Chapter 3
Conservatism

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Origins and development

In everyday language, the term 'conservative' has a variety of meanings. It can refer to moderate or cautious behavior, a life-style that is conventional, even conformist, or a fear of or refusal to change, particularly denoted by the verb 'to conserve'. 'Conservatism' was first used to describe a distinctive political position or ideology in the early nineteenth century. In the USA, it implied a pessimistic view of public affairs. By the 1820s, the term was being used to denote opposition to the principles and spirit of the 1789 Revolution. In the UK, Conservative gradually replaced Tory as a title of the principal opposition party to the Whigs, becoming the party's official name in 1835.

Conservative ideas arose in reaction to the growing pace of political, social and economic change, which in many ways which, in many ways, was symbolized by French Revolution. One of the earliest and perhaps the classic statement of conservative principles is contained in Edmund Burke's (see p. 74) Reflections on the Revolution in France ([1790] 1968), which deeply regretted the revolutionary challenge to the ancient régime that had occurred the previous year. During the nineteenth century, western states were transformed by the pressures unleashed by industrialization and reflected in the growth of liberalism, socialism and nationalism. While these ideologies preached reform and at times supported revolution, conservatism stood in defense of an increasingly embattled traditional social order.

Conservative thought has varied considerably as it has adapted itself to existing traditions and national cultures. British conservatism, for instance, has drawn heavily upon the ideas of Burke, who advocated not blind resistance to change, but rather a prudent willingness to 'change in order to conserve'. In the nineteenth century, British conservatives defended a political and social order that had already undergone profound change, in particular the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, as a result of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. Such pragmatic principles have also influenced the Conservative parties established in other Commonwealth countries. The Canadian Conservative Party adopted the title Progressive Conservative precisely to distance itself from reactionary ideas.

In continental Europe, where some autocratic monarchies persisted throughout much of the nineteenth century, a very different and more authoritarian form of conservatism developed, which defended monarchy and rigid autocratic values against the rising tide of reform. Only with

the formation of Christian democratic parties after the Second World War did continental conservatives, notably in Germany and Italy, fully accept political democracy and social reform. The USA, on the other hand, has been influenced relatively little by conservative ideas. The USA was formed as a result of a successful colonial war against the British crown. The US system of government and its political culture reflect deeply established liberal and progressive values, and politicians of both major parties – the Republicans and the Democrats – have traditionally resented being labeled 'conservative'. It is only since the 1960s that overtly conservative views have been expressed by elements within both parties, notably by southern Democrats and the wing of the Republican party that was associated in the 1960s with Senator Barry Goldwater, and which in the 1970s and 1980s supported Ronald Reagan, first as governor of California and then as president, 1981–9.

As conservative ideology arose in reaction against the French Revolution and the process of modernization in the West, it is less easy to identify political conservatism outside Europe and North America. In Africa, Asia and Latin America political movements have developed that sought to resist change and preserve traditional ways of life, but they have seldom employed specifically conservative arguments and values. An exception to this is perhaps the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, which has dominated politics in Japan since 1955. The LDP has close links with business interests and is committed to promoting a healthy private sector. At the same time it has attempted to preserve traditional Japanese values and customs, and has therefore supported distinctively conservative principles such as loyalty, duty and hierarchy. In other countries, conservatism has exhibited a populist-authoritarian character. Perón in Argentina and Khomeini (see p. 307) in Iran, for instance, both established regimes based upon strong central authority, but which also mobilized mass popular support on issues such as nationalism, economic progress and the defense of traditional values.

Although conservatism is the most intellectually modest of political ideologies, it has also been remarkably resilient, perhaps because of this fact. Conservatism has prospered because it has been unwilling to be tied down to a fixed system of ideas. A significant revival of conservative fortunes has in fact been evident since the 1970s with the political right regaining power in a number of countries. Particularly prominent in this respect were the Thatcher government in the UK (1979–90) and the Reagan administration in the USA (1981–9), both of which practiced an unusually radical and ideological brand of conservatism, commonly termed the 'new right'. New right ideas have drawn heavily upon free-market economics and in so doing have exposed deep divisions within conservatism. Indeed, so commentators argue that 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganism', and the new right project in general, do not properly belong within conservative ideology at all, so deeply are they influenced by classical liberal economics.

The new right has challenged traditional conservative economic views, but it nevertheless remains part of conservative ideology. In the first place, it has not abandoned traditional conservative social principles such as belief in order, authority and discipline, and in some respects it has strengthened them. Furthermore, the new right's enthusiasm for the free market has exposed the extent to which conservatism had already been influenced by liberal ideas. As with all political ideologies, conservatism contains a range of traditions. In the nineteenth century, it was closely associated with an authoritarian defence of monarchy and aristocracy, which has survived in the form of authoritarian populist movements in the developing world. In

the twentieth century, western conservatives were divided between paternalistic support for state intervention and a libertarian commitment to the free market. The significance of the new right is that it sought to revive the electoral fortunes of conservatism by readjusting the balance between these traditions in favour of libertarianism (see p. 91). However, in so doing, it brought such deep ideological tensions to the surface that it may have threatened the very survival of conservatism.

The desire to conserve – central themes

The character of conservative ideology has been the source of particular argument and debate. For example, it is often suggested that conservatives have a clearer understanding of what they oppose than of what they favour. In that sense, conservatism has been portrayed as a negative philosophy, its purpose being simply to preach resistance to, or at least suspicion of, change. However, if conservatism were to consist of no more than a knee-jerk defence of the status quo, it would be merely a political attitude rather than an ideology. In fact, many people or groups can be considered 'conservative' in the sense that they resist change, but certainly cannot be said to subscribe to a conservative political creed. For instance, communists in the Soviet Union who opposed the dismantling of the collectivised economy, and socialists who campaign in defence of the welfare state or nationalized industries, can both be classified as conservative in terms of their actions, but certainly not in terms of their political principles. The desire to resist change may be the recurrent theme within conservatism, but what distinguishes conservatives from supporters of rival political creeds is the distinctive way they uphold this position.

A second problem is that to describe conservatism as an ideology is to risk irritating conservatives themselves. They have often preferred to describe their beliefs as an 'attitude of mind' or 'common sense', as opposed to an 'ism' or ideology. Lord Hugh Cecil (1912), for example, described conservatism as 'a natural disposition of the human mind'. Others have argued that what is distinctive about conservatism is its emphasis on history and experience, and its distaste for rational thought. As discussed in Chapter 1, conservatives have typically eschewed the 'politics of principle' and adopted instead a traditionalist political stance. Their opponents have also lighted upon this feature of conservatism, sometimes portraying it as little more than an unprincipled apology for the interests of a ruling class or elite. However, both conservatives and their critics ignore the weight and range of theories that underpin conservative 'common sense'. For example, conservatives may prefer to base their thinking upon experience and history rather than abstract principles, but this preference is itself based upon specific beliefs, in this case about the limited rational capacities of human beings. Conservatism is neither simple pragmatism (see p. 11) nor mere opportunism. It is founded upon a particular set of political beliefs about human beings, the societies they live in and the importance of a distinctive set of political values. As such, like liberalism and socialism, it should rightfully be described as an ideology. The most significant of its central beliefs are the following:

- Tradition
- Human imperfection
- Organic society
- Hierarchy and authority
- Property

Tradition

Conservatives have argued against change on a number of grounds. A central and recurrent theme of conservatism is its defence of tradition – values, practices and institutions that have endured through time and, in particular, been past down from one generation to the next. Liberals, in contrast, argue that social institutions should not be evaluated according to how long they have survived, but how far they fulfil the needs and interests of individuals. If institutions fail this test they should be reformed, or perhaps removed. For example, liberals have often reached the conclusion that monarchy is a redundant institution in the modern world and should be abolished. Conservatives, however, fiercely disagree, and, for a number of reasons, believe that customs and institutions should be preserved precisely because they have survived the test of history.

For some conservatives, this conclusion reflects their religious faith. If the world is thought to have been fashioned by God the Creator, traditional customs and practices in society will be regarded as 'God given'. Burke thus believed that society was shaped by 'the law of our Creators', or what he also called 'natural law'. If human beings tamper with the world, they are challenging the will of God, and as a result they are likely to make human affairs worse rather than better. Since the eighteenth century, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain that tradition reflects the will of God. It was possible for Burke to believe that the institution of monarchy had been ordained by God because it had been so long-established and was still almost universally accepted. As the pace of historical change accelerated, however, old traditions were replaced by new ones, and these new ones – for example, free elections and universal suffrage – were clearly seen to be man-made rather than in any sense 'God given'. Nevertheless, the religious objection to change has been kept alive by modern fundamentalists, who believe that God's wishes have been revealed to humankind in the literal truth of their religious texts. The relationship between conservatism and religious fundamentalism is discussed in Chapter 10.

Most conservatives, however, support tradition without needing to argue that it has divine origins. Burke, for example, described society as a partnership between 'those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born'. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), the British novelist and essayist, expressed this idea as follows:

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes: our ancestors. It is a democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around.

