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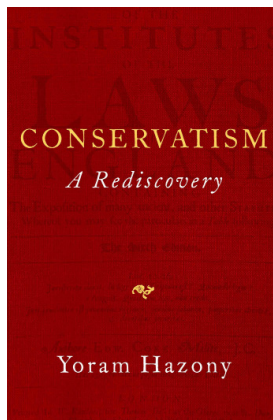
GRAEME GARRARD *offers a reconnaissance
of the modern Anglo-American right*

When the philosopher Hannah Arendt quipped that “the most radical revolutionary will become a conservative on the day after the revolution”, she was using the word “conservative” in its most general, contentless, non-ideological sense. All political ideologies are compatible with conservatism understood this way, except perhaps for anarchism. Western journalists during the Cold War sometimes referred to both die-hard Kremlin Bolsheviks and anti-communist American libertarians as “conservatives.”

Some people who call themselves “conservative” see it as a matter of personal temperament, a mere “disposition,” as philosopher Michael Oakeshott phrased it, rather than a conscious political ideology. For him a conservative is someone who delights in “what is present rather than what was or what may be.” Most people are conservative in this temperamental sense to some degree. We all have attachments to particular things that we naturally want to preserve, although not necessarily at any cost.

Self-evidently not everything is worth conserving. Only things with either inherent

value or personal value are. So more substantive definitions of “conservatism” involve conserving particular valuable things rather than just conserving anything from an innate disposition to do so. This can be called “conservatism of the good,” to coin a phrase. Conservatism so understood means preserving things because they are good, not just preserving things for the sake of it.



BUT THE PROBLEM immediately arises that the goods and values conservatives defend and their reasons for doing so vary drastically and are often contradictory. For example, some believe that maximising individual freedom is the core of conservatism, while others see the preservation of traditional forms of life and practices as essential, even at the cost of significantly limiting individual freedom.

Yoram Hazony belongs to the latter group. He is a “national conservative,” a traditionalist, an Anglophile, and an orthodox Jew who is chairman of the Edmund Burke Foundation. His ideological hero is the 17th century English jurist, politician and Hebraist John Selden, the “Greatest Conservative,” who stands in a long tradition of Anglo-American conservatism that runs seamlessly (as Hazony presents it) through English luminaries such as John Fortescue, Richard Hooker, Matthew Hale, and Edmund Burke to American Federalist statesmen such as George Washington, John Adams, Gouverneur Morris, and Alexander Hamilton. It is this stream of thought and practice that Hazony is primarily interested in reviving in

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the United States today as an antidote to the many social pathologies of contemporary American life, which he blames squarely on liberalism.

In his book *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* (2022) Hazony recounts that, while an undergraduate at Princeton University in the 1980s, he and some of his friends were inspired by the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States to found a campus magazine, *The Princeton Tory*, to support the political revival of conservatism in America. As editor, he tells us, he made sure that “the nationalist and religious pillars of conservatism were at the forefront” of the new magazine (p. 379).

Hazony also reports that he and his new wife “committed ourselves to a conservative life” at the time. For him, the personal is political, so he exhorts his readers to practise what they preach by devoting themselves to a life of “conservation and transmission” in an existing community of faith and tradition. He rebukes bookish conservatives who merely talk and theorise airily about conservatism “without actually living it” (p. 384). And he is dismissive of bachelor intellectuals, who tend to produce works of abstract theory that undermine traditional forms of life because they have no personal experience of being parents. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, and Immanuel Kant are mentioned as examples, although not Jesus, interestingly. And Hazony conveniently ignores mentioning that John Selden, David Hume, and George Washington were childless conservatives, as he understands the term. There’s a bit of testicle in politics for Hazony, to paraphrase Denis Diderot (a devoted father to his only surviving daughter, despite being an anti-conservative Enlightenment philosopher). So to be a true conservative you must be married with children. Being an Anglophile isn’t required, but it certainly helps (obviously Hazony has never lived in England, the surest cure for Anglophilia). You must also be a monotheist, honour your parents, and live a traditional life in “an actual conservative community in which the tradition still lives and is being handed down to new generations.” Hazony has found such a life for

himself and his family in Israel, where he now lives with his wife and nine children.

