



**SERRC**  
Social Epistemology  
Review & Reply Collective

<http://social-epistemology.com>  
ISSN: 2471-9560

Conservatism: The End of An Idea

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Wills, Bernard. "Conservatism: The End of An Idea." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 6, no. 12 (2017): 7-16.

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I recently noticed that conservatism as a political stance is definitively dead. Truth is it has been on life support for decades. This has not stopped all sorts of people from using the term both positively and negatively. All sorts of people proudly proclaim themselves to *be* conservatives while others angrily denounce people *as* conservatives. The death of conservatism means, for starters, that neither group fully grasps of the term they are using. The word has become utterly detached from the thing. Another thing it means is that an individual may have conservative opinions but only in the sense that an individual may worship the goddess Artemis in her back yard or live like a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Puritan. It is a private eccentricity with no public institutional reality. The death of conservatism is then something like the death of God.

### **A New Classification of Politics: Three Ideologies**

There is no significance to taking any public stand as a conservative. This is for one basic reason. This reason is that the victory of ideology in contemporary politics is now total and that conservatism is not an ideology.<sup>1</sup> Our political discourse is now divided between three ideological stances: the progressive, the neo-liberal and ethno-nationalist stances. So called social conservatives used to exist but they have utterly disappeared into the third stance as is plain with the rise of Trump in the United States and the rise of similar populists elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> There are now no social conservatives of any note who are not also ethno-nationalists and indeed primarily ethno-nationalists.

This is absolutely evident from their obsession with a purported clash of civilizations between the West and Islam. By and large Muslims share the values of social conservatives when it comes to things like family, modesty, the centrality of religion and so on. Yet social conservatives despise and fear Muslims all the same making it plain that by family values they mean white Anglo-Saxon family values and by piety they mean white Anglo-Saxon piety. That is the core of the ethno-nationalist position: that western Christian values are cherished not for their supposed universality but as the foundation of a tribal identity. From time to time the neo-Liberal stance is classified as ‘conservative’ though for no reason I can fathom: as Marx pointed out predatory capitalism rips the veil from all traditional pieties by reducing everything to a cash value. The proposition that limitless accumulation is the aim of

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<sup>1</sup> A fundamental problem with conservatism is that as soon as it defines itself *vis a vis* its ideological rivals it itself becomes an ideological construct rather than an assumed form of life. At that point conservatism turns into *reaction*. This problem was noted as long ago as Aristophanes the *Clouds*. One ace in the hole of the radical tradition is that as soon as traditional norms are questioned and have to be self-consciously defended the conservative standpoint is lost. At that point conservatism becomes a position duking it out with the other positions scoring the odd victory here and suffering the odd reverse there.

<sup>2</sup> The fatal weakness of social conservatism as a political movement was that it never articulated a positive vision of society leaving this work first to neo-liberals and now to ethno-nationalists. Its politics was simply oppositional: devoted to blocking actions against abortion or homosexuality or other things deemed decadent, conflicts that were and are unwinnable. On this basis it forged its foolish alliance first with corporate kleptocracy and then with strident populism culminating in ludicrous defenses of Trumpism from previously reputable conservative publications like *First Things*. (e.g Robert Reno <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2016/05/why-im-anti-anti-trump>)

life and indeed the primary duty of a citizen is consistent with no ancient wisdom I know of religious or otherwise.

Conservatism then is no more. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? It is hardly my place to say: conservatism itself advises us that like all human constructions it is finite and imperfect. However, at this point the reader may well be waiting, impatiently, for a definition of conservatism. What is it that I say has died?

I will proceed to offer if not a definition then an account of what conservatism is in the root sense of the word: an attitude to the world which seeks to conserve or protect those principles, values or institutions on which genuine human flourishing has always and will always rest. It will then be evident that people who use the term most loudly haven't the faintest interest in conservatism or conservative values and perhaps never have. Of course, I run the risk of baffling people (both boosters and knockers) who will not recognize *their* version of conservatism in anything I say. I ask such people to be patient until I finish my exposition.

### **How Were We Able to Drink Up the Sea?**

I said above that conservatism is not an ideology: from writers labelled 'conservative' it would be difficult to cull a doctrinal statement. This means that it has no definition in the sense of a core statement of doctrine or set of prescriptive demands: it is, if like, the position which is not a position but rather an attitude and a practice. However, I can give you a living example of it from a much despised source.

