

# Yale experience needs stronger conservative voice

After four years at Yale holding the conservative fort on a liberal campus, my time to leave draws near. Up until now I have been an undergraduate, but certain ceremonies in late May will transform me into an alumnus, an austere, distant agent of moral authority, or so I would like to think. Years of organized debates, arguments in section, and discussions in the dining hall have strengthened my conservatism and helped me understand the political philosophies that drive modern America. I hope not to bore the readers of my fifth and last column with sappy self-indulgence, but the experience of being a conservative at Yale deserves some public reflection.

Many people wonder why the best institutions of higher education tend to have a disproportionately large number of liberal students and faculty members. Anyone with an open mind who spends time talking with conservatives understands that they are no more unsociable, stupid, unimaginative, or dogmatic than liberals, though some people (Paul Krugman, for example, in his recent column ["An Academic Question," *The New York Times*, 4/5/05]) still say that conservatives are somehow intrinsically unfit for the academy. Conservative theorist Dinesh d'Souza argues that conservatives particularly enjoy practical work, in business for example, and that this leads them away from pure scholarship; but this isn't entirely satisfying as an explanation, considering the modern left's enthusiasm for activism. After all, a Yale Political Union debate has few practical consequences; but while the Union can support three right-wing parties (including my own, the Tory Party), the one left-wing party has to meet the perennial challenge of convincing campus liberals that debate is worthwhile in and of itself.

My own theory is that bright people get intoxicated with their own intelligence very easily. History tells us that human happiness rests not on revolution or reason, but on tradition, social custom, inherited wisdom, and faith; it is particularly easy for a good mind to be blinded to this lesson. Accustomed to solving every problem put before them, intelligent men and women have a hard time

accepting the conservative insight that some problems can't be solved and that their own rationality could be a dangerous thing. When one has little to be modest about, it's hard to muster the genuine humility that conservatism demands.

According to Thefacebook.com, 475 Yale students describe themselves as "conservative" or "very conservative." In contrast, there are 679 "very liberals" alone. Some con-

dining hall—were brutal. But on the other hand, I distinctly remember the day a classmate told me that he'd heard I was a conservative, and asked me to treat him to an opinion.

Most Yale students are members of a vast ideological majority that votes for Kerry, if not Nader, and can't imagine why a peer would do otherwise. I imagine that it is possible for many liberals to go through their entire Yale career without really getting to know a conservative at all, and certainly without engaging in a genuine debate with one. It should be obvious what a pity this is, for it's important that liberals hear the conservative voices that dot the Yale com-

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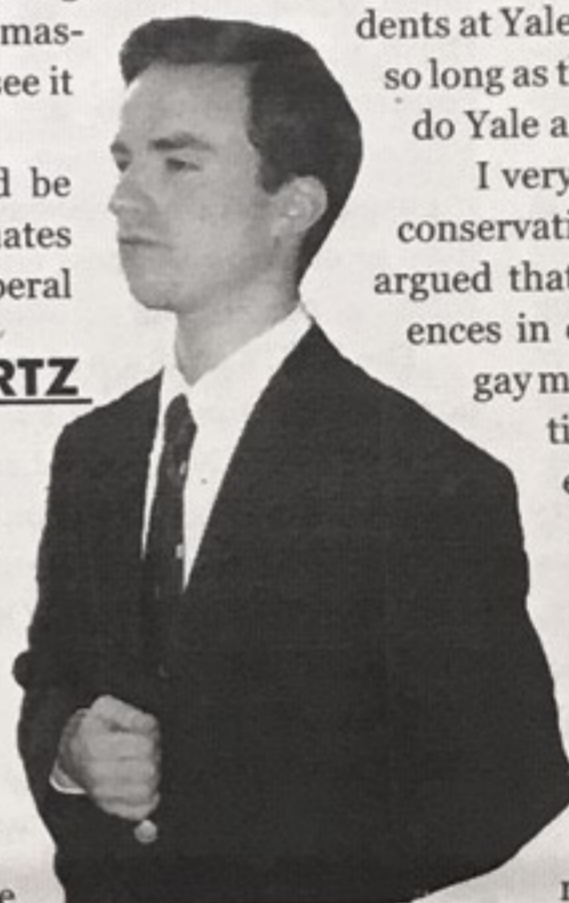
community. A majority of the country is more conservative than the average Yale student, and it would be terrible if a generation of our country's leaders graduated from college without knowing what the average American thinks and why, or if they went into the world with their liberal ideas unchallenged, or if the Yale conservatives destined for greatness avoided philosophical confrontation when they were young. Knowing conservatism to be a legitimate political position, it is the responsibility of conservative students at Yale to espouse it. The public conservatives, so long as they argue respectfully and in good faith, do Yale a great service.