For Hazony a conservative in general is “a traditionalist, a person who works to recover, restore, and build up the traditions of his forefathers and to pass them on to future generations.” His communitarian conception of conservatism builds from the claim that humans are born into hierarchically-structured families, tribes, and nations that bind them in ties of mutual loyalty and obligation. Traditional institutions, customs, and practices develop from these groups and are tested by trial and error over many generations. Those that pass the “test of time” survive because they are effective at promoting the long-term continuity, well-being, and general prosperity of their members.

From these “elementary facts of human life” Hazony derives eight general purposes of government: creating a more perfect union, justice, domestic peace, the common defence against foreign enemies, the general welfare, individual liberty, national liberty, and permanence and stability through the ages. However, like many conservatives such as his beloved Burke, Hazony denies that there is a general politics of conservatism that is universally applicable. He is a political pluralist who rejects a one-size-fits-all view of political practice. Rather, particular institutional arrangements and forms of governance will vary from time to time and from place to place and this is a good thing, provided they are consistent with the general purposes of government and the moral law (as he sees it). Hazony therefore situates his pluralistic conservatism between the opposite errors of a narrow, monistic Enlightenment liberalism which prescribes a single global political order, on the one hand, and the broad relativism he associates with atheism and nihilism, on the other.

Hazony asserts that God and Scripture provide the overall normative framework and standard within which we should lead our lives. Within these broad parameters a variety of different political traditions will grow up, some of which will flourish and oth-

ers eventually wither and die. Liberalism and Marxism lie well outside these moral limits for Hazony because they are “false” and therefore doomed to fail eventually, to fail the “test of time,” although not before causing great damage.

Much of Hazony’s book is devoted to one particular tradition of conservative thought and practice he calls “Anglo-American.” Its origins lie in the ideas of English jurists and writers such as Fortescue, Hooker, Selden, Hale and Burke. It was revived in the 1790s by the American Federalist Party of Washington, Adams, Morris, and Hamilton and is best expressed in the US Constitution of 1787 which, he claims, sought to establish “a distinct American nation of British heritage” (p. xxv). Hazony places nationalism at the heart of this view of conservatism and credits the Federalist Party with refounding their new republic as a patriotic and religious nation with a slightly adapted British constitution.

In Hazony’s very schematic account, there is an almost perfect continuity within this centuries-old tradition, as if the American Revolution itself was just a minor adjustment along the way hardly worth mentioning. “The republican America that emerged from the revolution,” he writes, “was in most respects very much like America before the revolution” (p. 261). This is the standard line of American Burkeans like Russell Kirk, who have an ideological need to downplay violent revolution in their conservative narrative of the American founding.

Opposed to this Anglophile tradition is a liberal Enlightenment tradition that Hazony traces from “rationalists” such as Hobbes, Locke, Condorcet, and the French Encyclopédistes to American revolutionar-

ies like Paine and Jefferson, whose radical, anti-conservative principles are set out most eloquently in the Declaration of Independence. He characterises this tradition as anti-nationalist and confederationist, favouring strong states’ rights in a loose federal structure. It suffers from a fatal blindness to the nation, he believes, that always afflicts liberal individualists like Locke and Jefferson.

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THE KEY FAULT line that Hazony draws is not the Revolution, separating American liberal republicanism from British parliamentary monarchism. Rather, it is between a continuous trans-Atlantic, Anglo-American national conservatism and a radical liberal rationalism that has led to the “catastrophe” he sees around him today in the US. In his scheme both liberals and conservatives supported the Revolution, the importance of which he studiously under-

states. For Hazony the “true” Americans are really West Brits who only wanted “to restore continuity with the English constitution and common law” (p. 47). Their opponents, led by the Francophile Jefferson, were alien radicals who backed the “atheistic” French Revolution and spoke in an abstract language of individual rights that departed from the customary, historically conditioned rights of Englishmen. They also favoured a wall of separation between church and state, unlike their Federalist opponents, who wanted some form of alliance between Christianity and the state.

In Hazony’s narrative, all was well with America from 1787 until the upheaval of the Second World War, and nothing has been well with it since. Until the 1940s, it remained a fundamentally traditional society. But this conservative, God-fearing democracy was overthrown by a secular liberal democracy, which was rooted in the Enlightenment and the radical political legacy of Jefferson. The

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struggles against both European fascism and Soviet communism in the 20th century pushed the U.S. to the liberal left under Roosevelt and his successors, which eventually became a hegemonic new civil religion replacing Christian nationalism as America's public faith. Inevitably, Hazony believes, this "bloodless revolution" eroded traditional forms of life, undermined established hierarchies and institutions, and ruptured the continuity with the Anglo-American past.

