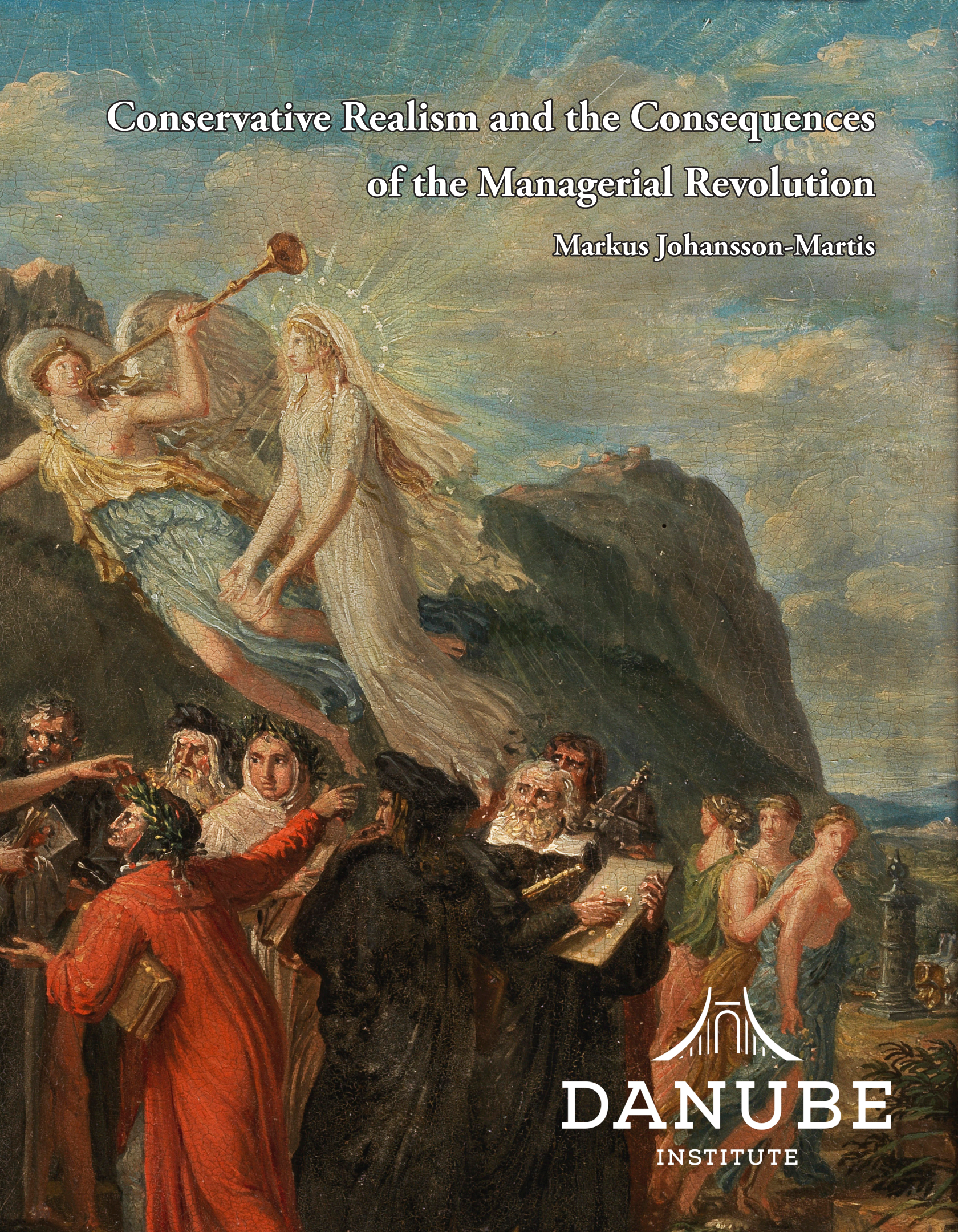
Conservative Realism and the Consequences of the Managerial Revolution

Markus Johansson-Martis



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Contents

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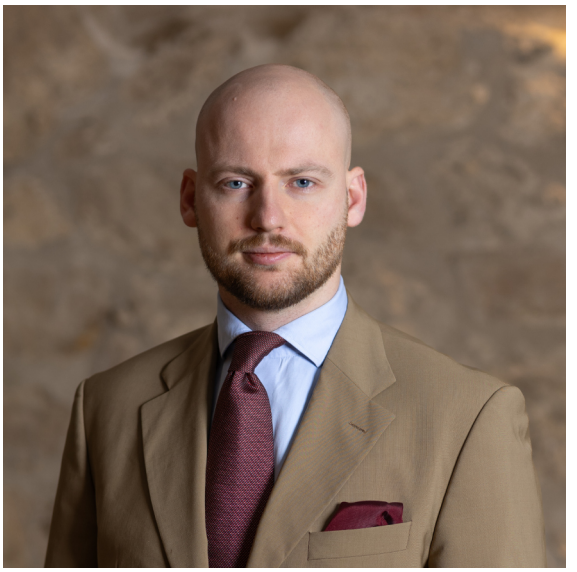
About the Author



Markus Johansson-Martis is a lawyer by training and a columnist. He has written for Riks, Sweden's largest conservative media outlet. He is the former chairman of the Conservative Students' Union, Northern Europe's largest conservative student organization, and has also served as a policy advisor to the Sweden Democrats. He holds an LL.M. from Stockholm University, specializing in constitutional law and the governance of public authorities.

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Abstract

This report argues that contemporary conservatism must evolve in response to the managerial revolution. Drawing on the work of James Burnham and Samuel T. Francis, this refers to a societal transformation of power and legitimacy that has concentrated influence in the hands of a new ruling class of "managers" who have displaced traditional elites and democratic institutions. Burnham and Francis outline how bureaucratic managers now dominate not only economic production but also cultural and ideological life.

In this context, the report introduces Conservative Realism as the essential form of conservatism in the managerial age. Conservative Realism synthesizes classical conservative thought, political realism and nationalism to confront the realities of institutional capture and ideological displacement. It rejects nostalgic passivity and embraces strategic restoration, recognizing that to conserve truly, one must sometimes restore radically.

