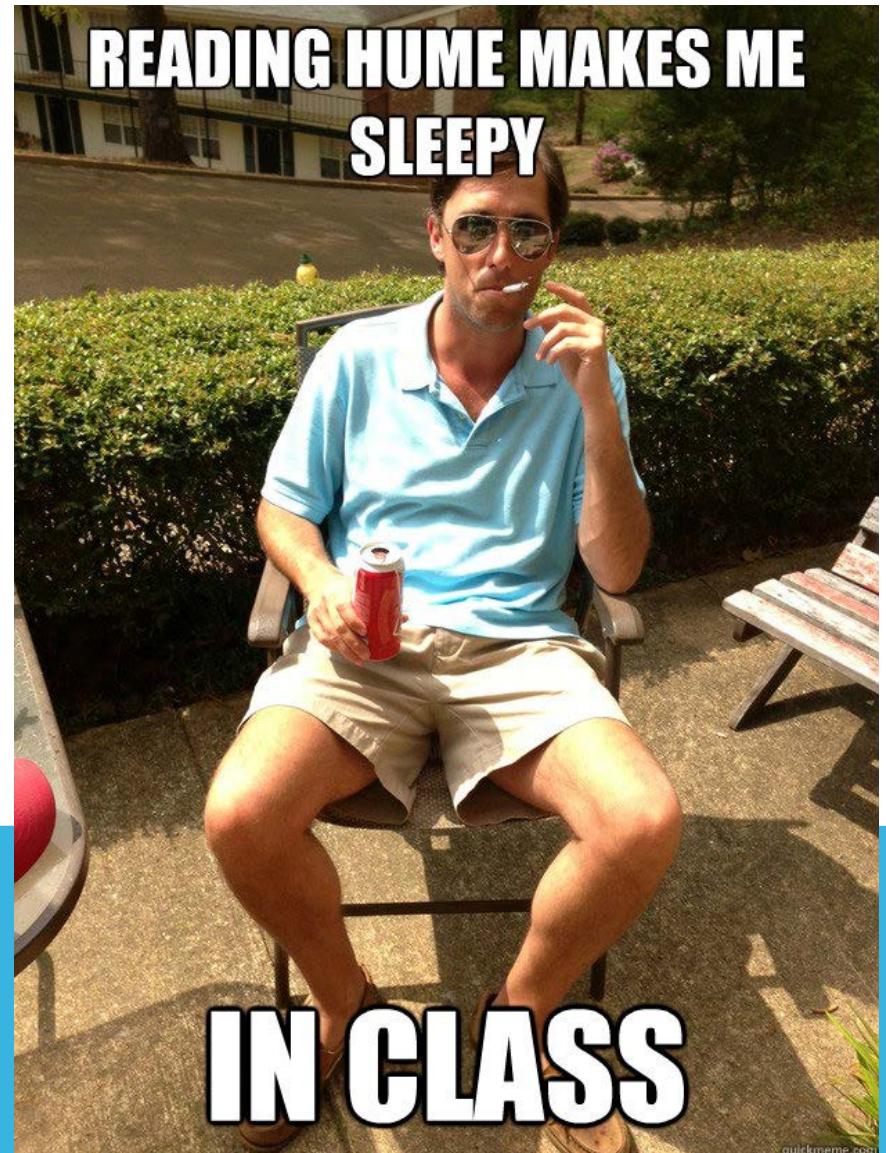
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Hume's Philosophical Claims



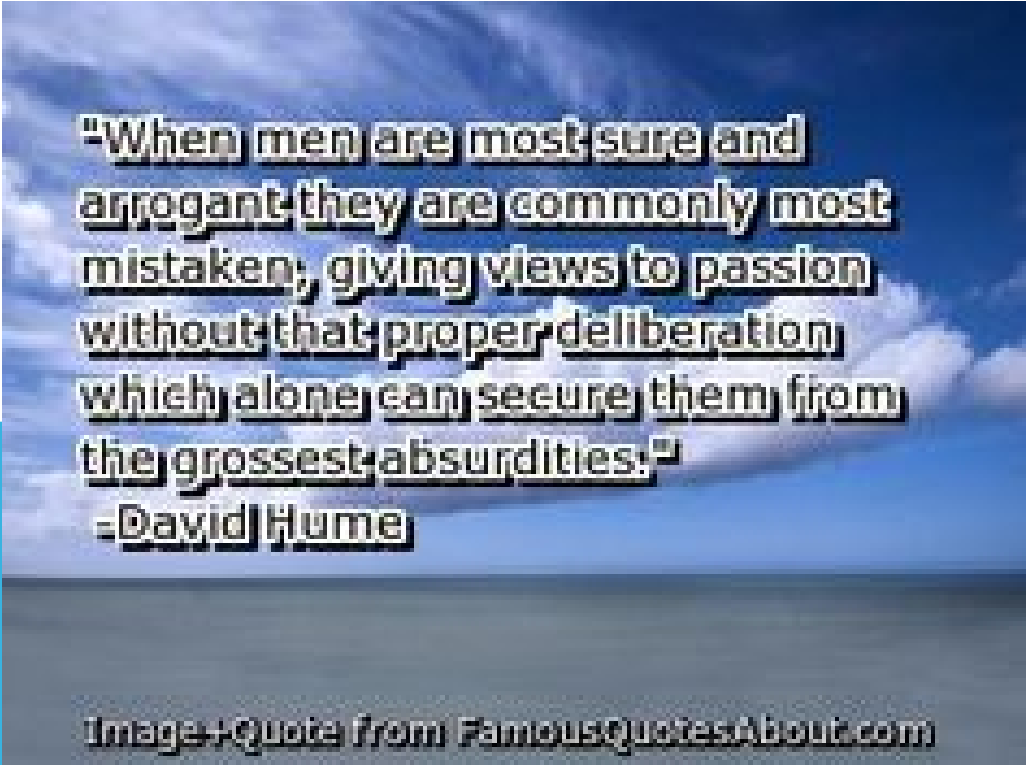
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1. Human understanding must be drawn from experience. All the materials of thinking – perceptions – are derived either from sensations or from reflection.