In time, liberalism itself was overthrown by an "updated Marxism" associated with radical progressive politics based on race and gender which is today labelled "woke" by its opponents. Hazony sees this as a natural evolution since liberalism is a "gateway to Marxism" with an inbuilt tendency "to give way and transfer power to Marxists" (p. 320-21). A new phase in American history began with the recent Marxist conquest of liberal institutions (government, religion, the media, universities), when the state will be used much more aggressively and coercively to completely reconstitute society from above.

Hazony ends his story of the rise and fall of Anglo-American conservatism on a quixotic note of forced optimism. He claims that the collapse of the liberal hegemony that has reigned supreme in the United States until recently has created an opportunity for a revival of national conservatism, which he believes is America's "best hope for restoration of political stability and health" (p. xvi). He looks forward to the emergence of a new Hamiltonian "conservative democracy" that will support and promote the traditional institutions of religion, family and nation which have been marginalized, denigrated, and relegated to the private sphere by liberalism. How he thinks this improbable reversal will come about he does not say.

Probably the most common misunderstandings of conservatism today are the beliefs that individual freedom is its paramount value and that the supreme principle of politics is to protect and enlarge it. Margaret Thatcher's intellectual hero, the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek, understood this,

which is why he wrote an essay on "Why I Am Not a Conservative." Hazony agrees that Hayek is not a conservative and is, in my view, rightly critical of his dogmatic faith in individual freedom as "the highest political end." This is a major strength of Hazony's communitarian portrait of conservatism. He views freedom as just one value among many which governments ought to promote and support, alongside order, community, justice, prosperity and security. Nor does he rank it as the highest value. He wisely advises that "a balance must always be maintained among the various liberties of the individual and between these liberties and the other aims of government" (p. 248), something that libertarians reject with their preoccupation with the single value of individual freedom. Hazony commends the Federalist authors of the 1787 Constitution for treating freedom as just one of many purposes of government, unlike most people calling themselves conservative today, who bang monotonously on the freedom drum.

It's worth noting that the most famous exponent of value pluralism was a liberal, Sir Isaiah Berlin. There are pluralistic and monistic versions of both liberalism and conservatism. Berlin was a liberal pluralist and Hazony is a conservative pluralist. Both views are more conceptually plausible and defensible than their monistic counterparts, which elevate a single value above others, usually for reasons that are less than self-evident, even to those who advocate them.

The Cold War forced Anglo-American conservatism into an awkward alliance with liberalism, previously an opponent. This was labelled "fusionism" in the US at the time, but it was really just a liberal takeover of conservatism, something that Hazony correctly condemns as fraudulent. This move was rationalized by Frank Meyer and propagated by William F. Buckley Jr., mainly through his magazine *National Review*, which he founded in 1955. "There is no 'fusion' to be found in Meyer's political theory," Hazony flatly declares, "which is as much an expression of rigid, dogmatic, Enlightenment liberalism as that of Ayn Rand" (p. 301).

Although Buckley described his magazine

as “a conservative weekly journal of opinion,” he called himself a “libertarian,” exemplifying the post-war American equation of libertarianism and conservatism. It is puzzling that Hazony, who firmly rejects this strange equation, still confusingly refers to Buckley’s “conservatism” (p. 303) and the “Cold War conservatism” of *National Review* (p. 363), since neither was conservative as Hazony understands the term. As he presents it, US politics in the Cold War was a struggle between left-wing and right-wing forms of liberalism, the latter of which some misleadingly called “fusionism,” which he claims “did much damage to the conservative element in American politics” (p. xxvi). His use of language here is puzzlingly inconsistent.

Even odder is Hazony’s sketchy and distorted presentation of Thatcher and Reagan, whose elections in 1979 and 1980 respectively, he tells us, energized his own youthful political activism. Both were neoconservatives (another term for “fusionism”) who tried to combine neoliberal economic dogma with social and cultural conservatism, an inherently unstable compound that proved politically effective for a time but whose incoherence doomed it to fail over the longer term. Hazony ignores their economics so he can spin the conservative revival of this period as mainly “nationalist and religious” (p. 369). He says nothing about Reagan’s admiration for Milton Friedman and his praise for the “magic of the market” while commending the president’s support for Catholic nationalism in Poland and his failed 1982 proposal for an amendment to the Constitution to return prayer to American public schools.