Tradition, in this sense, reflects the accumulated wisdom of the past. The institutions and practices of the past have been 'tested by time' and should therefore be preserved for the benefit of the living and for generations to Edmund Burke (1729–97)

Dublin-born British statesmen and political theorist, often seen as the father of the Anglo-American conservative tradition. A Whig politician, Burke was sympathetic towards the American Revolution of 1776 but earned his reputation through the staunch criticism of the 1789 French Revolution that he presented in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).

Burke was deeply opposed to the attempt to recast French politics in accordance with abstract principles such as liberty, equality and fraternity, arguing that wisdom resides largely in experience, tradition and history. Nevertheless he held that the French monarchy was in part responsible for its own fate, as it had obstinately refused to 'change in order to conserve'. Burke had a gloomy view of government, recognizing that, although it can prevent evil, it rarely promotes good. He also supported the classical economics of Adam Smith (see p. 52) and regarded market forces as 'natural law'.

come. This notion of tradition reflects an almost Darwinian belief that those institutions and customs that have survived have only done so because they have worked and been found to be of value. They have been endorsed by a process of 'natural selection' and demonstrated their fitness to survive. Conservatives in the UK, for instance, argue that the institution of monarchy should be preserved because it embodies historical wisdom and experience. In particular, the crown has provided the UK with a focus of national loyalty and respect 'above' party politics; quite simply, it has worked.

Conservatives also venerate tradition because it generates, for both society and the individual, a sense of identity. Established customs and practices are ones that individuals can recognize; they are familiar and reassuring. Tradition thus provides people with a feeling of 'rootedness' and belonging, which is all the stronger because it is historically-based. The institution of monarchy, for example, generates social cohesion by linking people to the past and providing them with a collective sense of who they are. Change, on the other hand, is a journey into the unknown: it creates uncertainty and insecurity and so endangers our happiness. Tradition therefore consists of rather more than political institutions that have stood the test of time. It encompasses all those customs and social practices that are familiar and generate security and belonging, ranging from the judiciary's insistence upon wearing traditional robes and wigs to campaigns to preserve, for example, the traditional colour of letter boxes or telephone boxes.

Human imperfection

In many ways conservatism is, a 'philosophy of human imperfection' (O'Sullivan, 1976). Other ideologies assume that human beings are naturally 'good', or that they can be made 'good' if their social circumstances are improved. In their most extreme form, such beliefs are utopian and envisage the perfectibility of humankind in an ideal society. Conservatives dismiss these ideas as, at best, idealistic dreams, and base their theories instead on the belief that human beings are both imperfect and unperfectible.

Human imperfection is understood in several ways. In the first place, human beings are thought to be psychologically limited and dependent creatures. In the view of conservatives, people fear isolation and instability. They are drawn psychologically to the safe and the familiar, and, above all, seek the security of knowing 'their place'. Such a portrait of human nature is very different from the image of the self-reliant, enterprising, 'utility maximiser' proposed by early liberals. The belief that individuals desire security and belonging has led conservatives to emphasize the importance of social order, and to be suspicious of the attractions of liberty. Order ensures that human life is stable and predictable; it provides security in an uncertain world. Liberty, on the other hand, presents individuals with choices and can generate change and uncertainty.

Conservatives have often echoed the views of Thomas Hobbes in being prepared to sacrifice liberty in the cause of social order.

Whereas other political philosophies trace the origins of immoral or criminal behaviour to society, conservatives believe it is rooted in the individual. Human beings are thought to be morally imperfect. Conservatives hold a pessimistic, even Hobbesian view of human nature. Humankind is innately selfish and greedy, anything but perfectible; as Hobbes put it, the desire for 'power after power' is the primary human urge. Some conservatives explain this by reference to the Old Testament doctrine of 'original sin'. Crime is therefore not a product of inequality or social disadvantage, as socialists and modern liberals tend to believe: rather, it is a consequence of base human instincts and appetites. People can only be persuaded to behave in a civilised fashion if they are deterred from expressing their violent and antisocial impulses. And the only effective deterrent is law, backed up by the knowledge that it will be strictly enforced. This explains the conservative preference for strong government and for 'tough' criminal justice regimes, based, often, upon long prison sentences and the use of corporal or even capital punishment. For conservatives, the role of law is not to uphold liberty, but to preserve order. The concepts of 'law' and 'order' are so closely related in the conservative mind that they have almost become a single, fused concept.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)

English political philosopher. Hobbes – the son of a minor clergyman who subsequently abandoned his family – became tutor to the exiled Prince of Wales, Charles Stuart, and lived under the patronage of the Cavendish family. Writing at a time of uncertainty and civil strife, precipitated by the English Revolution, Hobbes was the first since Aristotle to develop a comprehensive theory of nature and human behaviour.

Hobbes' classic work, Leviathan (1651), defended absolutist government as the only alternative to anarchy and disorder, and proposed that citizens have an unqualified obligation towards their state. In so doing he provided a rationalist defence for authoritarianism (see p. 84), which nevertheless disappointed supporters of the divine right of kings. Hobbes' individualist methodology, and the use he made of social contract theory, prefigured early liberalism.

Humankind's intellectual powers are also thought to be limited. As discussed in Chapter 1, conservatives have traditionally believe that the world is simply too complicated for human reason fully to grasp. The political world, as the UK political philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1901–90) put it, is 'boundless and bottomless'. Conservatives are therefore suspicious of abstract ideas and systems of thought that claim to understand what is, they argue, simply incomprehensible. They prefer to ground their ideas in tradition, experience and history; adopting a cautious, moderate and above all pragmatic approach to the world, and avoiding, if at all possible, doctrinaire or dogmatic beliefs. High-sounding political principles such as the 'rights of man', 'equality' and 'social justice' are fraught with danger because they provide a blueprint for the reform or remodelling of the world. Reform and revolution, conservatives warn, often lead to greater suffering rather than less. For a conservative, to do nothing may be preferable to doing something, and a conservative will always wish to ensure, as Oakeshott said, that 'the cure is not worse than the disease'. Nevertheless, conservative support for both

traditionalism and pragmatism has weakened as a result of the rise of the new right. In the first place, the new right is radical, in that it has sought to advance free-market reforms by dismantling inherited welfarist and interventionist structures. Second, new right radicalism is based upon rationalism (see p. 33) and a commitment to abstract theories and principles, notably those of economic liberalism.

Perspectives on …

Human nature

Liberals view human nature as a set of innate qualities intrinsic to the individual, placing little or no emphasis on social or historical conditioning. Humans are self-seeking and largely self-reliant creatures; but they are also governed by reason and are capable of personal development, particularly through education.

Conservatives believe that human beings are essentially limited and security-seeking creatures, drawn to the known, the familiar, the tried and tested. Human rationality is unreliable, and moral corruption is implicit in each human individual. The new right nevertheless embraces a form of self-seeking individualism.

Socialists regard humans as essentially social creatures, their capacities and behaviour being shaped more by nurture than by nature, and particularly by creative labour. Their propensity for cooperation, sociability and rationality means that the prospects for human development and personal growth are considerable.

Anarchists view human nature in highly optimistic terms. Humans are either seen to have a powerful inclination towards sociable, gregarious and cooperative behaviour, being capable of maintaining order through collective effort alone, or to be basically self-interested but rationally enlightened.

Fascists believe that humans are ruled by the will and other non-rational drives, most particularly by a deep sense of social belonging focused on nation or race. Although the masses are fitted only to serve and obey, elite members of the national community are capable of personal regeneration as ‘new men’ through dedication to the national or racial cause.

Feminists usually hold that men and women share a common human nature, gender differences being culturally or socially imposed. Separatist feminists nevertheless argue that men are genetically disposed to domination and cruelty, while women are naturally sympathetic, creative and peaceful.

Ecologists, particularly deep ecologists, see human nature as part of the broader ecosystem, even as part of nature itself. Materialism, greed and egoism therefore reflect the extent to which humans have become alienated from the oneness of life and thus from their own true nature. Human fulfilment requires a return to nature.

Organic society

The conservative view of society is very different from that of liberalism. Liberals believe that society arises from the actions of individuals, each intent upon pursuing self-interest. Social groups and associations are 'contractual' in that they are entered into voluntarily. Libertarian conservatives, including the liberal new right, who are attracted to liberal, free market ideas, have some sympathy with this view. Margaret Thatcher, paraphrasing Jeremy Bentham (see p. 51), thus proclaimed that 'There is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families.'

Traditional conservatives, on the other hand, believe that this is an 'atomistic' picture of society, based upon the pretence that individuals can be or want to be self-reliant. Conservatives believe, as explained earlier, that human beings are dependent and security-seeking creatures. They do not and cannot exist outside society, but desperately need to belong, to have 'roots' in society. The individual cannot be separated from society, but is part of the social groups that nurtures him or her: family, friends or peer group, workmates or colleagues, local community and even the nation. These groups provide individual life with security and meaning. As a result, traditional conservatives are reluctant to understand freedom in terms of 'negative freedom', in which the individual is 'left alone'. Freedom is rather a willing acceptance of social obligations and ties by individuals who recognize their value. Freedom involves 'doing one's duty'. When, for example, parents instruct children how to behave, they are not constraining their liberty, but providing guidance for their children's benefit. To act as a dutiful son or daughter and conform to parental wishes is to act freely, out of a recognition of one's obligations. Conservative believe that a society in which individuals know only their rights and do not acknowledge their duties would be rootless and atomistic. Indeed, it is the bonds of duty and obligation that hold society together.

