



UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

# The Conservative-Liberal Tradition

## From St. Thomas Aquinas to Robert Nozick

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Available online free of charge and on paper





# Pre-liberal Insights: Snorri and Aquinas

- The king is under the same law as his subjects
- If he seriously violates the law, he could be replaced
- Aquinas justified private property: brings peace and prosperity
- The liberal Salamanca School was Thomist
- Snorri described the individual, making choices





What happens without property rights?



## The Classical Thinkers: Locke, Hume, Smith

- Locke: Appropriation from commons need not harm others
- Hume: Private property and free trade responses to scarcity
- Smith: order without commands, unintended consequences



Responses to the French Revolution: Burke, Constant, Tocqueville

# Revolutions: Two Successes, Two Failures

- The 1688 and 1776 revolutions succeeded because they were made to preserve and extend existing liberties
- The 1789 and 1917 revolutions were made to reconstruct society; they turned into disasters
- Burke: the revolutionaries over-estimated the power of individual reason and under-estimated the potential of social reason, embodied in practices and traditions
- Constant: the revolutionaries did not understand modernity, diversity, freedom of choice and of contract
- Tocqueville: the revolutionaries did not appreciate intermediate institutions, spontaneously developed



Evolution, Not Revolution







Free trade Champions: Chydenius, Bastiat, Spencer, Sumner

# Trade the Key to Prosperity





Austrian pioneers:  
Menger and von Mises



Hayek: Socialism 'The Road to Serfdom'

# Hayek as a Conservative Liberal

- How can we accomplish so much when we know so little?
- Because we can utilise knowledge of others transmitted through the price mechanism and through traditions and practices
- Collective reason, accumulated cultural capital
- Theory of spontaneous order shows that liberty is possible and indeed inevitable
- It is desirable? Irrelevant question



# Crucial Role of Mont Pelerin Society



# Rappard, de Jouvenel, Popper, and von Mises





# Oakeshott's conservative liberalism

- Liberty as a skill, a practice
- Rejects rationalism, tradition necessary
- Western individual acquired the will and ability to make choices
- Search of order enabling different individuals to live together peacefully, different purposes
- Purposeless, but not pointless
- Latin *societas* and *universitas*, *Genossenschaft* and *Herrschaft*, English enterprise associations and civil associations
- Socialism in West a case of mistaken identity





# Summing up

- Economics necessary (and a powerful support of conservative liberalism), but not sufficient
- To have and to be, efficiency and identity
- Not everything a matter of choice
- There are also commitments, ties, loyalties by virtue of who we are
- Civil society: family, property, morality
- Political programme: free trade, private property, limited government
- Combining cosmopolitanism and patriotism, making populism and nationalism servants of and not threats to liberty
- The task: to offer spirited defence of Western civilisation