And Hazony similarly makes no mention of Thatcher’s devotion to the ideas of her favourite intellectual, Hayek, whom he criticizes

at length for his libertarian, individualistic doctrines. Shortly after becoming prime minister Thatcher wrote to her hero that “as one of your keenest supporters, I am determined that we should succeed. If we do so, your contribution to our ultimate victory will have been immense.” This to a man who had written that “the conservative lacks principles.”

Surely Thatcher and Reagan were classic “fusionists” who deserve to be criticized by Hazony for the same reasons he criticizes the quintessential “fusionists” Meyer and Buckley. Instead, he presents them as true-blue conservatives for their commitment to nationalism and public religion, completely disregarding their betrayal of conservatism by unleashing market forces that proved highly destructive of livelihoods and communities.

Intellectual history, like political history, is a messy and complex business. It reveals few pure genealogies. This is particularly true of America’s founding fathers, most of whom were both intellectuals and practising politicians. But you would never know it reading Hazony’s highly schematic and selective narrative of US history. It consists of two neatly opposed camps, one perfectly liberal and the other impeccably conservative, each with a spurious internal consistency. He is emphatic (and repetitious) that the political settlement in the new United States after 1787 represents a fundamental continuity with an “English inheritance” that stretches back for centuries before the revolution, which is barely mentioned, as it changed very little in Hazony’s eyes. This inheritance consists of: “the unitary executive power resting with the king; the bicameral legislature; the taxation initiative vested in the lower house of the legislature; the executive veto and the pardoning power; the procedure of impeachment; due process of law; the jury trial; the right to free speech, to bear arms, and to be

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immune from unreasonable search and the quartering of soldiers” (p. 47-8).

Much of this “English inheritance” is ultimately Roman, though mediated through England. The American founding fathers were strongly influenced by classical republican ideas and institutions, which are reflected in the political system they designed for the new United States. Many of their precedents were in ancient Rome, which had a Senate, bicameral legislature, executive veto, pardoning power and rule of law. And the “English inheritance” itself wasn’t pure; it was a mix of liberal and conservative ideas, Locke and Burke among many others.

To the extent that the new American republic was the beneficiary of an “English inheritance” it was shared by all, or virtually all, of the founding fathers of the United States, not just the Federalists. All were united in their support for most of the basic principles that Hazony lists as definitive of the “English inheritance,” which was not the exclusive property of one side. He exaggerates their differences to make them fit more neatly into his simplified account of American history.

The Constitution of 1787 that Hazony praises so lavishly for its continuity with the British system established a federal state more like Switzerland than Britain’s unitary state. This was a radical departure from the unwritten British constitution, where sovereignty is supreme, indivisible and legally illimitable (as jurist John Austin describes it), with a clear and definite chain of command culminating in the absolute sovereignty of Parliament (or the Crown-in-Parliament, to be precise). One of the mysteries of the American Constitution is that there’s no way to locate sovereignty in it.

Britain’s political system is based on a concentration of powers rather than a separation of powers like the US. The prime minister and cabinet (the political executive) are members of the legislature and answerable to it, contrary to the US, which is akin to the French presidential system in this regard. The UK prime minister wields much more concentrated power within the

British political system than the American president does within the US system. Britain never had a written constitution that distributed and limited government power. That’s why the Swiss writer Jean-Louis de Lolme remarked in 1771 that the British Parliament “can do everything but make a woman a man and a man a woman” (today even that limitation is being tested). This system was already in place *before* the Americans rebelled and was rejected by them for being tyrannical. Hazony has understated this divergence in his construction of a single, seamless Anglo-American “tradition.”

And the Crown is not just a shiny ornament adorning the British state. It is the British concept of the state. It is the ultimate source of sovereign authority and everything done by the state is in the name of the King, who is its personal embodiment. He owns all state lands, buildings, equipment, companies, contracts and military forces as sovereign (not personally) and oaths are sworn to him rather than to the constitution. The Crown provides the British state’s legal personality and is the basis of responsible government. This is a fundamentally different understanding of the state than that of a republic like the United States, something Hazony doesn’t even mention. It is a very telling omission given the centrality that he gives to the “English inheritance” in his conservative version of the American founding myth.

