Preparation for the September 14 topical seminar at the Lewes Library at 3pm

Topic: “What is Conservatism”

To prepare for the seminar, read the following materials and watch the recommended videos. After considering everything you have read and watched, write a response of between two and 400 words that addresses some of the discussion questions below. Email your written response to lewesseminar@gmail.com by the Monday before the seminar. Your response, along with chapter 6 of. (See attachment)[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Read selected quotes from chapter 1 of “Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition” by Roger Scruton (see below)
* Read Chapter 6 of “Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition” by Roger Scruton (Attachment to this email)
* Watch the interview on YouTube where Roger Scruton discusses his text. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3b6cRaScaxQ>
* Watch two short additional YouTube discussions about conservatism. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52Eojn4cuXw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alcnAvoIWWc>

* Add any additional material on the subject that you believe will add to the conversation.
* Read over the questions for discussion, using them as thought questions to write your response. Please feel free to address other issues you gleaned from the material.

­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Notes from chapter 1 of “Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition” by Roger Scruton**

Page 14: Conservatism as we know it today is a distinctly modern outlook, shaped by the Enlightenment and by the emergence of societies in which the “we” of social membership is balance at every point against the “I” of individual ambition.

Page 23: Conservatives and liberals agree on the need for limited government, representative institutions, separation of powers, and the basic rights of the citizens, all of which must be defended, they both believe, against the top-down administration of the modern collective state.

Page 24: For the conservative, human beings come into this world burdened by obligations, and subject to institutions and traditions that are contained within them a precious inheritance of wisdom, without which the exercise of freedom is as unlikely to destroy human rights and entitlements as to enhance them.

Page 31: Liberal viewed social political order as issuing from individual liberty; conservatives saw individual liberty as issuing from political order. It makes a political order legitimate, and the conservative view, it is not the free choices I created, but the free choices that it creates. The question of which comes first, liberty or order, was to drive the rules from conservatives for the next 200 years.

Page 39: Conservatism is about freedom, yes. But it is also about the institutions and attitudes that shape the responsible citizen and ensure the freedom that benefit to us all. Conservatism is therefore also about the limits of freedom. And here, is a potential conflict with the extremist liberal view that values freedom above all other things and refuses to set limits, encounter one of the principal political views of our times.

Page 40: Adam Smith believed that a market economy, while not without its evils, has a natural tendency to equilibrium. It lies in the “invisible hand” conception of human society and in the idea that collective solutions may be most effective when not directly intended. This argument has proven to be, in the long run, critical to the philosophy of conservatism. The argument tells us that, in conditions of normal social interactions, self-interested individuals, acting freely, will promote outcomes that benefit them all. They do not intend these outcomes, still less do they plan them.

Page 45: Edmund Burke rejected the liberal idea of the social contract as a deal agreed upon among living people. Society, he argued, does not contain the living only; it is an association between the dead, the living, and the unborn.

Page 46: Society, Burke believed, depends upon relations of affection and trust, and these can be built only from below, through face-to-face interactions. It is in the family, and local clubs and societies, school, church, team, regiment and university that people learn to interact as free beings, each taking responsibility for his actions and accounting to his neighbors.

Page 50: In short, the social contract requires a relation of membership, and one, moreover, which makes it plausible for the individual members to see the relationship between them in contractual terms.

Page 51: The aim of Burke’s argument in the *Reflections* is to uphold the priority of the “we” over the “I”, and to warn against what happens when the forms of social membership are taken away and society disintegrates.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Discussion Questions**

1. According to conservatives, interactions among humans cannot ignore the historical context around which these interactions take place. We cannot ignore history, customs and social ways that have led up to the present interaction. From the conservative perspective, the progressive legislative agenda errs by not considering tradition, but moves forward instead using rationalistic thinking. What would be an example of such legislation?
2. What is your understanding of how conservatives manage social change that occurs by virtue of the circumstances societies face over time? What would be an example? According to Scruton, how does this differ from liberals?
3. Alan Bloom in his text “The Closing of the American Mind” is concerned about the progressive view of openness to all ideas as being equally legitimate. He asks the question whether a nation without a shared vision of the public good can maintain a social contract among its members (p.27). How does this relate to Scruton’s perception of the present liberal movement?
4. What are some of Scruton’s concerns about liberals?
5. How do conservatives manage issues of social justice and how does this compare to liberals?
6. What are the differences how conservatives and liberals look at a free marketplace?

Submitted by Aram Terzian

1. NNote: Book is available on reserve at the Lewes Library [↑](#footnote-ref-1)