Such ideas are based upon a very particular view of society. Conservatives have traditionally thought of society as a living thing, an organism, whose parts work together just as the brain, heart, lungs and liver do within a human organism. Organisms differ from artefacts or machines in two important respects. First, unlike machines, organisms are not simply of collection of individual parts that can be arranged and, indeed, rearranged at will. Within an organism, the whole is more than a collection of its individual parts; the whole is sustained by a fragile set of relationships between and amongst its parts, which, once damaged, can result in the organism's death. Thus, a human body cannot be stripped down and reassembled in the same way as, say, a bicycle. Second, organisms are shaped by 'natural' factors rather than human ingenuity. An organic society is fashioned, ultimately, by natural necessity. For example, the family was not been 'invented' by any social thinker or political theorist, but is a product of natural social impulses such as love, caring and responsibility. In no sense, do children in a family agree to a 'contract' on joining the family – they simply grow up within it and are nurtured and guided by it.

The use of the 'organic metaphor' for understanding society has some profoundly conservative implications. A mechanical view of society, as adopted by liberals and most socialists, in which society is constructed by rational individuals for their own purposes, suggests that society can be tampered with and improved. This leads to a belief in progress, either in the shape of reform or of revolution. If society is organic, its structures and institutions have been shaped by forces that

beyond human control and, possibly, understanding, which implies that its delicate 'fabric' should be preserved and respected by the individuals who live within it. Organicism also shapes our attitude to particular institutions, society's 'parts'. These are viewed from a functionalist perspective: institutions develop and survive for a reason, and this reason is that they contribute to maintaining the larger whole. In other words, by virtue of existing, institutions demonstrate that they are worthwhile and desirable. Any attempt to reform or, worse, abolish an institution is thus fraught with dangers.

Organic ideas are evident in conservative arguments in favour of the family, established values and the nation. Conservatives regard the family as the most basic institution of society and, in many ways, a model for all other social institutions. Arising out of the simple need to bear and bring up children, the family provides its members, and particularly children, with safety and security, and teaches individuals about the value of duty and the need to respect others. Conservatives have therefore viewed a healthy family life as essential to the stability of society; the family should be protected, and if necessary strengthened. Organicism also underpins the conservative defence of established values. If morality is a matter of personal choice, as liberals believe, the 'moral fabric' of society is brought into question and, with it, the cohesion upon which social order is based. Conservative have thus feared moral and cultural pluralism (see p. 37), arguing, for instance, that multicultural societies are inherently unstable. Instead, conservative call for a common culture and shared values. Such a culture may nevertheless be fashioned from a variety of sources, important ones including tradition, the family and religion, in the form of 'traditional values', 'family values' and 'Christian values'. Finally, organicism explains why conservatives value the nation. Nations, like families, are formed naturally, in this case out of a natural affinity that develops amongst people who share the same language, history, culture and traditions. Patriotism (see p. 167) therefore provides both individuals and society at large with a necessary sense of identity and belonging. Such ideas provide the basis for conservative nationalism, examined in Chapter 5.

Perspectives on …

Society

Liberals regard society not as an entity in its own right but as a collection of individuals. To the extent that society exists, it is fashioned out of voluntary and contractual agreements made by self-interested human beings. Nevertheless there is a general balance of interests in society that tends to promote harmony and equilibrium.

Conservatives see society as an organism, a living entity. Society thus has an existence outside the individual, and in a sense is prior to the individual; it is held together by the bonds of tradition, authority and a common morality. The new right nevertheless subscribes to a form of liberal atomism.

Socialists have traditionally understood society in terms of unequal class power, economic and property divisions being deeper and more genuine than any broader social bonds. Marxists believe that society is characterized by class struggle, and argue that the only stable and cohesive society is a classless one.

Anarchists believe that society is characterized by unregulated and natural harmony, based on the natural human disposition towards cooperation and sociability. Social conflict and disharmony are thus clearly unnatural, a product of political rule and economic inequality.

Nationalists view society in terms of cultural or ethnic distinctiveness. Society is thus characterized by shared values and beliefs, ultimately rooted in a common national identity. This may imply that multinational societies are inherently unstable.

Fascists regard society as a unified organic whole, meaning that individual existence is meaningless unless it is dedicated to the common good rather than the private good. Nevertheless membership of society is strictly restricted on national or racial grounds.

Feminists have understood society in terms of patriarchy and an artificial division between the 'public' and 'private' spheres of life. Society may therefore be seen as an organized hypocrisy designed to routinise and uphold a system of male power.

Hierarchy and authority

Conservatives have traditionally believed the society is naturally hierarchical, characterized by fixed or established social gradations. Social equality is therefore rejected as undesirable and unachievable; power, status and property are always unequally distributed. Conservatives agree with liberals in accepting natural inequality amongst individuals: some are born with talents and skills that are denied to others. For liberals, however, this leads to a belief in meritocracy, in which individuals rise or fall according to their abilities and willingness to work. Traditionally, conservatives have believed that inequality is more deep-rooted. Inequality is an inevitable feature of an organic society, not merely a consequence of individual differences. Pre-democratic conservatives such as Burke were, in this way, able to embrace the idea of a 'natural aristocracy'. Just as the brain, the heart and the liver all perform very different functions within the body, the various classes and groups that make up society also have their own specific roles. There must be leaders and there must be followers; there must be managers and there must be workers; for that matter, there must be those who go out to work and those who stay at home and bring up children. Genuine social equality is therefore a myth; in reality, there is a natural inequality of wealth and social position, justified by a corresponding inequality of social responsibilities. The working class might not enjoy the same living standards and life chances as their employers, but, at the same time, they do not have the livelihoods and security of many other people resting on their shoulders. Hierarchy and organicism have thus invested in traditional conservatism a pronounced tendency towards paternalism (see p. 87).

The belief in hierarchy is strengthened by the emphasis conservatives place upon authority. Conservatives do not accept the liberal belief that authority arises out of a contract made by free individuals. In liberal theory, authority is thought to be established by individuals for their own benefit. In contrast, conservatives believe that authority, like society, develops naturally. Parents have authority over children: they control virtually every aspect of their young lives, but without any contract or agreement having been undertaken. Authority develops, once again, from natural necessity, in this case the need to ensure that children are cared for, kept away from danger, have a healthy diet, go to bed at sensible times and so on. Such authority can only be imposed 'from

above', quite simply because children do not know what is good for them. It does not and cannot arise 'from below'; in no sense can children be said to have agreed to be governed.

Authority is thought to be rooted in the nature of society and all social institutions. In schools, authority should be exercised by the teacher, in the workplace, by the employer, and in society at large, by government. Conservatives believe that authority is necessary and beneficial as everyone needs the guidance, support and security of knowing 'where they stand' and what is expected of them. Authority thus counters rootlessness and anomie. This has led conservatives to place special emphasis upon leadership and discipline. Leadership is a vital ingredient in any society because it is the capacity to give direction and provide inspiration for others. Discipline is not just mindless obedience but a willing and healthy respect for authority. Authoritarian conservatives go further and portray authority as absolute and unquestionable. Most conservatives, however, believe that authority should be exercised within limits and that these limits are imposed not by an artificial contract but by the natural responsibilities that authority entails. Parents should have authority over their children, but not the right to treat them in any way they choose. The authority of a parent reflects an obligation to nurture, guide and, if necessary, punish their children, but it does not empower a parent to abuse a child or, for example, sell the child into slavery.

Property

Property is an asset that possesses a deep and at times almost mystical significance for conservatives. Liberals believe that property reflects merit: those who work hard and possess talent will, and should, acquire wealth. Property, therefore, is 'earned'. This doctrine has an attraction for those conservatives who regard the ability to accumulate wealth as an important economic incentive. Nevertheless, conservatives also hold that property has a range of psychological and social advantages. For example, it provides security. In an uncertain and unpredictable world, property ownership gives people a sense of confidence and assurance, something to 'fall back on'. Property, whether the ownership of a house or savings in the bank, provides individuals with a source of protection. Conservatives therefore believe that thrift – caution in the management of money – is a virtue in itself and have sought to encourage private savings and investment in property.

Property ownership also promotes a range of important social values. Those who possess and enjoy their own property are more likely to respect the property of others. They will also be aware that property must be safeguarded from disorder and lawlessness. Property owners therefore have a 'stake' in society; they have an interest, in particular, in maintaining law and order. In this sense, property ownership can promote what can be thought of as the 'conservative values' of respect for law, authority and social order. However, a deeper and more personal reason why conservatives support property ownership is that it can almost be regarded as an extension of an individual's personality. People 'realize' themselves; even see themselves, in what they own. Possessions are not merely external objects, valued because they are useful – a house to keep one warm and dry, a car to provide transport and so on – but also reflect something of the owner's personality and character. This is why, conservatives point out, and burglary is a particularly unpleasant crime: its victims suffer not only the loss of or damage to their possessions, but also the sense that they have been personally violated. A home is the most

personal and intimate of possessions, it is decorated and organized according to the tastes and needs of its owner and therefore reflects his or her personality. The proposal of traditional socialists that property should be 'socialized' owned in common rather than by private individuals, thus strikes conservatives as particularly appalling because it threatens to create a soulless and depersonalized society.