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2. Simple impressions must be connected together, or “associated.” At any moment there is a great deal going on in a person’s mind, but you cannot reason if the contents of your mind are arbitrary: you need to connect, or associate, ideas.



"When men are most sure and arrogant they are commonly most mistaken; giving views to passion without that proper deliberation which alone can secure them from the grossest absurdities."

-David Hume

Image+Quote from FamousQuotesAbout.com

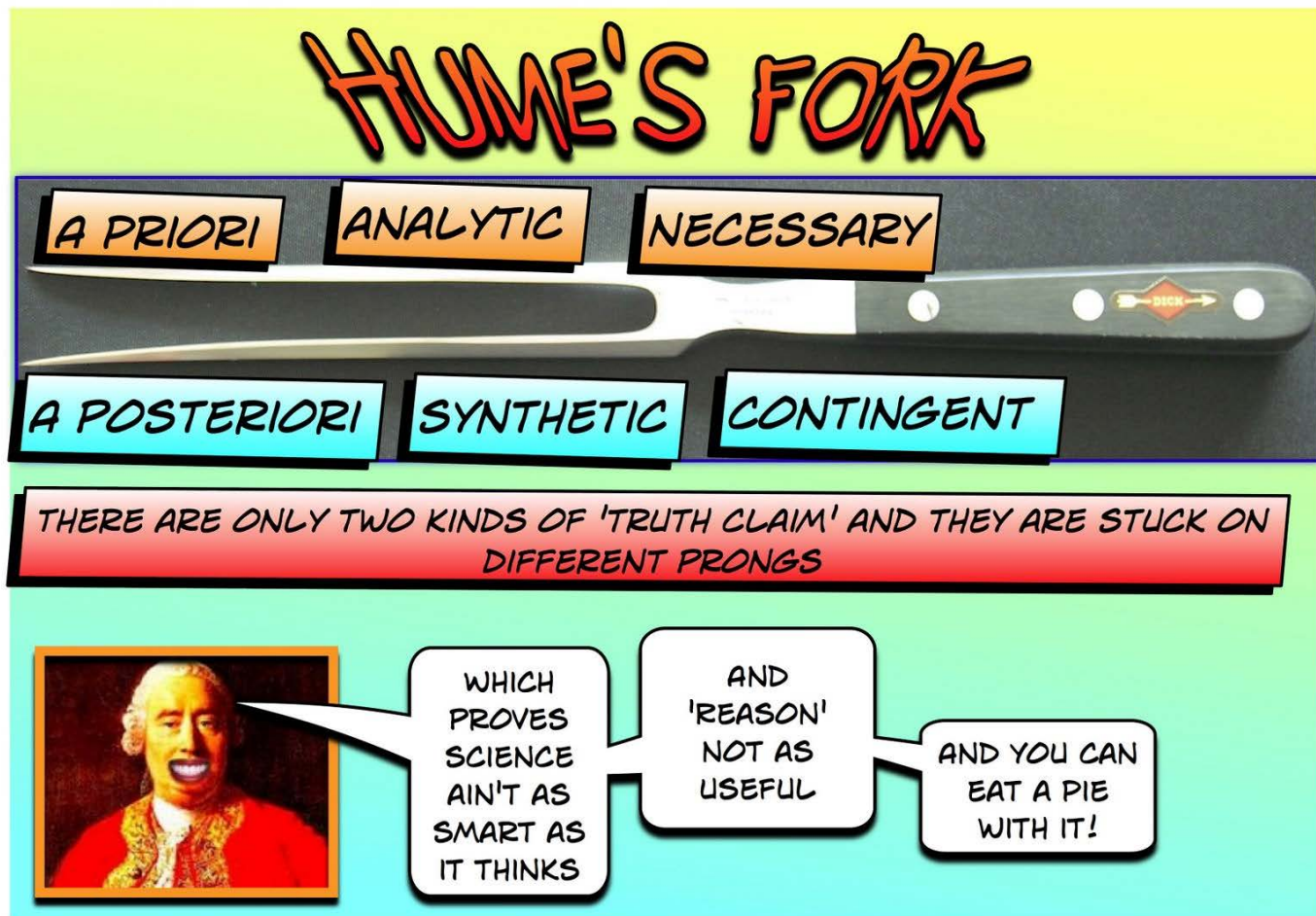
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3. We attribute causes to events on the basis of experience, and more specifically, habit.

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Hume rejects the idea that “reason” transcends, or goes beyond, what can be observed.



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Unlike liberals such as **Hobbes** and **Locke**, **Hume** rejects the idea of a social contract, arguing instead against the liberal notion of self-interest.



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Quote 1

- “Nothing is more surprising than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few.” – David Hume
- What does this quote mean?
- Do you agree with it?
- How is it applicable today? Or is it not?