I very much hope that I've done credit to the conservative tradition during my Yale career. I've argued that abortion is wrong, that racial preferences in college admissions are dangerous, that gay marriage should stay illegal, that immigration should be curtailed, that school vouchers are an excellent idea, that communism is a bad idea, that Lawrence Summers makes a good point, that drug use is immoral, that religion is indispensable to a moral system, and many, many other things that I believe. We conservatives have few illusions about actually persuading our peers to change their minds, but we must be heard.

servatives aren't on Thefacebook.com, and others don't identify themselves as such. Many avoid being publicly conservative out of fear—the "closet conservative" is a real phenomenon. But not all of the self-described conservatives act as spokesmen, so to speak, for conservatism at Yale. Some simply aren't interested in debate or don't spend time thinking about conservatism as a philosophy. Sad to say, other conservatives avoid genuine dialogue rather than setting an example for liberals. Though a few hundred Yalies have factual and philosophical mastery of the conservative position, many don't see it as their responsibility to assert it.

Judging by my own experience, I would be surprised if 200 Yale conservative undergraduates actively and effectively debate with their liberal friends. For a conservative, this is both a challenge and an opportunity. Being ideologically at odds with nearly everyone in your college isn't a pleasant experience in itself, needless to say, but it can be a useful one, especially if one relishes notoriety. The weeks leading up to the November election—when every conversation became an argument and when I got used to being addressed as "enemy" in the

### STEPHEN SCHWARTZ Always Right



# Danger of French rejection may doom EU constitution

About two weeks ago, French officials were forced to destroy 162,000 copies of the draft European Union constitutional treaty when the phrase "incoherent text" was accidentally added to one page. A reprint of the document is expected to cost French citizens €74,000. Never has a printing error so aptly summed up the mood of a nation.

The draft constitution is the latest in a series of institutional innovations that have characterized the EU's history since the '50s. In some nations, it is also among the least popular: In the most recent poll, French citizens disapproved of the new constitutional treaty by a 55-45 margin. This is significant, because the treaty is set to be ratified by a series of national referenda held in each EU member state—and France's vote is next. Ratification requires unanimity; without French approval, the treaty will collapse. If you believe former French President Valerie Giscard d'Estang, a French failure to ratify would place the EU in "crisis."

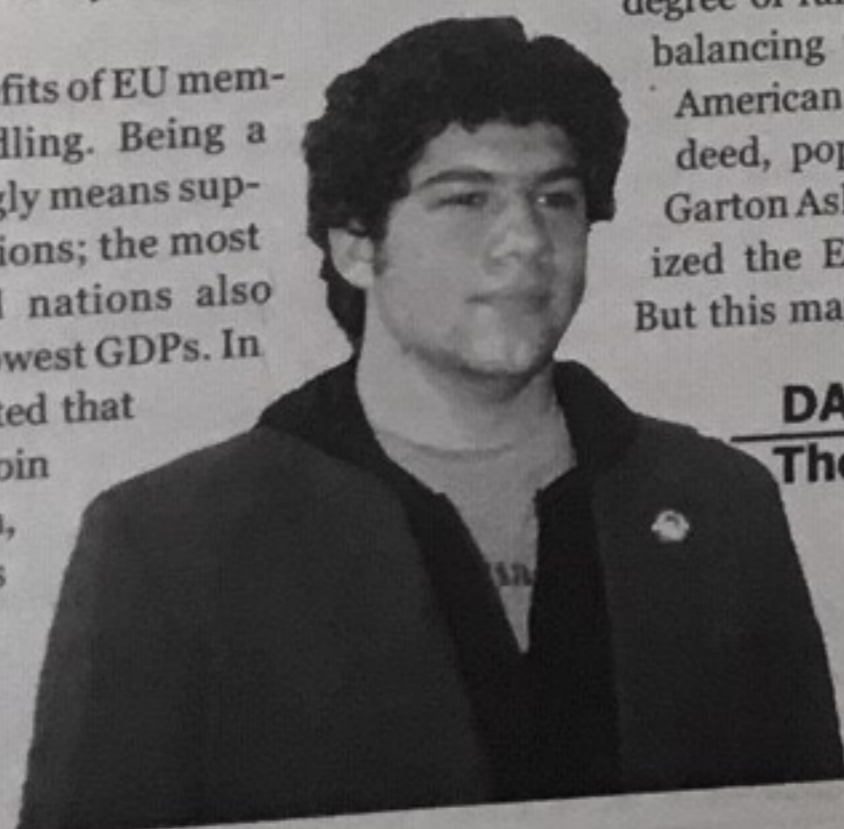
Today, the benefits of EU membership are dwindling. Being a member increasingly means supporting poorer nations; the most recently admitted nations also have the Union's lowest GDPs. In 2004, *Slate* predicted that "as more countries join the European Union, veteran members will ensure that the benefits of being a part of the club become fewer as they grow less

