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## The Post-Liberal Climate and the Tory Faith

### THE POST-LIBERAL CLIMATE

In a previous essay I have described the ancient theory of a political “dialectic” between liberals and conservatives, and explained what it tells us about conservative theory and practice, especially where the intergenerational transmission of institutional liberties is concerned.<sup>1</sup> But some political theorists and historians have also sought to describe a dialectic *within* the conservative tradition, and in the British Conservative party in particular. It seems to me that, if there is such a thing, then it could be useful for Conservatives today to understand more about this dialectic among them, especially if they want to adapt successfully to the apparent emergence of a “post-liberal” popular political climate. I am supposing here that the “post-liberal turn” is not merely a new name for conservatism or a particular school of conservative political thought, but a broader condition within which all political parties must increasingly operate. The popular turn against economic (“neo”) liberalism is well documented, especially since the Great Recession. But there are two other “realms” besides the economic – the governmental and the cultural – in which, according to Michael Lind, the “technocratic neoliberal elite”, as he calls it, has also been winning the “new class war” of the last few decades.<sup>2</sup> And it is against the liberal ideological assumptions of that elite, Lind thinks, that there is now an ongoing counter-revolution from below. For Lind, the native and mostly white working class of North America and Western Europe, having been excluded from power in all three realms, and being pressured from below by cheap immigrant labour

<sup>1</sup> FEAR 2020: 197–211.

<sup>2</sup> LIND 2020: xi.

undercutting wages, now turns to “populists” to defend its interests, since no established political party any longer seems willing. “Post-liberalism”, then, denotes the rejection, chiefly among native working classes, of the perceived hegemony of liberal dogma in all three realms: economics, government and culture. Is this fanciful? And, if not, does it apply to the UK?

### THE FUTURE OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY: SHORT- AND LONG-TERM CHALLENGES

Recent research by Tim Bale and others has shown that the economic preferences of those who switched their electoral support from Labour in 2015 to the Conservatives in 2017 are well to the left of Conservative MPs, while their social and cultural preferences are well to the right of them. These switchers are even, on average, to the right of Conservative party members.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the rejection of Corbynite Labour in 2019 owed to the cultural liberalism and technocratic internationalism exposed by the party’s positioning on Brexit. So while the Overton window of the university-educated “managerial–professional overclass minority” is more narrowly liberal,<sup>4</sup> the political centre ground among Britain’s working-class voters is elsewhere: more interventionist in economics, and more conservative on social and cultural issues.<sup>5</sup> The Conservatives successfully shifted towards that ground in 2017 and 2019. But this has left the party with a difficult challenge at the next election: to sustain support in both of the types of constituency in which it has recently been successful. First, it must still hold those liberal–conservative constituencies in the South of England in which key voters want fiscal prudence and a *laissez faire* attitude to personal and cultural matters, but who could easily switch to the Liberal Democrats. But second, the party must also maintain its support in Labour’s

<sup>3</sup> BALE et al. 2020: 13.

<sup>4</sup> LIND 2020: 72–73.

<sup>5</sup> For a recent and comprehensive discussion of the electoral prospects of this combination of preferences, see PITT 2021: 267–291.

former “Red Wall” in the Midlands and North of England and Wales, where key voters speak with little regard for the linguistic etiquette of political correctness, expect to be “levelled up” with generous state funding, and will switch back to Labour if they do not get it. The Conservative party must not be triumphalist, then, about having demolished the Red Wall. It can sustain some existing support there where the optics of Britishness and patriotism are in play, but the situation is still dangerous, because on substantive policy the party could easily lose support among both constituencies simultaneously. Labour can be expected to leak a certain amount of social and cultural progressivism, and what Eric Kaufmann calls “asymmetrical multiculturalism”. But the Conservatives cannot rely on voters rejecting Labour’s spending promises as they did in 2019. The “magic money tree” reproach has lost its power in view of the money that the Conservatives themselves found, during the Covid-19 panic, for the NHS, vaccines and business bailouts. Keeping Labour and the SNP out of office will require the Conservatives to be able to point to a material record of “levelling up” and “building back better”.

#### THE TWO FACES OF LIBERALISM

What Britain’s “post-liberal” voters want may seem irreconcilable with the basic principles of the modern Conservative party: interventionism (not liberalism) in economics, conservatism (not liberalism) on social and cultural issues. But the Conservative party has been most successful when it has recognised itself as a coalition and *concordia discors*,<sup>6</sup> and when personnel on one side of that coalition have recognised the benefit of lending the initiative to the other side for some specific purpose.

It has of course long been recognised that the Conservative party is not uniform doctrinally. At any time it has had within its ranks Whigs, Tories, protectionists and free marketeers, National Liberals, traditionalists, modernisers,

<sup>6</sup> OAKESHOTT 1996: 30.

individualists, collectivists, unionists, imperialists, Eurosceptics and Europhiles, and so on: factions or traditions with differing emphases. But beneath all this contingent variety, there have always been *two* elemental forces operating in British conservative thought, practice and rhetoric.

In this, conservatism is very much like liberalism. The basic conceptual contradiction of liberalism has already been straightforwardly elucidated by John Gray. Although his *Two Faces of Liberalism* was written in the context of the multiculturalism debate – before the Great Recession, before the European migrant crisis and before Brexit – it explains very neatly the particular dilemmas that liberals have faced more recently: sex education in Muslim schools, cultural “cancellation”, the attempts of employers, big tech and even the police to silence non-believers in gender identity theory, etc. Such dilemmas arise because liberals seek both (1) the peaceful coexistence of people who are pursuing different ideals, goods and values in different ways of life – the search for the state as a *modus vivendi*; and (2) the rational consensus on the best way of life, the ideal form of life, for all mankind. From the point of view of the first “face”, liberal institutions are simply the means to a peaceful coexistence. But from the point of view of the second “face”, liberals see good institutions as “applications of universal principles” found by human reason, or as means to discovering them – whether those principles are egalitarian or libertarian.<sup>7</sup> The choice for liberals, then, is whether a) to tolerate in the civil order a plurality of incompatible values, some of which are illiberal; or b) to attempt to enforce the compatible system of liberal values thought to have been discovered by liberal political philosophy. For Gray, “[i]f the liberal project is to be renewed, the ambiguity that has haunted it from its origins must be resolved. The idea of toleration as a means to a universal consensus on values must be given up, with the adoption instead of a project of *modus vivendi* among ways of life animated by permanently divergent values”.<sup>8</sup>

Though conservatism also has two “faces”, conservatives do not face exactly the same contradiction that liberals do, primarily because they have always

<sup>7</sup> GRAY 2000: 3, 17, 30.

<sup>8</sup> GRAY 2000: 25.

agreed that the rationalistic search for a consensus on the ideal way of life is folly: they already reject the liberal enlightenment fundamentalism of positivism, and already seek to establish empirical peaceful settlements between persons and groups in conflict, and thereafter to maintain that settlement prudently. Conservatives can agree to tolerate a socially deviant way of living that is not contrary to law or threatening to a concrete social-constitutional order, since it is to be expected that the fallen man will often make bad choices. However, conservatives thereby also agree that some people's life choices are not merely *different* choices, but are *poor* choices according to the *established standards*, and that such choices will prevent those people from living well. Those standards are not the product of abstract philosophising, so they can be treated as practically objective. The liberal relativising of all standards is thereby rejected: although between different nations conventions will vary, they are none the less *real*. Further, too many of such poor choices can eventually undermine the stability of the social-constitutional order, so there are grounds for intervening in people's lives, particularly when they are young and impressionable, and in ways that might make liberals uncomfortable.

### SCEPTICISM AND FAITH

But there is a formal identity between the two "faces" of liberalism and conservatism at a higher level of abstraction. Though Gray does not know it, he is really only narrating how the liberal tradition has refracted a deeper dialectic elucidated by Michael Oakeshott between "the politics of faith" and "the politics of scepticism". That dialectic, I am saying, is extremely insightful, and deserves better recognition than it currently gets.<sup>9</sup> But in the conservative tradition it plays out differently, and produces significant political advantages for conservatives which they have exploited before and can exploit again.

<sup>9</sup> *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* was written in the 1950s, but Oakeshott chose not to publish it, and it was discovered among his papers only after his death in 1990. See Tim Fuller's introduction to OAKESHOTT 1996: vii–ix.

The basic instinct of the “politics of scepticism”, Oakeshott explains, is to reduce the severity of conflict through adjustments to the system of rights, duties and means of redress, but not to spend any more of the community’s resources on this than is necessary.<sup>10</sup> Government must therefore be strong enough to do that job, but it is not omniscient, and it does not govern “minutely”. “Improvement” in the sceptical mode only means successful adjustments that lessen the severity of conflict. The political “sceptic” holds either (1) that we do not know enough about “right living” for governments to try to superintend it; or (2) that government would not be able to superintend “right living”, even if we did know. I have said “instinct”, but of course scepticism has also been worked up into explicit political theories of limited government and prudence, of the folly of perfectionism, and of the dangers of rushing into decisions, as well as of interfering where you can do more harm than good.<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, the politics of “faith”, as Oakeshott describes it, consists in the belief that man can be improved and perfected by his own efforts, chiefly through the perfection of his circumstances by government. Government is not merely an auxiliary agent of this pursuit: it is “the chief inspirer and sole director” of it. If “faith” here stands for a kind of religion, it is one founded upon the Pelagian heresy. We can recognise “faith” easily in the modernist

<sup>10</sup> OAKESHOTT 1996: 32–34.

<sup>11</sup> There is clearly overlap between what Oakeshott calls “the politics of scepticism” and what David Marquand calls “pluralism”: “Pluralists rejoice in variety. They are sceptical about theories – Marxism, economic liberalism, globalization – that presuppose uniformity. Pluralists like the clash and clang of argument; the monochrome sameness of the big battalions horrifies them; so does the sugary conformism of the politically correct. Instinctively, they are for the ‘little platoons’ that Edmund Burke saw as the nurseries of ‘public affections,’ and they want to protect them from the homogenising pressures of state, market and opinion. For them, a good society is a mosaic of vibrant smaller collectivities – trade unions, universities, business associations, local authorities, miners’ welfares, churches, mosques, Women’s Institutes, NGOs – each with its own identity, tradition, values and rituals. Thomas Hobbes, the philosopher of absolute sovereignty, famously compared such collectivities to ‘worms in the entrails of natural man.’ Pluralists see them as antibodies protecting the culture of democracy from infection.” Cited in LIND 2020: 84–85.

totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whether in its communist or nationalist versions – but also, Oakeshott thinks, in the gradualist socialism of post-war Western governments. The essence of “the politics of faith” is what, in *On Human Conduct*, he calls “enterprise association”: the state understood not as merely a *civil* association (that merely maintains the conditions of peaceful coexistence), but as a “society” that takes over from the mediaeval Church the achievement of a final goal for all men, the goal of something like spiritual improvement, the building of a New Jerusalem.