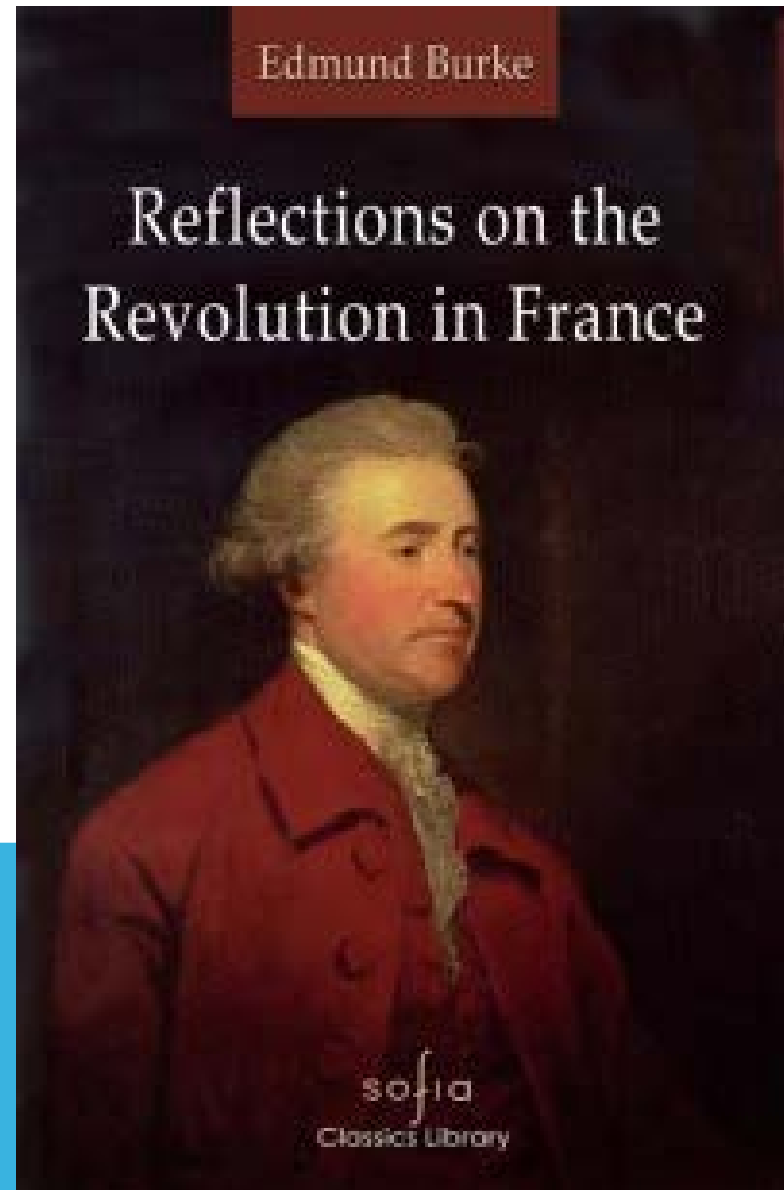
Political authority, or legitimacy, arises from the habit of obedience to a power that initially is recognized as neither legitimate, nor illegitimate, but simply as “given” (de facto as opposed to de jure).

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Edmund Burke

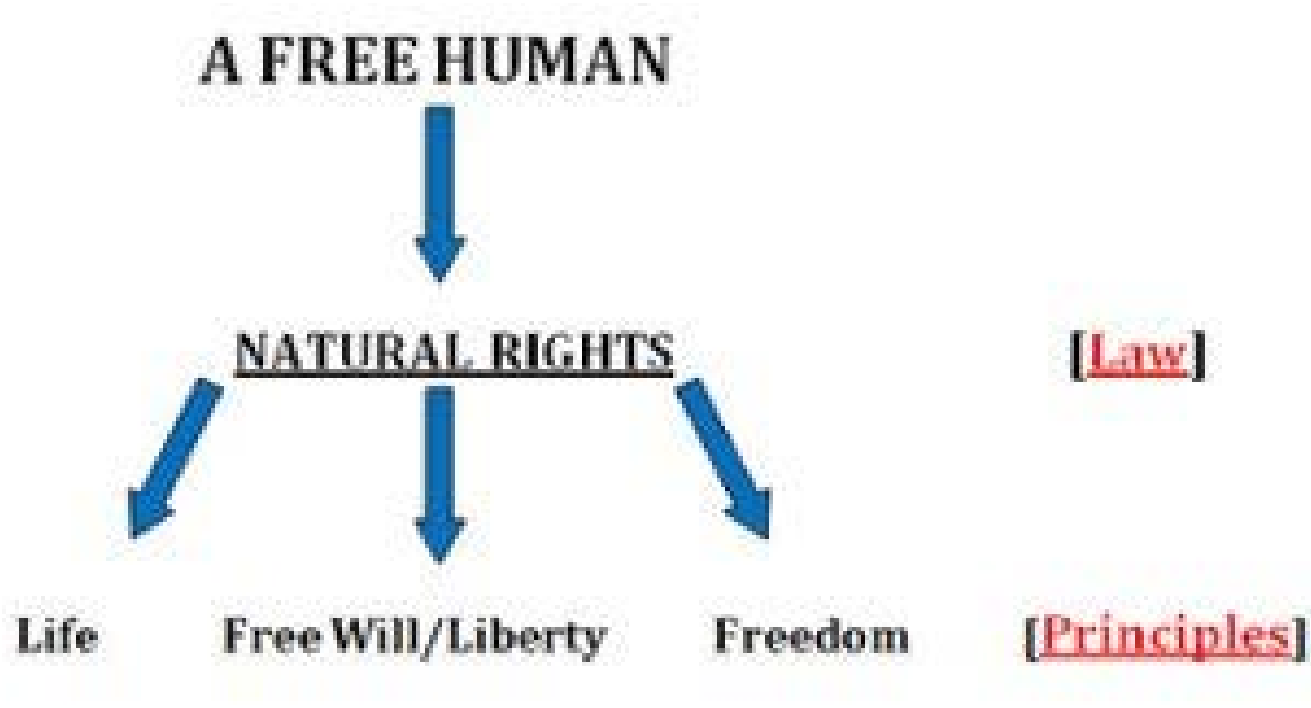
(1729-1797)

The authors note that if Hume is the first great conservative thinker, Burke is the most famous.



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As with **Hume**, **Burke's** philosophical starting point is a rejection of abstractions, such as “natural rights” (a very liberal concept).



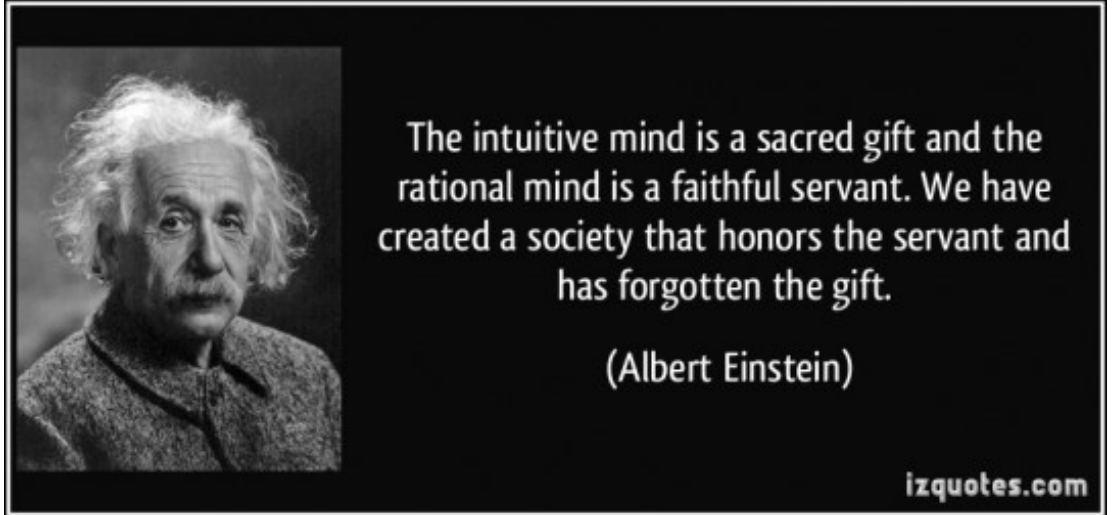
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For **Burke** (and indeed many conservatives), abstractions lead to theories, which eventually become dogma, which devolve into terror.

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Against
abstraction,
theory and
dogma, **Burke**
defends habit,
taste, and
“prejudice”



A note: **Burke** used the term “prejudice” as in pre-judgement, or a judgement made without going into theoretical abstractions, what we might call “intuition.”

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For **Burke**, the wisdom of others, including previous generations, is a resource to be respected if we are to avoid disastrous social consequences.

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Reflections on the Revolution in France

Compares 2 societies:

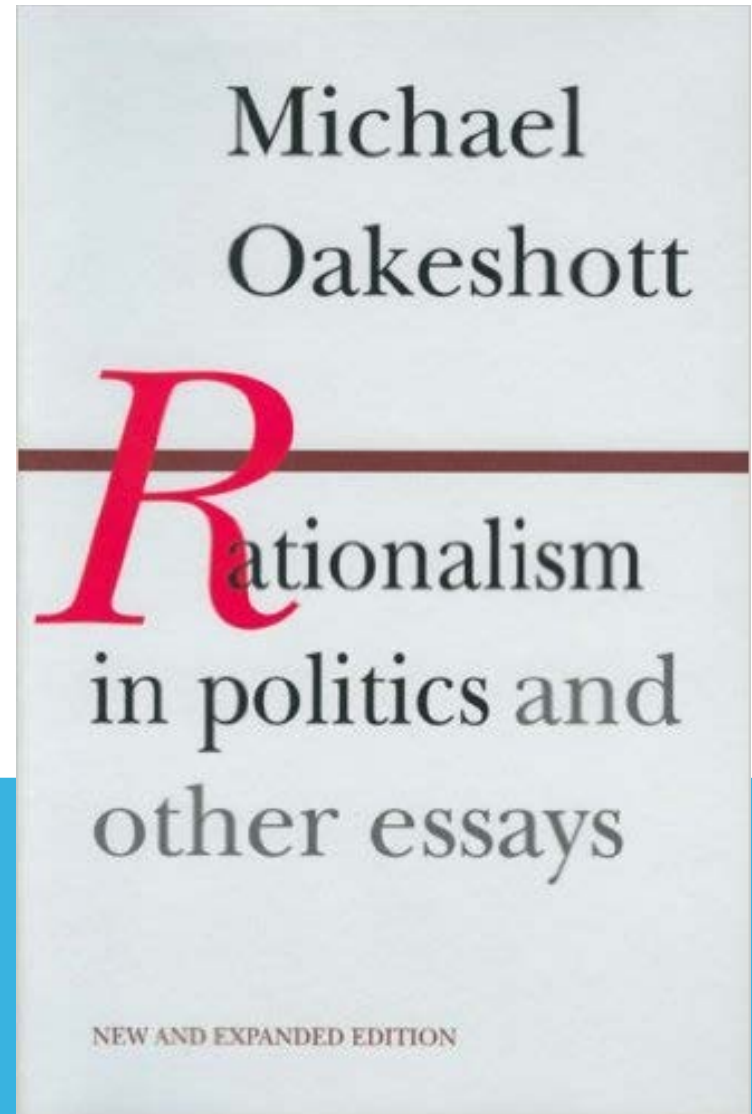
France – has abandoned prejudice in favor of “theory”

Britain – has remained close to its traditions, to which it is prejudiced.

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Michael Oakeshott
(1901-1990)

**Generally regarded
as the key
conservative
thinker of the
20th century.**



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Oakeshott's main concern (voiced in a very important essay titled "Rationalism in Politics") was that "rationalism" – a way of thinking that emphasizes independence of mind, freedom of thought, the authority of reason, was itself destructive toward political order.

Are we rational?



@CPSThinkTank

The man of conservative temperament believes that a known good is not lightly to be surrendered for an unknown better.

Michael Oakeshott

CONSERVATISM

To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss.

Michael Joseph Oakeshott

PICTUREQUOTES.COM

He also advanced a theory of knowledge which he divided into 2 archetypes:

1. Technical
2. Practical

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Technical Knowledge

...is formulated into rules that are deliberately learned, remembered and put into practice.



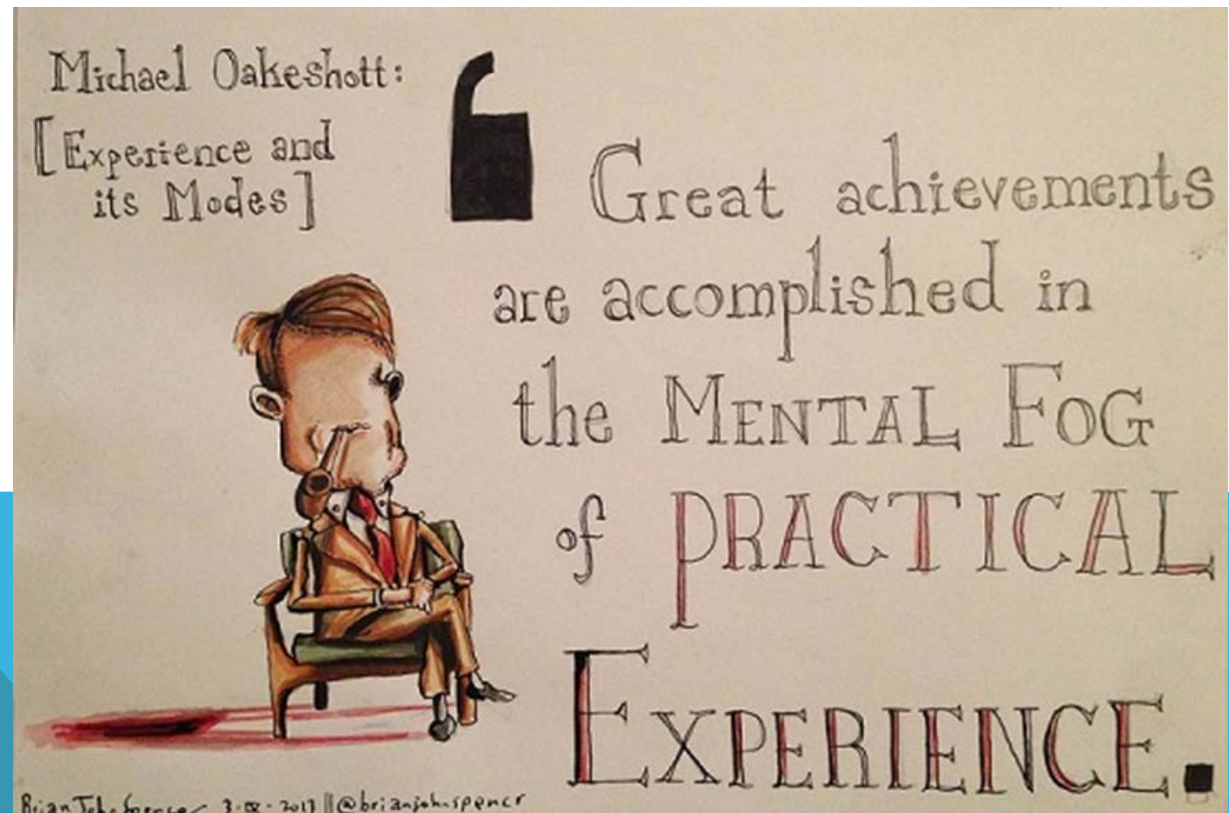
To try to do something which is inherently impossible is always a corrupting enterprise.

Michael Joseph Oakeshott

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Practical Knowledge

...is acquired only in use. It is not reflective, and cannot be formulated as rules.



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The political problem for Oakeshott was that rationalism rejected practical knowledge, and only recognized technical knowledge. An ideology, which is a form of technical knowledge, can be expressed in a set of propositions, whereas a tradition of thought – which is a kind of practical knowledge – cannot be.

Like Midas, the Rationalist is always in the unfortunate position of not being able to touch anything, without transforming it into an abstraction; he can never get a square meal of experience.

-Michael Oakeshott

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In a political sense, rationalism was the politics of the “inexperienced...” as in the experience of problem-solving (technical knowledge), rather than the recognition of the importance of tradition (practical knowledge).



