

*Conservatism Past and Present: A Philosophical Introduction*

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Short Description

Conservatism faces an uncertain future. In the academy and popular culture, conservatives are considered a proper object of ridicule and scorn. At the ballot box, while a plurality continue to vote for conservatives, there is little understanding—even among its supporters— exactly what conservatism is and why it matters. Meanwhile, conservatives remain on the defensive against the dominant politico-cultural forces of the left.

Rather than despair, however, conservatives might instead accept their condition as an opportunity for philosophy. There are few philosophical treatments of conservatism. But if one role for philosophy is to articulate and assess the habits and beliefs of common life, given the broad support for conservative ideas and policies among the public, it is unfortunate that philosophers have abandoned this role. This is especially so for our understanding of what conservatism is, where the analytical acumen of philosophers would be most salutary. Similarly, in the domain of what matters, philosophers—much enamored of abstract values—have neglected the importance of existing value, of which conservatives cherish.

In *Conservatism Past and Present: A Philosophical Introduction*, Tristan J. Rogers argues that conservatism is a coherent set of historically rooted ideas that remains relevant today. Part I presents a short history of conservative ideas, drawing on themes of human flourishing, the imperfectability of human nature, the importance of custom and habits, authority, and freedom. Part II builds on these themes to forge a philosophical synthesis. Conservatism, Rogers argues, is best understood as seeking to conserve what is good. Conservatives defend the good life, as well as the institutions that make such a life possible. Part III applies this view to contemporary conservative politics, focusing on issues such as nationalism, populism, immigration, sex and gender, education, history, and the welfare state.