Conservatives, however, are not prepared to go as far as laissez-faire liberals in believing that each individual has an absolute right to use their property however they may choose. While libertarian conservatives, and therefore the liberal new right, support an essentially liberal view of property, conservatives have traditionally argued that all rights, including property rights, entail obligations. Property is not an issue for the individual alone, but is also of importance to society. The rights of the individual must be balanced against the well-being of society or the nation. If, for example, conservatives believe that the national interest is served by government intervention in the economy, then the freedom of the businesses must be curtailed. Furthermore, property is not merely the creation of the present generation. Much of it – land, houses, and works of art – has been passed down from earlier generations. The present generation is, in that sense, the custodian of the wealth of the nation and has a duty to preserve and protect it for the benefit of future generations. Harold Macmillan, the UK Conservative prime minister, 1957–63, expressed just such a position in the 1980s when he objected to the Thatcher government's policy of privatization, describing it as 'selling off the family silver'.

Authoritarian conservatism

Whereas all conservatives would claim to respect the concept of authority, few modern conservatives would accept that their views are authoritarian. Nevertheless, although contemporary conservatives are keen to demonstrate their commitment to democratic, particularly liberal-democratic, principles, there is a tradition within conservatism that has favoured authoritarian rule, especially in continental Europe. At the time of the French Revolution, the principal defender of autocratic rule was the French political thinker Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). De Maistre was a fierce critic of the French Revolution, but, in contrast to Burke, he wished to restore absolute power to the hereditary monarchy. He was a reactionary and was quite unprepared to accept any reform of the ancien régime, which had been overthrown in 1789. His political philosophy was based upon willing and complete subordination to 'the master'. In Du Pape (1817) de Maistre went further and argued that above the earthly monarchies a supreme spiritual power should rule in the person of the pope. De Maistre believed deeply that society was organic, and would fragment or collapse if it were not bound together by the twin principles of 'throne and altar'. His central concern was therefore the preservation of order, which alone, he believed, could provide people with safety and security. Revolution, and even reform, would weaken the chains that bound people together and would lead to a descent into chaos and oppression. Even the cruel ruler should be obeyed because once the established principle of authority was questioned, infinitely greater suffering would result.

Throughout the nineteenth century, conservatives in continental Europe remained faithful to the rigid and hierarchical values of autocratic rule, and stood unbending in the face of rising liberal, nationalist and socialist protest. Nowhere was authoritarianism more entrenched than in Russia, where Tsar Nicholas I, 1825–55, proclaimed the principles of 'orthodoxy, autocracy and

nationality', in contrast to the values that had inspired the French Revolution: 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. Nicholas's successors

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is belief in or the practice of government 'from above', in which authority is exercised over a population with or without its consent. Authoritarianism thus differs from authority. The latter rests on legitimacy, and in that sense arises 'from below'. Authoritarian thinkers typically base their views on either a belief in the wisdom of established leaders or the idea that social order can only be maintained by unquestioning obedience. However, authoritarianism is usually distinguished from totalitarianism (see p. 227). The practice of government 'from above', which is associated with monarchical absolutism, traditional dictatorships and most forms of military rule, is concerned with the repression of opposition and political liberty, rather than the more radical goal of obliterating the distinction between the state and civil society.

stubbornly refused to allow their power to be constrained by constitutions or the development of parliamentary institutions. In Germany, constitutional government did develop, but Bismarck, the imperial chancellor, 1871–90, ensured that it remained a sham. Elsewhere, authoritarianism remained particularly strong in Catholic countries. The papacy suffered not only the loss of its temporal authority with the achievement of Italian unification, which led Pius IX to declare himself a 'prisoner of the Vatican', but also an assault upon its doctrines with the rise of secular political ideologies. In 1864 the pope condemned all radical or progressive ideas, including those of nationalism, liberalism and socialism, as 'false doctrines of our most unhappy age', and when confronted with the loss of the papal states and Rome he proclaimed in 1870 the edict of papal infallibility. The unwillingness of continental conservatives to come to terms with reform and democratic government extended well into the twentieth century. In the aftermath of the First World War, for example, conservative elites in Italy and Germany helped to overthrow parliamentary democracy and bring Mussolini (see p. 228) and Hitler (see p. 221) to power by providing support for and giving respectability to the rising fascist movements.

In other cases, conservative-authoritarian regimes have looked to the newly enfranchised masses for political support. This happened in France, where universal manhood suffrage was introduced in 1848. Louis Napoleon succeeded in being elected president, and he later established himself as Emperor Napoleon III by appealing to the smallholding peasantry, the largest element of the French electorate. The Napoleonic regime fused authoritarianism with the promise of economic prosperity and social reform in the kind of plebiscitary dictatorship more commonly found in the twentieth century. Bonapartism has parallels with twentieth-century Perónism. Juan Perón was dictator of Argentina, 1946–55, and proclaimed the familiar authoritarian themes of obedience, order and national unity. However he based his political support not upon the interests of traditional elites, but upon the impoverished masses, the 'shirtless ones', as Perón called them. The Perónist regime was populist (see p. 301) in that it moulded its policies according to the instincts and wishes of the common people, in this case popular resentment against 'Yankee imperialism', and a widespread desire for economic and social progress. Similar regimes have developed in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. However, although such regimes have tended to consolidate the position of conservative elites, and often embrace a distinctively

conservative form of nationalism, in mobilising popular support for dictatorial rule, authoritarian-populist regimes such as Perón's perhaps exhibit features that are more closely associated with fascism than conservatism.

Paternalistic conservatism

Although continental conservatives adopted an attitude of uncompromising resistance to change, a more flexible and ultimately more successful Anglo-American tradition can be traced back to Edmund Burke. The lesson that Burke drew from the French Revolution was that change can be natural or inevitable, in which case it should not be resisted. 'A state without the means of some change', he suggested, 'is without the means of its conservation' ([1790] 1975, p. 285). The characteristic style of Burkean conservatism is cautious, modest and pragmatic; it reflects a suspicion of fixed principles, whether revolutionary or reactionary. As Ian Gilmour (1978) put it, 'the wise Conservative travels light'. The values that conservatives hold most dear – tradition, order, authority, property and so on – will be safe only if policy is developed in the light of practical circumstances and experience. Such a position will rarely justify dramatic or radical change, but accepts a prudent willingness to 'change in order to conserve'. Pragmatic conservatives support neither the individual nor the state in principle, but are prepared to support either, or, more frequently, recommend a balance between the two, depending upon 'what works'. In practice, the reforming impulse in conservatism has also been closely associated with the survival into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of neo-feudal paternalistic values. There are two main traditions of paternalistic conservatism:

- One-nation conservatism
- Christian democracy

One-nation conservatism

The Anglo-American paternalistic tradition is often traced back to Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), UK prime minister in 1868 and again 1874–80. Disraeli developed his political philosophy in two novels, Sybil (1845) and Coningsby (1844), written before he assumed ministerial responsibilities. These novels emphasized the principle of social obligation, in stark contrast to the extreme individualism then dominant within the political establishment. Disraeli wrote against a background of growing industrialization, economic inequality and, in continental Europe at least, revolutionary upheaval. He tried to draw attention to the danger of Britain being divided into 'two nations: the Rich and the Poor'. In the best conservative tradition, Disraeli's argument was based upon a combination of prudence and principle.

On the one hand, growing social inequality contains the seed of revolution. A poor and oppressed working class, Disraeli feared, would not simply accept its misery. The revolutions that had broken out in Paternalism

Paternalism literally means to act in a fatherly fashion. As a political principle, it refers to power or authority being exercise over others with the intention of conferring benefit or preventing harm. Social welfare and laws such as the compulsory wearing of seat belts in cars are examples of paternalism. 'Soft' paternalism is characterized by broad consent on the part of those subject

to paternalism. ‘Hard’ paternalism operates regardless of consent, and thus overlaps with authoritarianism. The basis for paternalism is that wisdom and experience are unequally distributed in society; those in authority ‘know best’. Opponents argue that authority is not to be trusted and that paternalism restricts liberty and contributes to the ‘infantalization’ of society.

Europe in 1830 and 1848 seemed to bear out this belief. Reform would therefore be sensible because, in stemming the tide of revolution, it would ultimately be in the interests of the rich. On the other hand, Disraeli appealed to moral values. He suggested that wealth and privilege brought with them social obligations, in particular a responsibility for the poor or less well-off. In so doing, Disraeli drew on emphasized the organic conservative belief that society is held together by an acceptance of duty and obligations. He believed that society is naturally hierarchical, but also held that inequalities of wealth or social privilege give rise to an inequality of responsibilities. The wealthy and powerful must shoulder the burden of social responsibility, which in effect is the price of privilege. These ideas were based upon the feudal principle of noblesse oblige, the obligation of the aristocracy to be honourable and generous. For example, the landed nobility claimed to exercise a paternal responsibility for their peasants, as the king did in relation to the nation. Disraeli recommended that these obligations should not be abandoned, but should be expressed, in an increasingly industrialized world, in social reform. Such ideas came to be represented by the slogan ‘one nation’. In office, Disraeli was responsible both for the Second Reform Act of 1867, which for the first time extended the right to vote to the working class, and for the social reforms that improved housing conditions and hygiene.