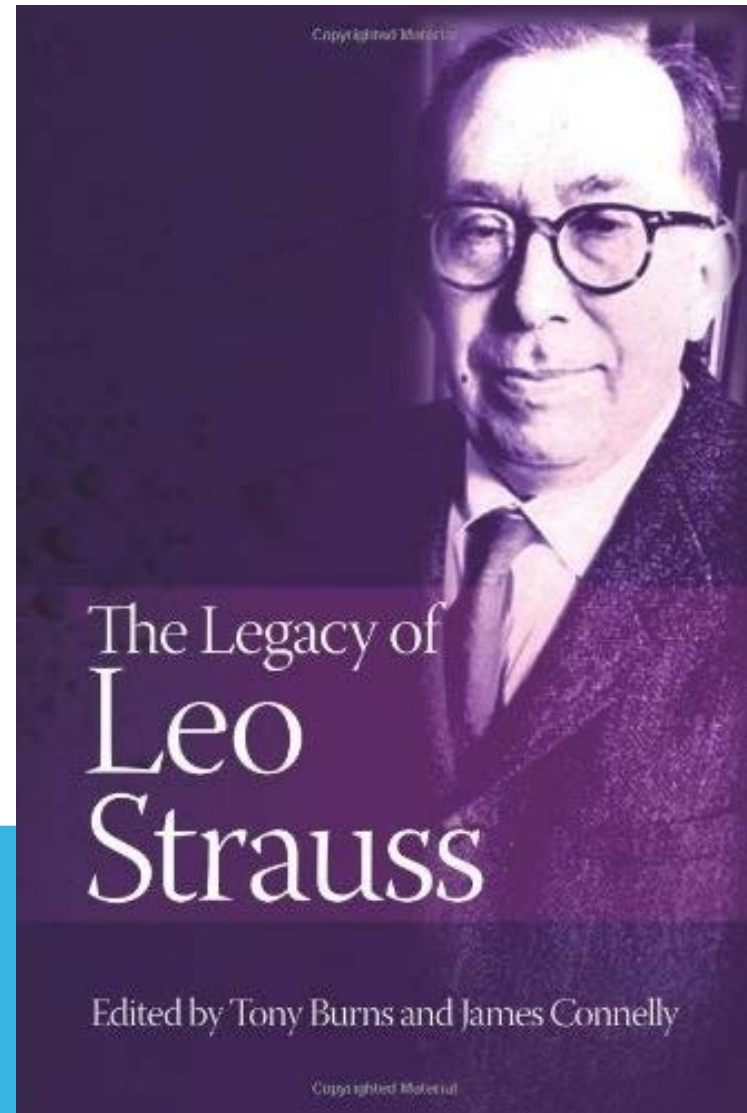
In political activity . . . men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel. ~Michael Oakeshott

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Leo Strauss

(1899-1973)

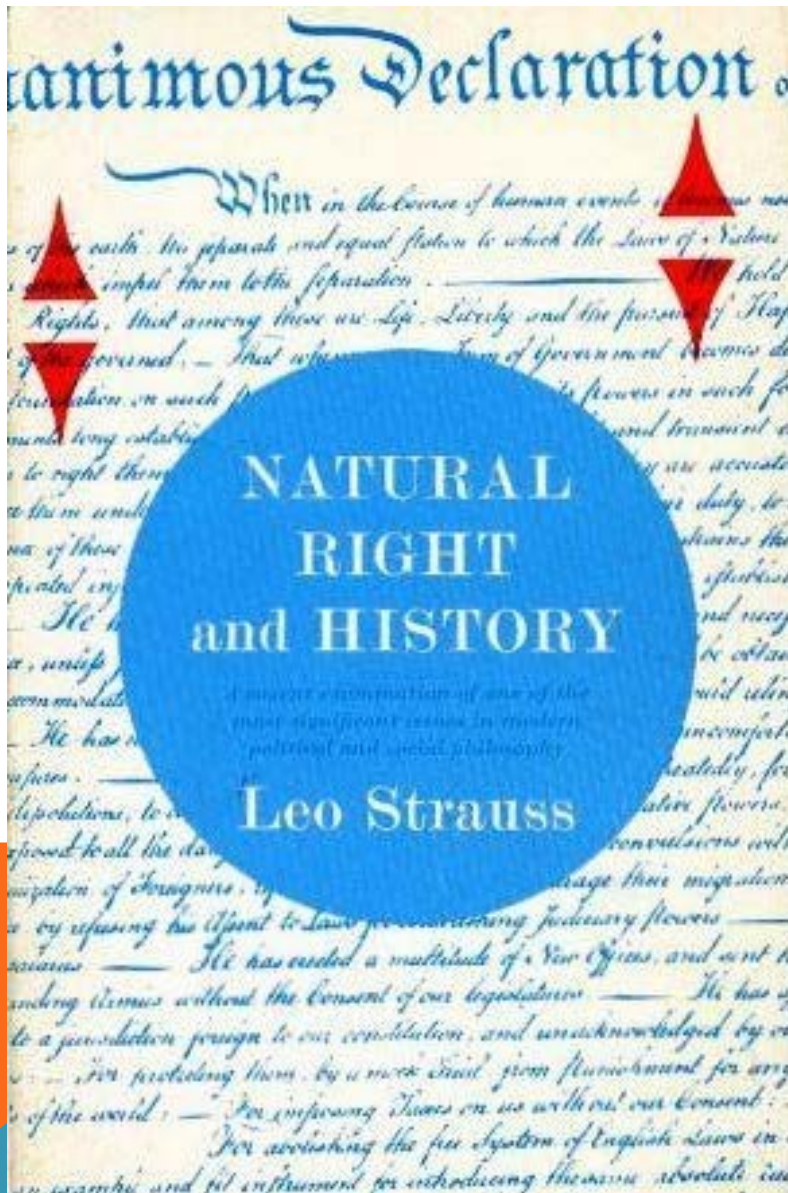
**Regarded as an
important
influence on
what is called
neo-
conservatism**



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Strauss sought to revive 2 traditions:

1. The reading of texts in the history of political thought.
2. The natural right tradition.



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Natural right stands opposed to cultural relativism. Modern thought, according to **Strauss**, is characterized by a rejection of objective validity in favor of relativism.