I find an excellent description of conservatism as a life stance expressed in the five pillars of the Islamic faith.<sup>3</sup> *Soi-disant* 'conservatives' who are shocked and angered by this should ask themselves why as these values seem to me core to any conservative stance towards the world. The first of these pillars is the *shahada* or profession of faith: There is no god but god and Mohammed is his prophet. Now conservatism does not inherently care about the latter part of this assertion: it is happy to recognize a multitude of other prophets who have taught in other parts of the world such as Siddartha, Jesus, or Confucius.

The first however is essential: conservatism is theocratic in orientation. Humans are first and foremost unconditionally responsible to a divine order: to the standards which are ultimate because they are founded in the unchanging nature of God. No human being is to place any finite value, such as family, clan, party in the place of God. They regard the finite as infinite in value and as an absolute end is to commit the arch-error of *shirk*. On this basis conservatism attaches only a qualified value to the goods of this world: it does not absolutize the relative. No movement, no passion, no interest which is merely human or temporary can trump our duty to god and his sovereign will. Order is prior absolutely to freedom and in fact it is true freedom to recognize this.

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<sup>3</sup> For a rich introduction to Islam and indeed to other major faiths see *The World's Religions* by John Huston Smith.

Of course this whole position is pointless if we do not know God's will. Fortunately, it is of the nature of god to reveal himself in scriptures, historical events, the exemplary deeds of prophets and saints and so on. God is present and active in the world. His will is manifest in the sacred teachings and philosophies (the *philosophia perennialis*) of the world as in the depths of our own conscience.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his will is present even in those conscious non-believers who nonetheless enshrine the eternal verities (the good, the beautiful and the true) within their hearts.

For this reason, the second pillar enjoins us to prayer. Humans must remember and acknowledge both internally and externally the absoluteness of God. This is important because it cuts against the grain. Our tendency is to lose focus in the midst of the world's distractions. We wander away from our final end and our ultimate good. We put wealth, or lust, or power or anger at the center of our lives instead of the union with god we all intrinsically long for. We miss our happiness by seeking it in things that cannot, of their very metaphysical nature, supply it.

This is why prayer, both personal and liturgical is central to a well lived life for in prayer we re-collect our ultimate aim, the peace that comes of divine union. This peace is the aim of all prayer even when expressed in its lowest manifestation which is petitionary prayer. Conservatism calls us to recollect those spiritual values that make for true fulfillment against everything faddish and temporary. It calls to put the eternal always before the merely modish and to this extent prayer is one of its liveliest manifestations as it a call to remember god in the midst of this world.

### **A Union of Materialism and Faith**

Yet our lives are in this world too. Conservatism rejects the pessimism of the millenarian and gnostic. It does not long for an immanent millennium to destroy the present world order but waits patiently for the fulfillment of things in the fullness of time. Thus, when faced with the worldly Gnosticism of the secular revolutionary or the religious despair of those who simply wish to be raptured into eternity as the world burns it counsels skepticism. Thus, as our status in the next world is determined by how we live in this one our duty to god is also our duty to community. Almsgiving is then a conservative value. Wealth exists to be shared. It is

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<sup>4</sup> This notion of a 'perennial philosophy' is central to writers we might place on the conservative spectrum from traditionalist writers like Rene Guenon to more eclectic figures like Aldous Huxley or Simone Weil who, while influential in some conservative circles, defy easy categorization. These metaphysically inclined thinkers contrast with the more pragmatic strain of conservatism stemming from the tradition of Burke and Swift. The American Russel Kirk may be taken as one of the last influential exponents of this view. One can add to this list the disciples of Leo Strauss (a far deeper thinker than Kirk), Canadians like George Grant as well as pure reactionaries in the tradition of Joseph de Maistre. What any of these figures would have thought of Donald J. Trump, a wealthy vulgarian straight from the pages of the *Satyricon*, one can only guess. Ironies abound here however: Guenon, a western convert to Islam, seems to have influenced the volcanic anti-Islamic rage of Steve Bannon. The paleo-conservatism of the genteel Russel Kirk also spawned the nativism of Pat Buchanan. Every stance has its shadow, the embodiment of its darker tendencies and ethno-nationalism seems to stand in this relation to conservatism.

not an idol and not an end. It is a means to community and those who are blessed with it in turn bless others. Wealth selfishly hoarded is not wealth at all and thus *zakat* is enjoined on all believers.