Oakeshott explains that, although the politics of “scepticism” and “faith” seem like incompatible programmes (and to a rationalist like Gray they *are* incompatible), they are better thought of as the “abstract principles” that are always incompletely realised, the “ideal extreme”<sup>12</sup> *poles* between which the practical activity of governing always fluctuates, and which gives politics its practically mixed and ambiguous character:<sup>13</sup> i.e. both, in *concordia discors*, the prudent keeping of the king’s peace *and* the attempt to “improve” the subjects. For conservatives, the poles of “faith” and “scepticism” are not a dichotomy: they too can be rebalanced according to the needs of circumstance. The respective theories of sceptical Whiggish prudence and faithful Tory activism are thus two baskets of ideological and rhetorical resources that can be plundered and deployed according to what the nation seems to want and need. It may be that there is still too much “faith” in British politics, and not enough “scepticism”, as Oakeshott thought. But the current post-liberal climate seems to consist in voters demanding *more* politics of faith, more “enterprise association”, not less. Liberal elites, say post-liberal theorists, have been too sceptical about government intervention in markets, too sceptical about intervening in the power relations of the workplace, and too sceptical about defending traditional Western beliefs about personal conduct and morality. *Modus vivendi* has worked for the middle class and for immigrant enclaves, but not for the native working class.

<sup>12</sup> OAKESHOTT 1996: 21–22.

<sup>13</sup> OAKESHOTT 1996: 17, 21.

Since the statist turn of the Liberal party in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “politics of faith” in Britain has been mostly understood in its egalitarian version.<sup>14</sup> The received political faith today is that government should engineer equality and should do so directly, by its own actions upon individuals and “communities”. The measure of progress is assumed to be proximity to absolute equality – which is why “progressive” taxation is that which punishes the rich and powerful for being so heretically unequal. The Conservative party has agreed terms with the egalitarian faith, which is why it has spent the post-Covid period facing the embarrassing practical question of what “levelling up” actually looks like when it comes down from heaven.

To some of us, the Conservatives’ accommodation of the politics of “faith” may sound like an abandonment of its sceptical tradition, and too much like appeasing socialism. But, first, the Conservative party is still the best bet for voters (and, importantly, donors) who still lean towards Whiggish scepticism about government ambitions, and who prefer mere stability and the prudent tactics of the limited style of politics. And we know that there is still significant scepticism of a sort in Britain (or at least in England) among both middle class and working-class voters: scepticism towards, for example, governments that try to spend their way out of their largest ever budget deficit; that squeeze their own people’s living standards in the futile attempt to offset China’s carbon emissions; that believe, despite shortages in vocations including nursing, that more school-leavers should go to university. On such questions, the other major parties are tied to the egalitarian faith, which obliges them to pursue social engineering, environmentalism and more interference with business rather than less. It is therefore vital for the future of the Conservative party that it maintain its sceptical tradition, its position as the most limited and prudent of the UK’s credible parties, and show its sceptical face to the relevant target voters and donors. For these voters, the party must appear the most prudent party of government, the most competent, the least idealistic, especially when the national debt as a percentage of GDP is so high.

<sup>14</sup> I use Oakeshott’s term “version”. See OAKESHOTT 1996: 22.



Here I am probably counselling the very strategy that Michael Lind fears: i.e. that the managerial liberal elite will “try to co-opt populist rebels by making minor concessions on immigration, trade, or domestic policy”.<sup>15</sup> But such minor concessions may well be part of the Conservative party’s best strategy. Whatever else it tries to do besides, the party has to remain more “insider” than “outsider”.<sup>16</sup> A radical rebalancing of the “new class war”, “sharing power with the working class majority” in every organisation or sector as Lind prefers, is dramatic and disruptive, and risks alienating a critical mass of the liberal managerial class. While this class is the bogeyman of the “post-liberal” turn, the Conservative party cannot afford to alienate them. The optimal strategy is to treat working-class voters as those whom they must win anew every election, and not as their new core electoral base.

I have so far discussed two authors, Gray and Oakeshott, who advocate more scepticism, in order (respectively) to accommodate the established fact of value pluralism in Western countries, and to rebalance the ship of state at a time when new generations seem to be pouring their faith into political utopianism. But precisely because of the simultaneous need to adapt to the “post-liberal” climate, and to retain its new voters of 2017 and 2019, it also needs to dust off its particular style of the “politics of faith”.

