EDPS 788n: Conservative Educational Thought
Professor Campbell F. Scribner
Summer 2018
Tuesday and Thursday, 5:15 - 8:00

Over the past fifty years, conservatism has emerged as a dominant force in American political and intellectual life, exerting significant influence over educational policy and the pedagogical beliefs of millions of families. Yet its basic tenets remain almost entirely neglected in schools of education, presented piecemeal rather than in a sustained philosophical context and denied serious consideration on their merits. By offering an introduction to conservative educational thought, the following course encourages a fair appraisal of its values and argumentation while also foregrounding the many contradictions that conservatives have managed to subordinate under rubrics of “liberty” or “small government.” Conservatism has no single meaning in education: it extends from points of liberal consensus to admittedly fringe positions, from an emphasis on orthodoxy to individual freedom, from refined elitism to rowdy populism. Its diversity allows many conservatives to deny that they are acting on any philosophy at all, relying instead on a loosely defined common sense. Shifting meanings also raise questions about the future of conservative educational thought, whose recent success may obscure future challenges and changes.

Please note that this course will focus on the formulation and dissemination of conservative ideas, touching only incidentally on the political environment in which those ideas have found traction. That is, its focus is ideology rather than politics or society per se. Whenever possible, the course will directly incorporate the writing of conservative thinkers or their sympathetic interpreters, although there will be a few critical pieces as well. Students interested in particular topics are encouraged to review the supplemental titles listed below. It is important to stress that conservatism is not a unitary phenomenon. That is, many tensions and contradictions exist between its various perspectives. Also, please note that the material below is intended to be thought-provoking rather than comprehensive or definitive. Some viewpoints may not represent the majority of conservative thinkers, but all are included for the basis of their argumentation or their resonance with significant portions of the conservative movement.

Ultimately, the course should equip students to engage conservative policymakers, preparing them for positions in political offices, law firms, or think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Cato Institute, or the Heritage Foundation. It may also refine their engagement with educational policy debates more generally.

University of Maryland Course Policies
This course adheres to the University’s course-related policies regarding absences, academic integrity, non-discrimination, and student rights. Please visit the following site for more information, and let me know if you have any questions about your rights or responsibilities.
http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html
**Course Readings**
Please note that this is a reading-intensive course, with a range of rich (but short) articles each week. Most course readings are on electronic reserve [R] and available through the course ELMS site. Students are expected to bring either hard or electronic copies of these readings to class, as well as detailed reference notes.

The only book that students are encouraged to buy is Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, which we will be reading more or less in its entirety.

**Grading**

**Class Participation (40%)**
Students are expected to arrive in class each week with a hard or electronic copy of the reading, ready to pose or respond to the discussion questions posted online. Strong participation grades reflect a willingness to engage in sustained discussion on a topic and to answer difficult questions, as well as mastery of the reading. Knowing that our class is a community of shared deliberation, students should demonstrate generosity and respect to their classmates; all should feel equally welcome to engage. If you need to miss class, please send a brief email in advance.

**Reading Responses (50%)**
Because it is difficult to complete a meaningful research paper in the span of a six-week summer course, the primary assignments for this class will be a series of one-page responses to the reading. Students must complete responses to ten of the reading assignments over the course of the summer. Each response should provide an overview of the author’s argument, at least one direct reference to the reading, and one question that we might take up in discussion. (If there are multiple readings for a particular class, students may choose one as their focus or put multiple readings in conversation with each other.) Responses should be cogently written, and the questions should be insightful. Students are encouraged to respond to classmates’ posts, both before and after class discussion. Responses must be posted to the course website at least an hour before our meeting.

**Position Paper (10%)**
As a final assignment, students are required to write a three to five-page paper developing a topic of interest that arose during our discussions. This paper offers an opportunity for critical thinking and personal growth. It does not require any outside research, but should be persuasively and rigorously argued. Students are encouraged to discuss their topic with the professor in advance of writing.
Examples of Conservative Educational Thought

Meeting #1 (05/29/2018)—Introductions and Definitions
Although our class will not be overly particular with terminology, we should begin with at least tentative labels to describe conservative thinkers, and with them, some questions. For example, in a society without official ranks, long riven by capitalism, secularism, and populism, what exactly do conservatives hope to “conserve”? How might they reconcile competing goods, such as freedom and order? Are conservatives “reactionary”? If so, in what sense of the word?

- Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative” [R]
- Robin, The Reactionary Mind (pp. 17-37) [R]

Also recommended—
(Primary Sources)
Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945)
Kirk, The Conservative Mind, from Burke to Eliot (Chicago: Regnery, 1972)
Schlafly, A Choice Not an Echo (Alton, IL: Pere Marquette Press, 1964)
Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964)
Weaver, Ideas Have Consequences (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948)

(Secondary Sources)
Maciag, Edmund Burke in America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013)

Meeting #2 (05/31/2018)—The Prehistory of Conservative Educational Thought
To what extent did conservatives have a coherent educational agenda before World War II? Were they confined to spasmodic rejections of the systemization and modernization of schools, or did they proactively advance their own values? If the latter, what were those values?

- Lasch, The True and Only Heaven (pp. 184-195) [R]
- Laats, The Other School Reformers (pp. 25-72) [R]
- (Optional) Moran, “Reading Race Into the Scopes Trial” [R]

Also recommended—
Meeting #3 (06/05/2018)—Education and the Individual

Conservatives have long valued individual conscience, character, and excellence as extensions of natural rights and as counterpoints to the leveling, collectivist impulses of American democracy. How are these virtues best applied to education, and how have they come into conflict with educational practices since the early twentieth century?

- Lewis, “Men Without Chests” [R]
- Pearce, “The End of Education” [R]
- Mencken, “Aristocracy” [R]
- Weaver, “Education and the Individual” [R]

Also recommended—


Meeting #4 (06/07/2018)—Rigor and Content

Since the turn of the twentieth century, conservatives’ primary criticisms of public-school pedagogy have related to the loss of rigor and a focus on process rather than content. These flaws, usually associated with “progressive education” and the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey, have sparked endorsements of “basic education” and a concern with course material. How have these causes aligned or conflicted with other conservative values, such as Christianity or republicanism? How could they best be implemented in our current policy environment?

- Fadiman, “The Case for Basic Education” [R]
- Hirsch, Cultural Literacy (excerpts) [R]
- Scialabba, “In Literacy We Trust” [R]
- Finn, “Curriculum Becomes a Reform Strategy” [R]

Also recommended—

Bell, Crisis in Education: A Challenge to American Complacency (New York: Whittlesey House, 1949)
Meeting #5 (06/12/2018)—Higher Education

The ideological excesses and moral drift of higher education have been a favorite target for conservatives since at least the 1920s. Particularly influential was the perspective of the classicist Leo Strauss and his student, Allan Bloom, both from the University of Chicago, who saw the leftward drift of university campuses since the 1960s as a dangerous and unthinking embrace of cultural relativism. How far did their objections extend, and how does their diagnosis fare today, when campuses remain roiled by cultural politics and contested notions of academic freedom?

- Bloom, *Closing of the American Mind* (please focus on Part I and Part III)
- Robinson, “Year One” [R]

Also recommended—

- Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (Chicago: Regnery, 1951)
- Sykes, *Fail U.: The False Promise of Higher Education* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2016)
Meeting #6 (06/14/2018)—Libertarianism, Heterodoxy, and Markets

Classical liberals (now called libertarians) anchor their politics in the free exchange of goods and ideas, which, besides being an intrinsic good, they associate with increased efficiency, variety, and responsiveness to individual needs. These virtues are not simply economic. They also offer the promise of social justice and diversity. How might market ideals be applied to public education, and what outcomes would proponents hope to see?

- Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (excerpts) [R]
- Rollert, “Sleight of the Invisible Hand” [R]
- Mill, *On Liberty* (excerpts) [R]
- Friedman, “The Role of the Government in Education” [R]

Also recommended—

Meeting #7 (06/19/2018)—Homeschooling, Parents’ Rights, and Religious Orthodoxy

With increasing government regulation and professional autonomy for teachers, many conservatives perceive a steady erosion of parents’ ability to control the content their children’s education. The trend has led millions of them to abandon public schools—indeed, any schools—and teach their children at home. By what right do they do so? Should we worry about the (relatively) unregulated nature and content of their instruction, or should we celebrate the liberty and variety that ensues from parental prerogative? Are homeschoolers any more likely to indoctrinate their children than the public schools, and to what extent are children public property? Likewise, religious belief is a primary motivation for conservatives to abandon public schools, which many Christians, following the teachings of Rousas Rushdoony, view as fundamentally irreconcilable with their faith. Some take a frankly theocratic approach, denying any sharp distinctions between church and state and aiming to restore the “covenant” between God and the American church. How should these beliefs fit within an otherwise pluralist society?

- Glanzer, “Rethinking the Boundaries and Burdens of Parental Authority” [R]
- Reich, “On Regulating Homeschooling: A Reply to Glanzer” [R]
- Ingersoll, *Building God’s Kingdom* (pp. 79-118) [R]
- The Hal Webb Team, “No More Prayer and Bible Reading in the Schools” [R]
- (Optional) Rushdoony, *Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* (excerpts) [R]

Also recommended—
Meeting #8 (06/21/2018)—The Race Question
There is a long history of minority groups embracing conservative values, although conservatives as a whole have rarely been at the forefront of campaigns for racial equity or the rights of national or linguistic minorities. How would conservatives account for or remedy the legacy of ethnic discrimination in the United States, and what role might education play in their proposals? How have conservatives advanced notions of republicanism, freedom, colorblindness, and racial or cultural difference in their arguments?

- Sowell, “The Education of Minority Children” [R]

Meeting #9 (06/26/2018)—Multiculturalism
Multiculturalism and the threat of ethnic strife has animated conservatives at least since at least the 1960s, and became a signal aspect of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. How should we interpret the commitment to the “melting pot” ideal and/or the preservation of a Eurocentric American culture? What exactly are conservatives’ fears or objections to immigration, and how have they been expressed in the past few decades?

- Gottfried, Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt (pp. 1-9, 138-149) [R]
- Auster, The Path to National Suicide (Part II) [R]
- Levinovitz, “Ban This Book” [R]

Also recommended—
Meeting #10 (06/28/2018)—Communitarianism

Some conservatives argue that our reliance on the modern state has weakened more natural, human-scale connections, replacing local governments, economies, and moral codes with larger and more coercive structures. Especially since the social fissures of the 1960s, these thinkers have urged a return to community and the common social arrangements that there hold. How have their perspectives drawn from traditional modes of schooling, and how might they affect educational policy in the future?

- Nisbet, *Quest for Community* (pp. xxi-65) [R]
- Theobald and Snauwaert, “The Educational Philosophy of Wendell Berry” [R]
- Goldman, “Misunderstanding Conservative Communitarianism” [R]

Also recommended—

MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007)

Meeting #11 (07/03/2018)—Communities, Moralism, and Civic Virtue

Central to calls for community is a recognition that communities rely on common moral bases, whether at the local or national level, and that freedom, rather than a matter of individual rights alone, is inseparable from civic virtue. What exactly do conservatives mean by morals and virtue, and how might their position inform civic education (and policymaking in general) in years to come?

- Himmelfarb, “The Re-Moralization of Society” [R]
- Koganzon, “Educating for Liberty?” [R]
- Andrews, “Bloodless Moralism” [R]
- (Optional) Frohnen, “Natural Law and Virtue” [R]

Meeting #12 (07/05/2018)—Community, Subsidiarity, and Catholics

Drawing on Tocqueville and others, communitarians often focus on public and private associations as the foundations of a vibrant civil society. We will be examining that tradition in
conjunction with the principle of subsidiarity—political decentralization—and the role that Catholic schools and social doctrines have played in illuminating each.

- Drew and Grant, “Subsidiarity: More than a Principle of Decentralization” [R]
- Coleman and Hoffer, Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities [R]

Also recommended—