Britain's Conservative Right since 1945

Traditional Toryism in a Cold Climate

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Foreword

This is an excellent and wide-ranging book—excellent, at least in part, because it is so wide-ranging.

Anyone who fondly imagines that the political Right is somehow synonymous with a Thatcherite attachment to the unfettered workings of the free market will soon be disabused by Dr. Kevin Hickson's patient unravelling of the many different strands of conservative right-wing thought. Indeed, although there was much that was genuinely conservative about Thatcherism—notably, its patriotism and moral traditionalism—circumstances dictated that it would be seen, above all, as the resurrection of nineteenth-century liberalism.

Hickson's discussion in some ways resembles an archaeological dig. For he has unearthed specimens of conservative ideology (including my own) which, without his work of excavation, would perhaps not have come to light after their initial, fleeting appearance. Still, if in the aftermath of Brexit, Conservatives are ever again to adopt a coherent public philosophy, they may find it profitable to sift through the material here presented in such a thoroughly rigorous, academic fashion. If nothing else, Hickson's book should remind us all that there is (or at any rate should be) more to Conservatism than keeping the CBI happy or appearing nice rather than nasty.

Among the many interesting questions arising from the book is this: what distinguishes the Conservative Right from your average or mainstream Conservative politician, who incidentally lives in terror of being

labelled right-wing for fear he will be shunned by polite society as well as, in all likelihood, his own party.

Actually, without the Conservative Right to nourish it, the Conservative Party would have precious little to offer beyond a thin gruel of bromides: the gospel of getting on, aka (materialist) aspiration; equality of opportunity; and, of course, economic liberalism extending, more and more these days, to social liberalism, with both doctrines enshrining freedom of choice as their most sacred dogma.

To liberal-minded conservatives, then, society is a contract between freely consenting, self-interested individuals who, if left more or less to themselves, will (so it is claimed) produce a natural harmony. Granted, a minimal legal framework, buttressed by a 'night-watchman state', are both needed to prevent people harming one another (as John Stuart Mill famously said); but otherwise laissez-faire is the best policy.

It is little wonder that those Conservative politicians who subscribe to this self-denying ordinance seldom have anything of consequence to say. They don't really believe in politics. Indeed, if truth be told, they have no political vocation. For them, all too often, politics collapses into economics. The business of politics is, well, business.

To compound this low view of government, many Conservatives, whether explicitly or not, endorse a state which is neutral towards rival conceptions of the good life, all of which are deemed to deserve equal respect. Judgementalism is the one sin decent, godless folk, and their representatives, cannot abide. Legislators must not permit their private ethical concerns to affect their public policies, which should be addressed purely to the satisfaction of people's desires and the protection of their interests, whatever these happen to be.

The Conservative Right takes an altogether less sanguine view of the anything goes, all lifestyles are equal, culture of liberal modernity. And for this reason, it takes a more elevated—high Tory, one might say—view of government and what it can or should do. The 'what Lola wants, Lola gets' credo may be appropriate for the marketplace where the consumer's sovereign wants cannot be gainsaid. But the notion is destructive of what Edmund Burke called the 'little platoons' of society, namely those intermediary institutions—intermediary, that is, between the individual and the state—which are not governed, wholly or at all, by the promptings of self-interest.

Of these, the most important is the family. The experience of the last fifty years or more (confirmed by countless pieces of research) has taught

that when this institution disintegrates, the effects, particularly on children—and by extension, on society—are dire: educational under-attainment, increasing resort to drink and drugs, unemployment and crime. Modernising Conservatives (David Cameron's name springs to mind) like to say they are 'relaxed' about the different forms families now take, thereby revealing a lazy acquiescence in the idea that whatever the process of change brings is necessarily beneficent or progressive.

The failure of conservative politicians and policy-makers to edit or judge social change is apparent in other areas, for example in the pathetic reluctance to enforce our drug laws on the grounds (not readily admitted) that the demand for illegal substances is such that decriminalisation is an inevitable consequence. Similarly, a woman's 'right to choose' seems so in tune with the prevailing ethos of consumerism that most Conservatives dare not even listen to arguments about lowering the time limits at which abortions should take place.

Needless to say, the Conservative Right is far from hostile to a market economy. But it does not believe in a market society, in which man as a moral and ethical creature is eclipsed by economic man. Citizens are not simply consumers and customers. How could they be when by definition privatised individuals are not citizens? Hollowed out by free-market dogmatists as they may have been in recent years, many institutions—one thinks especially of those belonging to the legal and medical professions—nonetheless resist to this day crass attempts to turn them into businesses. Sadly, it seems to be too late for the Universities.

Hickson has done his readers a valuable service in reminding them of conservative voices which have continued to echo Burke in asserting that:

> The state ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico, or tobacco, or some such low concern... It is to be looked upon with other reverence, because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are yet to be born.

Child Okeford, UK — Ian Crowther
June 2019

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A special word of thanks must go to Ian Crowther for writing the Foreword. Ian has made a sustained, distinctive and thoughtful contribution to the political thought of the Conservative Right, firstly as a regular contributor to *Monday World* and then as Literary Editor of *The Salisbury Review* for a number of years.

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I wish to put on record my appreciation to family and friends. Matt Beech and Jasper Miles, in particular, had to hear more about my

thinking on the Conservative Right than they ever would have wished and there were times when I should have been more attentive to the needs of my family when I was instead locked in my study.

Wistaston Dr. Kevin Hickson
July 2019

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This is a study of the Conservative Right since 1945: its major ideas, policy positions, organisations and personalities. It is written in the immediate context of Brexit, where the Conservative Right has gained greater significance. With the Government lacking a majority, the influence of factions within the Conservative Party increases. The need for such a study is therefore most timely. With the Conservative Right in a position of ascendance, it is necessary to trace its development historically. In order to do this, the study makes use of relevant archives and extensive interviews with key figures associated with the Conservative Right. It provides a distinctive and rigorous academic study of the Conservative Right, while adding to a growing body of literature which takes ideas and ideology importantly when studying the Conservative Party.[1]

The aim is to describe, to analyse and to evaluate. The book is not a polemic, but an academic study of a distinctive tradition, one which has arguably received insufficient scholarly attention.[2] It follows a hermeneutical methodology, seeking to recover the meaning of concepts, arguments and ideas in their historical context. Rather than following a chronological framework, the book instead approaches the Conservative Right in a thematic way, examining the key ideas within its political thought. A thematic, rather than chronological, framework allows for a clearer understanding of the Conservative Right. The ideas, concepts and issues which are held to be core to the political thought of the Conservative Right since 1945 are: Empire, immigration, Europe, the constitution, the Union, political economy, welfare and social morality.

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The study begins in 1945 for the obvious reason that it marks a watershed moment in British politics with the end of the Second World War and the election of the first majority Labour Government which embarked on a programme of what—by British standards at least—can be regarded as a radical reforming agenda. These reforms—social and economic—led to a new policy consensus up until the 1970s and those on the Right of the Conservative Party were to argue that mounting social and economic problems of that era were the direct consequence of the post-1945 settlement. It was also apparent that the United Kingdom had come out of the War weakened though victorious against the threat of Nazism and Fascism. However, Britain was to continue its decline after 1945—both relatively in terms of its economy and absolutely as a geopolitical power. The British Empire ceased to exist as the majority of its overseas territories were granted independence. The emerging Commonwealth led to dilemmas over how to handle rising non-white immigration. The emergence of European integration also posed a major challenge to the British system of government. Moreover, there were a number of challenges to the British constitution throughout this period, notably political violence in Northern Ireland and the rise of nationalism in Scotland and in Wales. The stresses and strains within the old order were apparent to those who wished to see it, and those who claimed to see it most clearly were the Conservative Right who saw themselves as not only the keepers of the Conservative conscience but also as defenders of the nation state.

The Ideology of the Conservative Right

Definition, if not quite everything in scholarly writing, is certainly of fundamental importance. Hence, we need to define what is meant by Conservative Right much more precisely.

One way of doing this is through the identification of core values and principles of an ideology. Inevitably, such an exercise is somewhat arbitrary and always open to challenge. The book will demonstrate that the set of core values identified here are recurring themes within the Conservative Right historically and contemporaneously. Another issue that needs to be discussed is whether it is possible to identify a single tradition we can term the Conservative Right or whether there are in fact multiple traditions, each underpinned by different value judgements and relevant at different times and for different reasons.

A key distinction here is between Conservatism and conservatism. While the latter concerns a more general tendency or disposition to resist change and preserve the familiar or could be understood as a wider tradition of philosophy, the former is concerned with the ideas and practices of the Conservative Party. The two may be interlinked, indeed it is one argument of this book that the traditional Conservative Right is the point at which the two most clearly intersect, but they can be—and usually are—distinct entities. The extent to which the Conservative Party is genuinely conservative can, and has been, questioned throughout the party's history. The party's desire to remain a credible electoral force has often seen it adopt the colours of its ideological (and sometimes) party rivals. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a dispute erupted within the party between opponents and supporters of Margaret Thatcher, with both sides claiming to be 'genuinely' conservative. On the pro-Thatcher side of the debate, Keith Joseph argued that he always thought he was a conservative but realised at the fall of the Heath Government in 1974 that he was not.[3] By this he meant he had been insufficiently free market. However, among the opponents of Thatcher and the rapidly emerging 'Thatcherism', Ian Gilmour spoke for them when he said that the free market had nothing to do with conservatism.[4] A third possible interpretation—one with which this book generally concurs—is that neither were conservative, but rather liberal in essence. Joseph was liberal in an economic sense, while Gilmour was liberal in a social and cultural sense.[5]

This dispute between Gilmour and Joseph leads on to the need to distinguish the terms Right and Left. Though dating back to the French Revolution, the usefulness of the terms has been disputed for almost as long. While the original use of the terms referred to those who sought to defend the status quo (Right) from those who sought radical change (Left), the terms have not always meant this. Indeed, in the era of Thatcherism, the terms appear to have been upended with the Right seeking radical change and the Left often defending the status quo. Indeed, as this study will show, there were those on the Right who also critiqued Thatcherism for its pace and extent of reform. It is now typical to argue that the terms should be rejected completely. However, this study uses the term for two reasons. Firstly, that many of the figures we examine self-identified as being on the Right. In the extensive interviews conducted for this study, few objected to being deemed to be on the Right of the political spectrum or the Right of the Conservative Party. Secondly, the terms Left and Right are used as convenient shorthand

labels in political conversation and so could be reasonably considered to have meaning to those participating in the conversation.

This, in turn, leads on to a further distinction. Thatcherism was synonymous with the New Right. However, for there to be a New Right there also has to be an 'Old Right'. While the former has been studied at considerable length, this study seeks to discover more precisely what the 'Old Right' was and how it both related to and differed from the New Right. The distinction is arbitrary to the extent that some individuals and organisations explored in this volume moved, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, from the Old to the New Right. The New Right should not be seen as a distinct ideological position. Instead there was some evolution from the Old Right to the New Right due to changing political context, in particular growing concerns over the decline of the British economy which led some to embrace the then fashionable idea of economic liberalism. Some went along with more conviction, others believed that there was really no alternative whereas some opposed the free-market emphasis which they believed was destructive of the traditions they were seeking to uphold.

It is also necessary to distinguish the Conservative Right from the One Nation tradition. The Conservative Right would distinguish itself from the moderate, or One Nation, wing of the Conservative Party which it would see as essentially liberal in character. Whereas the moderate wing would be willing to make the compromises necessary to get into power, the Right would see itself as defending the conscience of the party. For this reason the Conservative Right is frequently antagonistic towards currents in society and critical of the Conservative Party for being too willing to follow those currents.

Throughout the book we refer to the terms Tory, Toryism and Traditional Toryism. The term is related to but not synonymous with Conservatism. Enoch Powell said that he was born a Tory and would die a Tory.[6] John Biggs-Davison said that Toryism was something which was unique to the English: it 'is not a name for foreign intimation… Toryism is not for export'.[7] Although they disagreed over several issues as this book will explore, these two politicians were central to the development of the Conservative Right. For Biggs-Davison there were two strands of the Conservative Right the traditional which he represented and the popular, which was articulated by Powell.[8] Norton and Aughey distinguish between Whig and Tory strands of Conservatism. While the former was rationalistic, the latter was anti-rational, being concerned with instincts

rather than programmes.[9] The theme of Traditional Toryism is then explored by Aughey,[10] in general, and by the current author in terms of several of its key thinkers in particular.[11]