Introduction

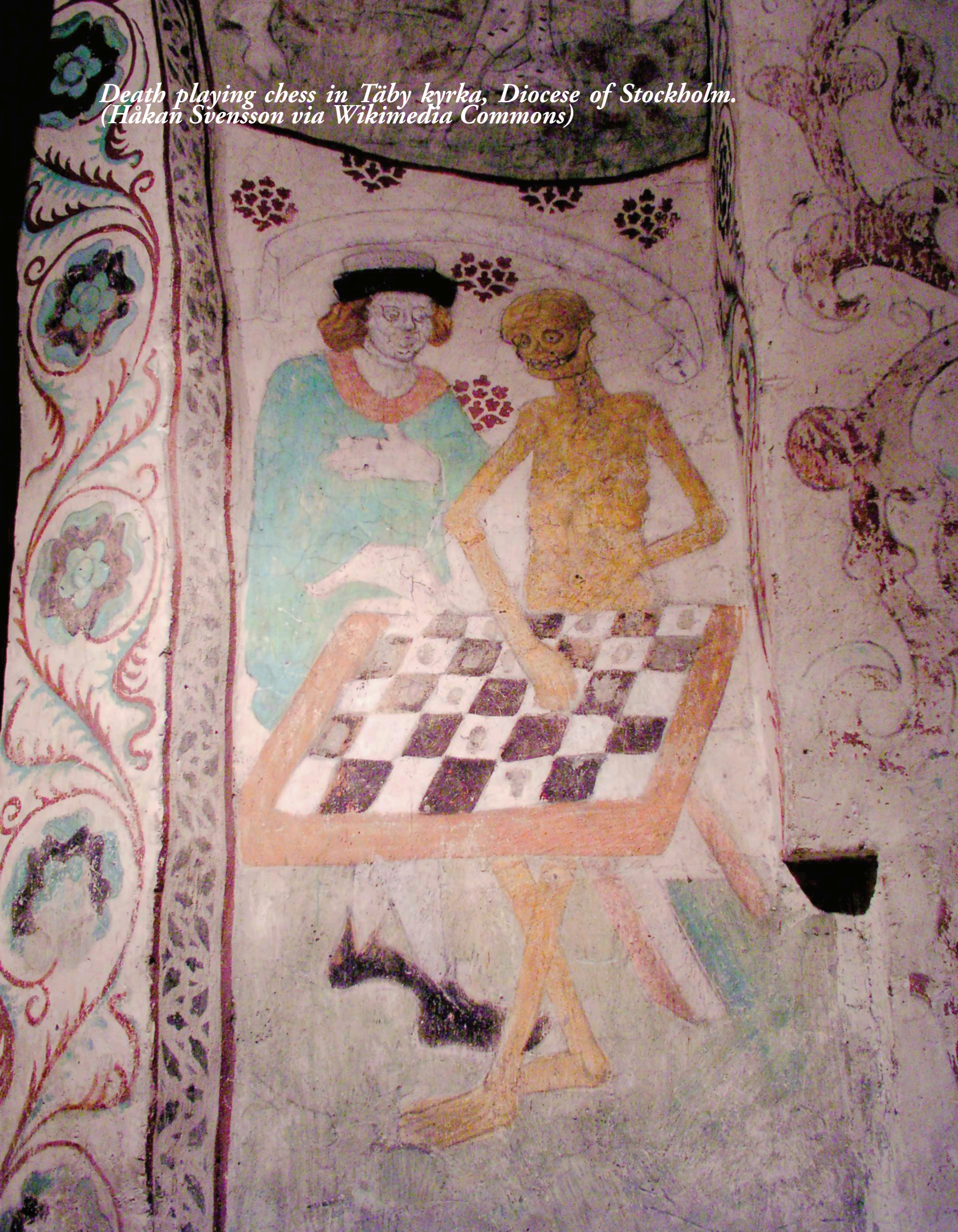
Political discourse today is increasingly framed as a struggle between a powerful elite and ordinary citizens—the few versus the many. While this framing captures a real tension, it obscures a deeper transformation in the structure of politics and society. It therefore limits our ideological understanding of why we have seen a rise of New Right movements across the West. To understand this phenomenon, we must look beyond surface level populism and examine the managerial revolution that reshaped society in the twentieth century.

This report argues that we no longer live in a capitalist society in the classical sense and, therefore, contemporary conservatism is different from earlier eras. Following the analysis of James Burnham and Samuel T. Francis, we inhabit a managerial society—one in which bureaucratic elites, managers, control not only economic resources but also cultural and ideological production. These actors do not own the means of production, but they dominate its operation, its narrative and its institutional logic.

Across the West, this managerial class is increasingly challenged by movements that blend nationalism, populism and conservative instincts. The MAGA movement's denunciation of the "Swamp" finds echoes in the UK's "blob," Sweden's "klägg," and France's "la caste." These movements are not merely reactive; they represent a deeper political realignment, which Burnham and Francis foresaw in the 20th century. These movements' rhetoric and ideological inclinations suggest we are living through a shift from broader conservatism to what this report calls Conservative Realism: a synthesis of classical conservative thought, political realism and nationalism, adapted to the conditions of managerial dominance.

This is important to understand, because otherwise one may focus too much on outdated categories such as left versus right, liberal versus conservative—frameworks that only explain the political terrain to a limited extent. By adopting a broader intellectual frame of reference, this report offers a more nuanced understanding of contemporary political conflicts: not only between ideologies, but between classes—those who benefit from the managerial revolution and those who do not. Those who hold what Francis calls a domestic ethic versus those who embrace a cosmopolitan ethic.

This thesis may unsettle some conservatives. Yet, as history shows, conservatism must develop and adapt to meet new conditions. The conservatism required today is not nostalgic or defensive, but strategic and restorative. Therefore, Conservative Realism is not a break from conservatism, but its necessary evolution—one that meets reality as it is and seeks to reshape it according to enduring principles.



Death playing chess in Täby kyrka, Diocese of Stockholm.
(Håkan Svensson via Wikimedia Commons)

The Managerial Revolution and its Ideology

Some dramatic changes have occurred in the West over the last century, but not in the way people usually discuss them. The former Trotskyist, later a conservative, James Burnham argued in his influential book *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) that he and his contemporaries were living through a revolution. Not one happening by guns and violence, but a step at a time, by power shifting its locus and logic. According to Burnham, the West was undergoing an irreversible shift from capitalism toward a new social order: *managerialism*,[1] meaning a change in society's ruling class, centre of power and dominant ideology.

In a managerial society, a technocratic elite of credentialed managers would exercise power through enlarged corporate and government bureaucracies, occupying the commanding heights of the economy, politics and culture.[2] Private property would not disappear, but the state would exercise a dominant role in the economy nonetheless, and social and political arrangements would be radically altered.[3] We can see these tendencies now, with growing numbers (and sizes) of state owned enterprises as well as transnational companies. Through these institutions, managers acquire the powers of owners yet lack their personal stake or responsibility.[4]

It is important to note, however, that just because a shift is occurring in the locus of power, it does not mean that old institutions (of the capitalist era) will disappear. Rather, their influence will diminish and be replaced. This was an outcome of all the benefits from efficient coordination of large scale production and collaboration between government and private entities. This brought about significant societal changes as well.[5]

Furthermore, Burnham predicted some of the actual consequences we see today.

