

## INTRODUCING CONSERVATISM: BURKE AND OAKESHOTT

Read all of Roberts and Sutch, chapter 9 (Burke reading in Gingell optional)

### Key passages from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (page numbers from Gingell et al)

**On the defense of hereditary rule:** "Unquestionably there was at the Revolution, in the person of King William, a small and a temporary deviation from the strict order of a regular hereditary succession...[but] if ever there was a time favourable for establishing the principle, that a king of popular choice was the only legal king, without all doubt it was at the Revolution [of 1688]. Its not being done at that time is proof that the nation was of the opinion it ought not to be done at any time." (MPT 181) – "King James was a bad king with a good title, and not an usurper." (185)

"...the succession of the crown has always been what it is now, an hereditary succession by law: in the old line it was a succession by the common law; in the new by the statute law, operating on the principles of the common law, not changing the substance, but regulating the mode" (183-4)

**On gradualism and revolution:** "An irregular, convulsive movement may be necessary to throw off an irregular, convulsive disease. But the course of succession is the healthy habit of the British constitution." (186)

"The Revolution Society [has]...been able to contrive no better remedy against arbitrary power than civil confusion"

"With or without right, a revolution will be the very last resource of the thinking and the good...The Revolution was made to preserve our ancient indisputable laws and liberties and that ancient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty...The very idea of the fabrication of a new government, is enough to fill us with disgust and horror...All the reformations we have hitherto made, have proceeded upon the principle of reference to antiquity." (190)

"This policy appears to me to be the result of a profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors." (191)

### Key Passages from Michael Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics* (page numbers from Roberts and Sutch)

[The rationalist stands for] independence of mind on all occasions...because the Rationalist never doubts the power of his 'reason'...to determine the worth of a think, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action." (IPT 253)

"innovation is an activity which generates not only the 'improvement' sought, but a new and complex situation of which this is only one of the components. The total change is always more extensive than the change designed" (256)

[Better to be governed by] a principle of *continuity*: authority is diffused between past, present, and future...Everything is temporary, but nothing is arbitrary." (259)

"To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss."