



From the “most fateful” to the “most fatal” social force? Conservatism and democracy reconsidered

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to reconsider the impact of conservatism on political liberty and liberal democracy in contemporary society. It applies Weber’s description of capitalism as the “most fateful” social force in modern society to analyzing conservatism in relation to political liberty and liberal democracy. The paper posits and finds that conservatism primarily (with secondary variations) negatively impacts political liberty and so modern liberal democracy. Alternatively, it argues and shows that conservatism almost invariably generates political repression and elimination or subversion of liberal democracy and society. It concludes that conservatism, especially in America, becomes from the “most fateful” to the “most fatal” social force on the account of its adverse impact on political liberty and democracy.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of conservatism and its essentially destructive effects on political liberties and liberal democracy in contemporary society.

Findings – The paper finds that conservatism, especially in America, becomes from the “most fateful” to the “most fatal” social force on the account of its adverse impact on political liberty and democracy.

Originality/value – The paper posits and finds that conservatism primarily (with secondary variations) negatively impacts political liberty and so modern liberal democracy. Alternatively, it argues and shows that conservatism almost invariably generates political repression and elimination or subversion of liberal democracy and society.

Keywords Capitalist systems, Democracy, Political systems

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber depicted the later as the “most fateful force” in modern Western society. To recall, Weber portrayed capitalism in such almost fatalistic terms primarily because of its economic characteristics (“continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise”) and effects (“renewed profit”), and only secondarily or not all owing to its presumably positive impact on liberty in society, including political liberties and democracy[1]. What primarily concerns this essay is the issue of whether or not conservatism as a social system and ideology rather than capitalism as an economic structure is conducive to liberty, in particular political liberties or liberal democracy. Weber’s designation of capitalism as the “most fateful force” in modern society serves as a background or analogy for this issue, in that conservatism as a social-ideological system can also, *ceteris paribus*, be considered or designated in these terms.

After all, recall at least in Weber’s pseudo-spiritualist or counter-materialist (contra Marx) historical reconstruction, modern Western capitalism originated in, or via an “elective affinity” and “inner relationship” with, Calvinism and its Anglo-Saxon



offspring Puritanism. Calvinism, including Puritanism, is in turn commonly considered and described as a model of religious conservatism or traditionalism (Goldstone, 1986), albeit mixed with, in Weber's words, "uncompromising" or revolutionary radicalism to form an extreme conservative-radical mixture (Tawney, 1962). Specifically, it is deemed what Simmel calls "orthodox" and other sociologists fundamentalist or absolutist (Munch, 2001) as well as sectarian (Lipset, 1996) Protestantism. To that extent, if capitalism became the "most fateful force" in modern society, this was primarily (albeit not only) because, or connected with the fact that, Calvinist-rooted religious and political conservatism had already become a functionally equivalent or historically proximate social factor in those Western societies where Weber identify such elective affinities or connections, specifically Great Britain and early America. Alternatively, it was precisely in those societies, as he puts it, "dominated by Puritanism" and by implication Calvinism as its theological basis that capitalism became such a social force. These societies included what he denotes "Puritan old and New England" ruled by "stodgy Calvinists" (Gould, 1996) as exemplified by Cromwell (Gorski, 2000) and Winthrop with his "austere Calvinism" (Kloppenber, 1998; also Bremer, 1995).

If Weber's assumed "elective affinity" is correct, then such religious and, via what he identifies as Calvinistic state churches or Puritan theocracies, authoritarian political conservatism historically had become the "most fateful force" of modern Western, post-Reformation society, primarily Great Britain and America, even before capitalism did. Or at least, conservatism did so simultaneously and jointly with Calvinist-based capitalism. This especially holds true of early America given its founding and long rule by what Tocqueville calls the Puritan Fathers and the eventual failure of Puritanism and its, in Weber's words, "abortive" mid-17th century Revolution (Goldstone, 1986; Moore, 1993) against official Anglicanism and the Monarchy in Great Britain. Thus, it was originally religious conservatism in the form of Puritanism that established itself as the "most fateful" or dominant social factor and even, in Tocqueville's words, the "destiny" or genesis of colonial and early post-revolutionary America through what Weber identifies as the Puritan "theocracy of New England" (Munch, 2001; Stivers, 1994; Tawney, 1962) during the 17-19th centuries. In Weber's view, consequently to, or simultaneously and jointly with, Puritanism, "sober, bourgeois" industrial, as different from pre-Calvinist merchant, capitalism became such a social force, starting with or anticipated by Franklin as the Calvinist (Byrne, 1997) embodiment of the "capitalist spirit" and fully establishing or culminating in his "robber-barons" successors during the post-bellum period. And, just as has been during most of American history (Lipset, 1996; Munch, 2001), Puritan-rooted religious conservatism continues to persist or reemerge as Weber's "most fateful" political-social, joined with "sober" Franklin-style capitalism as the main economic, force in modern America. It does through various "die hard" survivals or perennial revivals in Protestant fundamentalism and sectarianism continuing the "tradition of the Puritans" (Dunn and Woodard, 1996). It thus perpetually proves Tocqueville's observation and prediction of Puritanism as the "destiny" of the "first new nation" (Calhoun, 1993).

Historically, religious conservatism through its another fundamentalist revival remains a "fateful" or predominant social factor in America ushering in the 21st century, as it was via its Puritan theocracy in New England from the 17th century on (officially until the third decade of the 19th century). It does/did in historical anticipation of and elective affinity or association with modern capitalism embodied by Calvinist Franklin and, as Weber implies, neo-Calvinist "robber barons" in the post-bellum evangelical South *cum* as a "Bible Belt" (Mencken, 1982) and beyond. In

sum, at least in a Weberian framework, the description of capitalism as the “most fateful force” of modern life can also be extended to religious–political conservatism epitomized by European Calvinism and its “Anglo-Saxon” derivative Puritanism, as its assumed theological, ideological and ethical root or historical link via their reciprocal affinity and convergence.

In general, including but not limited to the Weberian framework, the standard clause *ceteris paribus* (other things equal) still applies. The clause specifically signifies that, in contrast to capitalism as primarily a partial, economic system and doctrine, as analyzed by Marx, Weber, Sombart and Schumpeter, thus partially dominant and pervasive, no matter how strong, force in relation to non-economic realms, at least culture or art (Habermas, 1975), conservatism tends to be what Durkheim, Pareto, Parsons and Mannheim denote a total social system and ideology. Hence, conservatism seeks to become the “most fateful” factor in modern life totally and, as some analysts observe for US Puritan-inspired neo-conservatives like Reagan *et al.* (Blomberg and Harrington, 2000) categorizing them under “rigid extremists”, rigidly and uncompromisingly. A paradigmatic instance is religious–political conservatism like Calvinism (Gorski, 2003) and its Anglo-Saxon derivation Puritanism that operated, originally and through Protestant sectarianism, as the historically predominant and most prestigious factor in American history and society up to the 21st century (Jenness, 2004; Lipset, 1996). It did in the form of an actual societal system or “God’s Providential design” (Bendix, 1984) of what Weber describes as the total, absolute and uncompromising “mastery of the world” involving “totalistic” social control (Eisenstadt, 1965), including moral absolutism and rigor and its theocratic repression (Munch, 2001). For the present purpose, religious and other conservatism, unlike modern capitalism, will be considered and described as the “most fateful” or dominant force in modern life primarily on the account of its effects on liberty in society, including political liberty or liberal democracy, and just secondarily due to its consequences for the economy, free markets included, or at least both in association (as Weber implies by his Calvinist-capitalist “elective affinity”).

Another, comparative specification of the *ceteris paribus* clause is that the Weberian designation of conservatism particularly holds true, if not of contemporary Europe, albeit with some exceptions (Catholic Ireland, Poland and in part Italy), then of modern America (Byrne, 1997; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Inglehart, 2004), first and foremost, the South and Midwest (e.g. the “red” US states during the elections of the early 2000s), as suggested by both sociologically informed and casual observations. And if not, in a further specification or concession, applying to America as a whole, then the designation applies to some of its regions, primarily the ultra-conservative (“hot-red”) South and related regions (e.g. Utah, Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, etc.).

At the minimum, what contemporary sociologists identify as the persistently hyper-conservative, including fundamentalist and consequently “under-democratized” South (Amenta *et al.*, 2001) or Mencken’s (1982) “Southern Bible Belt” (Bauman, 1997; Putnam, 2000) justifies describing especially religious–cultural, conservatism as the “most fateful force” in modern America from the 1980s through the 2000s. It thus continues, even reinforcing and expanding, a long-standing consistent conservative pattern[2]. The pattern starts with Puritanism and its American “genesis” and dominance through Weber’s “theocracy of New England” under Winthrop and his “austere Calvinism”, and apparently self-perpetuated, via its fundamentalist or sectarian survivals and revivals, into what Tocqueville predicted as America’s Puritan “destiny”. Moreover, some analysts observe that “Southern Bible Belt” religious–political

conservatism has in recent times expanded to and dominated the rest of the country to the point of democracy in America “heading South” and American politics being placed in the ultra-conservative, including fundamentalist, sectarian and racist (or xenophobic), “shadow of Dixie” (Cochran, 2001).

These observations suggest that evidently this long conservative “shadow” continues to be cast on and act as the determining factor of the South and via, an apparent political and social contagion, most of America (excepting the liberal coast). This region tenaciously, if not proudly, remains “under-democratized” or “backward” in political democracy, including voting rights and civil liberties, just as active social policy, notably a welfare state, even within America (Amenta *et al.*, 2001), let alone modern Western democracies. In that sense, the South remains in, to use Mannheim’s terms, an authoritarian, pre-democratic stage or “mind”, while the world ushers in what is expected or heralded to be the liberal-democratic (or another “American”) 21st century or the “age of great expectations” about universal liberty, equality and justice “for all” in Voltaire–Kant–Jefferson’s sense (Dombrowski, 2001). And, it does so just as it has done in the past since the Puritan-based Great Awakenings, not to mention the slavery and its undemocratic and violent legacy, including vigilante violence or lynching usually (albeit not only) committed, incited and supported by Southern conservatism, especially religious fundamentalism (Jacobs *et al.*, 2005; Messner *et al.*, 2005). Predictably, through its movement “North” and beyond, such an ultra-conservative region in part makes, or contributes to making, America what sociologists describe as a salient and persistent case of “backwardness” in liberal–secular democracy, as well as in universalistic, progressive social policy (Amenta *et al.*, 2001), notably a welfare state, as the “new American exceptionalism” (Quadagno, 1999), among modern Western societies. Relatedly and even more, it makes the “new nation” a striking deviation from the global trends to liberalism, secularism and rationalism (Inglehart and Baker, 2000) among these and cognate societies, thus sociologically older than the “old” despised world of Europe.

If the aforesaid about contemporary America, notably the South within it, is correct, these conservative tendencies justify and necessitate reconsidering and describing, just as they aim at reestablishing, conservatism as the “most fateful”, if not, as the observation implies, fatal force in modern American society. They aim to recreate and redesign yet again American society as what Puritanism once designed, created, and ruled as a “Holy Biblical Commonwealth” or “Christian Sparta” (Kloppenber, 1998) in colonial and post-revolutionary times, as in 17th-19th century New England. In regional and historical terms, New England’s theocratic “Biblical Commonwealth” of New England was, as Weber suggests, the proof or symbol of original Puritan conservatism as a dominant social force in 17th-19th century America. Analogously, the “theocentric” (Wall, 1998) “Bible Belt” of the South and beyond in America, a theological design dating from the theocratic Great Awakenings of the 1740s-1800s, provides a proof (or “food for thought”) of derivative Puritan-inspired neo-conservatism (Dunn and Woodard, 1996) or sectarianism (Lipset, 1996) and its continuously renewed, even reinforced dominance during the late 20 and early 21st centuries.

With the above in mind, the remainder of this paper identifies and discusses what Veblen may call certain “ends, ways, and means” whereby conservatism critically affects human liberty in society, focusing on its effects on political liberties and liberal democracy. The paper revolves around the subject of the impact of conservatism on political liberties and thus liberal democracy defined in these terms.

Conservatism and political liberties: general considerations

In general, conservatism typically tends to adversely affect or be antithetical and ultimately destructive to political liberties and liberal democracy. In this sense, conservatism can be described as a sort of adverse selection or antithesis with respect to political liberties and liberal democracy, just as it originated out of medievalism in negative reaction to nascent liberalism as its “immediate antagonist” (Mannheim, 1986). Specifically, Veblen’s “ends, ways, and means” whereby conservatism adversely affects political liberty and liberal democracy comprise the following:

- conservative authoritarianism;
- political coercion and repression;
- Machiavellianism;
- conservative–fascist coalitions;
- political anti-liberalism;
- fascism;
- theocracy;
- oligarchy;
- plutocracy; and
- militarism and imperialism.

Conservative authoritarianism

The most comprehensive and axiomatic way, and means, embracing or resulting in most others, whereby conservatism typically adversely affects political liberties and liberal democracy, is conservative authoritarianism as its intrinsic property or ultimate outcome. Conservatism either inherently constitutes or ultimately tends to become authoritarianism in that it has or generates authoritarian tendencies or outcomes, and consequently is almost axiomatically (by assumption) de-coupled from and antithetical to political liberties and democracy. In general, conservatism represents or evolves into “conservative authoritarianism” (Miliband, 1969) in virtue of its long-standing opposition to a modern liberal–secular and pluralist society (Munch, 2001) as a free, democratic, egalitarian and just social system.

Thus, in the aftermath of, just as prior to, the French Revolution, traditional European conservatism, as represented by what Parsons (1967)[3] calls conservative sociologists like de Maistre, Bonald and Tocqueville in France, plus Burke in Great Britain, was predominantly authoritarian, anti-democratic, including aristocratic, just as traditionalist or anti-modernist, in character or outcomes, as was a fortiori its medieval-feudal origin and antecedent. This also holds true of later 19th century European, including French, British and especially German, conservatism with its “strong agrarian interests” (Elias, 1972) and consequently its authoritarian features, with Bismarck’s “plebiscitary-conservative” (Habermas, 1989) authoritarianism as an exemplar and a historical precedent or inspiration for Nazism. Also, in subsequent periods like interwar (1918-1939) Europe, conservatism reportedly produced its own authoritarian movements and “various strands of conservative authoritarianism” (Blinkhorn, 2003) persisted and ultimately eliminated, in anti-liberal alliance with its totalitarian “hard edge”, fascism, liberal democracy, including Germany’s postwar Weimar Republic (Hinchman, 1984). For instance, the supreme conservative imperative

and strategy during the Weimer Republic was that liberal democracy “must be overcome” by the new (or rather old) authoritarian conservatism (Noakes, 2003).

Overall, the observations that European conservatism actually represented or entailed “authoritarianism before fascism” and authoritarian systems with non-fascist, yet “essentially conservative” roots (Blinkhorn, 2003) were present and dominant in interwar and prior Europe suggests that conservatism was or became authoritarianism even before the rise of fascism as its extreme subtype or regular ally. Alternatively, even if fascism, including Nazism, never existed in Europe, traditional European, notably German, conservatism could still be described in terms of authoritarianism. Hence, the argument of conservatism as authoritarianism does not generally hinge (stand or fall) on the presence of fascism and its destructive effect on democracy, though this extreme conservative subtype strengthens such arguments to the theoretical level of an even more self-evident axiom. Moreover, early American (e.g. Alexander Hamilton’s) conservatism is sometimes described as “authoritarian conservatism”, traced back to that of its French epitome de Maistre (Dunn and Woodard, 1996), and even as having totalitarian political outcomes[4]. This also applies to its successor, paleo-, notably anti-New Deal, conservatism (Scotchie, 1999) and its own revival from the dead (Dunn and Woodard, 1996), neo-conservatism, as indicated by the description “neo-conservative social authoritarianism” (Eccleshall, 2000). If so, this casts doubt on the venerable conservative ethnocentric claims to “American exceptionalism *cum* superiority” (Lipset and Marks, 2000), specifically the exceptional-superior non-authoritarian or democratic character and effects of US paleo- and neo-conservatism invidiously compared to its “inferior”, old, and authoritarian counterparts (and modern liberalism construed as “statism”) in Europe.

Generally, in virtually all societal settings, including Western Europe and America, and historical times, traditionalism and (post) modernity alike, conservatism constitutes one of the major societal sources of authoritarianism or totalitarianism (Moore, 1993). Further, conservatism often becomes one of the main social roots of totalitarianism understood in the sense of an even more extreme antithesis than authoritarianism of political and social liberties, i.e. democracy and free civil society, as shown by fascism and neo-fascism. Also, conservative authoritarianism, as the most comprehensive, to some extent encompasses or generates the most other “ends, ways, and means” whereby conservatism adversely affects and is antithetical to political freedoms and liberal democracy. Conservatism authoritarianism is specified by and composed of a wide range of authoritarian “ends, ways, and means”, from repression to fascism and to imperialism.

Political coercion and repression

One of these specific authoritarian ends, ways and means of conservatism is political coercion and repression, particularly the coercive imposition of conservative beliefs and values, via a repressive government, including a police state, notably a sort of moral-religious, vice police (Infantino, 2003). In a sense, coercion and repression is the original, primary and perennial characteristic and practice of authoritarian conservatism, from its medieval theocratic archetype and its early form in Europe in adverse reaction to the French Revolution to its subsequent developments in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, including interwar European conservative authoritarianism and American paleo- and neo-conservatism through the 2000s. While not all types or instruments of coercion and repression are conservative, (authoritarian) conservatism is typically, in Weber’s sense of ideal types, coercive and repressive, particularly in

respect of the imposition of its ideas and values on the political system and society as a whole. For instance, most US paleo- and neo-conservatives are observed to apply state coercion to impose moral values and behaviors “consistent” with their religious beliefs (Pichardo, 1997; also Lipset, 1996).

When/if in political–secular power, conservatism translates and materializes this tendency into a coercive and repressive government. The latter not rarely reaches the point of an intrusive and brutal police state or official state-sponsored terrorism (Gibbs, 1989). Such a state typically functions in formal or informal “holy” alliance with legally separated, yet politically active and ambitious “sacred” church powers enforcing religious coercion and repression via condemnation, expulsion or other “spiritual” ends, ways and means, with the effect of a sort of moral–religious or simply vice police in the form and image of the “Puritan policeman” (Merrill, 1945), as during most of American history, up to the 21st century. When/if not in political power, conservatism performs the same operation via a theocentric church (viz. Islamic or Christian fundamentalism) claiming and wielding sacred power and Divinely ordained authority in opposition to a secular (“liberal”) government, and via extra-institutional repression. The latter often includes counter-state terrorism (e.g. militia and vigilante violence), usually entwined with state terrorism, as the case of religiously motivated anti-government terrorism in America and Islamic countries shows.

In either case, conservatism has a tendency to counteract processes leading to a “less repressive world” (Moore, 1993). Alternatively, it tends to create or promote a world of political coercion and repression by either government or anti-government conservative forces, including physical state and anti-state violence and punishment (e.g. imprisonment, torture, executions of both guilty and innocent persons for sins and crimes alike). For example, US neo-conservatism by its Draconian “get-tough” criminal laws and sanctions like the war on drugs dramatically lowered the “threshold” not only for, often life long, imprisonment, but also for the death penalty (Becky and Western, 2004). The observed outcome of these neo-conservative institutions in America during the 2000s is almost 2.5 million prisoners, yielding the largest prison population and the highest prisoner rate in the world (750 per 100,000), and growing numbers of executed (including innocent) people to the point of accounting for the most (80 percent) of executions globally, alongside secular and theocratic dictatorships like China, Iran and others. In global terms, America under neo-conservatism accounts for no less than one-quarter of the world prison (and five percent of human) population, and virtually all executions in modern Western societies.

As mentioned, the ultimate form and symbol of a conservative coercive and repressive government is a police-penal state, including some kind of religious-vice police (Infantino, 2003) instituted and perpetuated in theocratic and moralistic conservatism. While the police-penal state is widely considered an intrusive and brutal elimination or degeneration of political liberties and liberal democracy, it is classically and persistently rationalized by conservatives on grounds such as “law-and-order”, “national security”, “stability” and similar rationalizations and slogans. For example, owing to conservative “law-and-order” policies and slogans (Dahrendorf, 1979) trying and succeeding to suppress political–cultural liberalization, in America during the 1960s, those employed in police and other repressive agencies were in so large numbers as “never before in any capitalist country” in modern times, except for Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany (Miliband, 1969). So were *a fortiori* during the 1980s-2000s, as the “golden age” or pandemonium of the neo-conservative police-penal state and repressive government in America, with these policies generating an “enormous increase in felony

convictions and incarceration [and executions]” (Uggen and Manza, 2002). In comparative-historical terms, these recent trends, displaying a Draconian harshness (Patell, 2001), render the US neo-conservative penal or criminal justice system a “unique anomaly” of the early 21st century (Pager, 2003) among Western democracies and beyond, except for Islamic theocracies and secular dictatorships like China and Singapore as its functional equivalents or analogues in this respect, notably executions (Jacobs *et al.*, 2005).

Overall, what Dahrendorf (1979) denotes as the conservative-authoritarian ideology and system of a repressive police-penal state, justified by “law-and-order slogans” and glorifying the “good old” values of authority, discipline and punishment, belongs to the “collectivist threats” to political liberties and liberal democracy in contemporary societies. Thus, America and Britain witnessed “a higher degree of state repression” and the consequent undermining of democracy and social solidarity alike (Habermas, 2001) under neo-conservative political dominance, such as Reaganism and Thatcherism, respectively. In this sense, conservatism incorporates or results in a “conservative-authoritarian state” (Habermas, 1975), ultimately in the form of an intrusive and Draconian policing-penal, particularly vice-police, state. In sum, whether with or without a police state in formal terms (e.g. police size, intrusion and brutality), conservatism amounts to a coercive-repressive system of government imposing its values and beliefs on society and to that extent adversely affects and is deeply antithetical to political freedoms and liberal democracy.

Manipulation and subversion of political liberties and democracy

Another, specific authoritarian element and outcome of conservatism is Machiavellianism, as manifested in its manipulation, exploitation and subversion of political liberties and democracy. To be sure, not all Machiavellian politics is conservative. Yet, most conservatism is or results in Machiavellianism in Pareto’s original (though perhaps debatable) meaning of the end, notably political “malignant” power, justifying the means used (Simon, 1976), or realizing culturally prestigious ends “by any means whatsoever” (Merton, 1968; also, Bowles *et al.*, 2001). In particular, this is what Mannheim (1936) explicitly suggests noting that conservatism historically has aimed at the mastery of specific life situations and in extension what Weber calls in reference to Calvinism the mastery of the world, through its tendency to Machiavellianism, “a rather cold-blooded” reflection on and use of the methods of domination. So does by implication Parsons (1967), who, following Weber, remarks that conservative Protestantism regards human beings not (so much) from the view of “their value in themselves as of their usefulness” to one’s own narrow ends, including individual or sectional political power (plus the “purposes of God”), thus in essentially Machiavellian and “impersonal, unsentimental” terms. Generally, religious and other social conservatism tends to rationalize its usually unrecognized or invisible political Machiavellianism by “higher” transcendent reasons that supposedly exonerate it from and thus sanctify its actions, including its crimes that “must be committed” (Infantino, 2003) in the name of “God and nation”[5]. The ultimate Machiavellian political imperative of conservatism is that, as Michels observes and predicts, “democracy must be eliminated” by any ways and means, ideally “by the democratic way of the popular will”, ultimately by violence or counter-state terrorism.

In comparative-historical terms, Machiavellianism in the sense of achieving political power by any “technique of domination” is not limited to early European conservatism,

as Mannheim in part implies, including its religious, Calvinist or other form. Rather, it is a common feature or effect of conservatism's subsequent variations in this and other regions, including America (despite denials by US conservatives like Strauss *et al.*). Thus, elements and signs of Machiavellianism in American conservatism, including McCarthyism as its extreme variant, are found in that US paleo-, specifically anti-New Deal, conservatives devised a political electoral-campaign strategy in which any wining tactic and means was "legitimate"[6], including those that conservative moderates otherwise would "abhor" (Lipset, 1955).

Machiavellianism is not only a passé or remnant, as in fascism and McCarthyism. It is the continuing and reinforcing feature or result of European and American conservatism, manifested in the conservative and other "politics of corruption" (Terchek, 1997) of power and democracy, and embodied by various "shady characters"[7] (Habermas, 2001) in Europe, America and beyond. Even some US (Straussian) conservatives implicitly admit this Machiavellianism by noting that, like in Europe, "especially in America" politics, including by implication its conservative form, adopts the Machiavellian tradition of "moral and political realism" (Deutsch and Soffer, 1987). As a recurring exemplar, American neo-conservatism tends to resort to Machiavellian strategies of open or more frequently covert racism, including traditional racist tactics and xenophobia or anti-immigration agitation (Plotke, 2002), for political aims[8] (Shepard, 1998). Another recent case involves neo-conservative Draconian "tough-on-crime" policies, exemplified by the anti-drug war and other temperance or culture wars. Admittedly, these wars are "futile" (Bell, 2002) from the stance of democracy and modern society, yet they are actually observed to attain a Machiavellian end, typically the (re)election of US political conservatives and the party alike claiming "credit" (Hill, 2002). Notably, most US conservatives are found to apply and/or advocate the death penalty for Machiavellian, "strategic reasons" (Jacobs and Carmichael, 2002), simply (re)election and other political gains. Thus, they reportedly "exploit" popular concerns about crime (and sin) in the classic Machiavellian style to the point of actually increasing the societal support for capital punishment (Baumer *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, sociological analyses suggest that the neo-conservative Draconian use of and Machiavellian support for the death penalty in America are "functionally equivalent" to executions in third-world theocratic and secular dictatorships like Iran and China, respectively (Jacobs *et al.*, 2005).

If so, the above implies that in US neo-conservatism even human, including sometimes innocent, lives are effectively placed in the function of the Machiavellian quest for political power or exploited and sacrificed for the aim of (re)election. In retrospect, such neo-conservative Draconian laws and punishments in America, a far cry from extolled conservative "American exceptionalism" (Lipset and Marks, 2000), reaffirm the long-standing tendency for Machiavellian conservatism to devise and use any methods and techniques of domination to attain the mastery of polity and society, thus abusing, perverting or eliminating political freedoms and democracy. In sum, Machiavellianism historically precedes as well as surpasses in scope conservatism in Mannheim's (1986) sense of transformed or revived medieval-feudal traditionalism become "self-reflective" in adverse reaction to modern liberalism defined as its "immediate antagonist". Yet, conservatism, including US neo-conservatism, embraces and develops Machiavellianism to the point of technical perfection in political domination and manipulation, i.e. unprecedented perverse sophistication in terms of the politics of absolute corruption of power and democracy.

“Holy alliances” vs political freedom and liberal democracy

Another specific end, way and means whereby conservatism adversely affects political liberty and liberal democracy is through its coalition and collaboration with fascism against democratic-liberal governments and forces. These conservative–fascist “unholy” alliances are driven by the shared hostility of authoritarian conservatism and fascism to liberal democracy that, as Michels prophetically observed, “must be eliminated” by virtually any, including preferably democratic, ways and means. For instance, in interwar Germany conservatives and fascists shared and acted on the conviction that liberal democracy “must be overcome” by the “new” conservatism *cum* fascism, political freedom by repression (“integration”), authoritarian charismatic leadership and submission, and equality by inequality, hierarchy and oppressive order[9] (Noakes, 2003).