First, he foresaw the European continental political system being smashed as it was. No single nation shall try to dominate the European continent as it did during the capitalist era.[6] Instead, nations and men will line up with one or the other of the superstates of tomorrow. No more would sovereign countries be divided up into a score of sovereign nations, each with its independent border guards, tariffs, export restrictions, currencies, forts, armies and bureaucracies. Only as a propaganda talking point would national independence be preserved.

One other aspect of managerial politics he foresaw was the political struggle between metropolitan areas and the rest of the country, all around different nations. He wrote that the "backward areas" of the majority of people and the territories of nations would not automatically unite behind a single suprastate continent. Instead, they would want to "break free" from domination and claim their own destiny.[7]

But who are these managers?

Burnham wrote that they would be recognized as, for example, 'production managers,' operating executives, administrative engineers, or, in government, administrators, commissioners and bureaucrats. It does not really matter whether it is about legal or financial positions, nor governmental or corporate processes.[8] Exemplifying this point, he gave the example of America during the New Deal under Franklin D. Roosevelt: regulations, laws and decrees were issued more and more by an interconnected group of administrative boards, commissions, bureaus, or whatever other name may be used for comparable agencies.[9]

Samuel Todd Francis, Burnham's intellectual successor, argued for similar points. He noted, as Burnham did, that managers and people sharing their ideology would be found in every metropolitan area of every country. Second, they would exist within government agencies, large companies and organizations. Third, as Francis later pointed out, they inhabit the establishment media.[10] It is a hydra of similar interests among people who share their class and ideology. They include politicians, administrative workers, journalists, PR firms, lawyers, lobbyists, NGOs and similar bodies sharing an interest in upholding the managerial order and the status quo.

At this point, it would be fair to ask, "What came first, the chicken or the egg"? Meaning, are these aligned because of material interest or ideological similarities? Neither Burnham nor Francis discussed this. Instead, they are following a view of ideologies stemming from the so-called *Latin realists*, which are inherent to political realism (which will be explained in next chapter). Their perspective is that ideology (including ethics) stems from your interest. Meaning that if you are the ruling class, your ideological beliefs will align with the interests of staying in that position.

In his book *Beautiful Losers* (1993), Francis discussed many topics relevant to this subject. Among other things, he

explained the managers' ideology and ethics. He called it liberal managerialism, built on cosmopolitan ethics.[11]

The latter means an ethic that views localism and small communities generally as parochial, even as veils for bigotry and selfishness. The small town, the family, class, religion, ethnicity and community ties tend all to be backward striving, repressive and exploitative. Likewise, the older virtues—work, thrift, discipline, sacrifice and deferred gratification—were dismissed as puritanical, absolutist, superstitious and often hypocritical.[12] This ethic is opposed to what Francis saw as the new conservative ethic (a domestic ethic, which will be explained later in the report). Instead, it finds virtue in the large city, in the anonymous (which, in their own minds, means "liberated") relationships of declassed, desexed, demoralized and deracinated atoms that know no group or national identity. He writes that the ethic " idealizes material indulgence, the glorification of the self, and the transcendence of conventional values, loyalties, and social bonds. At the same time, it denigrates the values of self-sacrifice, community, and moral and social order."[13]

As Burnham predicted, and Francis further elaborated, the managerial elite tend to perpetuate their own power and privilege, making themselves enemies of democracy. Much like managers incrementally taking control of production and political influence, they speak as if their ideology is democracy itself, but it is, in truth, liberal managerialism.[14]

What that means is this: after examining some policy goals of "postwar liberals" in areas such as crime, poverty, public health and education, he argued that, in every case, liberal objectives broadly aligned with the structural interests of managerial elites rather than those of the declining bourgeoisie. What connected initiatives like the welfare state, feminism, employment protections, school reform and liberal internationalism? All served to advance managerial power through a process of "homogenization."[15]

To give some more examples it would be aligned with liberal managerialism to think that to be pro-democracy, as Europeans, we must want to increase the power and political influence of EU bureaucracy and reduce the influence of national elections. To raise people's living standard, we need to raise taxes to fund grants. To protect the people from corrupt politicians, we need non-electable experts. For the media to "check the power", we need not more plurality in media but fewer, only already established, media outlets.To "save" families, we need more feminism and individualism. To sustain the demographic pyramid scheme of welfare states, we need not larger families but more migration

On the surface, liberalism appeared to promote a fair social contract and equal protection for all. Beneath this egalitarian facade, Francis claimed, lies a vindictive purpose: to undermine and subvert traditional ways of life. The most common tools for managers' and managerial liberals' goals seem to be the redistribution of power and economic policy. For the sake of this report, the coined term for this will be asymmetrical minority rule, meaning the few (ruling class) are "ruling" in a way suitable for themselves and other minorities and interest groups of different sorts. Their strategy of use is therefore asymmetrical minority redistribution, meaning redistributing power and money from the majority of people to a minority of interests. It plays out as an inversion of the threat to democracy that Alexis de Tocqueville talked about and called "tyranny of the majority.". Nevertheless, we seem to have the opposite. They do not necessarily pursue the interests of interest groups because of majority will, but because it serves their own interests rather than the majority's.

As Burnham notes, classical liberalism grounds legitimacy in the protection of individual rights under a social contract. Liberal managerialism, by contrast, legitimizes itself through the managers' ability to retain power.[16] Francis adds that this legitimacy stems from rejecting bourgeois ideals—like a limited, neutral state—in favor of an ideology that justifies its own dominance. For managerial elites, authority is legitimate simply because it is managerial, sustained by centralised control, much like bourgeois rule was upheld by bourgeois institutions under capitalism.[17]

What the reader will realize after the next chapter is that the perspective on politics and ideology shown in both Burnham and Francis' writings is very much influenced by political realism. As with this chapter, the next one on Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) will also be essential to grasp in order to understand why the most influential notion of contemporary conservatism is Conservative Realism.

Ceiling painting of the Marble Hall, Melk Abbey, Austria. (Paul Troger via Wikimedia Commons)

The Realist Understanding of Politics

Two of the most influential political realists in the history of political theory are Niccolò Machiavelli, the Florentine Renaissance thinker and diplomat, and Thomas Hobbes, the English philosopher best known for Leviathan. Both lived through political upheaval, though in different countries and centuries. Using distinct modes of reasoning, they developed contrasting realist perspectives—insights that will inform this report's later analysis of contemporary struggles in politics, ideology and the dynamics of authority and legitimacy.

Both grounded their thought in human nature as the basis for understanding the limits and possibilities of political life. Their views reflect classical realist themes: a pessimistic view of humanity and structural determinism. Yet they approached political reality from different vantage points—Hobbes through metaphysics, Machiavelli through historical experience. Realism, at its core, seeks to identify the forces that drive political action and constrain its outcomes. [18]

For both Machiavelli and Hobbes, every man strives for power. From that, people are born into a relationship of "conflict" among each other. For Niccolò Machiavelli, power essentially is a question of the willing authorization people give to a political settlement. According to Burnham (who was an expert on Machiavelli) this is what Machiavellianism says about human nature. He only tries to study man as "political man", in somewhat the same way as Adam Smith analysed "economic man," meaning man's nature is only interesting insofar as man functions in the realm of politics. [19] Clearly, however, one can make assumptions about Machiavelli's view of men embedded in his theories.

For example, Machiavelli states that A has power over B only when B accepts the condition of being ruled by A out of B's free will. That means whether a state has power does not depend solely on how much army or wealth it possesses; it also depends on people's free will to trust the government that commands them. Since men by nature can act in a given condition no matter how debased and fragile they are, a prince or a republic does not have power over men unless its own people or its conquered people use their free will to accept the sovereign's rule.[20] Here lies an important detail in the relation between A (the Prince) and B (the people). A can have its own agency in relation to the will of B, but at the same time, the Prince, to some extent, is dependent on B.

This view differs from Hobbes's foundation. Unlike Machiavelli, Hobbes introduces the concept of the "state of nature." In *Leviathan* (1651), he examines the basic characteristics of man prior to any political construction. In this natural state, man pursues his desires without restraint—free to act as he pleases, driven primarily by passion. Moral considerations or concern for others are secondary. As Hobbes writes: "The power of man, to take it universally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good."[21]

To regulate this pursuit of power, Hobbes argues, it must be in every man's interest to do so. For him, war and conflict are the greatest threats to human flourishing. No one truly desires the chaos of the state of nature; thus, surrendering power to a strong sovereign becomes a rational choice in pursuit of peace.

The sovereign, Hobbes writes, is the compounded power of many, united by consent in one person, forming what he calls a "Commonwealth."[22] This sovereign is an artificial entity, authorized from below by its members. This contrasts with Machiavelli's view, which sees political authority as a reciprocal relationship between ruler and ruled.[23] To eliminate the risk of conflict, Hobbes grounds his political theory in the principle of security: self preservation above all. In this light, the sovereign becomes the ultimate protector, embodying the collective power of the people.[24] Legitimacy, according to Hobbes, arises because the people authorize the sovereign. This notion of popular sovereignty stands in stark contrast to the medieval idea of divine or inherent kingship. From a realist perspective, the doctrine of "divine right" serves a similar function to what Machiavelli calls *Mythos*, a concept for which Hobbes's rationalist framework leaves little room. While Hobbes grounds legitimacy in reason and self preservation, Machiavelli emphasises the political necessity of *Mythos* and the leader's ability to wield it. For him, it's not the ethical content of religion that matters, but its function.[25] Any belief system can serve this role, and *Mythos* appears, in his view, across all civilizations. Like Plato's "noble lie" in *The Republic*, *Mythos* sustains political order regardless of its truth. What matters is its effect: it leads people to accept the political structure as legitimate.

Machiavelli sees this clearly in religion's utility. It binds a fragmented polity through shared consciousness and demands sacrifice in the name of something greater. In this sense, he is a "true believer"; not in the truth of religion, but in its political function. *Mythos* is justified if it secures continuity and cohesion.[26]

Granting legitimacy to a new authority is one thing; maintaining it is another. Machiavelli holds that if a ruler cannot uphold his authority, he ceases to be one. In a way, legitimacy doesn't seem to work in a Machiavellian conceptual framework.

Hobbes, by contrast, builds his theory around legitimacy: the sovereign remains sovereign only if he ensures peace and safety. If he fails, the Commonwealth withdraws its consent, and the process of authorising a new sovereign begins anew. What sets Hobbes apart is the rationality he attributes to the Commonwealth—far greater than Machiavelli allows.

In *The Prince* (1532), Machiavelli makes clear he does not envision a sovereign or timeless state. On the contrary, laws and institutions are rooted in human origin and subject to decay. The state, for Machiavelli, is a perishable entity; no legal abstraction—be it sovereignty or the "immorality" of *raison d'état*—can preserve it. Its survival depends on capable rulers.[27] Legitimacy, in this view, belongs to those who seize and hold power.

Although more nuanced than it may seem, a ruler's authority, in Machiavellian terms, rests on two pillars: conquest and foundation. Conquest expresses the leader's will to power, which stems from fortuna—the capacity to shape circumstances to one's advantage.[28] In this view, the conquest of states is not incidental but a deliberate act of power expansion, often through war or conflict, aimed at establishing hegemony over rivals.[29]

Foundation, by contrast, refers to the ruler's ability to craft policies and institutions that ensure the regime's durability and governability.[30] It is the prince's task to impose order within a fluid and uncertain social reality. In line with the realists' pessimistic view of human nature, this becomes an obligation: to structure the state in ways that prevent collapse. As Machiavelli writes, "The principal foundations of all states—new, old, or mixed—are good laws and good arms."[31] A wise ruler, he adds, must govern so that his citizens "always and in all circumstances need the state and of him," for then they will remain loyal.[32]

In conclusion, the key difference lies in how legitimacy is conceived. For Hobbes, legitimacy originates from the people but hinges on the ruler's ability to ensure peace and security. For Machiavelli, legitimacy is less a formal question than a matter of effective rule: if the prince can establish a durable foundation—shaped by *mythos* and historical context—his authority will be accepted. In both cases, power must be maintained, but only Hobbes roots that power in popular consent.

Defining Modern Conservatism

Neither Hobbes nor Machiavelli were conservative thinkers in the modern sense; the term itself didn't exist in their time. Still, aspects of their thought resonate with both historical and contemporary conservatism.

Scruton argues that conservatism has historically emerged as a defence of tradition against movements that threaten its continuity—a recurring pattern across eras. His account highlights conservatism's impulse to preserve inherited customs and institutions, especially in times of upheaval.[33] This image is central to *Conservatism* (2017), where Scruton offers a concise history of the development of modern conservative thought. According to Scruton, conservatism was shaped by three revolutions: the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the American Revolution of 1783 and the French Revolution of 1789.

When the Glorious Revolution occurred in 1688, the earliest conservatives opposed liberal reforms in defence of England's established customs and institutions—monarchy, the Anglican Church and other bodies whose legitimacy stemmed from inheritance rather than choice. According to Scruton, these reforms aimed to wrest power from the monarchy and redistribute it to a modernizing aristocracy. This shift was driven by tensions between church and state during the Reformation and by the rise of natural law as a limit on sovereign power.[34] While liberals debated legitimacy and natural rights, conservatives defended the existing monarch and church precisely because they were established. One prominent voice, living after the revolution, was Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776), who saw the established order as valuable because it contained within its structure the solutions to social conflict and the tacit knowledge for continuity. His view was that established institutions are useful and, therefore, worth preserving; and for that reason, legitimate.[35]

Regarding the French and American revolutions, Scruton makes an important distinction, similar to what Burke argued, that the former is not at all conservative and the latter would be.

Unlike the French Revolution, the American Revolution was not a wholesale rejection of order but a conservative effort to preserve traditional rights and institutions. Many revolutionaries argued that their liberties stemmed from Magna Carta and common law—tradition, not innovation—and sought to restore freedoms disrupted by British policy.[36] The French Revolution, by contrast, was rooted in philosophical abstraction. As Scruton notes, its declaration did not refer to existing institutions and defined rights without any legal mechanism to uphold them. It was a product of pure theory, shaped by Rousseau's *a priori* idealism.

From a conservative perspective, this was deeply problematic. Freedom, Scruton argues, is always at risk unless protected by law. The state must safeguard communities and families, which embody inherited wisdom. Burke called these "little platoons"—the social units that anchor tradition. He also insisted that society is not merely a contract among the living, but a trusteeship binding past, present and future.[37] This principle stands as a bulwark against radical upheaval, such as the French attempt to remake society and man from scratch.

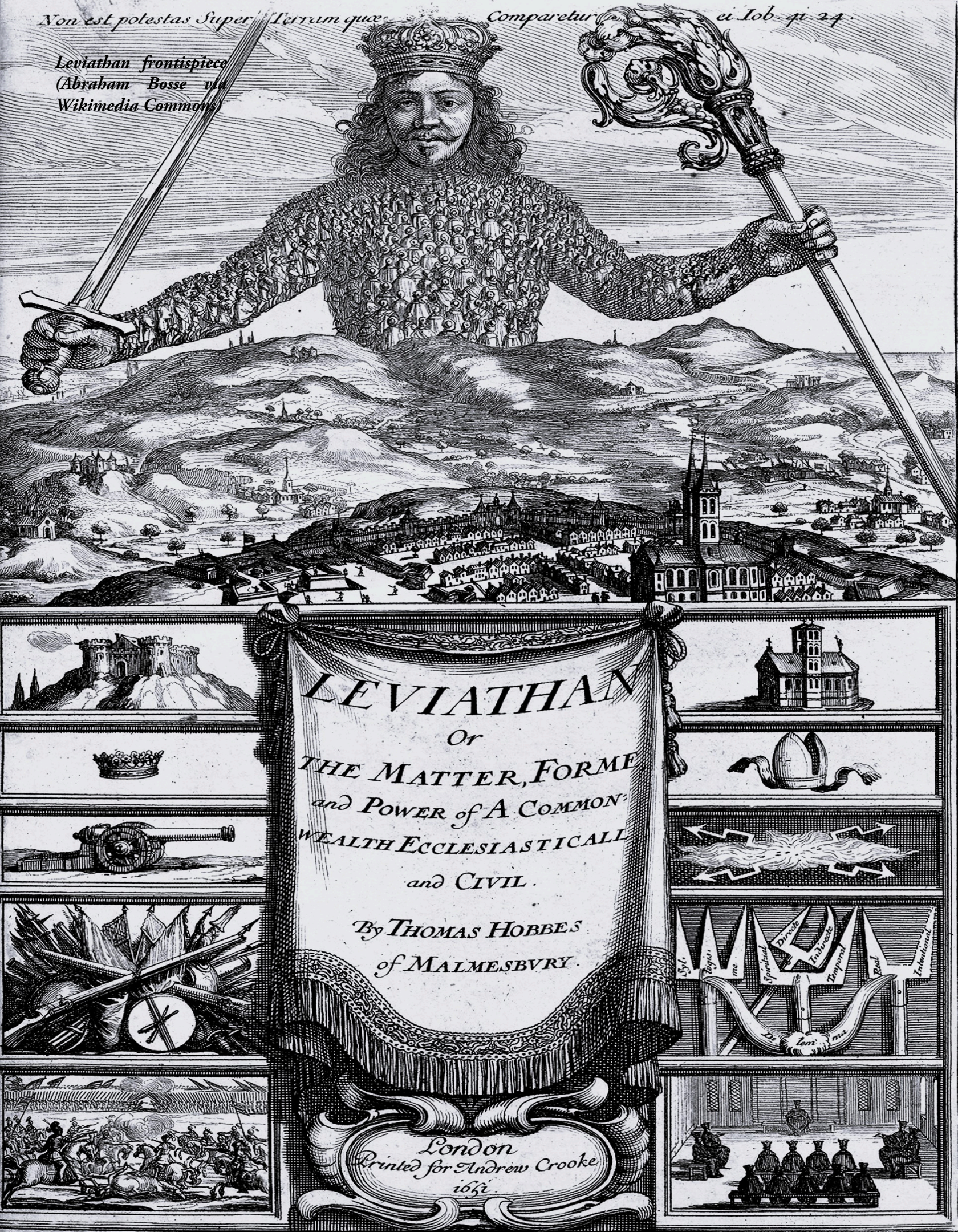
Another important era to Scruton in his book is the Industrial Revolution and the rise of socialism. During this period of evolution, the struggle for conservatism became against socialism and its abstract ideals of how society should be run and its social planning ideas.[38] In the name of "justice", "progress" and "happiness", they would rearrange the whole of society from top to bottom through, among other things, redistribution.[39]

Conservatives recognised that modern society left many feeling alienated, as its rationalist ideals—whether the pursuit of pleasure in utilitarianism or profit in capitalism—clashed with human nature. They rejected the notion, shared by liberals and socialists, that human value could be reduced to such aims. Instead, they emphasised the need for class harmony over class conflict, arguing that society could not be improved by pitting groups against each other. In contrast to classical liberalism, conservatives began supporting state intervention to relieve poverty, expand education and ensure that those excluded from prosperity were not left behind.[40]

Today, more than a century and a half later, the conservative tradition has been enriched by new influences, though its core remains rooted in historical lessons: belief in the established order, the shared interest in preserving continuity, the protection of "little platoons" and the pursuit of social harmony across classes.

Yet modern conservatism has evolved, and these newer elements must be examined to prepare for the discussion of Conservative Realism in the next chapter. For this purpose, Söderbaum's *Modern Konservatism – Filosofi, bärande idéer och inriktning* (2020) offers valuable guidance.[41]

Leviathan frontispiece (Abraham Bosse via Wikimedia Commons)



Building on historical foundations, Söderbaum identifies several key features of contemporary New Right movements and parties. Next to the previously mentioned lessons from history, he adds some important factors of modern conservative movements,

First, it can be mentioned that, unlike some earlier forms, modern conservatism embraces an optimistic view of democracy and popular sovereignty. The idea is that public involvement fosters a deeper investment in society's development.[42] At the same time, it affirms the need to protect minorities—individuals included—against what Tocqueville called the "tyranny of the majority." Conservatives therefore uphold freedom of the press, freedom of speech and a functioning political opposition as essential safeguards.[43] This approach echoes a Hobbesian logic: popularity can help preserve order and continuity—not absolutely, but in a tempered, moderate form.

In contrast to liberalism and socialism, Söderbaum argues, conservatism is grounded in reality. It draws first on society's historical experience and second on human nature—rather than on abstract ideas about how humans ought to be, similarly to realism.[44] This is shown in different ways.

As previously noted, conservatives tend to uphold established institutions, which distinguishes them from conservative realists. These institutions are vital for preserving Burke's "little platoons."[45] Söderbaum sees modern conservatism as a direct counterpoint to liberal individualism and socialist class analysis. Its aim is not to elevate one group but to foster harmony across classes. To borrow the Machiavellian terminology, the leader must take fortune and foundation into account. Politics within the state will only be unbalanced and destructive when individualism or class struggle is made its central focus, as liberals and socialists, respectively, tend to do.[46]

This also contrasts with the cosmopolitan ethics of liberal managerialism, which seeks to erase cultural particularities in the name of "liberation." Conservatives, by contrast, value traditions and local attachments for their utility and embedded wisdom. These "little platoons" are not just sentimental: they are the basis of social order.

Another important aspect of modern conservatism is the fusion with nationalism.

Across the West, populist New Right parties tend to blend nationalism and conservatism, though the balance varies by country. Some lean more heavily on Christian-influenced social policies, while others are not truly conservative, just opposed to progressive agendas.

This divergence is also evident in attitudes toward international cooperation. Nationalist leaning movements are generally more sceptical of supranational organizations, viewing them as constraints on national sovereignty. Others, however, show no desire to leave these institutions. Still, a shared critique persists: that such bodies promote liberalism, diffuse it across member states and centralize power. In this sense, they function as agents of liberal managerialism, reproducing its ideology and reinforcing its dominance.

Yet it is telling that few New Right parties advocate withdrawal from the EU or NATO, just as few adopt absolutist positions on social issues. This suggests they are neither strictly conservative nor strictly nationalist. One reason may be pragmatic: collaboration is seen as necessary, and there is little electoral support for more radical positions. This stands in contrast to the liberal managerial approach, which often places ideological commitments above both popular will and national sovereignty.

This also speaks to the fact that they are neither strictly conservative nor nationalistic. It could be the case because they see a need for collaboration and because there is no popular base for these opinions among voters. A position then would be in direct contrast to a liberal managerial approach to politics, which puts ideology above both the will of the people and national sovereignty.

Conservative Realism: A Synthesis for Our Time

What emerges from the movements of New Right parties, especially in light of the previous chapters, is a distinct form of conservatism rooted less in ideology than in social reality. Earlier discussions of managerialism hinted at this trajectory, pointing toward the MARs and Burnham's foresight into future political fault lines—once speculative, now unmistakably present.

In his 1993 essay *Message From Mars*, Samuel Francis outlined what he saw as the future base of conservatism: the Middle American Radicals, or MARs. This group, largely excluded from the prosperity of the managerial elite, consists of the broad swath of Americans living outside metropolitan centers. The same demographic is present in most western countries and are having a similar attitude toward politics. Francis's vision reads like a populist manifesto—one that could easily align with the rhetoric of the MAGA movement or other New Right currents across the West today.

Francis observed early on that the political instincts of MARs resembled those of a proletariat more than a propertied middle class. Unlike the established Republican Party, they were open to nationalism and populism.[47] Distinct from both Left and Right orthodoxies, MARs did not see the government as favouring only the rich (as the Left claimed), nor as overly generous to the poor (as the Right often argued). Instead, they viewed the system as serving both while the middle class footed the bill.[48] This critique of asymmetrical redistribution stands in direct contrast to the managerial logic outlined in previous chapters.

Francis noted that MARs do not engage with politics in a systematic or ideological way. Yet they instinctively defend their communal roots—echoing Burke's "little platoons." Their values oppose cosmopolitan ethics: they emphasise duty over entitlement, loyalty to concrete persons and institutions over abstract allegiances, and uphold sacrifice and delayed gratification as social necessities. These values, Francis called *Domestic ethics*.[49]

Francis called MARs "radicals" not in the sense of conservative radicalism, but because they are inclined to wanting to depose elites, challenge existing hierarchies, and redistribute power back to the majority. He noted that "*[overthrowing the managerial elite] is revolutionary not in the sense that its realization will require violent rebellion, mass liquidation, or totalitarian rule*" since that was not in the interest of New Right, or MARs. Their "revolution" was, in peaceful ways, to replace one elite by another.[50]

That redistribution, he argued, must move from the managerial elite to the majority—through a new conservative movement grounded in MARs' domestic ethics.

This radical posture shares roots with nationalism: the recognition that politics presupposes a "we." That "we" is not abstract, but formed through people, tradition and historical continuity—a Hobbesian commonwealth of "little platoons," infused with mythos and belief in the nation-state. In contrast, the managerial class believes primarily in managerialism itself.

MARs favour national sovereignty and a government rooted in popular sovereignty. They oppose centralization and technocratic insulation from public influence. Their loyalty to states and communities is not based on institutional form, but on ownership—these are theirs. And that, too, stands in direct opposition to liberal managerialism.

Francis's idea of unorthodox conservatism was not strictly a conservative frame of reference. Instead, it was a clear anti-cosmopolitan ethical ambition. In daily discussion, this would be called an anti-woke, anti-progressivist standpoint with nationalistic tendencies, also being sceptical of the modern version of managerial capitalism.

