Challenge Your Beliefs: Agrarian Conservatism

This week we'll be discussing Agrarian Conservatives, a group that is hard to place in our ordinary political universe. As you do the readings and answer the questions below, think about where you would place them in relation to the rest of the political spectrum. There are a lot of questions to answer this week, so in lieu of a summary essay, just jot down some thoughts on that issue when you're done.

1. Are you humble? How important is humility in life and politics? What are the political consequences of humility? Do your own political preferences value humility?

2. Imagine you asked two friends where they are going after graduation from law school: one says "I got a six-figure job in New York," the other says "I'm going back to Yadkinville to go into practice with my Dad." How would you (and the authors) feel about their choices and why?

2. A corporate-driven economy is bad because...? (If you don't believe it's bad, say that, and describe the rationale you usually hear. Either way, be careful when you do the post-answer that you don't assume their arguments are yours because of superficial similarities)

3. On first read, Agrarian Conservatism and Libertarianism seem at odds. Farmer/Author Joel Salatin ("Everything I want to do is illegal") claims to be both. How does he manage that? Similarly, Rod Dreher (optional reading "Crunchy-Cons") "affirm[s] the superiority of the free market." Does he really?

4. Agrarian conservative writers call for a more equal "distribution of property," which sounds an awful lot like Progressives' calls for a more equal "distribution of wealth." Before reading, lay out what the latter means and the argument for it; after reading, do that for the former and point out the differences.

5. You may know about the two different widely-used conceptions of liberty: "Negative Liberty" means the State (or society) doesn't control a certain activities so people can do what they want, and "Positive Liberty" means the State (or society) empowers/supports individuals so they can do what they want. Before
reading, where do conservatives and progressives stand on Liberty? After, where do Agrarian Conservatives stand?

6. We’ve touched on the role of religion in politics, particularly in terms of the way American Christians participate in politics. What does it mean to treat something as sacred? What is the proper role of "sanctity" in politics?

7. In our first week’s reading, Barry Goldwater claimed that conservatism is different from liberalism because it cares about more than just economics. Obama certainly seems to agree with that: everything we hear from him is about money, either inequality, handing it out to people, or "investing" it in whatever. Are Republicans any different, though, talking about "prosperity," jobs, the "free market," running higher education "like a business," and so on? Sure, both parties have their token non-economic issue, abortion and Global Warming, but aside from that, is there evidence that either party really cares about anything but money?

8. Right wing bloggers love to mock Progressive tree-hugger environmentalists for the way they literally "worship" the Earth, often comparing progressives' calls to "ignore skeptics and believe the 'consensus' on Global Warming" to devout Christians' calls to "ignore skeptics and believe Creationism." Why do conservatives have a problem with Gaia-worship, and afterwards, what do Agrarian Conservatives think?

9. An author named Freyfogle argues that one cannot be both pro-individual freedom and part of the solution to our environmental problems:

   The truth is that economic and ecological radicals are not much different. Both are selfish and narrow in their understanding of the world (because both are radical liberals). This false dichotomy must be exposed and overcome if good conservation is to prevail. Environmental problems are not just caused by material factors like population, energy use, and technology. They are cultural in origin. And the cult of the radical individual is the greatest threat to our environment.

   If you consider yourself hostile to either Freedom (against both economic freedom and social/sexual freedom) or the Environment, say so and skip the question. From what I’ve heard from the majority of you, though, you are at least sympathetic to both. How would you respond to Freyfogle’s accusation that your libertarian sympathies are the "greatest threat to our environment?" What might Salatin say?

10. Agrarian conservatives fear is that neither political mainstream in America cares about communities. Democrats talk about how it "takes a village," but then they strip America’s villages from inside and out. They invoke federal powers to
force villages to follow national rules, rather than doing what works for that village; in the name of self-expression they deny village members the authority to regulate each other's behavior. Republicans talk about community, but they work to empower large firms, whose branches act as parts of the corporation, not local communities. They talk about morality, but contradict that by insisting upon universal standards for morality that denies communities ability to choose their own (varying) idea of what morality is, while simultaneously claiming that "Freedom" is the be all and all of life. Libertarians, of course, mix anti-community features of both. Thinking about the policies you've supported (and your answer to question #2), can you honestly say you are pro-community (if you are actually anti-community, say that, and justify your position against the Agrarian conservatives attacks).