In essence, fascism, including Nazism, arose as a specific form or product of that “new Conservatism” in Germany and elsewhere in interwar Europe. Recall, conservatism in Europe, notably Germany, constituted or contained “authoritarianism before fascism” (Blinkhorn, 2003), as prior to and during the German Weimar Republic. And, the rise and eventual dominance of fascism, notably Nazism, provided an opportunity for a conservative–fascist authoritarian or totalitarian alliance, cooperation or “flirt” against liberal democracy. For example, like in Italy during the 1920s, by the early 1930s German conservative groups aligned with the Nazis on the identical “spectrum” of authoritarian radicalism and nationalism, and welcomed or used Nazism as a “possible weapon” of conservatism against liberalism and democracy (Blinkhorn, 2003).

As known, the above radical-nationalist spectrum combined the authoritarian elimination of liberal democracy within the German polity with aggressive nationalism, militarism and imperialism, including wars of extermination, against other societies. As for the second element, German conservatism had a long pedigree or history of what Pareto describes as “preach[ing] militarism, war, and extermination against the enemies of Germany and also against those who, though not her enemies, refuse to be her slaves”. And, the conservative (Bismarck’s) “military unification of the state” (Habermas *et al.*, 1998) was probably the first act toward realizing this doctrine, and Nazism acted as its nihilistic pandemonium via societal madness (Bourdieu, 2000) and “perversions” (Barnes, 2000). In essence, traditional conservatives in Germany, like Europe overall and America (e.g. Hamilton’s brand of conservatism), represented the advocates of an “anti-democratic” system and their enmity toward liberal democracy “climaxed” in Nazism as the supreme anti-liberal challenge (Manent, 1998) or extreme anti-liberalism (Dahrendorf, 1979). In general, the “coupling of fascism and conservatism” yielded a new type of authoritarian political system, simply totalitarianism, even though the fascist “tiger” (nearly) “devoured” conservatives rationally choosing a la Machiavelli to “ride” it solely in Germany (Blinkhorn, 2003).

While the anti-liberal and (thus) anti-democratic “coupling” of fascism and conservatism was most manifest during interwar Europe, it has not completely disappeared since the defeat of the first in WWII. This is shown by various (mainly) covert alliances, mutual sympathies or “flirts” between conservatives and fascists under different names in many European and other countries, including America, notably during the Cold War, McCarthyism, and even in recent times (e.g. neo-conservatives and neo-fascist militia movements). Further, the “coupling” of fascism and conservatism, far from being the dead past, can be envisioned to be reenacted, albeit in varying forms and with different players, under serious political–social crises and catastrophic events comparable to WWI, the Great Depression and the Cold War

(e.g. terrorist attacks, state of emergency and war, economic crisis, etc.). And, by “coupling” with fascism in various social settings and historical conjunctures and times, conservatism effectively decouples itself from and ultimately destroys political and other freedom, thus liberal democracy and a free society overall. In sum, conservative–fascist fusions or mutual affinities against liberal democracy, from interwar to contemporary Europe and America, invariably generate authoritarian or totalitarian outcomes, thus reflecting the shared feature of conservatism and fascism as anti-liberal and non-democratic, including nationalistic, militarist and imperialist, ideologies and sociopolitical systems.

Political anti-liberalism

The preceding intimates another way and means whereby conservatism operates as a kind of adverse selection toward and ultimately destruction of political liberties and liberal democracy. This is anti-liberalism, as implied and epitomized in the conservative alliance or collaboration with fascism against liberal-democratic governments. Like its perennial enmity toward liberal democracy, political anti-liberalism is a general authoritarian feature that conservatism shares with fascism, including Nazism, just as communism, as Mannheim (1936) and other sociologists (Habermas, 1989) suggest[10]. European and American conservatism alike is usually defined and defines itself in negative terms of anti-liberalism, namely in opposition to liberalism as a political “system and philosophy” (Van Dyke, 1995) of freedom. For example, Michels notes that Prussian rulers (e.g. King Frederick William IV) were strongly anti-liberal denouncing liberalism in favor of “romanticist conservatism”[11]. Subsequently, following the reunification of Prussia with the other German states, Bismarck’s authoritarian conservatism attacked and virtually vanquished political liberalism in Germany (Habermas, 1989). The result of this conservative attack was that Germany became more undemocratically “organized from top to bottom” than liberal societies (Mann, 1993). The above *a fortiori* applied to Hitler’s “new conservatism” in the form of Nazism by continuing and elevating Bismarck’s anti-liberal project to its totalitarian and nihilistic climax during the 1920s-1930s. Overall, traditional European conservatism typically held and established illiberal and/or authoritarian ideas and institutions (Blinkhorn, 2003).

Following its European antecedent, American conservatism also entails anti-liberalism as manifest in its long and persisting, even intensifying, open or covert assaults on the history and theory of liberal–secular democracy in America (Kloppenber, 1998). Both US paleo- and neo-conservatives reject political liberalism on the ground of its “degrading” egalitarianism and the “crisis of moral foundations” (Deutsch and Soffer, 1987) imputed to liberal democracy in this country and beyond. Notably, US social conservatives complain about the “liberal democratic ideal” of liberty, including its “dedication to individual freedom” (Deutsch and Soffer, 1987), and, predictably, propose an anti-liberal and essentially undemocratic, including theocentric moral virtue-from-religious piety, alternative. This indicates that conservative anti-liberalism in the sense of opposing and suspecting the “liberal democratic ideal” of individual and political freedom is by assumption or in reality anti-democratic in its nature or consequences, including unintended side-effects, despite the “libertarian” self-image of US conservatives. At least, this holds true, within US paleo-conservatism, of McCarthyism as the opposite par excellence of the “liberal democratic ideal” and in neo-conservatism of its extreme anti-liberal versions (e.g. the political “far right”, “Christian” terrorist militia, Protestant sects and fundamentalists, etc.).

As noted, conservatism shares political anti-liberalism with fascism, including Nazism, as exemplified in their alliances against liberal democracy and philosophy in the past, present and likely the future. In this respect, fascism has given a “bad name” to political anti-liberalism and consequently to its conservative-authoritarian rendition, from de Maistre, Burke and Bismarck to McCarthyism and neo-conservatism, including Thatcherism, Reaganism and their sequels. Fascism in interwar Germany and Europe, first and foremost, was self-defined as a counterforce to liberalism (Blinkhorn, 2003) as a political system and ideology, as well as to social democracy and communism. Hence, fascism, notably Nazism, adopted and reinforced the explicit or implicit negative self-definition of European, including German (excluding British?), conservatism in terms of anti-liberalism. In this respect, conservatism and fascism came to share “basic” values and ends, reaching anti-liberal (right-wing) ideological and political consensus (Noakes, 2003).

At first glance, analogous historical commonalities or links of fascism in Europe with American paleo-conservatism are seemingly non-existent or impertinent. However, the latter has also negatively “defined itself against liberalism”, including liberal democracy and civil society, as has, with some qualifications, neo-conservatism in America and in part Britain. In particular, US neo-conservatism is self-defined by political as well as cultural anti-liberalism, including moral and religious traditionalism and anti-secularism (Brouwer, 1998). Moreover, some analysts imply a near-identity of US and other neo-conservatism with fascism in terms of anti-liberalism by asserting that the neo-conservative revolution in America and beyond is deceptive in virtue of appropriating “all the signs of modernity”, thus recasting the “old Black Forest pastoral of the conservative revolutionaries” *cum* fascists during the 1930s (Bourdieu, 1998). If not an identity, the above suggests, to use Weber-Parsons’ words, the elective affinity or convergence between conservatism and fascism on political anti-liberalism in the sense of an overt or covert opposition to the “liberal-democratic ideal” (Deutsch and Soffer, 1987) of human freedom, dignity and life.

Fascism

The aforesaid reintroduces fascism as the most radical or extreme, along (and often conjoined) with theocracy and religious fundamentalism, way and means whereby conservatism adversely affects and ultimately eliminates political freedom and modern democracy. At first sight, it may seem, particularly to US and other neo-conservatives, implausible and unfair to attribute or link fascism, notably its destructive anti-democratic practices and outcomes, to conservatism. This is a seemingly valid objection given that conservatism in the form of medieval traditionalism as its original or source historically precedes and differs in many respects from fascism, yet addressed and preempted by identifying the shared conservative–fascist self-definition and even joint action against the “liberal-democratic ideal”. The specific point is that fascism is rooted in and derives from medieval-based conservatism, not that it represents authoritarianism or totalitarianism, thus a paradigmatic enemy of a free society. For the fascist antithesis to and destruction of political freedoms and liberal democracy hardly needs much elaboration and demonstration in virtue of being supremely axiomatic (by definition) and empirically confirmed.

In general, fascism has historically been a particular form or product, as well as a regular ally, of conservatism. In particular, the latter has functioned and been identified as a reactionary (and capitalist) phenomenon to the effect that conservatism (or capitalism), owing to “abortive” bourgeois revolutions, moves toward culminating in

fascism (Moore, 1993). Admittedly, based on its past tendencies, authoritarian conservatism is expected to become fascism “under certain conditions” (Lipset, 1955) like those in Europe during the 1920s-1930s, and even America over the 1950s (Putnam, 2000) punctuated by the Cold War and punctured by the conservative offspring or ally, McCarthyism. Consequently, most sociologists describe or treat fascism as an extreme form (Dahrendorf, 1979) of conservatism, an extremist, “rightist” phenomenon manifesting or endorsed by “conservative forces” (Lipset, 1955). Thus, fascism in interwar Europe, particularly Nazism in Germany, is considered and described as the “hard edge of conservatism” (Blinkhorn, 2003). Notably, German conservatism regarded the Nazis’ liquidation of the Weimar Republic as “historic honor” and a “tremendous feat” assuring its “gratitude” (Noakes, 2003).

The aforesaid highlights the observation that Nazism and German conservatism “shared the basic same values and goals”, notably the liquidation of liberal democracy in Germany and beyond. While the fascist liquidation of liberal democracy in Europe and beyond has been overt, unequivocal and unapologetic needing no special detection and demonstration, the “gratitude” as well as active support by conservatives has been usually covert, almost the “best kept secret” within European and other conservatism, thus less known to many. A mitigated variation of this tendency is seen in the relationship of McCarthyism, as the American conservative functional analogue or proxy of fascism, and conservatism as whole in America. This is shown by the support, gratitude or acquiescence of many US conservatives, including economic libertarians (Tilman, 2001), in face of the undemocratic practices of McCarthy *et al.* and their successors or proxies (e.g. Goldwater, Reagan) under changed “libertarian” cloths and names (Plotke, 2002).

In historical terms, fascism by liquidating liberal democracy in interwar Europe, as well as McCarthyism threatening to do so in America, achieved what both European, including in part British (Burke’s), and American conservatism have attempted to do and hoped ever since the French Revolution and the Enlightenment: to eliminate the “liberal-democratic ideal” of freedom and equality. Fascism hence fulfilled perennial conservative aims or dreams, at least temporarily. Notably, Nazism made Maistre’s, Burke’s and other notorious conservatives’ dreams come true, particularly revealing and consummating Bismarck–Hitler’s “authoritarian continuities between” in German history and society (Blinkhorn, 2003), traditional and “new” conservatism’ or fascism. In this sense, German fascists and in part McCarthy *et al.* could claim, at least by their legacies in or residual “ugly scars” (Smelser and Mitchell, 2002) on American politics and society, an even more “tremendous feat” and higher “historic honor”, with the “gratitude” and covert support of conservatives of all times, stripes and colors, from European medieval reactionaries to extreme US neo-conservatives, being “assured”.

No wonder, even economists like Mises (1957) admit a conservative association and affinity with fascism by stating that the “very nature” of a fascist-despotic government impels it toward “extreme conservatism”, and conversely, the second leading to and reinforcing the first. Notably, some sociologists define fascism as conservative, right-wing authoritarianism (Lipset, 1955) and/or totalitarianism (Giddens, 1979). At this juncture, one could make a distinction between conservative authoritarianism and fascist totalitarianism, consequently conservatism and fascism overall. Though often found in the literature, the distinction between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, as its “total” or ultimate case, is one of pseudo-statistical “degrees of un-freedom” rather than of substance, insofar as both represent just different designations for what Popper (1966) denotes, curiously with respect to an authoritarian state, the “most objectionable

form of government". (What Popper calls and considers authoritarianism, others like Aron, Adorno and Arendt[12] name and treat as totalitarianism.) If so, then the distinction between conservatism and fascism in these terms is one between different quantitative degrees of un-freedom and non-democracy rather than of quality, thus not essential to the present exposition.

In sum, while not all conservatism is fascism, the latter is almost universally a special case, facet or result of the former. And, if fascism is an extreme or authoritarian-totalitarian subtype of conservatism, fascist attacks on, destructions of and threats to political liberties and democracy can be plausibly associated with or placed within the broader conservative context. Moreover, as noted, in most cases conservatism has covertly and even overtly supported fascist anti-liberal attacks and destructions by rewarding fascism with "historic honor" and "gratitude", as shown in the fascist liquidation of and McCarthyism's threat to liberal democracy in Europe and America. Simply, "all is within the family" or "big tent" of European and American, paleo- and neo-conservatism when it comes to eliminating political liberties and liberal democracy by fascism and neo-fascism in Europe and McCarthyism or its neo-conservative sequels in America.

Oligarchy and plutocracy

Conservatism adversely affects and ultimately eliminates political liberties and liberal democracy through other ends, ways and means such as oligarchy and plutocracy considered jointly to be non- or pseudo-democratic phenomena. While certainly not all oligarchies and plutocracies are conservative in origin or effect, conservatism tends to be oligarchic and/or plutocratic, and to that extent to oppose, subvert and undermine political liberties and democracy. As with fascism, the crucial point is not that oligarchy or plutocracy is, as Weber, Pareto, Michels, Mosca and others suggest, the antithesis or subversion of democracy, which needs no extensive argumentation, as that conservatism entails and generates oligarchic and plutocratic features and outcomes.

Thus, Michels' "iron law" of oligarchy, stating that oligarchic structure "suffocates the basic democratic principle", is principally (though not solely) one of conservative oligarchy and by implication plutocracy. For example, he notes that oligarchic organization is the "source from which conservative currents flow over the plain of democracy, occasioning there disastrous floods". This warrants specifying the "iron law" of oligarchy in terms of oligarchic conservatism: "who says conservatism, says oligarchy", as, in Michels' view, an antipode of liberal democracy. Alternatively, Michels' "iron law" of oligarchy implies that oligarchic organization is inherently conservative in its nature, operation or effect. In his view, this is due to that oligarchic and other political organization "leads to power" and "power is always conservative", as "natural and normal" organizational development gives even the "most revolutionary [organizations] an indelible stamp of conservatism".[13] If so, an alternative version or interpretation (obverse) of the "iron law" of oligarchy is "who says oligarchy, says conservatism". This qualifies the statement that not all oligarchies are conservative, in the sense that even if not being such initially, they, including those most radical or revolutionary, become so eventually in their functioning and effects by obtaining an "indelible stamp of conservatism" due to the conservative and corrupting (in Acton's sense) nature of power.

In short, oligarchy becomes conservative sooner or later, just as conservatism tends to be more or less oligarchic, either way with corresponding adverse and eventually destructive effects on political liberties and liberal democracy. Thus, if the

“fundamental threat” to political and all freedom is the coercive power by an oligarchy (Friedman and Friedman, 1982), conservatism by its inherent oligarchic features and outcomes threatens liberties and democracy. For illustration, an analysis observes and predicts that American neo-conservatism aims at a “greater oligarchical control” of the state and the economy alike, with economic and political elites continuing to “fuse” (Pryor, 2002).

The above observation is relevant not only for its diagnosis of the intrinsic oligarchic tendencies or outcomes of US and other conservatism. It is also so for identifying plutocratic features and effects in conservatism, as well as suggesting what has been known since Aristotle and Tocqueville. This is that oligarchy in the sense of the “rule of a few” is typically (related to) plutocracy understood as the “rule of the rich”, and conversely, as the “rich” are usually “a few”, though one can imagine some divergences (e.g. oligarchic domination by the non-wealthy or ascetic, as usually in theocracy, as well as putatively in communism and fascism). Specifically, the “oligarchical control” of the state is Michels’ classical political oligarchy, and that of the economy what Weber calls, referring to America during the robber-barons, “naked plutocracy”, while the prediction that US “economic and political elites will continue to fuse” is one of the fusion of plutocracies and oligarchies. Notably, the expression the US “corporate oligarchy” which only takes on the “trappings of a democracy” (Berman, 2000) indicates this plutocratic–oligarchic fusion redefining American neo-conservatism, as does the “top heavy” (Wolff, 2002).

Historically, a “corporate oligarchy”, a plutocratic–oligarchic fusion, is far from being an invention of US neo-conservatism (despite its claims to newness). Instead, it is a long-standing feature or outcome of its paleo-precursor at least from the “gilded age” embodied and dominated by the proverbial “robbers-would-be-aristocrats”, as well as traditional conservatism in Europe since *laissez-faire* capitalism and before. Thus, under American paleo-conservatism as well as British *laissez-faire* capitalism (e.g. the second half of the 19th century), with the “exclusion of the propertyless” from complete political participation (Alexander, 2001), government considered solely “the wishes of 8 percent [or so] of the population” (Centeno, 1994), the property class, thus excluding, as in the US South, not only non-whites but also what Weber called the “poor white trash”. Such exclusions on wealth grounds and the resulting narrow social basis of a conservative government illustrate the notion and practice of oligarchic plutocracy or plutocratic oligarchy, i.e. in a charitable interpretation, “exclusionary democracy” as an evident oxymoron. Evidently, this is a non- or at most quasi-democratic political system, exemplified by the persistently “under-democratized” and hyper-conservative US South (Amenta and Halfmann, 2000).

In particular, similar to Weber’s detection of a “naked” oligarchic plutocracy, Veblen identifies the US conservative government as a “department of the business organization” in the sense of a small and exclusive property-class, thus a fusion of plutocratic–oligarchic exclusionary control and political closure. Alternatively, Veblen suggests that the US oligarchic plutocracy usually adopts and promotes conservatism, or more so than the “great body” of the American people, by observing that the “citizens of substance and weight” overwhelmingly represent the “conservative element” in America. The conservative-plutocratic symbiosis holds true, with prudent qualifications, of the US upper class since Veblen–Weber’s robber-barons times. Thus, subsequent US upper classes are observed to reveal strong class consciousness primarily, with secondary variations during the 1930s and 1960s-1970s, in the form of “aggressively conservative” ideologies and policies, even “extreme right-wing

conservatism” (Barton, 1985). For example, most US corporations were politically conservative during the 1980s, since their corporate political-action committees largely involved a consistent “ideological effort to promote conservatism” (Clawson and Neudstadt, 1989). Also, during the 2000s a plutocratic exemplar and symbol of “extreme right-wing conservatism” has been Enronism in the sense of an Enron-style fusion of “robber-baron” business practices (Desai, 2005) with ultra-conservative politics, and a form of what analysts identify as neo-conservative “mafia capitalism” in America (Pryor, 2002).