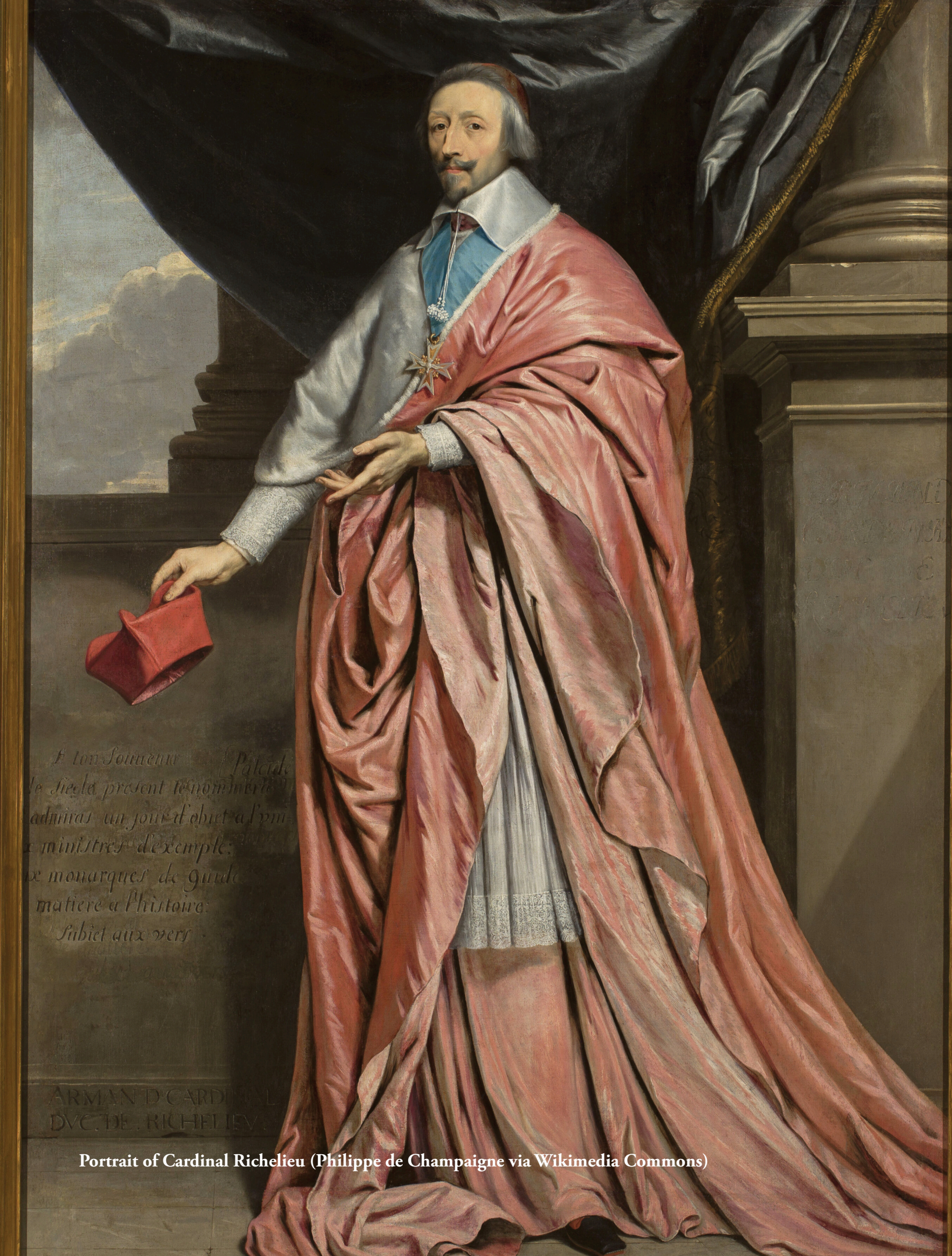
For the very same reason, Conservative Realism is sceptical towards international collaboration. This aligns with the political realism of Machiavelli and Hobbes in two ways: first, the nation state has historical continuity and, in our modern era, is, for the same reason, a practical mythos, which for example a federalized EU has not. This logic also calls for viewing the state itself as an organism—in relation to other nationals and entities.

To conclude this chapter, the core conflict must be underscored. All previous arguments converge on a single axis, one that echoes Burnham's class analysis and Trotskyian background. Rather than undermining conservative and conservative realist thought, this conflict affirms it.

Conservative Realism identifies a clear class struggle: an "us versus them," where "they" are the beneficiaries of asymmetrical minority redistribution across all social strata. Influence has shifted from the productive middle class and bourgeoisie to a bloated bureaucracy born of managerialism, comprising lower-tier officials, communicators and HR staff. High-level managers, media elites and multinational executives have overtaken traditional capitalist roles. Low-

accountability officials in EU institutions and US expert committees increasingly replace elected leaders. Together, these actors form what some call the "transfariat": those dependent on state transfers and institutional privilege. As Francis argued, the central struggle is against liberal managerialism on three fronts: its elite dominance over national parliaments; its redistribution to favoured minorities; and its cosmopolitan ethical framework.

If Burnham's logic holds, there is no simple exit from the managerial matrix. Conservative Realism, then, is not a return to the past but a realignment of political power, one that reflects the conservative and nationalist instincts of populations across nations, while remaining grounded in realist principles of legitimacy, authority and mythos.



Portrait of Cardinal Richelieu (Philippe de Champaigne via Wikimedia Commons)

A Conservative Realist Approach to Radical Changes

Up to this point, we've seen how Conservative Realism diverges from traditional conservatism, partly through its nationalist orientation, partly through its engagement with realism. One crucial difference yet to be addressed is its attitude toward the principle of precaution.

Conservatives, by nature, prefer the known to the unknown. As previously noted, tradition carries embedded knowledge and is therefore useful. Söderbaum distinguishes between change and development: conservatives favour development, understood as historical continuity, where the best of the past informs gradual improvement.[51] In contrast, liberal managerialism treats tradition as a constraint to be overcome, aiming to reshape human nature by reshaping society through abstract ideals and engineered reform.

Yet today's political landscape no longer reflects this classic dichotomy. What we face is not development but disruptive change. Does this shift compel a more realism oriented response?

This report argues that Burnham and Francis were correct: we live in a liberal managerial society, and its consequences are clear—radical values, uprooted norms, and a redefinition of national democracy and the state's role. The tables have turned. Conservative Realism responds not by defending the status quo, but by adapting to new terrain—one where realism, not precaution, becomes the operative principle.

This principle can be illustrated through a scenario. Imagine a city that has existed since medieval times. Over centuries, buildings and parks have been replaced due to decay, economic shifts, or changing needs. Yet a pattern emerges: structures that hold aesthetic and cultural meaning tend to endure across generations.