Several analysts of the Conservative Party, especially those who may be deemed more sympathetic to its Right wing would deny that the Party is ideological, or indeed that ideology matters. The influential Tory historian Maurice Cowling formulated a historical approach which treated ideas as if they were largely unimportant.[12] Instead, in the sphere of what he called 'high politics' what mattered was the pursuit of power by individual politicians within the political elite. Outcomes of such things as the struggle to extend the franchise to sections of the male working class in the 1860s, the rise of the Labour Party in the years after the First World War and the events which led up to the outbreak of World War Two can all be interpreted in this way. Building on this approach, Jim Bulpitt argued that ideas were irrelevant to serious politicians as they were concerned with statecraft, the pursuit and exercise of power.[13] Hence, to look for an ideology of the Conservative Right would be foolhardy from this perspective. However, it is possible to identify certain core ideas or recurring themes in the historical evolution of the Conservative Party more generally and its right-wing in particular.

Michael Freeden describes political ideologies as clusters of social concepts, each interpreted in different ways and consistently being reformulated.[14] He identifies core, adjacent and peripheral values. The core values are at the essence of any ideology, for instance freedom is essential to liberalism and equality to socialism. However, these concepts are essentially contested. They are open to a range of possible interpretations. Liberty can be described as either positive (freedom to) or negative (freedom from); equality as either outcome or opportunity. Adjacent values are those which have a semi-permanence and peripheral concepts are those which come and go over time as issues ebb and flow. Applying this model to conservatism (I deliberately use lower case here to signify a wider philosophical position) we could identify certain core values without the presence of which it would be possible to argue that an ideology is not conservative. Such concepts would include tradition, authority, social order and nationhood. Each of these concepts is itself contested so that there emerge different strands of conservatism. So too in the Conservative Party. To give two examples. Social order is normally interpreted by the Party's right-wing as concerned with the defence of traditional (Christian) morality and the rule of law. However, while not

necessarily opposing those things, more progressive (or One Nation) Conservatives would normally place more emphasis on social order as the preservation of social unity through measures designed to alleviate class antagonisms. Similarly, when we look at the concept of the nation, more right-wing elements within the Conservative Party would tend to see their country as being under threat from internal and external challenges. In contrast, One Nation Conservatives have often defined nationhood as something which is best expressed and enhanced through international cooperation. For instance, that membership of the European Union extends, rather than limits, national sovereignty.

Hence we can identify certain interpretations of key concepts which are central to any understanding of the Conservative Right. These concepts, or values, can be simply listed as: a pessimistic view of human nature, preservation of social order, promotion of the authority of the state, nationalism and inequality. As will be discussed in the next section listing of values for any ideology is problematic since there will always be tensions within any given ideological tradition. Ideologies are evolving traditions of thought and practice. However, we will list them here and enter qualifications later. These views are held instinctively by those on the Conservative Right. As Jonathan Aitken put it, 'a true conservative feels things from the heart and doesn't intellectually rationalise them'.[15]

Pessimism

Most ideologies would tend to start with a conception of human nature. For liberals and for most socialists, human nature is best understood in positive terms. Human beings, following Enlightenment philosophy, are imbued with reason and rationality. They should therefore be free to pursue their own version of the good. Social reform is only justified where existing structures are deemed to corrupt 'true' human nature. In contrast, traditional conservatism held to a much more pessimistic view of human nature. As John Hayes put it, 'we appreciate that man is fallen, frail and faulted'.[16] Hayes argues that the only option, therefore, is to 'make the best of an imperfect world'.[17] Normally, the justification for this came from Scripture, with the act of original sin being committed in the Garden of Eden. Since we are all descended from Adam and Eve, as the first humans, then we all inherited that sin. For some, Biblical reference was explicit. For John Biggs-Davison: 'The Tory believes in the doctrine of original sin… His opinion of human nature and human

beings is humbler and more cautious than that of the liberal or socialist'.[18] Lord Blake warned that optimistic social reformers were bound to be disappointed since, 'cruel and evil people exist at all times in all forms of society'.[19] For others they derived their sense of pessimism from empirical observation, if human beings are rational then why should there be so much sin in the world?

Hence philosophic conservatives would tend to a much more negative view of human nature. Rather than seeing the extension of human freedom as inherently a good thing, therefore, greater emphasis was placed on the need for social order and respect for established tradition, custom and practice. Lord Sudeley argued that, 'our nature is so corrupt that laws are necessary to impose the code of conduct which rests a little above ourselves'.[20] The conservative view of human nature leads traditionalists on to emphasising responsibilities rather than rights. According to Alan Smith, writing in a Monday Club pamphlet at the end of the 'permissive' 1960s, 'man is an individual but an individual with duties as well as rights'.[21] It was this focus on duties which distinguished conservatism from its major ideological rivals liberalism and socialism.

