

Anthony Kronman

True Conservatism: Reclaiming Our Humanity in An Arrogant Age

(Yale University Press, 2025)

"The rich and enlightened societies of the modern West are the most prosperous, tolerant, and democratic the world has ever known," writes Anthony Kronman at the beginning of his new book, *True Conservatism: Reclaiming Our Humanity in An Arrogant Age* (Yale University Press, 2025). We all have reason, he says, to honor and protect the leading ideals of our enlightened civilization—those of political equality, religious toleration and scientific reason. But these ideals harbor three prejudices that travel in their shadow and draw undeserved authority from them.

One is the belief that equality is not only an important value but the highest value of all, dictating the terms on which every other is to be assigned its appropriate weight. A second is that the past is merely a storehouse of useful experiments on which we are free to draw as our present needs require. The third is that the existence of God is a belief to which one may or may not subscribe—and not the truth about the world. In his book, Kronman diagnoses each of these prejudices and shows how it cuts us off from what we need to live lives of a fully human kind: an appreciation of the worth of custom and inheritance; an openness to the splendor of what is excellent and rare; a feeling for the expansive solidarity of our friendship for the dead; and a recognition of the dignity, indeed necessity, of the human longing for a connection to the eternal and divine.

In Kronman's view, the true conservative is the one who seeks to protect these human values in an enlightened age that puts all of them at risk, without

repudiating the ideals of equality, reason and toleration that should continue to inspire our loyalty and commitment. His is a humanistic conservatism based on “many years reading and teaching old books of great power and beauty in an undergraduate program devoted to the study of literary, philosophical, and historical works of lasting value.” It is, he says, “the conservatism of a child of the enlightenment, grateful to have been born when he was yet not entirely at home in his enlightened world.” The aim of his book, Kronman writes, is “to show that humanism *is* conservatism, not at all times and places, perhaps, but under the aegis of the prejudices that surreptitiously accompany our enlightened ideals and do so much harm to the human spirit.”

Anthony Kronman is Sterling Professor of Law at Yale Law School. A former dean of the Law School, he currently teaches constitutional law and legal philosophy. He has also taught for many years in the Directed Studies program in Yale College. His books include “The Assault on American Excellence” (2019); “Education’s End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life” (2007); “Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan” (2016), and “After Disbelief: On Disenchantment, Disappointment, Eternity, and Joy” (2022).