Disraeli's ideas had a considerable impact upon conservatism and contributed to a radical and reforming tradition that still appeals both to the pragmatic instincts of conservatives and to their sense of social duty. In the UK these ideas provide the basis of what is called ‘one-nation conservatism’, whose supporters sometimes style themselves as ‘Tories’ to denote their commitment to pre-industrial, hierarchic and paternal values. Disraeli's ideas were subsequently taken up in the late nineteenth century by Lord Randolph Churchill in the form of ‘Tory democracy’. In an age of widening political democracy, Churchill stressed the need for traditional institutions – for example the monarchy, the House of Lords and the church – to enjoy a wider base of social support. This could be achieved by winning working-class votes for the Conservative Party by continuing Disraeli's policy of social reform. One-nation conservatism can thus be seen as a form of Tory welfarism.

The highpoint of the one-nation tradition was reached in the 1950s and 1960s, when conservative governments in the UK and elsewhere came to practice a version of Keynesian social democracy, managing the economy in line with the goal of full employment and supporting enlarged welfare provision. This stance was based not upon a belief in positive freedom (as in the case of modern liberalism), nor upon a commitment to equality (as in the case of parliamentary socialism), but on the need for a non-ideological, ‘middle way’ between the extremes of laissez-faire liberalism and socialist state planning. Conservatism was therefore the way of moderation, and sought to draw a balance between rampant individualism and overbearing collectivism. In the UK, the idea was most clearly expresses Harold Macmillan's The Middle Way ([1938] 1966). Macmillan, who was to be prime minister 1957–63, advocated what he called ‘planned capitalism’, which he described as ‘a mixed system which combines state ownership, regulation or control of certain aspects of economic activity with the drive and

initiative of private enterprise'. One nationist, or Tory, ideas nevertheless only provide a qualified basis for social and economic intervention. The purpose of one-nation conservatism is to consolidate hierarchy rather than to remove it, and its wish to improve the conditions of the less well-off is limited to the desire to ensure that the poor no longer pose a threat to the established order.

Toryism

'Tory' was used in eighteenth-century Britain to refer to a parliamentary faction that (as opposed to the Whigs) supported monarchical power and the Church of England, and represented the landed gentry; in the United States, it implied loyalty to the British crown. Although in the mid-nineteenth century the British Conservative Party emerged out of the Tories, and in the UK 'Tory' is still widely (but unhelpfully) used as a synonym for Conservative, Toryism is best understood as a distinctive ideological stance within broader conservatism. Its characteristic features are a belief in hierarchy, tradition, duty and organicism. While 'high' Toryism articulates a neo-feudal belief in a ruling class and a pre-democratic faith in established institutions, the Tory tradition is also hospitable to welfarist and reformist ideas, providing these serve the cause of social continuity.

Christian democracy

Interventionist policies were also adopted by the Christian democratic parties that were formed in various parts of continental Europe after 1945. The most important of these were the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in then-West Germany and the Christian Democratic Party (DC) in Italy. In the aftermath of the Second World War, continental conservatives abandoned their authoritarian beliefs. This new form of conservatism was committed to political democracy and influenced by the paternalistic social traditions of Catholicism. As Protestantism is associated with the idea of salvation through individual effort, its social theory has often been seen to endorse individualism (see p. 30) and extol the value of hard work, competition and personal responsibility. The German sociologist, Max Weber (1864–1920), for instance, linked the Protestant ethic to the 'spirit of capitalism'. Catholic social theory, in contrast, has traditionally focused upon the social group rather than the individual, and stressed balance or organic harmony rather than competition. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the papacy's firm commitment to autocracy, Catholic parties, such as Zentrum, the Centre Party, in Germany, supported constitutional government, political democracy and social reform. After 1945, Catholic social theory encouraged the newly-formed Christian democratic parties to practice a from of democratic corporatism that highlighted the importance of intermediate institutions, such as churches, unions and business groups, bound together by the notion of 'social partnership'. In contrast to the traditional stress upon the nation, Christian democracy, particularly in Germany, also supported the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, the idea that decisions should be made by the lowest appropriate institution. Sympathy for subsidiarity has allowed Christian democrats to support both decentralization, particularly in the form of federalism, and, in marked contrast to UK conservatives, Europeanization or European integration.

The willingness of Christian democratic parties to practice Keynesian-welfarist policies draws more heavily on the flexible and pragmatic ideas of economists such as Friedrich List (1789–1846) than upon the strict market principles of Adam Smith (see p. 52) and David Ricardo. List emphasized the economic importance of politics and political power, for instance, in recognizing the need for government intervention to protect infant industries for the rigours of foreign competition. This has lead to support for the idea of the 'social market economy', which has been widely influential across much of continental Europe. A social market is an economy that is structured by market principles and largely free from government control, operating in the context of a society in which cohesion is maintained through a comprehensive welfare system and effective public services. The market is thus not so much an end in itself as a means of generating wealth in order to achieve broader social goals. Such thinking has resulted in a particular model of capitalism being adopted across much of continental Europe and, to an extent, within the EU, which is sometimes dubbed Rhine–Alpine capitalism or 'social capitalism' in contrast to Anglo-American capitalism or 'enterprise capitalism'. Whereas the former stresses partnership and cooperation, the latter is based on the untrammelled workings of market economics. Social market thinking has, since the 1970s, made Christian democracy in particular and continental European conservatism in general, far less susceptible to the attractions of free-market economics than either the UK or the US versions of one nationist paternalism.

Libertarian conservatism

Although conservatism draws heavily upon pre-industrial ideas such as organicism, hierarchy and obligation, the ideology has also been much influenced by liberal ideas, especially classical liberal ideas. This is sometimes seen as a late-twentieth-century development, the new right having in some way 'hijacked' conservatism in the interests of classical liberalism. Nevertheless, liberal doctrines, especially those concerning the free market, have been advanced by conservatives since the late eighteenth century and can be said to constitute a rival tradition to conservative paternalism. These ideas are libertarian in that they advocate the greatest possible economic liberty and the least possible government regulation of social life. Libertarian conservatives have not simply converted to liberalism but believe liberal economics to be compatible with a more traditional, conservative social philosophy, based upon values such as authority and duty. This is evident in the work of Edmund Burke, in many ways the founder of traditional conservatism, but also a keen supporter of the liberal economics of Adam Smith.

The libertarian tradition has been strongest in those countries where classical liberal ideas have had the greatest impact, once again the UK and the United States. As early as the late eighteenth century, Burke expressed a strong preference for free trade in commercial affairs and a competitive, self-regulating market economy in domestic affairs. The free market is efficient and fair, but it is also, Burke believed, natural and necessary. It is 'natural' in that it reflects a desire for wealth, a 'love of lucre', that is part of human nature. The laws of the market are therefore 'natural laws'. He accepted that working conditions dictated by the market are, for many, 'degrading, unseemly, unmanly and often most unwholesome', but insisted that they would suffer further if the 'natural course of things' were

Libertarianism

Libertarianism refers to a range of theories that give strict priority to liberty (understood in negative terms) over other values, such as authority, tradition and equality. Libertarians thus seek to maximize the realm of individual freedom and minimize the scope of public authority, typically seeing the state as the principal threat to liberty. The two best-known libertarian traditions are rooted in the idea of individual rights (as with Robert Nozick, see p. 97) and in laissez-faire economic doctrines (as with Friedrich Hayek, see p. 95), although socialists have also embraced libertarianism. Libertarianism is sometimes distinguished from liberalism on the ground that the latter, even in its classical form, refuses to give priority to liberty over order. However, it differs from anarchism in that libertarians generally recognize the need for a minimal or nightwatchman state, sometimes styling themselves as 'minarchists'.

disturbed. Burke saw no tension between his support for a market economy and his defence of a traditional social order, because he believed that by the late eighteenth century the traditional order in Britain had ceased to be feudal and had instead become capitalist. The capitalist free market could therefore be defended on grounds of tradition, just like the monarchy and the church.

Libertarian conservatives are not, however, consistent liberals. They believe in economic individualism and 'getting government offs the back of businesses, but they are less prepared to extend this principle of individual liberty to other aspects of social life. Early liberals such as Richard Cobden (1804–65) and John Stuart Mill were prepared to place social and moral responsibility in the hands of the individual, not merely economic responsibility. As Hayek emphasized in The Constitution of Liberty (1960), liberalism can be distinguished from both conservatism and, in his view, socialism by its belief that moral decisions should be left to the individual, unless they lead to conduct that threatens other people. The individual therefore needs as little guidance as possible from the state. Conservatives, even libertarian conservatives, have a more pessimistic view of human nature. A strong state is required to maintain public order and ensure that authority is respected. Indeed, in some respects libertarian conservatives are attracted to free-market theories precisely because they promise to secure social order. Whereas liberals have believed that the market economy preserves individual liberty and freedom of choice, conservatives have at times been attracted to the market as an instrument of social discipline. Market forces regulate and control economic and social activity. For example, they may deter workers from pushing for higher wage increases by threatening them with unemployment. As such, the market can be seen as an instrument that maintains social stability and works alongside the more evident forces of coercion: the police and the courts. While some conservatives have feared that market capitalism leads to endless innovation and restless competition, upsetting social cohesion, others have been attracted to it in the belief that it can establish a 'market order', sustained by impersonal 'natural laws' rather than the guiding hand of political authority.