One example of this was the Seventeenth Century philosopher Thomas Hobbes who argued that human beings were driven by selfish instincts who would inevitably conflict with other individuals pursuing their self interest. In a state of nature—that is a social condition without the existence of a sovereign power to uphold the rule of law—life of man would be 'poor, nasty, solitary, brutish and short'.[22] Individuals, realising that the only way they could live in peace and security would forgo their unlimited freedom by signing it away in the form of a social contract to a sovereign power, which would be charged with the sole responsibility of maintaining the social order.

In contrast to Hobbes' reliance on the theoretical construct of a social contract, Edmund Burke emphasised the need for individuals to respect tradition.[23] The idea that individuals chose which polity they belonged to was nonsense since people were born into a pre-existing social order. They had no right other than to plead allegiance to its rule over them. The established political system had evolved over centuries and had developed its own character over time. Individuals could not possibly know more than the accumulated wisdom of tradition and so any attempt to overthrow it, as was happening in France at the time he wrote, would be bound to end in tyranny.

At the end of the Nineteenth Century, Lord Salisbury served as Prime Minister. His premiership is one of the longest in British history yet is known for having few striking achievements. As Andrew Roberts says, it is barely remembered at all.[24] Modern governments would seek to find their place in history, a lasting legacy, some major act of social change for which they would be remembered. Salisbury, in contrast, believed that the role of government was to do very little other than to preserve social order and protect the nation from external enemies. Although he believed that certain forces at work at the time he was alive would lead to social disintegration there was nothing one could ultimately do to stop them. The wise statesman would delay. Government would need to be ever vigilant but ultimately was bound to fail. The frailties of human nature would ensure that all that was good in society would decay.[25] The traditionalist Conservative therefore would resist change, and would only see it as justified where it is designed to avert more radical reform by remedying a recognised and accepted defect in the present arrangement of things.

The primary aim of the Conservative statesman should therefore be to maintain the status quo, only allowing limited change where necessary. As Kenneth Pickthorn stated, 'a Conservative is a man who believes that in politics the onus of proof is on the proposer of change, that the umpire when in doubt should give it for the batsman'.[26] Such a bias towards limited change was based on a recognition of the frailties of the human intellect. As Gillian Peele put it: 'for the Conservative, ordinary men and women and their imperfect and perhaps regrettable wants and emotions have to be seen as the starting-point of political debate and not as the raw material from which a new and radically different sort of society might be moulded'.[27] Whereas the 'progressive' reformer would welcome radical change where it furthered their principles, the conservative would regard this as the arrogant dismissal of accumulated wisdom. In place of progress, conservatives recognised that all that may be achieved is to go 'round and round very much on the same spot'.[28] As the current Lord Salisbury put it, 'proper Tories don't really believe in –isms because they don't really believe in the perfectibility of man and if you don't believe in the perfectibility of man you know that things are going to go wrong'.[29]

Although followers of the Victorian Salisbury would maintain he was correct they would accept that a political party in the democratic era would be hard pressed to echo his pessimism publicly. A party exclaiming

at a General Election that it could ultimately not do anything to halt the forces of decay would not attract much support. Therefore, even the most pessimistic of Tories have been keen to demonstrate their support for any Conservative Leader they think capable of fighting the good fight, even if they ultimately thought they would lose the battle against the forces of 'progress'.[30]

However, to leave this discussion of the Tory view of human nature there would be mistaken. Traditional Conservatives have also stressed the virtues of human character.[31] Michael Oakeshott talked of the individual as someone possessing character, a character of self-help and individual responsibility. In contrast, there was the individual manqué, a person who lacked the essential characteristics of the upright individual.[32] Although such people exist in any society they were particularly prevalent in Britain after the Second World War since the welfare state had created a culture of dependency. Margaret Thatcher stated that she wished to reverse this process and restore what she termed the Victorian values, or what one of her closest academic supporters termed, the vigorous virtues.[33] Hence, although humans would ultimately remain sinners—meaning that there will always be some level of social coercion—they were also capable of acting responsibly. Writing in 2005, Edward Leigh still believed that there was grounds for optimism.