The likely reason for the embrace of conservatism by Veblenian and post-Veblenian plutocracies in America and elsewhere, with some exceptions of “liberal” plutocrats or rich, is identical to the equivalent tendency of Michels’ oligarchy, the conservative character and effects of political, including plutocratic, power. Like in the case of oligarchy, conservatism tends to be more or less plutocratic, just as sooner or later plutocracy becomes conservative, with negative effects on political liberties and democracy in either scenario. Hence, Michels’ “iron law” can, for the present purpose, be “aggregated” into one of conservative oligarchy *and* plutocracy: “who says conservatism, says oligarchy and plutocracy” and, alternatively, “who says oligarchy and plutocracy, says conservatism”. Of course, the integrated form of the law expressing the adverse oligarchic–plutocratic effects on political freedom is that “who says conservatism, says oligarchy and plutocracy, and consequently non- or quasi-democracy”. In sum, by virtue of its underlying oligarchic and/or plutocratic elements, and of oligarchy and/or plutocracy eventually becoming conservative, conservatism suppresses or undermines political liberties and liberal democracy.

Theocracy

Another, perhaps even more manifest, powerful and “efficient” way and means whereby conservatism adversely affects and directly attacks and effectively eliminates political freedom and liberal democracy is theocracy in the sense of a fusion or alliance between sacred and secular power, church and state, religious and political dominance. Probably even more manifestly and substantially than oligarchy and plutocracy, theocracy is essentially and invariably in historical terms a conservative phenomenon, specifically the inherent property and outcome of stringent moral–religious conservatism, notably of fundamentalism. Alternatively, “liberal” theocracy or theocratic moral–religious “liberalism” is an inner contradiction by assumption or a non-entity in reality. The point is that religious conservatism typically entails or generates theocratic features or outcomes, just as theocracy is intrinsically or eventually becomes conservative, not that it is an undemocratic political system, even in some views, the “greatest danger to democracy in any nation” (Swomley, 2001), as paradigmatic and established (except perhaps for US and other “democratic” theocrats as “walking contradictions”). So, to argue that conservatism tends to be theocratic in design or result, including side-effects, as well as conversely – i.e. that theocracy is conservative – is to say that it constitutes a grave and even lethal “danger to democracy”.

To do justice to conservatism as a whole, not all its forms have theocratic tendencies and effects, as shown by its secular political form and economic libertarianism that declaratively reject or suspect theocracy as a threat to democracy, just as do classical and modern liberalism. The argument specifically applies to strident moral–religious conservatism, more precisely its fundamentalist, radical or extreme subtype, such as what Weber and other sociologists (Lipset, 1996) call Protestant sectarianism or evangelicalism in America, alongside orthodox Catholicism represented by the Vatican

Church with its perpetual struggles against liberalism (Burns, 1990), as well as Islamic, Hindu and other fundamentalism outside of Christianity. As a general rule, while not all strict moral-religious conservatism is theocratic by achieving effective political hegemony, or theocratic in wishing to be hegemonic in politics, theocracy is almost universally a creation and blueprint of conservative or traditionalist religion, morality and culture. Notably, rigid moral-religious conservatism, involving fundamentalism in religion and, as a corollary, absolutism in morality, is typically theocratic or at least theocratic (Wall, 1998) in design or effect, just as theocracy is essentially conservative, fundamentalist or absolutist in this respect. Historically, in most societies and times, conservatism has been in various ways intertwined with theocracy as a political system, and consequently decoupled from and antithetical and eventually destructive to liberal-secular democracy. To illustrate and make the historical story short, suffice it mention a few indicative instances of this conservative-theocratic interconnection.

For instance, Pareto implies that the Christian “Roman theocracy”, exemplified in the Vatican Church-State and enforced by its “Holy” Inquisition, was in essence the outcome of the conservative (papal) transformation of “the religion of Christ, which seemed especially made for the poor and humble” into one for theocratic religious officials as well as the rich and powerful. Alternatively, once established the Roman theocracy has become rigidly conservative, with the Vatican Church becoming and remaining by the 21st century some sort of paragon and symbol of doctrinarian moral-religious and sociopolitical conservatism, alternatively anti-liberalism (Burns, 1990), in Western democracies and global Christianity, at least “ecumenical” Catholicism.

In another instance, Weber associates theocracies during early Protestantism, epitomized in “Calvinistic State Churches” in Europe and their extensions in England and America such as old and New England’s Puritan theocracies, with “Protestant sectarianism” as a particular form of strict moral-religious conservatism or anti-liberalism (Lipset, 1996). Notably, he attributes or links these theocracies to what he calls the “unexampled tyranny of Puritanism” and Protestantism in general (Bendix, 1977), including the “Puritan ideal of godly politics” (Zaret, 1989) and society (German, 1995). Following and intensifying its parent Calvinism, Puritanism was a salient form of stringent moral and religious conservatism, including fundamentalism in the form of evangelicalism or “Biblicism, primitivism and restorationism” (Coffey, 1998), and in that sense extremism or radicalism (Tawney, 1962). Furthermore, “unexampled” suggests what Weber states explicitly: Calvinism, including Puritanism, was the “most absolutely unbearable form of ecclesiastical control of the individual which could possibly exist [and] has perhaps never existed”, and to that extent even surpassing or rivaling that of the “Roman theocracy”, including its Inquisition[14].

In particular, what Weber calls “strict Calvinist bibliocracy” in the meaning of “taking the life of the first generations of Christians as a model”, as a Protestant “Christian” variant of theocracy, is by assumption traced to theologically and socially conservative or fundamentalist Protestantism postulating and enforcing Biblical revelation and inerrancy (Deutsch and Soffer, 1987) and seeking a “return” to religious and cultural origins (Turner, 2002). He intimates and anticipates, referring to the “first Baptist communities”, incorporating into Calvinist Bibliocracy what American religious conservatism, especially predominant Protestant fundamentalism like (Southern) Baptism and related sects, aims to realize as the theocratic design of a “Bible Belt” (Bauman, 1997) in the South and beyond, though US “Christian” conservatives do not call it theocracy invidiously imputed instead to the “old Europe” and non-Christian religions like fundamentalist Islam. Also, Weber explicitly incorporates New England’s

Puritan theocracy *cum* Winthrop's "shining city" of a "Bible Commonwealth" into Calvinist theocracies, even the "most totalitarian" subtype of the latter (Stivers, 1994). Consequently, he associates and basically equates this theocracy with the tyranny of Puritanism – i.e. "domination over the sinful world by religious virtuosi belonging to the 'pure' church" and implementing the "Puritan ideal of godly politics" and society – as its distinctly conservative moral–religious basis. He implies that New England's theocracy as "God's Kingdom" on Earth (Munch, 2001) was the supreme historical creation of American religious paleo-conservatism like Puritanism, just as the South's "Bible Belt" is the prime achievement or project of its neo-conservative successor or revival, notably revived Protestant sectarianism (Lipset, 1996) in the Puritan tradition (Dunn and Woodard, 1996).

In sum, theocracy is typically an authoritarian political creation, realization or extension of religious conservatism or theological fundamentalism, just as once established theocracies are overwhelmingly conservative in both "sacred" spiritual and "temporal" social terms, probably in consequence to the conservative attributes of political, including theocratic, power. In virtue of its interconnections with theocracy as the integration of religion and politics, such conservatism or fundamentalism poses and generates an ultimate, lethal danger to liberal–secular democracy defined precisely by the formal constitutional differentiation between sacred and secular powers. The preceding then yields a tentative variation on Michels' iron law of conservative oligarchy: "who says rigid religious conservatism or fundamentalism does theocracy and thus no liberal–secular democracy" and, alternatively, "who means theocracy and no democracy does religious conservatism or fundamentalism".

Militarism and imperialism

Militarism and imperialism is an additional, probably the most violent and brutal, way and means whereby conservatism commits adverse selection toward and ultimately uncreative destruction of political freedoms and liberal democracy not only within a certain conservative society but also across societies. While not all forms of militarism and imperialism, including aggressive wars, are conservative in origin and effect, yet conservatism typically harbors militarist and imperialist, including warlike, features and effects, or more than does non-conservatism, notably liberalism. The point is not that militarism and imperialism, including what Spencer calls offensive wars within primitive military society, constitutes a grave threat to political liberties and democracy, a proposition widely shared, even by many conservatives. Recall a US conservative President's warning about the dangers that the military–industrial complex poses to democracy in America and the common observation and prediction that the first casualty of imperialist or offensive war is almost invariably freedom, along with truth and life. Rather, the thrust of the argument is that conservatism comprises and generates militarism and imperialism, usually driven and justified by aggressive nationalism ("patriotism") as the intrinsic conservative attribute since, as Pareto implies (Habermas, 2001, at least "pan-German" and other conservatives a la Bismarck *et al.* (and Burke in Great Britain before), embraced, intensified and abused by its fascist derivatives, notably Nazism, as well as by US paleo- and neo-conservatism, including McCarthyism and Reaganism and its ramifications through the 2000s (Steinmetz, 2005). Alternatively, militarism and imperialism once established and rationalized by "patriotic" causes tend to regenerate and reinforce their primary generator conservatism in accordance with the observed and assumed conservative effects of political, including military–imperialist, power. Both ways, conservatism

produces adverse and eventually destructive consequences for political liberties and democracy.