This is especially important as we tend to the selfish and misguided view that our wealth is the deserved result of our special virtue whereas in truth all good things come from god and god alone. As it comes from god it is given back to god as god is present in the neediness of our neighbors and the needs of our community. How vulgar then is the so called 'prosperity gospel' preached by certain Christians who claim to have Jesus in their hearts when they do not even have Mohammed! There are many displays of vulgar wealth in the Islamic world as in ours. People in the East *and* the West need constant reminding that the needs of the community outweigh the wants of the individual.

This is part of our human fallibility, our tendency to forget our ultimate end for merely proximate ones. The principle of almsgiving is, however, particularly salutary for those of us living in the Christian west as our societies have made the endless accumulation of personal wealth their over-riding principle even at the expense of the very soil we live on and the air we breathe. I should note though entirely in line with conservatism *zakat* assumes that differences between people entail differences in wealth and that this will not be abolished but equalized through giving.

The fourth pillar counsels fasting on the sound conservative principle that we do not live for the gratification of the senses but for the fulfillment of the spirit. Fasting reminds us that the primary struggle in life is with ourselves and that the demands of the moral and communal life are at odds (often) with the gratification of the senses. Indeed, there is no substitute for the feeling of hunger as those who never feel it have no conception of the suffering of those who do. This is why great wealth so often goes with poverty of the spirit and why it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

Yet fasting is only one letter away from feasting. As there is a time to curb the senses there is a time to release them particularly in the context of communal celebration. As Aristotle said long ago, proper self-control involves not just self-denial, knowing when to say no to our desires, but also knowing when to indulge them: one does not gorge at a funeral or fast at a wedding. Still, as giving free rein to our desires must be choice and not compulsion our moral training will tend to focus on self-denial so that our indulgence may be unconstrained by evil habit.

Finally, the fifth pillar enjoins on us pilgrimage to Mecca and why not as life itself is a pilgrimage? T. S. Eliot prays: "help us to care and not to care" and this is the core of the notion that we are pilgrims in this world. The world of time and space we inhabit is both affirmed and transcended. We give ourselves over to finite ends yet leave the fruit of our action in the hands of providence. The finite passes over to the infinite as we give over our worldly projects and passions, releasing them into the eternal will of God.

On practical level this is a powerful inoculation against despair as the world does not bear all the weight of our expectations (which of its creaturely nature it can never bear). Consider as an example the old expression “better dead than red”. Those who uttered this expression meant that the Western Bourgeois form of freedom was freedom absolute and that its potential loss justified the nuclear annihilation of the planet. Of course, Western Bourgeois freedom (though admirable in many ways) is a provincial form of freedom. It does not exhaust every possibility of human good. Only a whig-history-on-steroids view of western institutions as the inevitable and only culmination of human history could justify such nihilism.

Conservatism will have no truck with this sentiment. History is an arena of struggle subject to advances and retreats. Yet possibilities for good remain in the darkest of times and the insanity of history can never destroy or even affect in the slightest the eternal essence of God source and ground of all good. In a godless universe, where this world is the only locus of good, history becomes a battleground in which the stakes are absolute and compromise unthinkable: hence the vicious ideological battles of those who think they have solved the riddle of history and claim to be bringing about the final human good.

### **When Opposition to the Radical Falls Away**

Of course it can be objected that conservatism as I have described it here has no more been tried than Christianity or communism. Conservatism, one might say, has never really existed outside the elegant, wistful prose of conservatives. There is much truth to this charge yet it is, of course, true of all moral stances that their instantiations are very far indeed from their archetypal forms. Hence we get the characteristic vice of the conservative: the tendency to forget fundamental values for external privileges and the inability to identify what it is that ought, in fact, to be conserved.

Still, on the plus side of the ledger, the conservative might well ask whether his or her own view is comprehensive of all its rivals. Conservatives share with progressives a concern for justice and equity especially for the poor and marginalized. Conservatives share with ethno-nationalism a concern for the particularities of language and culture over against the homogenizing tendencies of globalism and technocracy. Conservatives even share with neo-liberals a suspicion of totalitarian power, planning and control.