> in poll after poll, the majority of the British show themselves…obstinately attached to common sense. They still believe, for the most part, in "small c" conservative values – law and order, patriotism, marriage, family, parental discipline, and so on.[34]

Lord Coleraine believed that authentic conservative philosophy combined both Tory and Whig elements in its understanding of the human condition. The Tory tradition recognised that human nature contained 'dark and frightening propensities', whereas the Whig appreciated that the individual is a 'uniquely valuable being'. The two strands were complimentary, holding each other in bounds.[35]

Such a view of human nature leads traditionalist Conservatives to adopt one of two positions. The first is the importance of experience in contrast to radicals, who stress the importance of youthful idealism and who embrace youth culture and counter culture. This was seen most vividly in the 1960s, but also frequently among those who argue for the

lowering of the voting age and other reforms designed to foster a greater sense of political activism in the young. In contrast, conservatives have argued that politics is a skilled activity requiring the application of judgement based on experience. Such arguments for the value of experience were also used to justify the refusal to extend the franchise to working-class men and to women. Peregrine Worsthorne was unashamedly elitist when he argues that this is the virtue of a political system based on aristocratic rule.[36]

However, another tendency within the Conservative Right has led it to embrace more populist arguments, trusting the instincts of the masses against the elites. Biggs-Davison thought it a virtue that the British people had 'been shrewdly resistant' to intellectuals.[37] Sir Cyril Osborne argued that the character of the people is to be found in the rural areas:

> Village life retains much of England's traditional virtues – self reliance and self respect, and a willingness to work… You country people have a natural gentility, dignity, and decency.[38]

In contrast, the metropolitan elites hold to a different set of values to the majority of the population. This has been seen most vividly in recent years in relation to Brexit, where the wishes of the electorate are deemed to be being thwarted by the elite. Michael Gove's comment that Britain no longer trusts experts can be seen in this context.[39] Writing in 1944, Christopher Hollis stated his belief that, 'there is no form of inequality more generally galling than the superiority over the average man claimed by the intellectual'.[40] Against the development of a professional political elite, charted by commentators such as Peter Oborne,[41] traditionalists prefer the well-intentioned amateur. Politics is ultimately about principles rather than facts, and the amateur is closer to the political instincts of the mass. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher captured the Tory mood when she spoke of 'another Britain which may not make the daily news (of) thoughtful people, oh, tantalisingly slow to act yet marvellously determined when they do'.[42] The values of liberals and socialists are alien to the instinctive positions of the mass of the population, for whom Tories claim to speak. William Cash stated that 'Conservatism is not anti-establishment for the sake of it, but should be willing to take it on when it is doing things which are not in the interests of the people I represent and not in the interests of the country at large'.[43]

Social Order

Following on from this conception of human nature, traditionalists would therefore argue that the central objective of public policy must be the preservation of social order. Moral order must be defended, for otherwise, as Ian Crowther puts it, 'people left to their own devices… are people left to their own vices'.[44] Throughout this study we will see that the Conservative Right placed great emphasis on the preservation of the rule of law. To cite Lord Salisbury again, the state needed not only to possess strong coercive powers but to demonstrate them. Hence, he believed that it was wrong to abolish public executions in England since this sent out the clearest symbol of all regarding the duties the citizen had to follow the laws of the land. A particular strength of the English (not British) system of law according to Roger Scruton is the evolutionary nature of judge-made law in the form of Common Law, which is a distinctly English tradition. However, the failure of the English themselves to recognise this has placed it in jeopardy.[45]

Each generation of the Conservative Right has sought to dismiss claims by those of more 'progressive' opinions that law and order needed humane reform. According to Biggs-Davison, liberals neglected the importance of individual responsibility: 'men can be made better, the "progressives" insist by Act of Parliament. Nor is man wholly responsible or culpable. He is the product of his environment and that can be transformed'.[46] This approach dehumanises by reducing, if not eliminating the importance of punishment. For Scruton, punishment concerns retaliation for breaking the law. Rehabilitation fails to deal with an evil which has been perpetrated. 'It is a retribution, an institutionalised revenge, the desert of the criminal as much as the right of his victim'.[47] We see this in the attempts to refute arguments in favour of abolition of the death penalty in the 1960s, of corporal punishment in schools, in prison reform and in the apparent 'softness' of rehabilitation schemes. It is not that traditionalists seek to dismiss the role of rehabilitation in penal policy, since what would be the point of a criminal law which did not lead to reduced rates of recidivism? However, they would argue that a policy which prioritises rehabilitation over all else is incorrect since it negates the victim. Instead, penal policy should have a strong deterrent effect—like Lord Salisbury's defence of public executions—and prioritise punishment of wrongdoers.