The idea of loyalty does feature prominently in Hazony’s book, which holds it out as an important conservative virtue. Indeed, he writes that it is “the most powerful force operative in the political realm” (p. 114) and claims to find it “obvious that government must aim to shape the society it governs in such a way as to encourage mutual loyalty” (p. 245). Hazony tells us repeatedly that societies are composed of “loyalty groups” starting with families and extending outwards to the nation. Bonds of mutual loyalty and affection are a fundamental part of the social cement that holds communities and nations together and must therefore be nurtured and protected.

The eminent Canadian philosopher George Grant agrees with Hazony on this point.

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“Loyalties rather than principles,” he wrote, “are the mark of the conservative.” That is why Grant put loyalism at the heart of English-Canadian identity, which was originally rooted in the values and beliefs of those who fled north from the American Revolution. Their loyalty to the Crown and what it symbolized for them outweighed their concerns about its purported abuse. Having grievances against your government, as some Loyalists did, doesn’t justify violent revolution against an order to which you feel personal loyalty, just as most children don’t rebel against parental authority even when it is sometimes overbearing. For Grant, the conservatism of these loyal Americans was “essentially the social doctrine that public order and tradition, in contrast to freedom and experiment, were central to the good life. The British Crown was a symbol of a continuing loyalty to the state — less equivocal than was expected from republicans. In our early expansions, this conservative nationalism expressed itself in the use of public control in the political and economic spheres.”[†]

It is not at all surprising that Hazony is silent about this central aspect of the British system, since it is an awkward embarrassment to his overly neat, schematic story of the violent, revolutionary founding of a supposedly conservative republic, which Samuel Johnson branded a “contagion of disloyalty.” Hazony writes that the representatives of the people “may remove a chief executive where his behaviour manifestly endangers the integrity and well-being of the nation as a whole” (p. 31). For all its inadequacies, British tax policy in the Thirteen Colonies prior to the Revolution hardly

posed an existential threat to the Americans. While American Burkeans like to stress that Burke was sympathetic to the grievances of the American colonists and a vocal advocate of British conciliation to them (both true), they don’t like to admit that he never publicly endorsed their revolution. Like the Loyalists who fled to Canada, losing most of their possessions in the process, Burke believed in gradual, evolutionary change and loyalty to the Crown. Given all of this, it is hard not to see the name of Hazony’s undergraduate magazine, *The Princeton Tory*, as ironic; he should have called it *The Princeton Whig*.

TODAY MOST TRADITIONAL conservatives are preoccupied fighting “culture wars” against the progressive left and Hazony is no different. He says virtually nothing about economics in his book, as if it was just not a part of conservative thought and practice. That’s for the libertarians. But it is a grave omission. He adopts a kind of culturalism, where only ideas and values matter, the opposite of Marxist materialism and just as mistaken. The obvious truth is that both matter and affect each other. No theory is complete without an account of both values and economics and how they are related.

What little Hazony does say about economics is highly condensed and disappointing. He reports that, while an undergraduate at Princeton, he read Friedman and “cheered the conservative campaign to roll back government in America and Britain” (p. 379). He also tells us that property rights and the free enterprise system are “indispensable for the advancement of the nation in its wealth and well-being” (p. 343). This is qualified by an admission that free markets “can have a corrosive effect on traditional institutions” and that the excessive accumulation of wealth and power in private hands “can damage national security, national cohesion, individual liberties, and public morals.” That’s it.

And Hazony is not alone here. There doesn’t appear to be a distinctive conservative view of economics today, one that amounts to more than standard classical liberal *clichés* about limited government and free markets. What are traditional conservative principles of pro-

* George Grant, “Review of *Benjamin Disraeli: The Early Letters, Volumes I and II*, edited by J. A. W. Gunn, John Matthews, and Donald M. Schurman,” in *Collected Works of George Grant: Vol. 4: 1970 – 1988*, edited by Arthur Davis and Henry Roper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 913.

† George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 71.

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duction and distribution? Shouldn't it oppose free trade in favour of protectionism? How do economic values and policies relate to other conservative goods? You won't find answers to these fundamental questions in Hazony's book. It is a dimension of conservative thought he has yet to rediscover.