Tensions within Conservatism (1)

Pragmatic conservatism	v.	Libertarian conservatism
pragmatic	–	ideological
traditionalism	–	radicalism
social duty	–	egoism
organic society	–	atomistic individualism
hierarchy	–	meritocracy
paternalism	–	self-help
moral responsibility	–	economic rights
natural order	–	market order
'middle way' economics	–	*laissez-faire* economics
qualified welfarism	–	anti-welfarism

New right

During the early post-1945 period, pragmatic and paternalistic ideas dominated conservatism throughout much of the western world. The remnants of authoritarian conservatism collapsed with the overthrow of the Portuguese and Spanish dictatorships in the 1970s. Just as conservatives had come to accept political democracy during the nineteenth century, after 1945 they came to accept a qualified form of social democracy. This tendency was confirmed by the rapid and sustained economic growth of the post-war years, the 'long boom', which appeared to bear out the success of 'managed capitalism'. During the 1970s, however, a set of more radical ideas developed within conservatism, directly challenging the Keynesian welfarist orthodoxy. These new right ideas had their greatest initial impact in the USA and the UK, but they came to be influential in parts of continental Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and had some kind of effect upon western states across the globe.

The 'new right' is a broad term and has been used to describe ideas that range from the demand for tax cuts to calls for greater censorship of television and films, and even campaigns against immigration or in favour of repatriation. In essence, the new right is a marriage between two apparently contrasting ideological traditions. The first of these is classical liberal economics, particularly the free market theories of Adam Smith, which were revived in the second half of the twentieth century as a critique of 'big' government and economic and social intervention. This is called the liberal new right or neoliberalism (see pp. 54–7). The second element in the new right is traditional conservative – and notably pre-Disraelian – social theory, especially its defence of order, authority and discipline. This is called the conservative new right, or neoconservatism The new right thus attempts to fuse economic libertarianism with state and social authoritarianism. As such, it is a blend of radical, reactionary and traditional features. Its radicalism is evident in its robust efforts to dismantle or 'roll back' its inheritance, namely interventionist government and liberal or permissive social values. This radicalism is clearest in relation to the liberal new right, which draws upon rational theories and abstract principles, and so dismisses tradition. New right radicalism is nevertheless a form of reactionary radicalism, in that both the liberal and conservative new right hark back to a usually nineteenth-century 'golden

age' of supposed economic propriety and moral fortitude. However, the new right also makes an appeal to tradition, particularly though the emphasis neoconservatives place on so-called 'traditional values'.

New right ideas were the product of various historical factors. Perhaps most importantly, the 'long boom' of the post-war period ended in recession in the early 1970s, with rising unemployment coinciding with high inflation, a phenomenon that economists call 'stagflation'. Keynesian demand management, which had previously been credited for delivering stable economic growth and maintaining social cohesion, thus came under growing pressure from a political right that showed an increasing fondness for earlier, free market thinking. New right thought was also influenced by social factors, especially the spread of a liberal social philosophy. Conservatives feared that this had led to the twin evils of permissiveness and widespread welfare dependency. For instance, neoconservatism emerged in the USA in the 1970s and 1980s through the recruitment of a number of former-liberals intellectuals, led by Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, who came to believe that society's ills were largely tied up with the spread of a rights-based culture in which citizens had a declining sense of duty and responsibility. Finally, international factors helped to shape the emergent new right, strengthening nationalist sentiments within conservatism and reviving support for power politics. The US new right was alarmed at what it believed to be the growing military might of the Soviet Union and the damage done to national prestige by the events in Vietnam and Iran. In the UK, there was concern about the loss of great power status and the threat to national sovereignty posed, particularly for the 1980s onwards, by European integration.

Liberal new right

The liberal aspects of new right thinking are most definitely drawn from classical rather than modern liberalism, and in particular from neoliberalism, which is examined in Chapter 2. It amounts to a restatement of the case for a minimal state. This has been summed up as 'private, good; public, bad'. The liberal new right is anti-statist. The state is regarded as a realm of coercion and unfreedom: collectivism restricts individual initiative and saps self-respect. Government, however benignly disposed, invariably has a damaging effect on human affairs. Instead, faith is placed in the individual and the market. Individuals should be encouraged to be self-reliant and to make rational choices in their own interests. The market is respected as a mechanism through which the sum of individual choices will lead to progress and general benefit. As such, the liberal new right has attempted to establish the dominance of libertarian ideas over paternalistic ones within conservative ideology.

The dominant theme within this anti-statist doctrine is an ideological commitment to the free market. The new right has resurrected the classical economics of Smith and Ricardo (1772–1823), as it has been presented in the work of modern economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Free market ideas, which had been abandoned in favour of Keynesianism during the early twentieth century, gained renewed credibility during the 1970s. Governments experienced increasing difficulty in delivering economic stability and sustained growth. Doubts consequently developed about whether it was in the power of government at all to solve economic problems. Hayek and Friedman, for example, challenged the very idea of a 'managed' or planned' economy. They pointed to the inefficiency of the centrally planned economies of the

Soviet Union and eastern Europe, arguing that the task of allocating resources in a complex, industrialized economy was simply too difficult for any set of state bureaucrats to achieve successfully. The inevitable results of collectivization were shortages of vital goods and the need to queue for the bare necessities of life. The virtue of the market, on the other hand, is that it acts as the central nervous system of the economy, reconciling the supply of goods and services with the demand for them. It allocates resources to their most profitable use and thereby ensures that consumer needs are satisfied. In the light of the re-emergence of unemployment and inflation in the 1970s, Hayek and Friedman argued that government was invariably the cause of economic problems, rather than the cure.

The ideas of Keynesianism (see p. 63) were one of the chief targets of new-right criticism. Keynes had argued that capitalist economies were not self-regulating. He placed particular emphasis upon the 'demand side' of the economy, believing that the level of economic activity and employment

Friedrich von Hayek (1899–1992)

Austrian economist and political philosopher. Hayek, an academic, taught at the London School of Economics and the Universities of Chicago, Freiburg and Salzburg. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for economics in 1974.

An exponent of the so-called Austrian School, Hayek was a firm believer in individualism and market order, and an implacable critic of socialism. The Road to Serfdom (1944) was a pioneering work that attacked economic interventionism as implicitly totalitarian; later works such as The Constitution of Liberty (1960) and Law, Legislation and Liberty (1979) supported a modified form of traditionalism and upheld an Anglo-American version of constitutionalism (see p. 41). Hayek's writings had a considerable impact upon the emergent new right.

were dictated by 'aggregate demand' in the economy. Keynes' solution to the problem of unemployment was that governments should 'manage demand' by running a budget deficit: government should 'inject' more money into the economy through public spending than it 'withdraws' through taxation. Milton Friedman, however, argued that there was a 'natural rate of unemployment' that was beyond the ability of government to influence, and that the attempts of government to eradicate unemployment by employing Keynesian techniques had merely caused other, more damaging, economic problems.

For free market economists, inflation rather than unemployment is the most serious of economic problems. Inflation is a rise in the general price level, which leads to a decline in the value of money, that is, the same amount of money buys fewer goods. Inflation, neoliberals believe, money'. The economic policies of both the Reagan and the Thatcher administration during the 1980s were guided by these free-market and monetarist theories. Both administrations allowed unemployment to rise sharply in the early 1980s in the belief that only the market could solve the problem. Similarly, they placed emphasis on cutting inflation by reducing, or controlling the increase in, government expenditure.

The new right is also opposed to the very idea of a mixed economy and public ownership. After 1945 many western states nationalised their basic industries in order to facilitate the management of their economies. This created economies that were a mixture of state-owned 'public sector' and individually owned 'private sector' industries. The new right has set about reversing this trend. Starting under Thatcher in the UK in the 1980s but later extending to many other western states, and most aggressively pursued in postcommunist states in the 1990s, a policy of privatization has effectively dismantled both mixed economies and collectivized economies by transferring industries from public to private ownership. Nationalized industries were criticized as being inherently inefficient because, unlike private firms and industries, they are not disciplined by the profit motive. Waste and inefficiency in the public sector can be tolerated, the new right argue, because the taxpayer will always pick up the bill.

