

## HERTOG 2021 SUMMER COURSES

### POLITICAL HERETICS

**Matthew Continetti**, Resident Fellow, AEI

What spurs ideological conversions? How do intellectuals who hold strong political views come to change their minds and adopt different – sometimes opposing – ideas? In this seminar, led by AEI fellow Matthew Continetti, students will track the political odysseys of five prominent intellectuals who, for different reasons, broke ranks with their fellow partisans.

Students will survey thinkers who journeyed from Left to Right (Whittaker Chambers and Norman Podhoretz), who broke with the Left (Christopher Hitchens), who broke with neoconservatism (Francis Fukuyama), and who left the Republican Party (George F. Will). In so doing, students will meditate on the nature of political ideology and identity, the conflicting pull of loyalty and dissent, and the larger shifts in American political and intellectual life over several generations.

This seminar will meet online weekly on **Wednesdays** from **6 PM to 8 PM ET** on the following dates: June 16, 23, 30, July 7, & 14.

#### Course Materials

- Course Reader

**Discussion Papers:** Each fellow will be responsible for completing a brief discussion paper (1-2 pages, single spaced). See below for your assigned session.

**Papers are due the day before your assigned session by 5 PM ET.** They should be posted on the course Slack channel and will be part of the assigned readings for the session. Paper-writers should be ready to briefly present their ideas during the seminar.

#### Resources:

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

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**Wednesday, June 16, 2021**

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**6 PM – 8 PM ET**

**Session I: Whittaker Chambers**

**Readings:**

- Daniel Oppenheimer, Ch. 1, *Exit Right: The People Who Left the Left and Reshaped the American Century* (2016)
- Whittaker Chambers, “The Direct Glance,” in ed. William F. Buckley, Jr., *Did You Ever See a Dream Walking? American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century* (1970), pp. 489–509

**Suggested Viewing:**

- Whittaker Chambers, [HUAC Testimony](#), August 25, 1948

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What drew Chambers to membership in the Communist Party? What pushed him away from the Party and from communism?
2. What does Chambers identify as “the problem of man in this century”? And what is his answer to it?
3. To what degree did Chambers’ personality change along with his politics?

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**Wednesday, June 23, 2021**

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**6 PM – 8 PM ET**

**Session II: Norman Podhoretz**

**Readings:**

- Oppenheimer, Ch. 4, *Exit Right*
- Andrew Ferguson, “Making It Final,” *The American Spectator*, July 1995
- Norman Podhoretz, “From *Breaking Ranks*: Prologue” and “From *Breaking Ranks*: Postscript,” in ed. Thomas L. Jeffers, *The Norman Podhoretz Reader* (2003)

## Suggested Viewing:

- Norman Podhoretz, "[Reflections of a Jewish Neoconservative](#)," Tikvah Fund, July 17, 2017
- Norman Podhoretz, "[Intellectuals at War](#)," Think Tank with Ben Wattenberg, April 19, 1999

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Norman Podhoretz admire Norman Mailer? How did this admiration relate to Podhoretz's ambitions and journey?
2. What role did "the politics of interest" play in Podhoretz's ideological transition?
3. What is the connection Podhoretz draws between the politics of interest and the preservation of political liberty?
4. What is Podhoretz's explanation for radicalism? Where does he see radicalism in the postscript of *Breaking Ranks*? Where might he see it today?

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**Wednesday, June 30, 2021**

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**6 PM – 8 PM ET**

**Session III: Christopher Hitchens**

## Readings:

- Oppenheimer, Ch. 6, *Exit Right*
- Andrew Ferguson, "Naughty Boy," *Washingtonian*, November 1993
- Christopher Hitchens, "Against Rationalization," "Taking Sides," and "So Long, Fellow Travelers," in eds. Simon Cottee and Thomas Cushman, *Christopher Hitchens and His Critics: Terror, Iraq, and the Left*, pp. 44–46, 101–08

## Suggested Viewing:

- Christopher Hitchens, "[Conversations with History](#)," University of California, February 8, 2008
- Christopher Hitchens & George Galloway, "[Iraq War Debate](#)," Baruch College, September 14, 2005

## Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the personal and political qualities that made Hitchens unique in 1980s Washington, DC.
2. What role did Hitchens's personal commitments have in his support for the war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq?
3. Did Christopher Hitchens leave the Left, or did the Left, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, leave him?
4. What values did Hitchens absorb from the Left – and were these values compatible with those of the Right?

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**Wednesday, July 7, 2021**

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**6 PM – 8 PM ET**

**Session IV: Francis Fukuyama**

## Readings:

- Wesley Yang, "Democracy and Its Discontents," *Esquire*, October 17, 2018
- Francis Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment," *The National Interest*, Summer 2004, pp. 57–68
- Charles Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism," *The National Interest*, Fall 2004, pp. 15–25
- Francis Fukuyama, "After Neoconservatism," *The New York Times Magazine*, February 19, 2006

## Suggested Viewing:

- Francis Fukuyama, "[In Depth](#)," CSPAN BookTV, March 5, 2006

## Discussion Questions:

1. What provoked Fukuyama's break with neoconservatism?
2. What do you make of the Krauthammer/Fukuyama debate? Who scored the most points?
3. What is Fukuyama's general critique of neoconservatism? How is it different from or similar to other critiques on the Left and Right?
4. Are we still living in the end of History?

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**Wednesday, July 14, 2021**

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**6 PM – 8 PM ET**

**Session V: George F. Will**

**Readings:**

- Andrew Ferguson, “The Greatness of George F. Will,” *The Weekly Standard*, October 12, 2017
- Kristen East, “George Will Leaves the GOP,” *Politico*, June 25, 2016
- George F. Will, “The Tempting of America,” *Newsweek*, December 4, 1989
- George F. Will, *Statecraft as Soulcraft* (1983), pp. 122–39
- George F. Will, *The Conservative Sensibility* (2019), pp. 155–207, 227–39

**Suggested Viewing:**

- George F. Will, “[American Conservatism: Preserving the Idea of Perpetual Change](#),” Aspen Institute, July 20, 2020
- George Will and Robert Doar, “[The Conservative Sensibility](#),” AEI, June 11, 2019

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Explain why George Will opposes Donald Trump, and how that opposition affected his decision to leave the Republican Party.
2. What is the difference between the jurisprudential views expressed in Will’s review of Robert Bork’s book and those in his own *Conservative Sensibility*? Do you agree with Will’s assertion of a difference between “judicial activism” and “judicial engagement”?
3. Why did George Will change his mind on the virtues promoted in a commercial society? Which George Will presents the best evidence for his compelling case?
4. Reflect on the relationship between personality and ideology expressed in the lives of all of our subjects. Did people change, or did circumstances change?
5. Which of our subjects changed the substance of their views, and which simply found themselves in a new political orientation based on the flow of events?