However, conservatism, in the west at least, may well be dead for a more fundamental reason. This is because there is a powerful alternative to the conservative tradition and that is the *radical* tradition. All three of our contemporary ideologies have their roots in radicalism and are closer to each other than they can readily imagine given their current conflict. For the radical tradition the constraints imposed by tradition are in almost all cases artificial. What the conservative tradition would constrain the radical tradition would release. Radicalism envisages a flowering of human diversity, a host of new avenues in which self-hood can be explored beyond the stale platitudes of convention. This radical principle has

routed conservatism (much of which expressed itself as cheap nostalgia anyway) and is the default position of all North Americans.<sup>5</sup>

This spirit can express itself as radical egalitarianism or its opposite. For instance, among ethno-nationalists it is assumed that the will of the *demos* embodies the wisdom and good sense of the people. This wisdom would readily express itself were it not for the constraints imposed by various 'elites' whose abstract intellectualism has lost touch with the community and indeed with reality. These elites constantly invoke the authority of science, or education or expertise or data against what 'simple folk' can see with their own eyes. When the *demos* seeks to express its will this is declared 'unconstitutional' or 'against the rule of law' by lawyers or advocacy groups or other 'elite' institutions.

The *demos* however, holds all such institutions in contempt and seeks to impose its will through a 'great leader' who is willing to flout them and indeed is willing to flout moral convention altogether (even moral conventions like marital fidelity to which the *demos* remain sentimentally attached). Thus, we have a kind of direct democracy outside of constitutional and legal constraints such as conservatism has forever warned against. That these radicals sometimes espouse 'conservative' seeming policies or points of view is irrelevant as they espouse them lawlessly and in a manner contemptuous of the very traditions they claim to value.

Why, for instance, is it conservative to despise the opinions of the educated and even pour contempt on the intellect itself? Such things are an expression of a rebellious and anti-authoritarian spirit. The *demos* trusts only in its collective judgment and not only rejects but actively despises any other principle. That this attitude is over-determined by socio-economic factors is plain but that does not make it any easier to deal with on a day to day basis especially as the scapegoating of immigrants, prisoners and others is high on the populist wish-list and the populace resents institutional constraints on its will to revenge especially.<sup>6</sup> There is of course the other side of this coin and that is the populism of progressive movements such as the occupy movement, black-bloc radicals and so on.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Any defense of a conservative principle in politics and society in the west can only be a highly qualified one for the reason that there are (in my view at least) a plurality of moral languages with claims on our attention and one of these is indeed that of the radical tradition. For Westerners this problem is acute for, as far as I able to determine, the roots of radicalism are in the *Gospels* and the *Epistles of Paul*. These are not Conservative documents in my reading of them precisely for their doctrine of radical solidarity with the poor which undermines the binaries on which traditional human societies are built (and sometimes subverts those texts themselves). It was not for nothing that the Emperors of Rome thought Christianity a fundamental threat to civilized standards. In the West, then, the radical principle is already present in its primary theological constitution (however much it tries to ignore or forget that fact).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, conservative Christianity is, with some honorable exceptions, becoming a pharisaical revenge cult. Behind all the rhetoric around 'security' (Canada remains one of the securest societies on planet Earth where terrorism is concerned) and the 'Muslim threat' one will find the simple will to retaliate in kind against anyone who represents the hated 'other' no matter how guilty or how innocent.

<sup>7</sup> I have before me the online Anarchist Library compiled by the Green Mountain Collective. (<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anti-racist-action-the-green-mountain-anarchist-collective-black-bloc-tactics-communicue>). These sources give the inescapable impression of an abstract ideological rage consuming

These movements, it must be said, have aims that seem overall nobler and better than the beefs and resentments of populists. However, this is a weakness as much as a strength: as I said above every stance struggles with its shadow. Noble ideals are a proven danger when not accompanied by political and moral pragmatism and relentless self-examination. Moral crusaders have a distressing tendency to fumble badly when actually called upon to run things: this is because sweeping moral denunciations are a form of cheap grace while actual governance (self-governance included) is slow, patient work.

### **Return to Innocence Lost (or Imagined)**

There is also a false innocence that can be maintained simply by never facing the temptations of power. William Blake (a far deeper radical) was a persistent critic of any form of abstract moralism. For him no political or theological order could be the basis of freedom that did not overcome the problem of self-righteousness: our tendency to identify ourselves with an abstract principle of goodness and others (inevitably) with an abstract principle of evil. In a powerful image he tells us that blood sacrifice and war are the culmination of the moral law, the categories of good and evil unrelieved by charity, solidarity, or forgiveness.<sup>8</sup>

Moralism is for Blake a form of violence. (see for instance plates 47-51 of *Jerusalem*) Our care must embrace the ‘minute particulars’ of humanity: no ‘humanism’ can be liberating that puts an abstraction like ‘Humanity’ before flesh and blood human beings. We all have encountered people who virtue signal on every conceivable ‘issue’ but have little but venom in their hearts: one danger of the progressive stance lies, then, in the monsters of self-righteous zeal that it breeds.