In Spencer's terms, political conservatism creates or sustains what he calls militant *qua* militarist, warlike, oppressive, primitive, near-barbarian and traditional, society, including an imperialist polity and foreign policy, as opposed to industrial, peaceful, democratic and civilized modern society. Alternatively, militarism and imperialism are intrinsically or ultimately become conservative in both secular and "sacred" terms. In retrospect, what Spencer in his evolutionary optimism fails to envision is that conservatism may fuse (elements of) militarist and industrial society in an integrated, not necessarily harmonious, tension-free or non-contradictory, social-political system. This possibility is precisely indicated by the "military-industrial complex" in America and to a lesser extent his native Great Britain, as well as France, Germany and other Western societies (NATO countries). Consequently, this is a failure to envisage that a military-industrial political system can be virtually as conservative in political and religious spheres as a purely militarist, war-based polity expected to disappear in the long course of social evolution as the barbarian residue of the "dead past" to be eventually superseded by "peaceful" industrialism with its implied pacifism, notably by (as Schumpeter contends and predicts) non-imperialistic capitalism[15]. Significantly, Spencer implicitly attributes the emergence or persistence of military societies, including aggressive wars, to conservatism as the sociopolitical system of "restraints" on individual freedom, including "coercive legislation", just as the predicted demise of the first in favor of industrial society mostly to the expected evolutionary extinction of conservative ideas and institutions. In essence, Spencer's opposition between authoritarian militarist-imperialist and democratic pacifist-industrial societies, thus war and peace, reflects or parallels that between conservatism and its alternatives like J. S. Mill's forces of rigid "authority" and "social liberty".

In historical-empirical terms, the ties of political-religious conservatism with militarism and imperialism, including offensive local and global wars, as well as aggressive nationalism (Calhoun, 1993; Friedland, 2001), have been evident, consistent and strong, albeit with certain qualifications. To be sure, not all militarism and imperialism, including aggressive nationalism and offensive wars, in history or reality can be attributed to political-religious conservatism. Yet, the latter typically has militarist-imperialist and nationalist-ethnocentric ("patriotic") properties and effects, or more frequently and intensively so than its "pacifist" (a pejorative term for US conservatives and fascists) alternatives like liberalism regularly accused by conservative-fascist forces for being "soft" on the military, foreign enemies and "unpatriotic". In particular, the two world wars can be essentially considered, to paraphrase Clausewitz's famous definition of war, the continuation and escalation of, first and foremost, conservative militarist, imperialistic and aggressive nationalist or racist policies by "other means", so primarily instruments and outcomes of conservatism. Specifically, as the continuation or result of the old-new conservative policies and institutions, respectively, in Germany since its 1871 unification, these wars exemplify the "authoritarian continuities in German history between Bismarck and Hitler", thus substantively traditional Prussian or pan-German (including Austrian) conservatism and fascism, in terms of militarism, imperialism, aggressive nationalism or racism[16] and offensive wars.

On these and other occasions before and afterwards, from Germany and other Europe to America and elsewhere, conservatism typically, with secondary exceptions, acted as what Mises describes as the doctrine and policy of offensive war, militarism

and imperialism, actuated and rationalized by aggressive nationalism, in inter-state relations, like “intolerance and persecution” within the state. Recall, Pareto observes that the old German conservatism since Bismarck and before “preaches militarism, war and extermination against the enemies of Germany and also against those who, though not her enemies, refuse to be her slaves” and acts accordingly, thus practicing its preaching. Hence, it generated a pattern that Nazism and Hitler did not really have to reinvent but only to escalate, intensify and elevate into a nihilistic climax or madness.

Moreover, the phrase “militarism, war and extermination against enemies” can be *mutatis mutandis* taken to apply to conservatism as a whole, including that in continental European and in part, perhaps minus “extermination”, Great Britain and America, especially during the Cold War, McCarthyism and the neo-conservative global permanent “war on terror” and the “axis of evil”. For instance, during the 2000s nationalistic and militaristic neo-conservatism – once again after McCarthyism or the Cold War – placed America in a sort of global and permanent state of emergency[17] (Turner, 2002) as the optimal or ultimate condition to fulfill its “manifest destiny” or “Divine mission”. Predictably, this state of emergency assumed the form of a neo-conservative global permanent “war on terror” Orwellian-style *cum* peace, a sort of revived Puritan-style crusade against the “evil”, “ungodly” and “impure” world, inspired and sanctified by American “patriotism” or Americanism (Lipset, 1996) as a type of civil, even true religion. US conservatism overall has typically harbored, if not a strictly imperialist (yet see Steinmetz, 2005), then a militant-nationalist or narrow “ethnocentric” reconstruction of the American nation as in a “permanent state of war” (Habermas *et al.*, 1998). Thus, the Cold War, including its semi-grotesque rendition in McCarthyism, was the paleo- and the war on the “axis of evil” is the neo-conservative rendition of this military state, with their destructive effects on political liberties and democracy at home and abroad, on human “liberty, property and life” (“destroy to rebuild”).

In sum, conservatism typically displays or produces militarist-imperialist and aggressive nationalist features and outcomes, including global permanent offensive wars. And, militarism and imperialism once instituted, consolidated and rationalized by nationalism become stridently conservative in political and other terms due to the intrinsic tendency of military-imperial power for “conservation”. Either way, military-imperialist-nationalist conservatism acts as an ultimate, lethal danger to peaceful and inclusive democracy in intra- and inter-state, domestic and global terms. It threatens to resurrect from the “dead hand of the past” Spencer’s oppressive, militarist and barbaric society and destroy its democratic, pacifist and civilized successor in the form of liberal democracy. The above suggests the following variation on Michels’ “law” of conservative authoritarianism. To paraphrase Michels, “who says conservatism, does militarism, imperialism, aggressive nationalism, and offensive war, hence no peaceful inclusive democracy”, conversely, “who means militarism, imperialism, nationalism, and war, thus no peaceful democracy, does conservatism”.

Conclusion

Capitalism is, in Weber’s account, “most fateful force in our modern life”, and thus understood may indeed be, if “libertarian” economists are correct, both a system of “natural” economic freedom (Hayek, 1991) and a “necessary” (Friedman and Friedman, 1982), even sufficient (Mises, 1966) condition of non-economic liberty, notably political liberties or liberal democracy. This has served as a historical background in the sense

of Weberian capitalism supposedly having its religious-cultural ground, sanctification or analogue in conservative Protestantism (Calvinism), as well as an instructive analogy for reconsidering the relationship of conservatism to political liberty and liberal democracy in contemporary society.

Such an analogy has been instructive not only because, as in Weber's account, modern Western capitalism emerged and established itself as the "most fateful force" of modern life through an "elective affinity" or "intimate relationship" with Calvinism as a species of religious, political and cultural conservatism (and extremism or radicalism) rooted in medievalism (Gorski, 2003; Heller, 1986). It is also because modern capitalism, especially its American and other anti-egalitarian, authoritarian, plutocratic and oligarchic (Hodgson, 1999; Pryor, 2002), including anti-labor (Myles, 1994) and nationalistic (Giddens, 1998), variant, can be, as Hayek's "spontaneous" market order, considered a type of economic conservatism (Dahrendorf, 1979) or traditionalism epitomized by the old doctrine or myth of *laissez-faire*. In extension, it can be, as a total social system, deemed a form of political and cultural conservatism, including conservative oligarchy and religious traditionalism or fundamentalism (Inglehart and Baker, 2000) eventuating in or designing totalitarian theocracy *cum* "godly" politics and society.

In sum, such capitalism-conservatism paradoxically and contradictorily (Munch, 2001) mixes "free markets" with exclusionary political oligarchy or plutocracy and repression (Pryor, 2002) and even a design of theocracy in the image of America as a "Bible Belt" (Bauman, 1997). In turn, this mix is to be analytically distinguished from non-conservative capitalism as both an economic and social system, epitomized by egalitarian market economies, involving industrial democracy, and liberal-secular or "social" democracies or welfare states, and civil societies in Western Europe, which US conservatives detest intensively. Thus, only American and related (British Thatcherite or Singapore-style) anti-liberal, anti-egalitarian and anti-welfare capitalism, as distinguished from its liberal, egalitarian and welfare variant (Trigilia, 2002), can be deemed a special case of economic and other conservatism. This makes its supposedly inseparable link to freedom an analogue to the relationship of conservatism to liberty, as examined in this essay.