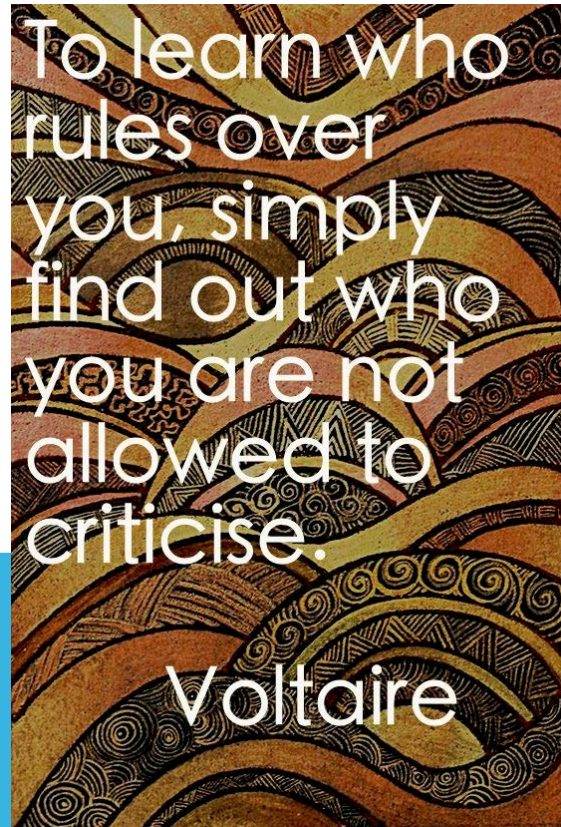
Leo Strauss's discoveries in the history of political philosophy had the effect of liberating his students from the yoke of contemporary thought.

— *William Kristol* —

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The logic of natural right is that those possessing the greatest wisdom should rule, and their power should be in proportion to their possession of the virtue of wisdom.

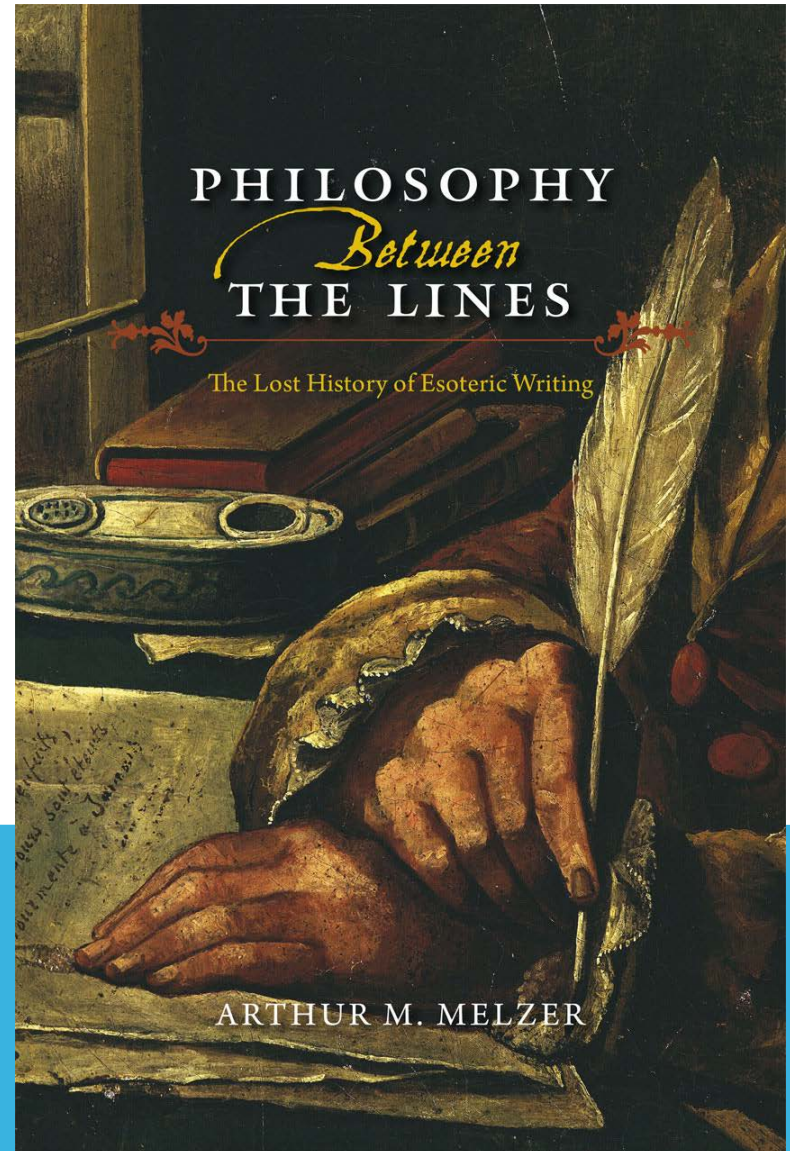
This, **Hoffman** and **Graham** note, is incompatible with the modern (liberal) idea of consent (i.e. rulers rule by consent of the ruled and not by appeal to the rulers' superior wisdom).



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Strauss's

argument that one must “read between the lines” when examining political texts, was based on the notion of 2 levels of writing:



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Exoteric Niches

Languages in Exoteric Niches:

- larger speaker populations
- greater geographical coverage
- greater degree of contact with other languages
- intergroup communication - use the language to speak to outsiders (individuals from different ethnic and/or linguistic backgrounds)
- more non-native speakers

Wray and Grace (2007)

One type of writing (exoteric), was directed at a popular audience...

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...the other (esoteric), had a “hidden” or secret teaching that is only revealed on careful reading.

Esoteric Niches

Languages in Esoteric Niches:

- smaller speaker populations
- smaller geographical coverage
- less contact with other languages
- intra-group communication
- Share:
 - a culture and environment
 - general knowledge of the community and its activities
 - have a unified identity.

The Noble Lie?

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Hoffman and **Graham** note that the influence of neoconservatives is most keenly felt in U.S. foreign policy.



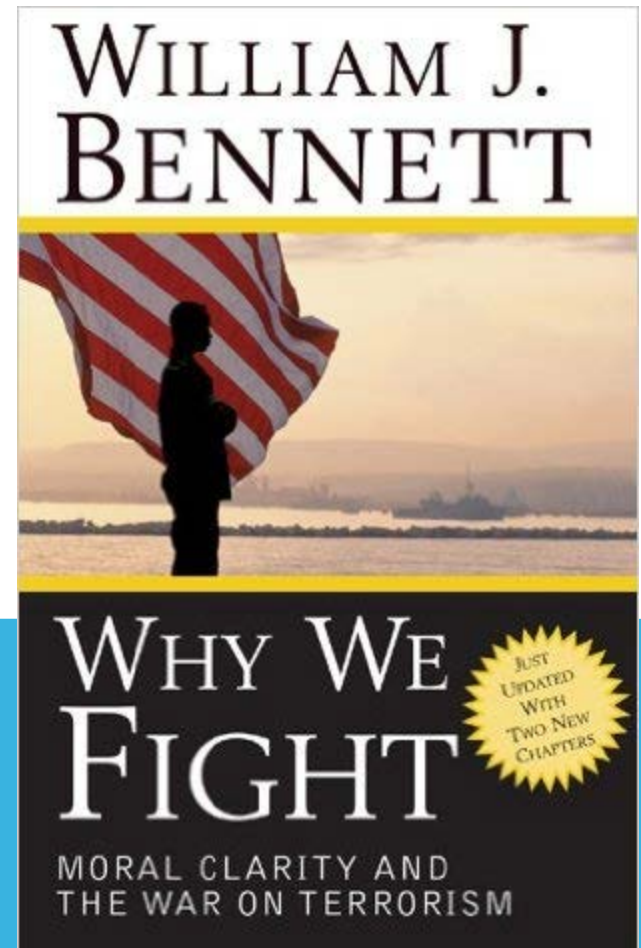
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The 4 Tenets of Neoconservative Thought (Ibrahim Koncak)



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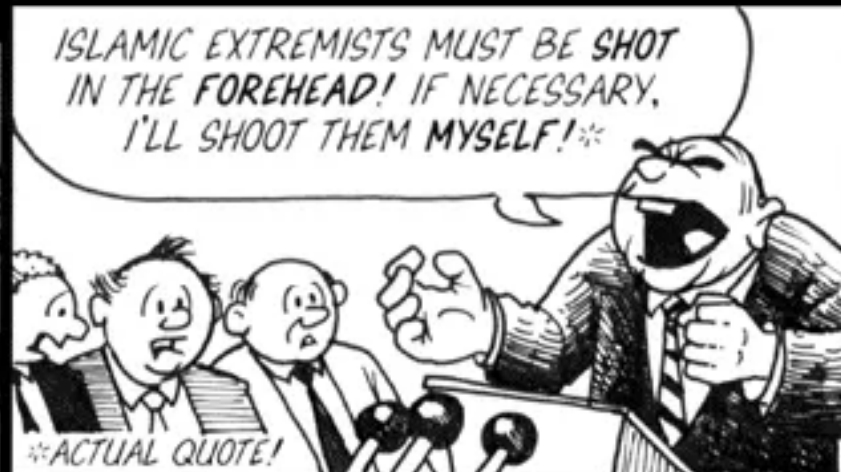
1. Moral Clarity – An understanding of the forces of good and evil in the international arena. This gets articulated in terms of the internal characteristics of state democratic leaders and democracies are good; tyrants and tyrannical regimes are bad.



MEET PRESIDENT ISLAM KARIMOV OF UZBEKISTAN! KARIMOV'S HOBBIES INCLUDE RUNNING FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS...



...MAKING INSPIRATIONAL SPEECHES TO FOSTER RELIGIOUS TOLORANCE...



...RUNNING UZBEKISTAN'S WORLD-FAMOUS JUDICIAL SYSTEM...



...AND OF COURSE, COUNTING THE AMERICAN AID MONEY.



MORAL CLARITY IS VERY MUDDY NOWADAYS

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2. **Military Preeminence** – the USA should have strategic and ideological predominance in the world. What people fear most in the world is US retrenchment and isolationism, rather than US activism and hegemony. International relations should be based on preponderance of power, instead of the traditional balance of power, as the route to peace and stability.

IT'S TIME TO
STOP CUTTING
THE MILITARY
BUDGET.



CONSERVATISM

3. **Leverage of Military Power** – is the willingness to use military force to pursue its foreign policy goals and is based on two premises:

a) The US ends are noble and good, therefore;

b) We are morally derelict if we do not use force in pursuit of those ends (such as democratization)



Remember:

Fair minded nations will appreciate the benevolent nature of US hegemony, those that don't, will simply have to live with, or in fear of, America's overwhelming power

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4. **Skepticism** – about the ability of international law and institutions to bring about peace and justice in the world. The I.C.C. and the U.N. are seen by neoconservatives as mechanisms used by weaker powers to tie down the USA.



If I were doing the Security Council today, I'd have one permanent member, the United States, because that's the real reflection of the distribution of power in the world. All international laws are invalid, meaningless attempts to constrict American power.

— *John Bolton* —

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VOTING CONSERVATIVE

I vote **Conservative** to keep
Foreigners, Minorities, Women,
Socialists, Gays and Liberals from
ruining my life.

I vote **Conservative** to keep this
moron from realising I'm the
only one **ruining** his life.



CONSERVATISM