At any rate, such people envisage (after some difficult to specify revolutionary event) a world in which a host of sexualities, ethnicities, personalities and identities flourish without constraint and (though this is surely impossible) without mutual contradiction.<sup>9</sup> As the

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itself in an intellectual and historical vacuum: pretty much as Hegel saw the French revolutionaries. (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, 604) Talking to proponents of these views online (if talking is quite the word for it) only deepens this impression. Perhaps I am being harsh however: if the reader is curious, she may peruse Hegel’s chapter ‘Absolute Freedom and Terror’ and judge for herself if the comparison is apt. Those curious as to why the revolution always eats itself and why revolutionaries must at last turn on themselves may find Hegel’s analysis helpful.

<sup>8</sup> That ‘progressives’ will verbally disembowel each other over ideological differences barely discernible to outsiders shows that they are far from immune to the mimetic violence described by René Girard (2001; 24-31) Just as Blake said, moral abstraction enacts ritual violence. Progressivism is far from alone in this of course and indeed the ethno-nationalist stance is even more Manichean and violent. Still, the fact that it is over all the most humane of the current stances only makes the trap deeper: without what theologians once called a sense of sin it is difficult to imagine any politics escaping the scapegoating impulse and the self-righteous violence it manifests. Considering the ridicule and anger one provokes from many progressives by defending a stance of non-violence things do not seem hopeful.

<sup>9</sup> This is a deeper problem than many realize. The total liberation of one standpoint is the suppression of another: unconditional solidarity with ALL standpoints at once seems a chimerical notion. This is why in practice progressives (for instance) must always favor some oppressed people over others: aboriginal people in

economic discipline of Capitalism lies behind all other forms of oppression the current economic order must be overthrown. The suggested alternative is often some form of anarchism.

Like the populists, anarchists distrust and despise constitutionalism which after all only serves to protect the oppressors. Indeed, the anarchists despise traditional civil liberties as a form of constraint and mock those who espouse them as 'liberals'. In particular, they resent the fact that such liberties prevent them from waging all-out war against their eternal adversary the populists. The populists heartily agree. Both sides fantasize about epic street confrontations or cyber battles that will issue in a final rout of the forces of evil. In other words, they are secular (and indeed religious) millenarians.

Each believes in a great battle, an apocalyptic convulsion that will only happen if liberals and other idiots get out of the way. A significant minority of each group considers this not just as a 'culture war' but as a 'war' war with brickbats, fires and vandalism of property. At any rate both agree on the Manichean position: the world and everything in it is hopelessly vitiated and corrupt and must be purged by fire whether this be the literal fire of Armageddon or the flames of secular revolution.

Finally, we have the technological dreamers. They do not dream of an unconstrained populist will or an unconstrained flowering of genders and sexualities but of the unconstrained power of technical and economic innovation. The enemy is, again the state and its institutions. Regulation of industry and common sense controls over heedless technological advancement are as bizarre and repellent to them as constraints on abortion or sexuality are to progressives. They, after all, represent the creative energy behind all forms of human advancement, all growth and prosperity. Technological or business imperatives cannot be questioned without questioning prosperity and progress themselves: the two things which for this ideology are non-negotiable. Such people see nothing ironic or odd in

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Guatemala, say, over outlandish folk like the Copts in Egypt. This why the radical stance may, for all protestations to the contrary, be implicitly totalitarian. Consider the following problem: A adopts the deep narrative about himself that he is the one true prophet of God. A desires not only the liberty to adopt this self-description but demands the universal recognition of this deep description by others. It is, to him, a fundamental denial of his personhood should anyone question his foundational narrative as, in his mind, he IS this narrative. However, trouble arises if B also adopts the deep story that SHE is the one true prophet of God as others cannot offer unconditional affirmation of both narratives. Here is where the currently much maligned standpoint of liberalism steps in. The liberal defers the *eschaton* by imposing articles of peace on A and B while each prosecutes their claim to be the one true prophet. With this peace imposed A and B come to the realization that, whatever differences divide them, they share a common nature as rational agents. They can now differ on each other's deep story, neither one need be forced to accept the other because neither party is *reducible* to their narrative. With that they can go about their affairs. The alternative is playing the zero sum game of establishing *my* narrative as the dominant one through the suppression of the other contrary narrative. A simply destroys B. This is the totalitarian stance. Its dangers are evident yet the liberal stance costs as well. By entering *that* stance, we forgo universal recognition for the sake of peace and subordinate our deep story to the common good, at which point we cease to be simply *our* story, we assume a common public narrative as our own somewhat as we give up our private religious perceptions to join a church. I tend to think that is a cost worth paying though others may differ.