This reflects the conservative view. It does not oppose modern architecture or change, but insists that development should preserve what is valuable from the past. Older buildings carry collective memory and often possess a beauty newer constructions lack. Still, new buildings are necessary. Because humans are fallible, poor taste or misguided planning can lead to the loss of something irreplaceable. That's why conservatives advocate the precautionary principle: replace only a few buildings at a time, not entire districts. This allows for course correction and the reemergence of proven traditions. Change should be gradual and rooted in continuity.

That is the theory. But reality sometimes demands a different approach. This framework, for instance, would not be applicable to the rebuilding of Rotterdam in the late Forties, after it was destroyed during the Second World War and had to be rebuilt from scratch with relatively few material resources. Here, a more adaptive but still conservative approach is required.

According to Söderbaum, there is a Burkean litmus test for reform: if the aim is to "change in order to preserve," the reform is conservative.[52] Would it be radical to tear down buildings in order to restore them to their pre–World War II appearance? Certainly, but it would also be conservative. This illustrates the paradox of contemporary politics, where stereotypical conservatism clings to the precautionary principle, even when circumstances demand bold action.

For this case also, not even Burke´s main critique of the revolution was about the method of uprising, since he favoured the American Revolution, but the revolutionary spirit that came with it.[53] What he opposed was the abstract, utopian impulse that animated the French Revolution. He closed Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) with a telling metaphor: *"When the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be endangered by overloading it upon one side, [it] is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise."*[54]

If a movement holds power with a democratic mandate, it is difficult to argue against restoring a historical social order—even if doing so requires "radical" change. From a Conservative Realist standpoint, this is not only permissible but necessary. As Lord Hugh Cecil noted in 1912, if using the state is the difference between civilization and barbarism (figuratively speaking), then the choice is clear.[55]

Neither Hobbes nor Machiavelli would disagree. Both saw the sovereign as a practical and legitimate foundation for the commonwealth, especially when legitimacy flows from popular sovereignty, as it does in many New Right movements.

Francis, writing in the American context, argued that winning the executive presidency was essential to counter managerial dominance and restore historical continuity. Not through illegal or violent means, but through decisive use of state power.[56] Unlike liberals, New Right movements do not possess an aversion to utilizing the state apparatus to realize political objectives.

In our era, Conservative Realism may well affirm the conservative insight that civic society and its "little platoons" should exist independently of the state[57] while also recognizing that managerialism has eroded the conditions for such independence. Thus, wielding state power becomes one tool among others to restore the foundations for civic flourishing. Nationalists are often more willing to accept this logic. After all, even for conservatives, the state remains the supreme guardian of social order.[58]

If modern conservatism critiques state power for expanding in response to unrest—tightening control and eroding society—it cannot simultaneously refuse to use that same power to restore the order it once protected. This paradox defines our contemporary predicament.

In sum, Conservative Realists cannot wholly adhere to the precautionary principle favoured by modern conservatives, as their aim is to restore society in alignment with its historical context rather than perpetuating revolutionary distortions.

Returning to our earlier example of Rotterdam: what is the most conservative course of action?

Surely not to preserve the experimental modernist landscape simply because it was inherited by the contemporary population of Rotterdam. Rather, the current inhabitants were dispossessed of their heritage, first by war, then by postwar reconstruction. While it would be reckless to demolish everything overnight, the population has every right to reclaim the society they should have inherited and passed on. The same principle applies to politics.

Conclusion: Towards a New Conservatism

History may rhyme rather than repeat, but that does not mean conservatives cannot learn from it. On the contrary: by studying past struggles and recognizing the distinct challenges of each era, we chart a path forward. This report has argued that modern conservatism must evolve into Conservative Realism; a synthesis of classical conservative thought, political realism and nationalist populism, adapted to the managerial age.

The transformation identified by Burnham and Francis is not merely economic—it is a reordering of power, ideology, and legitimacy. Technocrats and credentialed experts have displaced both traditional elites and democratic institutions. As Francis noted, they maintain control through asymmetrical minority redistribution: transferring power and resources from the majority to favoured minorities, while concentrating authority in unelected bodies. Opposition to this system—and the ideology that sustains it—is central to the New Right across the West.

Conservative Realism, as discussed in this report, is grounded in more profound political truths about man and society, and how they operate. Also, on how Hobbes and Machiavelli understood that legitimacy rests not on abstract ideals, but on concrete capacity: the ability to provide security, maintain order and embody the people's will. Furthermore, on Machiavelli's fortuna, mythos and foundation show that authority requires both widespread acceptance and institutional durability. Hobbes located sovereignty in the people's need for protection and unity. Legitimacy flows from serving the fundamental interests of the commonwealth—not from universalist abstractions. That is a deeply conservative insight.

Conservatism is shaped by historical experience, evolving through responses to new challenges. Today, it values democratic participation, individual rights, social harmony over class conflict and the nation state as the embodiment of historical community—standing in contrast to the ambitions of liberal managerial elites. Yet conservatism falters when it becomes purely defensive. Applying the precautionary principle indiscriminately may preserve not tradition, but the revolutionary changes already imposed. This is the conservative paradox: to conserve truly, one must sometimes restore radically. That distinction—between defending genuine development and restoring what has been unjustly destroyed—is the heart of Conservative Realism.

Conservative Realism fuses realist analysis with conservative principles and nationalist energy. The populist base of the New Right does not represent traditional conservatism, but radical resistance to a status quo that itself broke with historical continuity. As Francis showed, these movements defend concrete social forms—family, work, community, national sovereignty—against cosmopolitan dissolution. They are not uniquely American; Burnham foresaw similar demographic shifts across the West, which we now witness. Thus, Conservative Realism embraces the nation state as the practical mythos through which popular sovereignty is exercised. Drawing from Burnham's Trotskyist background, it recognises that today's central conflict is class oriented, not in the Marxist sense, but between those who embody domestic ethics and those who promote cosmopolitan ones. In short, the productive classes versus the parasitic classes, who profit from managerial ideology at every level.

Conservative Realism demands that conservatives act as restorationists, not mere defenders. It requires recognising the true nature of contemporary conflict—not left versus right, but managerial elite versus the people. It calls for a realist understanding of power and for strategic use of state authority to challenge entrenched interests in education, media, bureaucracy and international institutions. Above all, it grounds action in historical consciousness, as of understanding Burke's view of society as a trusteeship between the living, the dead and the unborn.

Conservative Realism is not a break from conservatism, but its necessary evolution in an age of managerial dominance. The compass remains, but the terrain has shifted. Defending captured institutions no longer guarantees traditional ends. By synthesizing the insights explored in this report, Conservative Realism offers a coherent framework—one that meets reality as it is and seeks to reshape it according to enduring principles rooted in historical continuity, not managerial abstraction.

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