Social conservatives have been repeatedly concerned about what they see as the erosion of traditional moral precepts, again drawing on their own interpretation of the Bible. This reached its peak in the 1960s with the passing of so-called 'permissive' legislation including abolition of the death penalty, relaxation of divorce law, legalisation of homosexuality and abortion, and loosening laws on censorship. Advocates of such reforms would argue that these measures were 'civilising'. However, traditionalist critics argued that they were giving licence to immoral acts and storing up future social problems. By the 1970s and 1980s, the Conservative Right believed that their warnings of the previous decade were coming true. Writing in 1982 John Heydon Stokes argued that progress had been exclusively material, with 'a marked rise in living standards and an appalling fall in moral standards'.[48] Whether one was the cause of the other, however, was largely ignored in these commentaries. The matter split the conservative right in the 1980s, with defenders of Thatcherism, such as Shirley Letwin, arguing that Thatcher was restoring the 'vigorous virtues' whereas dissenters such as Peregrine Worsthorne believed that all she was doing was fuelling bourgeois materialism.[49] More recently, socially conservative commentators have argued that further social liberalisation and political correctness have only exacerbated such issues. Despite 18 years of Conservative Government in the intervening period, Hayes sounded a similar note to earlier warnings when he said that, 'the liberal orthodoxy is failing Britain'.[50] For some, the Thatcher years had not really been socially conservative at all.[51] Indeed, although social conservatism is not limited to the right of the Conservative Party it is certainly something which exercises the Conservative Right including—as we will see later in the book—criticising the Conservative Party itself for being too influenced by social liberalism.

Authority and Sovereignty

The Conservative Right would also uphold the virtues of a strong but limited state, possessing both authority and sovereignty.

As T. E. Utley has argued, the primary responsibility of the state is the defence of the nation and the preservation of social order.[52] This is the essence of political activity, contrary to more idealised notions of the political. It must therefore be imbued with significant powers including a monopoly of legitimate coercive power. It must also be able to apply this

power to all parts of the territory which it governs. As Lord Salisbury said, the role of the government is like that of the policeman. If there were no criminals there would be no need for the policeman. Similarly, if there were no threats to the social order there would be no need for the government. Utley argued in the period after 1945 that government had lost sight of this essential function and had started to develop other interests which at the same time increased the powers of the state but also weakened it as its attention was diverted from its core functions.[53] Similarly, Oakeshott argued that the British state had moved decisively away from being a 'civil association' concerned with upholding the rule of law towards an 'enterprise association' which had a project within which individuals ceased to be free actors and instead became resources for the attainment of some specific purpose.[54] Such projects included social justice and higher rates of economic growth. The post-1945 policy settlement was a clear instance of an enterprise association. Supporters and detractors of Thatcherism would argue over whether her governments marked a new type of enterprise association or a return to a pre-1945 era of civil association.

For traditionalists, society is comprised of several institutions which provide sources of authority. These include the church and the family. Unfortunately, they maintain, these institutions have been consistently undermined. Church attendance was high in Victorian and Edwardian Britain, but declined from the end of the First World War onwards. This decline has become sharper in more recent years. Factors such as the spread of secular humanism and of other faiths as Britain became more multicultural are significant, but so too have been the growth of liberalism within the churches and especially the Established Church. For some, a key aim is the need to show reverence for the traditional prayer book.[55] While the Church of England remains important to some such as Roger Scruton,[56] precisely because it is the established church and imbued with English cultural influences, others have moved to either the Catholic faith or evangelical churches because they have remained less open to the forces of religious liberalism. The family, too, has been in decline due to the increased numbers of children born out of wedlock and changes to the law which make divorce and abortion easier. Hence, Edward Leigh argues that 'traditional sources of authority, including religion and the family, have been challenged by liberal ideas that assert the primacy of individual choice in all political considerations'.[57] Once again,