the fact the demands of progress and the spread of prosperity never conflict with their own self-interest.

The self-interest of the entrepreneur or innovator *is* the interest of the community. In a seeming parody of the Marxist utopia where the freedom of each is the freedom of all the neo-liberals and libertarians do not see the economic freedom of the individual as ever conflicting with the good of the community. This is, of course, the dream of anarchists as well: that individual wills can exist in immediate and natural harmony once the power of the state is gone. The technophiles go even further however: for them this harmony can be achieved and maintained in the midst of unrestrained *competition*.

The magic of the market will smooth out all inequities and bring prosperity and balance to all (or, if the libertarian leans also to vengeful populism, to the *deserving*). At any rate the neo-liberals have one ace in the hole that it is difficult to imagine anyone overcoming: this is the fact that almost all acts of rebellion can be appropriated and monetized. This is particularly true of physical vandalism. Capitalism does not fetishize physical property the way some anarchists think it does: burn a bank to the ground and you will find only that stock in private security companies has gone up.

### **Liberation as Consuming Fire**

For all three groups the enemy is clear as is the goal: the repressed must be liberated. The demos must be free to enact its vengeful fantasies on immigrants, prisoners or gays. The libertarian must be free to innovate and make more money than anyone can find a use for. Sexual and ethnic minorities must be free to express their forms of life to whatever limit logic implies. All must be free and all must be free especially of the enemy of freedom, the state and its laws and institutions.<sup>10</sup> This is the core of each position quite apart from the fact that within each there may be many demands reasonable in themselves.

This indicates that the radical stance is *the* stance where our politics is concerned. Everything must be liberated though conservatives may warn again and again that liberation may mean the freedom of everything awful as easily as the freedom of everything good. Lamentation however is pointless (with apologies to Canada's lamenter-in-chief George Parkin Grant!). This is because the radical principle is *our* principle and is, indeed, along with conservatism, a fundamental human option. Moreover, it has great achievements to its credit even as conservatism has many disgraces.

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<sup>10</sup> This is why the most embattled principle of all is the centrism espoused by the Democratic party in the U.S. and the Liberal Party in Canada. As in the thirties it seems "the center cannot hold" (to quote W.B. Yeats). The basic problem seems to me that no centrist government can impose discipline on the fossil fuel industry. Nor can it impose any discipline on the speculators and financiers who hoard badly needed funds offshore: a miserly activity contrary to the very nature of the capitalism they are said to espouse. That said, if there is anything which can be said to be 'conservative' in the current context it is belief in a social democratic state with traditional civil liberties protected by a strong constitutional framework. This, if I would hazard a guess, would be the best polity currently on offer. I have given short shrift to the phenomenon of political centrism in this piece, a deficiency I hope to make up in a subsequent essay.

At the same time radicalism imposes its own constraints: most of us would rejoice if anti-vaxxers stopped being such fools yet they are acting on an impeccable radical principle, that of personal autonomy, as well as a suspicion of institutionalized medicine that many of us share. In fact, this example raises a vexing problem: vaccination can only be carried out on a population, all must buy into it for it to work. How would an anarchist society founded on a principle of radical freedom (whether anarcho-communist or right wing patriot) handle a question of this sort? Will radical stances license such appalling disorder that conservatism will become a living option? Are Clinton and Trudeau after all the best we can hope for?

Blake certainly painted a dark vision of the hellish cycle of rebellion and reaction: the perpetual alteration between sanguinary radicalism and stultifying conservatism. Is this our future? Philosophy, alas, does not deal with the future. It counsels only that we temper hope as well as fear and judge all things *sub-specie-aeternitatis*. It is with this stoic sentiment, as boring as it is true, that I will conclude. We seem at an impasse though the author would certainly be happy to learn from others that he is unduly pessimistic about the world.

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