Free market economists, furthermore, have shifted attention from the 'demand side' of the economy to its 'supply side'. Supply-side economics means that governments should foster growth by providing conditions that encourage producers to produce, rather than consumers to consume. The two main blocks to the creation of an entrepreneurial, supply-side culture are high taxes and government regulation. Taxes, in this view, discourage enterprise and infringe property rights. 'Reaganomics' in the 1980s was largely defined by the most dramatic cuts in personal and corporate taxation ever witnessed in the USA. After his election victory in 2000, George W. Bush revived this policy with a sweeping programme of tax cuts. Under Thatcher in the UK, levels of direct taxation were progressively reduced to near US levels, the highest rate of income tax being reduced from 83 pence in the pound in 1979 to 40 pence in the pound by 1988. The Reagan administration also pursued the goal of deregulation. It believed that the independent regulation agencies, which are set up by Congress and had proliferated since the 1960s, were disrupting the efficiency of the private economy and that the public interest was more likely to be guaranteed by the market mechanism itself rather than any government agency. Consequently, the funding of these agencies was dramatically reduced; for example, the Environmental Protection Agency suffered a 50 per cent cut in its budget. In addition, personnel were appointed to these agencies who had greater sympathy for the free market than they had for government regulation.

threatens the entire basis of a market economy because in reducing faith in money, the means of exchange, it discourages people from undertaking commercial or economic activity. A health market economy therefore requires that money has a sound and stable value. Both Hayek and Friedman thus argued that the principal economic responsibility of government is the maintenance of 'sound money', achieved by lowering or, as Hayek hoped, eradicating inflation altogether. Keynesianism, however, had fuelled inflation and generated the 'stagflation' of the 1970s. This was explained by monetarism, the theory that the price level is determined by the quantity of money in the economy: the money supply. Inflation, in other words, occurs when 'too much money chases too few goods'. As Keynesian policies had allowed government spending to exceed tax revenues, they had expanded the money supply and thereby fuelled inflation, without, in the process, having any beneficial effect upon the 'natural rate' of unemployment. Governments had, in effect, 'printed The liberal new right is not only anti-statist on grounds of economic efficiency and responsiveness, but also because of its political principles, notably its commitment to individual liberty. The new right claims to be defending freedom against 'creeping collectivism'. At the extreme, these ideas lead in the direction of anarcho-capitalism,

discussed in Chapter 7, which believes that all goods and services, including the courts and public order, should be delivered by the market. The freedom defended by the liberal, libertarian and even anarchist elements of the new right is negative freedom: the removal of external restrictions upon the individual. As the collective power of government is seen as the principal threat to the individual, freedom can only be ensured by 'rolling back the state'. This, in particular, means rolling back social welfare. In addition to economic arguments against welfare – for example, that increased social expenditure pushes up taxes, and that public sector welfare institutions are inherently inefficient – the new right objects to welfare on moral grounds. In the first place, reviving the nineteenth century ideas of self-help, the welfare state is criticized for having created a 'culture of dependency': it saps initiative and enterprise and robs people of dignity and self-respect. Welfare is thus the cause of disadvantage, not its cure. Such a theory resurrects the notion of the 'undeserving poor'. The idea that people owe nothing to society and, in turn, are owed nothing by society was most graphically expressed in Margaret Thatcher's assertion that 'there is no such thing as society'. Charles Murray (1984) also argued that, as welfare relieves women of dependency on 'breadwinning' men, it is a major cause of family breakdown, creating an underclass largely composed of single mothers and fatherless children. A further new right argument against welfare is based upon a commitment to individual rights. Robert Nozick (1974) advanced

Robert Nozick (1938–2002)

US academic and political philosopher. Nozick's major work Anarchy, State and Utopia (1974) is widely seen as one of the most important modern works of political philosophy, and it has profoundly influenced new right theories and beliefs.

Nozick developed a form of rights-based libertarianism in response to the ideas of John Rawls (see p. 62). Drawing upon Locke and nineteenth-century US individualists such as Lysander Spooner (1808–87) and Benjamin Tucker (1854–1939), he argued that property rights should be strictly upheld, provided the property was justly purchased or justly transferred from one person to another. This position means support for minimal government and minimal taxation, and undermines the case for welfare and redistribution. In later life, Nozick modified his extreme libertarianism.

this most forcefully in condemning all policies of welfare and redistribution as a violation of property rights. In this view, so long as property has been acquired justly, to transfer it, without consent, from one person to another amounts to 'legalized theft'.

Conservative new right

The conservative new right, or neoconservatism, is defined by its fear of social fragmentation or breakdown, which is seen as a product of liberal reform and the spread of 'progressive' values. Authority, in its various guises, is viewed as the solution to fragmentation and disorder because it acts as a kind of 'social glue', binding people together, giving them a sense of who they are and what is expected of them. The new right has, as a result, been interpreted as a form of 'authoritarian populism', reflecting and responding to widespread popular anxiety about the relaxation of moral standards and the weakening of authority in society (Hall and Jacques, 1983).

This emphasis upon authority allied to a heightened sensitivity to the fragility of society clearly demonstrated that neoconservatism has its roots in traditional or organic conservatism. However, it differs markedly from paternalistic conservatism, which also draws heavily upon organic ideas. Whereas one-nation conservativism, for instance, believes that community is best maintained by reducing poverty and narrowing material inequalities, neoconservatism looks to strengthen community by restoring authority and imposing social discipline. Neoconservative authoritarianism is, to this extent, consistent with neoliberal libertarianism.

The three principal concerns of the conservative new right are with law and order, public morality and national identity. Neoconservatives believe that rising crime, delinquency and anti-social behaviour generally are a consequence of a larger decline of authority that has affected most western societies since the 1960s. People need and want the security of knowing 'where they stand'. This security is provided by the exercise of authority, in the family by the father, at school by the teacher, at work by the employer, and in society at large by a system of 'law and order'. Permissiveness, the cult of the individual and of 'doing one's own thing', undermines the established structures of society by permitting, even encouraging, the questioning of authority. Neoconservatives thus subscribe to a form of social authoritarianism. This can be seen in neoconservative calls for the strengthening of the family. The 'family', however, is understood in strictly traditional terms. It is thought to be naturally hierarchical: children should listen to, respect and obey their parents; and it is naturally patriarchal: the husband is the provider and the wife the home-maker. If these authority relationships are weakened, children will be brought up without a set of decent moral values and with little respect for their elders.

This social authoritarianism is matched by state authoritarianism, the desire for a strong state reflected in a 'tough' stance on law and order. By accepting the idea of inherent moral corruption, neoconservatives believe that the roots of disorder reside in the human soul rather than in social injustice. Crime and delinquency can therefore only be countered by a fear of punishment, and punishment can only be effective if it is severe. This has led, in the USA and the UK in particular, to a greater emphasis upon custodial sentences and to longer prison sentences, based upon the belief that 'prison works'. Neoconservatives in the USA have campaigned for restoration of the death penalty, which had been denounced as a 'cruel and unusual punishment' by the Supreme Court in the 1960s. By the late 1980s capital punishment had been reinstated in a majority of the states. In the UK in the 1980s, a 'short, sharp shock' regime was introduced in youth custody centres, and in the 1990s, under John Major, support was given to minimum sentences and US-style 'boot camps' for young offenders.

The conservative new right has also been concerned about issues of public morality, in many ways as a reaction against the so-called 'permissive 1960s'. By the 1960s, rising affluence in the post-war period had led to a growing willingness, especially amongst the young, to question and criticize conventional moral and social standards. From the perspective of the new right, this was a serious threat to established values and common morality, upon which the stability of society is founded. In the face of this liberal morality, Thatcher in the UK proclaimed her support for 'Victorian values', and in the USA organizations such as Moral Majority campaigned for a return to 'family values'. Neoconservatives see two dangers in a permissive society. In the first place, the freedom to choose one's own morals or life-style could lead to the choice of immoral

or 'evil' views. There is a significant religious element in the conservative new right, especially in the USA. During the 1970s and 1980s various US groups sprang up that expressed concern about the decline of 'traditional values'. Many of these were associated with the 'born again' Christian movement and in effect constituted a 'Christian new right'. Moral Majority, founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979 and supported by Ronald Reagan and powerful Southern senators such as Jessie Helms, acted as an umbrella organization for this movement. Since the 1980s its principal energies have been devoted to the campaign against abortion, and in particular the attempt to overturn the 1973 Supreme Court judgement on Roe vs Wade, which legalized abortion in the USA. Homosexuality, pornography, premarital sex and, in the USA at least, the teaching of Darwinian theories of evolution rather than Biblical 'creationism' have also been castigated as morally 'bad'. The second danger of permissiveness is not so much that people may adopt the wrong morals or life-styles, but may simply choose different moral positions. For a liberal, moral pluralism is healthy because it promotes diversity and rational debate, but for a neoconservative it is deeply threatening because it undermines the cohesion of society. A permissive society is a society that lacks ethical norms and unifying moral standards. It is a 'pathless desert', which provides neither guidance nor support for individuals and their families. If individuals merely do as they please, civilized standards of behaviour will be impossible to maintain.

Finally, the conservative new right is distinguished by its desire to strengthen national identity in the face of threats from within and without. The value of the nation, from the neoconservative perspective, is that it binds society together by giving it a common cultural and civic identity, which is all the stronger for being rooted in history and tradition. Nations are organic entities that arise from a natural tendency to be drawn to others who are similar to oneself. The most significant threat to the nation 'from within' is the growth of multiculturalism. Increased cultural diversity both weakens the bonds of nationhood, threatening the political community, and creates the spectre of ethnic and racial conflict. For these reasons, neoconservatives have been in the forefront of campaigns for stronger controls on immigration and, sometimes, for a privileged status to be granted to the 'host' community's culture. For instance, in response to the growth of the Hispanic population, US neoconservatives have called for English to be recognized as the country's 'official' language. The threats 'from without' are many and various. In the UK, the main threat has been posed by European integration; indeed, in the 1990s UK conservatism almost came to be defined by 'Euroscepticism', its resistance to European integration and, in particular, monetary union. In the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, the principal threat was perceived as world communism and specifically the Soviet Union, viewed by Ronald Reagan as 'an evil empire'. Since September 11, 2001, however, global terrorism has been the pre-eminent strategic, political and cultural threat against which US national identity has been defined. George W. Bush's increasingly assertive and unilateralist foreign policy in Afghanistan and elsewhere, seen as part of a 'war on terror', was thus portrayed as a defence of American values and the American way of life.