### THE TORY FAITH

There is, you see, also a distinctly Tory version of political faith which has been eclipsed in recent decades. We do not recognise it as such because it is anti-rationalist, inegalitarian and anti-modernist, and because in practice it is always significantly compromised by the Conservative tendency to scepticism. But it *is* activist and Pelagian all the same, and it does posit a “common good”. Therefore, when Conservatives believe themselves to have “improved” the state

<sup>15</sup> LIND 2020: xiv. On “populist demagogues”, see 79–88.

<sup>16</sup> LIND 2020: 1.

of Britain, rather than only to have maintained it, it is improvement towards the following extreme that they have in mind.

The Tory faith asserts: first, that government should not be neutral on the question of what it is to live rightly, as classical liberals have attempted to be. Government *should* prescribe particular practices and standards; and (second) that these are the same practices and standards that comprise a successful human life. So far, these features are held in common with the egalitarian faith that I have said is hegemonic today. But in addition this Tory faith holds that (third) what we need for living our best lives is not the discovery of rationalistic “enlightened” morals which are then to be concretely institutionalised in novel quasi-non-governmental organisations, but rather the old institutional order, the “ancient constitution”, that we have in the past realised less imperfectly. That order comprises political institutions, private institutions and the intermediary civic associations of civil society<sup>17</sup> – along with the historic virtues and standards of conduct upon which their success depends. These institutions, practices and standards are authoritative success criteria of right living, and they *are* the common good: the institutional order is sacred, and we owe it our loyalty. But (fourth) the personal advancement that our institutions and standards foster will never be realised equally. Although the institutional order and its standards are therefore to be asserted and defended unapologetically as common to all citizens, all citizens will not participate or thrive in it uniformly. There should be different routes through it. Some people, sometimes many people, will fail, or find a level lower than they think they deserve. This is not sceptical realism: it is the positive belief that there are natural differences between people, and that the institutional order should facilitate the meritocratic ranking of those differences in their outward manifestations. Fifth, the Tory faith holds that some will resent and reject the entire “system”, but that this does not delegitimise the institutions, or the civil order of the nation as a whole. There have always been “anti-political” people, and this is in fact how they find their correct place at the bottom of the order. Finally, the Tory faith holds (sixth)

<sup>17</sup> What I mean by “civic” institutions is roughly the same as Phillip Blond: i.e. “particular social formations with particular privileges and duties”. See BLOND 2010: 172.

that government is the creator and protector of this institutional order and its practices and standards against disruption from without and from within. Government will therefore be the agent of *restoration* when the order and its practices and standards have been degraded by opponents.

This Tory faith is what animated Victorian interest in reviving something of England's feudal order; it is prescriptive, traditionalistic, somewhat nationalistic and inegalitarian. It is liberal in the sense that it prizes liberties for individuals, but illiberal in that it rejects libertinism and licentiousness and favours the dutiful restraint effected by established institutions and Christian morality. It is also recognisable in many of the groups whose fortunes Kevin Hickson has traced in *Britain's Conservative Right since 1945*.<sup>18</sup>

For most members of the House of Commons, including most on the Conservative benches, all of this makes the rich stock or "basket" of faithful Tory political theory unpromising for the future direction of the party, because the future must be "modern," i.e. liberal. This is because the Conservative party in parliament and in the press, and almost all of what survives of it in British universities, is only conservative fiscally. Its fundamental presuppositions about human conduct are sceptical; so on social and cultural questions, most elite conservatives conform to what Phillip Blond has called "mass bohemianism".<sup>19</sup>

### THE TORY ADVANTAGE

But it is a mistake to think that the Tory faith is not popular with working-class voters. Indeed we know from the work of American psychologist Jonathan Haidt that the differences between the moral psychology of left-leaning and right-leaning voters actually give conservatives a popular and therefore electoral advantage.<sup>20</sup> Haidt's work has revealed that liberal moral thinking is based on three "foundations", which he expresses as conceptual pairs: "care-harm",

<sup>18</sup> HICKSON 2020.

<sup>19</sup> BLOND 2010: 283.

<sup>20</sup> HAIDT 2013: 180–216.

“liberty–oppression” and “fairness–cheating”. Conservative moral thinking, on the other hand, is based on *six* foundations: the three shared with liberals *plus* three to which liberals are insensitive: “loyalty–betrayal”, “authority–subversion” and “sanctity–degradation”.<sup>21</sup>

The electoral advantage of conservatives, Haidt explains, is that, while they can appeal to the same three moral foundations as liberals, they can also tap into three other foundations which liberals do not even know exist. Thus, on the negative side, they can additionally appeal to voters who have a strong distaste for *betrayal* (especially the conspicuous repudiation of one’s own country which Sir Roger Scruton calls “oikophobia”); for the *subversion* of order and authority, and for the *degradation* of “sacred” standards. Conservatives can offer the restoration of *loyalty*, of *authority* and even some sort of *re-sanctification*. Exactly how these moral values should or even can be revived in our institutions is a practical problem, which I therefore leave to others. But some obstacles are obvious to even the casual political spectator: the personnel of the parliamentary Conservative party today appear largely insensitive to the values of loyalty, authority and sanctity. It may therefore prove difficult to get conservative moral foundations through the House of Commons, let alone to realise the Tory project of reviving them in real civic institutions.

### THE ETHOS OF RESTORATION

Still, this is where the ideological resources of the Tory faith can shape and justify the economic interventionism that Red Wall conservatives now expect. Tories believe that strong government can and should *restore* the condition of the nation’s established institutions when they have been degraded, because it is in and through those institutions that its members advance themselves.<sup>22</sup> “Established” is an important qualifier, because there is a crucial difference between those institutions that are old and real – which foster personal

<sup>21</sup> HAIDT 2013: 180–216.

<sup>22</sup> Blond mentions “restoration” a few times: see for example BLOND 2010: 34, 80.

advancement and benefit society, but which are now always struggling – and those institutions which are novel, fake and dysfunctional, which seem only to rip them off and undermine society, but which seem to be always growing. Among the real institutions we find traditional education, including in grammar schools, Church schools and private schools, which should transmit, among other things, knowledge of our history, our literature and our common myths, as well as autonomy and obedience to authority. We find also the apprenticeship; the technical college; the small or medium-sized business, firm or company; the prison, which dispenses criminal justice that is actually retributive; the non-intensive farm; the trade union; the marriage, family and household; the town council; the local shop, post office, church and library; and the huge range of autonomous local associations, all of which are reliant in some way on people having expendable time and money to give. A comment on this last class of associations: the great problem for “social” conservatives, diagnosed by both Lind and Blond, is the deteriorated state of civil society, the middle “layer” of organised activity, between the individual and the state – a deterioration which has been particularly visible in working class life since the 1940s, possibly owing in part to the displacement of their material benefits by a central welfare state.<sup>23</sup>

Conversely, among the fake and dysfunctional institutions that undermine working-class advancement we find a semblance of schooling based on wacky progressive pedagogic dogma, and on the institutionalised assumption that teachers are not trustworthy or professional; lightweight degree programmes and academic qualification inflation; many high-cost, low-impact and self-serving government agencies, and a travesty of criminal justice that sees convicts treated with therapeutic holidays.