willing to indefinitely foot the bill for others' development." The EU faces a relatively stagnant economy, a pension crisis due to an aging population, increasing immigration from Third World countries, and the possible admission of Turkey as a member. Furthermore, it has done precious little to improve its relations with average Europeans, who see it as a distant, ill-defined body. Yale political science professor and EU scholar Jolyon Howorth likes to tell students about the time the United Kingdom government distributed copies of the draft constitution at a soccer match, only to have them used as weapons in the ensuing riots.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. The EU was supposed to unite Europe by bringing its various peoples and cultures closer together. Why, instead, has it seemingly produced a group of nations willing to back out the moment the bottom line turns red?

One reason may be waning anti-Americanism. The EU has traditionally found a degree of *raison d'être* in counterbalancing what they see as an American world hegemony. Indeed, popular writer Timothy Garton Ash famously characterized the EU as "not-America." But this may be changing. In the

### DANIEL A. MUNZ The War on Error



wake of the Iraq debacle, the United States is adopting a much more conciliatory attitude to-

wards Europe, which was already sharply divided by major disagreements over the conflict. Indeed, in January, President George W. Bush, DC '68, sent Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to major European capitals on a sort of "reconciliation tour," with the instructions to visit Brussels, the EU's capital, last. If friends are united by common enemies, it may be that the European friendship is doomed to fail.

A more important problem, though, is that nobody knows exactly where the the EU is headed. The French, in classic style, have their own answer for this question: *finalité*. *Finalité* refers, broadly, to the underlying goal or vision that motivates the EU's constant forward progress. It is the international relations version of existentialism, a phrase that dares Europe's leaders to look beyond the institutional intricacies of their technocratic wonderland, and ask the question: "Why is the European Union here?" Needless to say, no two European leaders—indeed, no two Europeans—have the same answer.

In the past, the economic benefits of EU membership have been enough to keep the issue of *finalité* on the back burner. But as those benefits dwindle, it is increasingly necessary to unite Europe with a sense of community and nationalism that transcends demographic trends and economic fluctuations. In America, expensive social programs that redistributed wealth withstood conservative assaults because their defenders successfully argued that all Americans, by virtue of a shared national identity, had a commitment to the well-being of their fellow citizens. If Europe continues to lack a sense of unity, the European Union may not be able to maintain a compelling rationale for its existence.

In this sense, the draft constitution may do more harm than good. To be sure, it makes the EU more federal: Under the new constitution, member nations would be subject to rulings by the EU's overarching federal judiciary and would be represented abroad by single diplomatic and legal personalities. But these measures are only encouraging those who already embrace further federal integration. To national governments, they signal an encroachment on sovereignty. Even if national governments are willing to give up some sovereignty in exchange for the global influence that only EU membership can provide—the French government, it should be noted, is campaigning strongly for a "Yes" vote—EU citizens don't share this incentive, and the draft constitution does little, if anything, to placate them. They fear that the prerogatives of their democratically elected leaders will be usurped by a supranational entity whose actions they cannot shape and to whose new motto and anthem (all innovations of the constitutional treaty) they feel little personal allegiance. Under the draft constitution, the European Parliament, theoretically the most democratic of the EU's three branches, remains structurally the weakest.

In many respects, the draft EU constitution is a major step forward, but it is also the latest step in a history of creeping federalism. With the draft constitution, the EU must choose either to embrace this path or to reverse the momentum of a half century of innovation. Combine this difficult decision with the waning benefits of EU membership, and one has to wonder whether the French—or any European people—will willingly pay for government under a constitution containing incoherent text.