Tensions within the new right

Not all thinkers or politicians who subscribe to new right ideas hold both neoliberal and neoconservative views. For example Roger Scruton (2001), a noted UK neoconservative, argued that a principled commitment to the free market has no place within conservatism. Similarly,

consistent libertarians, such as Nozick and the anarcho-capitalists, have no sympathy for conservative social theory. Nevertheless, neoliberal and neoconservative views usually do coincide, and it is this attempt to fuse economic liberalism with social conservatism that gives the new right its distinctive character. The two governments most clearly influenced by new right ideas, the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, supported, if to different degrees, both the liberal and the conservative new right. The dual character of Thatcherism in the UK was summed up by Andrew Gamble (1988) as a commitment to 'the free economy and the strong state'. The goal of the new right, in this view, is the construction of a strong but minimal state. However, the degree to which neoliberalism and neoconservatism are compatible has been the source of considerable debate.

Gamble's analysis emphasizes key political linkages between the 'free market' and the 'strong state', in that in a context of widening inequality and weakening state supports there is a greater need to police the market order and uphold social and political authority. In other words, the political and social forces that are unleashed by 'rolling back' the state can only be contained by strengthening state authority. New right theorists themselves nevertheless hold that neoliberalism and neoconservatism are compatible at a deeper, ideological level. For instance, Letwin (1992) portrayed Thatcherism in the UK as a moral crusade committed to a set of so-called 'vigorous virtues' – uprightness, self-sufficiency, energy, independent-mindedness, loyalty and robustness – which in economic life require the rolling back of the state, but in social life imply greater intervention to maintain law and order, uphold national ideals and strengthen defence. For Willetts (1992), the apparent tension within the new right reflects nothing more than the basic and enduring concern of conservatism, which is to balance its commitment to the individual against its commitment to community.

Tensions within Conservatism (2)

Liberal new right	v.	Conservative new right
classical liberalism	–	traditional conservatism
atomism	–	organicism
radicalism	–	traditionalism
libertarianism	–	authoritarianism
economic dynamism	–	social order
self-interest/enterprise	–	traditional values
equality of opportunity	–	natural hierarchy
minimal state	–	strong state
internationalism	–	insular nationalism
pro-globalization	–	anti-globalization

Nevertheless, it is difficult to view the new right as fully coherent in either ideological or political terms. Neoliberalism upholds values such as freedom, choice, rights and competition that are rooted in a conception of human nature that stresses robust individualism and self-reliance. Neoconservatism champions values such as authority, discipline, respect and duty that are rooted in a conception of human nature that stresses fragility, fallibility and social dependence. Politically, this tension is manifest in the tendency of neoliberalism to unleash

forces and pressures that run directly counter to the fondest hopes of neoconservatism. For example, the relentless dynamism of unregulated capitalism strains social cohesion and weakens the authority of established values and traditional institutions. Moreover, although neoliberals understand freedom in essentially economic terms, viewing it as freedom of choice in the market-place, it is very difficult to prevent the principle of individual responsibility being extended to moral and other matters. Finally, as markets are no respecters of national borders, consistent neoliberalism has globalizing and internationalist implications that serve to undermine the nation as a meaningful economic, political and cultural entity.

Conservatism in the twenty-first century

The late twentieth century appeared to provide fuel for conservative optimism if not triumphalism. Conservatism appears to have succeeded in overthrowing the 'pro-state' tendency that has characterized government throughout much of the twentieth century, especially since 1945, and in establishing an alternative 'pro-market' tendency. However, perhaps the major achievement of conservatism has been the vanquishing of its major rival, socialism. Parliamentary socialists, in states ranging from New Zealand and Australia to Spain, Sweden and the UK, have increasingly sought to maintain electoral credibility by embracing the values and philosophy of the market, accepting that there is no economically viable alternative to capitalism. More dramatically, the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and elsewhere produced, at least initially, a flowering of traditionalist political doctrines and free-market economics ones. What is more, conservatism's contribution to this process lay largely in its capacity to recreate itself as an ideological project. Distancing itself from its organicist, hierarchical and non-ideological instincts, conservatism, in the guise of the new right, aligned itself with market individualism and social authoritarianism. Although the 'heroic' phase of new right politics, associated with figures such as Thatcher and Reagan and the battle against the 'nanny state', may have passed and given way to a 'managerial' phase, this should not disguise the fact that market values have come to be accepted across the spectrum of conservative beliefs. Having exposed the twentieth-century 'socialist' mistakes of central planning and welfare capitalism, public policy in the twenty-first century looked set to be dominated by the 'new' conservative blend of the free market and the strong state. This is most clearly evident in the USA, where, particularly under George W. Bush, pro-corporate and anti-welfarist tendencies have been strengthened while the advent of global terrorism has produced an emphasis upon homeland security and a determination to build up military capacity.

However, conservatism is also confronted by a number of challenges. One of these is that the very collapse of socialism creates problems in itself. As the twentieth century progressed, conservatism increasingly defined itself through its antipathy towards state control, usually associated with the advance of socialism. Indeed, this may have been the real significance of the emergence of new right ideas and values. However, if conservatism has become a critique of central planning and economic management, what role will it have once these have disappeared? In other words, how can conservatism remain relevant in a post-socialist age? A further problem stems from the long-term economic viability of the free-market philosophy. Faith in the free market has been historically and culturally limited. Enthusiasm for unregulated capitalism has been a largely Anglo-American phenomenon that peaked during the nineteenth century in association with classical liberalism, and was revived in the late twentieth century in the form of

the new right. 'Rolling back the state' in economic life may sharpen incentives, intensify competition and promote entrepreneurialism, but sooner or later the disadvantages become apparent, notably short-termism, low investment, widening inequality and social exclusion. Just as liberals eventually came to recognize that the free market is an economic dead end, conservatives in the twenty-first century may have to learn the same lesson. The USA's continued faith in market economics may, in this sense, simply be an example of American exceptionalism.

Furthermore, conservatism has, at best, an ambivalent relationship with postmodernity. On the one hand, there is more than an echo of traditional conservative scepticism in the postmodernist rejection of the Enlightenment project. Both traditional conservatism and postmodernism (see p. 323) hold that truth is essentially partial and local. Moreover, as Giddens (see p. 151) has argued, as risk and uncertainty increase, the attraction of 'philosophic conservatism', viewed as a philosophy of protection, conservation and solidarity, becomes greater. On the other hand, the advent of late modernity or postmodernity threatens to undermine the very basis of traditional or organic conservatism. The increasing complexity of modern society confronts individuals with ever wider choices and opportunities and makes it increasingly difficult to identify, still less defend, 'established' values or a 'common' culture. Globalization also contributes to this process of 'de-traditionalization' by intensifying social flux and diluting any sense of national identity. Indeed, it can be argued that conservatism, in the form of the liberal new right, has in this sense powerfully contributed to conservatism's undoing. The neoliberal utopia is, after all, a society that is strictly individualist and endlessly dynamic.

However, despite the political and economic drawbacks of free-market neoliberalism, conservatives may find that it is more difficult to ditch new right ideas than it was to embrace them in the first place. While the adoption of new right principles may have been essentially a pragmatic response to declining conservative electoral and political fortunes, they brought with them a distinctively unconservative passion for principle and infected conservatism with the virus of ideological conviction. With this inevitably comes greater intellectual rigidity. Conservatives, in other words, may no longer 'travel light' in ideological terms. The danger is that whereas in the past conservatism encountered little internal resistance to its attempts to recreate itself as a viable ideological project, this may not be the case in the future.

Further reading

Adonis, A. and Hames, T. (eds) A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher–Reagan Decade in Perspective (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). A series of articles that explores the nature, extent and legacy of shifts within conservatism during the 1980s.

Eatwell, R. and N. O'Sullivan (eds), The Nature of the Right: European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789 (London: Pinter, 1989). An authoritative and thoughtful collection of essays on approaches to right-wing thought and the variety of conservative and rightist traditions.

Gamble, A., The Free Economy and the Strong State (London: Macmillan, 1988). An influential examination of the new right project that focuses specifically on Thatcherism in Britain.

Gray, J. and Willetts, D., Is Conservatism Dead? (London: Profile Books, 1997). A short and accessible account of both sides of the debate about the future of conservatism.

Honderich, T., Conservatism (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991). A distinctive and rigorously unsympathetic account of conservative thought; closely argued and interesting.

O'Sullivan, N., Conservatism (London: Dent; New York: St Martin's, 1976). A classic account of conservatism that lays particular stress upon its character as a ‘philosophy of imperfection’.

Scruton, R., The Meaning of Conservatism, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001). A stylish and openly sympathetic study that develops its own view of the conservative tradition.