Like, and often intertwined or even equated with, modern capitalism, conservatism has in a sense become Weber's "most fateful force" in contemporary, particularly American, society, notably the Southern "Bible Belt" (and "red" states), at the threshold of the 21st century. Given its evidently adverse and ultimately destructive impact on human freedom and life, directly or indirectly (as via fascism), conservatism may become from the "most fateful" to the "most *fatal*" force in modern society, most likely America, the South at least. If so, then world history will virtually repeat itself producing a sense of *déjà vu*. For conservatism has already at least twice been the "most fatal" force in contemporary society, notably Europe, as prior to and through its own provoked two catastrophic wars as Clausewitz's continuations of primarily the old and new conservative (fascist) politics by "other means", respectively. Such an outcome indicates that modern society, assumed to learn only from catastrophes, actually has refused even "learning from catastrophe" (Habermas, 2001), including WWII. This applies to, if not Europe given its long experience and remembrance of such conservative practices, then America owing to its seemingly "shorter memory" of and perennial enamoring with authoritarian conservatism, in particular religious fundamentalism. And, in contemporary America during neo-conservatism, especially the "Bible Belt" or "red" states, "catastrophe" to learn, if ever, from is not so much WWII

as “foreign madness”, but New England’s Puritan theocracy and McCarthyism, including their shared persecutions/executions of dissenters a la “Salem with witches”, as native “all-American” phenomena (though US neo-conservatives would indignantly reject this view).

Notes

1. Actually, Weber seems to link political democracy more with other non-economic processes such as rational or bureaucratic public administration than with capitalism itself or a market economy. Thus, he observes that “everywhere bureaucratization foreshadows mass democracy” (Weber, 1968, p. 225), with the “progress” of the first “paralleling” that of the second, though “democracy as such is opposed to the rule of bureaucracy”. Specifically, Weber (1968, p. 979) notes that such “democratic currents” as “equality before law” and the “demand for legal guarantees against arbitrariness” presuppose or require a “formal and rational objectivity of [bureaucratic] administration, as opposed to the personal discretion.” Now, one may wonder how to reconcile Weber’s statements, such as “bureaucratization foreshadows mass democracy” and “democratic currents” necessitate a “formal and rational objectivity” of bureaucratic administration with “democracy as such is opposed to the rule of bureaucracy”. One way to do is to, as Weber does, link bureaucracy as rational administration with modern democratic capitalism, namely “office” with “capitalist enterprise”, though the first, as he implies, historically predates and even conditions the second. (Weber treats bureaucracy as a “precondition” of modern capitalism observing that the latter “presupposes”, alongside a “fully developed money economy”, a “strictly rational and efficient administration”.) Another way is to understand the first propositions or notions (“bureaucratization”, “mass democracy”, “democratic currents”) in historical-empirical terms, and the second (“democracy as such”, “rule of bureaucracy”) as Weberian ideal types; otherwise, they seem in tension, if not contradiction. At any case, Weber suggests that political democracy, just as bureaucracy, historically precedes modern capitalism, a historical moment and even truism (e.g. Greek democratic city-states) that most conservative or libertarian economists curiously overlook or downplay. In particular, he notices that direct democracy or “immediately democratic” (and local) administration, with the Greek polis as the prototype, is a phenomenon long prior to modern capitalism. Alternatively, Weber implies that what he calls (apparently evoking Marx) “modern bourgeois democracy” during the “age of capitalism” is just a historical democratic form or stage, not democracy tout de court, contrary to, for example, his partial follower, Schumpeter. Moreover, Weber suggests that modern capitalism is linked not only or even primarily with (bourgeois) democracy, but also with plutocracy or oligarchy as narrow bourgeois political rule, as does Pareto, a far cry from the conservative-libertarian capitalist-democratic (including the Schumpeterian) symbiosis. This is implicit in his observation that “with every development of economic differentiation (including capitalism) arises the probability that (direct democratic) administration will fall into the hands of the wealthy [i.e.,] to turn into rule by notables [who] rule as an honorific duty which derives from economic position” (Weber, 1968, pp. 949-50). This is simply, in his words, a “plutocratic recruitment of the leading political strata” under modern capitalism as well as pre-capitalist societies (of course, like democracy, plutocracy or wealthy oligarchy precedes capitalism). For instance, recall Weber’s identification of a “naked plutocracy”, embodied by the “robber-barons” or “captains of industry” and their associations (“clubs of the metropolitan plutocracy”), in capitalist America, where, as he puts it, “mere money in itself also purchases [political] power” (but not social status). Since a capitalist plutocracy defined in Weberian terms of money-capital purchasing political power is a non-or quasi-democratic antipode or subversion, it casts doubt on the strong conservative-libertarian argument that democracy is “inseparably linked” with modern capitalism.

2. Dunn and Woodard (1996, p. 94) remark that in colonial and revolutionary America “social conservatism was characteristic of the American South”, just as has since, including the post-civil war era.
3. Parsons (1967, p. viii) includes de Maistre, Bonald and Tocqueville into the “conservatives” of the early French sociological tradition, and Rousseau, Saint Simon and Comte into the “liberals”. In particular, Parsons (1967, pp. xiii–iv) describes Tocqueville as a representative of the “anxious nostalgia of the Ancient Regime” and (“indeed”) the “apologist of a fully aristocratic society”.
4. For instance, Foerster (1962, p. 36), citing Hamilton’s anti-democratic proclamations (“the people! – the people is a great beast!”, the “imprudence of democracy”), admonishes that “had [the US] attempted to follow Hamilton completely, the nation might have had a government like that of eighteenth-century England, monarchical and aristocratic, or like the “Leviathan” state of Hobbes, highly centralized and authoritative [i.e.] the totalitarian state.”
5. A case in point is what Dahrendorf (1979, p. 113) denotes the Machiavellian “mystification of the quest for political power by vague talk about the meaning of life” as characteristic of social conservatism.
6. Lipset (1955, p. 193) adds that in America during the 1950s the “[conservative] party desire to win elections plus the general desire of [conservatism] to dominate the society has led [moderate conservatives] to adopt tactics which normally they would abhor” – i.e. simply immoral or Machiavellian means.
7. Habermas (2001, p. 80) specifically mentions Berlusconi in Italy and Perot as “shady characters” in contemporary conservatism.
8. Shepard (1998, p. 907) suggests that US neo-conservatives “learned Wallace’s Machiavellian strategy of assuming positions and employing rhetoric that contained veiled racial messages: Nixon manipulated the busing issue; Reagan maimed affirmative action; Bush made a symbol of Willie Horton; and Gingrich demeans welfare mothers”.
9. Blinkhorn (2003, p. 72) adds that, just as Europe overall, in Germany conservatism opposed “liberal democracy [and its] degrading egalitarianism and a selfish and atomistic individualism [as a threat to] the strength and solidarity of the *Volk* [and] advocated a powerful authoritarian state to ensure a tough defense of German interests abroad and a hierarchical political and social order at home”.
10. Kettler *et al.* (1984, p. 80) remark that Mannheim finds “similarities and affinities between socialist and conservative thinking, despite social and political antagonism between them”.
11. Michels states that “King Frederick William IV of Prussia threatened to abdicate whenever liberal ideas were tending in Prussian politics to gain the upper hand over the romanticist conservatism which was dear to his heart”.
12. According to Bähr (2002, p. 811), to Arendt totalitarianism “is a term – not a metaphor – that describes a type of regime that, no longer satisfied with the limited aims of classical despotisms and dictatorships, demands continual mobilization of its subjects and never allows the society to settle down into a durable hierarchical order. In addition [it] offers an all-encompassing ideological framework that abridges the complexity of life in a single, axiomatic, reality-resistant postulate that allows no cognitive dissonance; and is predicated on an experience of mass superfluity”. If so, then totalitarianism is simply the term describing a total or absolute type of authoritarianism.
13. Michels’ observation that even the “most revolutionary” groups acquire an “indelible stamp of conservatism” is a particular variation on the tendency for what is non-conservatism or radicalism in the beginning to eventually, notably when institutionalized and politically dominant, become conservatism, as many historical

cases show, ranging from radical Protestantism (Puritanism) to laissez-faire capitalism to communism and anti-communism, all more or less becoming conservative in their later stages of institutionalization and political dominance. So is his remark that “power is always conservative” a generalization or euphemism for Acton’s diagnosis of its corrupting effects.

14. Weber specifically remarks that the “ecclesiastical supervision of the life of the individual” by Calvinistic theocracies or state churches “almost amounted to an inquisition” directed against the “liberation of individual powers”.
15. This also implies that, like most economists from Smith and Ricardo to Schumpeter and Keynes, Spencer fails to recognize or minimizes what Marx *et al.* and in part Weber detect as the frequent ties of industrialism or modern capitalism with militarism and imperialism, as witnessed prior to and during WWI and II, as well as subsequently exemplified by the US military–industrial complex, but this matter is beyond the scope of the essay.
16. For example, like many non-Germans or non-Arians, Hungarian-born sociologist and philosopher Mannheim had a first-hand experience with conservative, fascist-style xenophobia and nationalism in interwar Germany. Reportedly, due to his “foreign bodies” and “alien in culture” (Kettler *et al.*, 1984, p. 76), Mannheim was denied (and never granted since) citizenship by the ultra-conservative Bavaria ministry during the 1920s (after emigrating from Hungary), leaving for Great Britain following Hitler becoming German Chancellor (in 1933).
17. Turner (2002, p. 105) comments that America “is seen by conservatives as a nation that has departed from its sacred mission [and] faced by an urgent decision to restore its ethical mission in the context of a state of global [and] permanent state of emergency”.

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