The Tory faith holds that the former institutions will work, so long as they are maintained, whereas the latter, being incompetent and fake, as well as expensive, should be dissolved or assimilated into established institutions. So, the Tory faith turns neither to the optimism of simply “re-empowering” individuals (by raising

<sup>23</sup> BLOND 2010: 15.

welfare payments, for example) in the hope that they will use that power wisely; nor does it seek to solve problems by setting up quangos that quickly subvert their purpose and increase costs by multiplying their failure demand.<sup>24</sup>

It is important however to point out that much of what Conservative governments really ought to look at restoring is not “red meat” to the Red Wall: parliamentary sovereignty and the balanced constitution are clearly threatened by executive agencies, courts (especially the Supreme Court), transnational bodies and the power-acquisitive devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales – but no one in Workington votes on the basis of such matters. Further, we must be aware of the basic and perhaps obvious problem, or even contradiction, of attempting to use the blunt instrument of central government to revivify moribund working-class institutions, to backfill a hollowed-out civil society of autonomous civic organisations. In practice, such attempts tend to create new agencies, new targets, new central controls and new areas of dependency. The Conservatives should focus, then, on (1) those institutions that are obviously in need of restoration; where (2) that restoration is something that government can realistically achieve (where the institutions are anyway within the historical remit of the sovereign authority); and where (3) the benefit to working-class voters would be tangible.

It is helpful to identify one “job done”, which is the UK’s restored institution of national borders – at least *de jure*. Leaving the EU has restored sovereignty over immigration rules, which means that the EU can no longer be blamed for cheap labour undercutting the wages of the native working class. So long as the rules of entry, settlement, citizenship and especially employment are competently managed – since “immigration policy is essentially labour policy”<sup>25</sup> – this *should* make life harder for the “populist” charlatan statesmen who have in recent years been able to make electoral hostages of natural Conservative voters. It also makes Lind’s analysis somewhat obsolete, since the liberal elite has now significantly compromised on the *laissez faire* immigration policy that has long served its own interests.

<sup>24</sup> See BLOND 2010: 255.

<sup>25</sup> LIND 2020: 21.

Among the other institutions that (1) foster the kind of liberties and restraint required for living right, according to the Tory faith, which are also (2) genuinely desired by Red Wall switchers, we find home ownership within a proper neighbourhood. Restoring that institution and its benefit to working-class advancement means reforming the property market and the construction industry, both of which have been degraded by poor architecture and the vested interests of sectoral oligarchs.<sup>26</sup> We also find the workplace that fosters both diligence and dignity. Blond and Lind have already advocated more shared decision-making in the workplace, albeit in slightly different ways: for Blond, shared ownership of assets, modernised mutualism in the form of civic companies, and the revival of genuinely free markets;<sup>27</sup> for Lind, the return of state-brokered tripartite business–labour–government “bargaining” over wages and working conditions, and similar power-sharing arrangements in the cultural realm. But basic meritocracy in the workplace is also in need of restoration. This need not be as ambitious as a new regime of recruitment and promotion based on virtue, as Blond proposes:<sup>28</sup> simply restoring the preference for competence would be a good start. Presently many of Britain’s large organisations are governed by unaccountable rhetoricians who fail upwards and then defend their position by permanent revolution, shirking responsibility to committees and consultants, promoting only those willing to speak the jargon of managerialism and the cant of EDI, and punishing everyone else with constant supervision, zero autonomy and a perpetual regime of fake training. Restoring meritocratic conditions involves percolating autonomy “downwards” within institutions that already exist and which are already working, and restoring the conditions that used to hold those at the top accountable. Restoring employees’ autonomy need not be costly or legislatively demanding.

<sup>26</sup> See BLOND 2010: 18.

<sup>27</sup> BLOND 2010: 34.

<sup>28</sup> Although the critic might accuse Blond of not explaining exactly *which* “virtues” he has in mind (see BLOND 2010: 182–183), or (alternatively) of imposing a uniform system of virtues over a complex and evolving civic economy, we can point out simply that the concrete “virtues” pertinent to a particular association are usually empirically obvious to those who are part of it.

The task is chiefly to identify the regulatory innovations that have, in recent years, caused managers to distrust their subordinates – to impose excessive supervision upon them, and to confiscate their workplace liberties to make executive decisions by using their common sense – and to repeal, reverse, or reform those innovations, in order to restore dignity in the workplace.

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