It is a great shame that Hazony has passed up the opportunity to explore the destructive effects that free markets and private power can and often do have on the traditional forms of life and culture (which Marx saw as a benefit of markets) that he cares so much about. The large multinational corporations that dominate markets today succeed by relentlessly bombarding both our private and public worlds with advertising, opening borders to the free flow of labour, goods and capital, commercializing as much of our lives as possible, inflaming appetites, bulldozing local cultures in the pursuit of profits, and sweeping aside traditions that inhibit consumption and defer gratification. This has been apparent since at least the mid-19th century, causing many at the time (including conservatives) to voice their concerns about the harmful effects of free markets on people, communities, and ecology. There's nothing obviously conservative about the endless "creative destruction" of capitalism, particularly in its present oligopolistic form. That is why some conservatives like Grant have favoured using the state to limit rapacious private power and act in the public interest. "What is socialism," he asked, "if it is not the use of government to restrain greed in the name of social good? Was it not appealing to the conservative idea of social order against the liberal idea of freedom?"* My own view is that social democracy is an economic system that is much less destructive

of the things that traditional conservatives value than pro-market ideologies like libertarianism or neoliberalism. That's why "fusionism" and "neoconservatism" have been more effective as political strategies than as conceptually coherent positions.

I find it hard to take seriously the proposition that the racially reductionistic ideology of the progressive left commonly referred to as 'woke' is a form of 'updated Marxism.'

Unlike Hazony, I find it hard to take seriously the proposition that the racially reductionistic ideology of the progressive left that is today commonly referred to as "woke" is a form of "updated Marxism." It's not even updated socialism. While he does point to some vague structural similarities between Marxism and "wokeism," all political ideologies have structural

similarities. That does not really prove anything. But in terms of content they have virtually nothing in common, which may explain why Hazony doesn't name any "new Marxist" who is in a position of power or influence in America today, even though they are meant to be running virtually everything now.

MARX WASN'T "WOKE," so the "woke" today cannot really be Marxists. For Marx the only struggle that mattered was between economic classes, which is why he wrote virtually nothing about race or gender. He was a "dialectical materialist" who believed that the economic base of a society determines its cultural and political superstructure, which is why he would likely view our "culture wars" as utterly futile.

It is a common rhetorical device for people on the right to brand their opponents on the left as socialists, communists, or Marxists, just as people on the left routinely pin the labels fascist and racist on adversaries to their right. But Hazony has a doctorate in political philosophy (from Rutgers University), so he really should know better.

Hazony's is a book about American con-

* Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, p. 59.

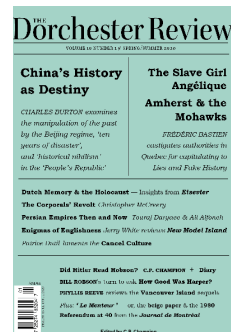
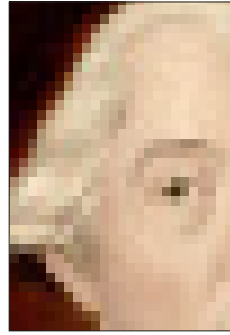
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servatism by an American conservative for American conservatives. It is a work of polemics rather than scholarship or political philosophy, although it is informed by scholarship and was written by an intellectual with a very advanced knowledge of political philosophy. Polemical books have their uses, but enlightenment isn't normally one of them. In this case the presentation of history, ideas and politics is distorted to suit a clear agenda. Unless you share that agenda, its use must be quite limited except perhaps as a sounding board.

Hazony's book does offer insights and much of value. Its conception of conservative thought and practice in which individual freedom is not central is refreshing and worthwhile, even if its attempt to connect

that conception to the history and politics of the United States is contorted and selective. Of course freedom has value, but that value is only comprehensible in terms of other goods and purposes. Hazony's effort to encompass the latter in his case for conservatism is commendable. The crude reduction of the word "conservative" to little more than maximization of individual freedom so common today throughout the English-speaking world represents a sad impoverishment. But Hazony has understated the degree to which America's violent founding cut it off from goods and purposes that he, as a traditional conservative, wants to preserve. Not all of those goods and purposes were worth preserving. Dr. Hazony and I would disagree on that, among much else. But ideologies, although limited and distorting, don't have to be reductionistic, as his study of conservatism proves. ✗

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