

## Conclusion: A Personal Perspective on the Future of British Conservatism

The normative question of what British conservatism ought to be is a pressing one, therefore, I intended in this conclusion to briefly stretch out what I believe the future of British conservatism should be or at very least some priorities for it.

Benjamin Disraeli, in the House of Commons in 1845, remarked about Sir Robert Peel that “the Right Honourable gentleman caught the Whigs bathing and walked away with their clothes”. The intention was to embarrass Peel. In the battle for ideas the British Conservative Party are in need of some ideational clothing because without it they will feel the chill of the winds of “progressive” change. Indeed, they shall be blown off course from Fadland to Fashionland, if they do not have a moral compass to sail by. The aim should be to channel these winds into the sails of custom. Yet, to do so, conservatives will need to pick up and wield the sword of imagination.

It seems to me that the future of conservatism needs to enable people to live a conservative life, to enable the ownership of private property, to attain meaningful jobs, to build trust in our communities, to conserve and enhance our environment and to provide an education that passes on the best and necessary knowledge from one generation to the next.

### A CONSERVATIVE SWORD OF IMAGINATION

The American historian Henry Adams wrote that “all experience is an arch to build upon”. We can use this arch to assist us and learning from the past can assist us in our understanding of who we are. Studying our ancestors and our past brings us into contact with their beliefs and values and shows us how we might use these to solve the proven grievances of our time. If we do this

successfully, we may improve our society considerably. Though we will never succeed in making our society perfect, or creating a utopia on Earth, we can improve our society by learning from the past regarding what to do and what not.

Traditions, according to Michael Oakeshott are a source of disseminating information and tacit knowledge. This knowledge is not explicit, meaning the knowledge embedded in traditions and customs may not be easily written down in a textbook. Existing traditions of behaviour are themselves a principal index of concrete behavioural values which are a product of wisdom and experience, in other words, a guide to living and in inculcating habits of virtue and wisdom in the young.

#### A CONSERVATIVE LIFE: THE FAMILY

The foundation of any conservative platform must grow from Edmund Burke's view of society; that is, the association of the dead, the living and the unborn. Indeed, it seems to me that it has to start with the primary association in civil society, by which I mean the family. The family is the nucleus of political organisation, and they are a socially and economically interdependent organism. With this in mind, we require a tax and welfare system that justly raises taxes and provides benefits to families as core units in society. As I have written elsewhere married couples are now the minority in the UK and the rate of marriage is low, but divorces are on the up, and over the last decade, fertility rates are down and considerably so from the high in 1964.<sup>1</sup>

It does seem that family breakdown has played a major role in the alienation of the young from their families, their culture and their country. The breakdown of families means a breaking down of folklore, ways of doing things and social capital of the children. The positive news is that being embedded in a functioning cross-generational family assists to alleviate this alienation and mitigates against the desire to turn things upside down. As Hegel and others

<sup>1</sup> PITT 2023.

have articulated humans by nature are political and social animals, and they are bound by their identity to the family and that our identity is formed in the family unit and then in the wider civil society. The breakdown of the primary unit of society is leading to an identity crisis in our young and they are turning to ideological solutions that are divorced from reality. Conservatives must reject the notion of an abstract, ahistorical, rational individual agent who can create their own identity and make that shape reality to a fiction, because we are born with a biological sex, we are born into a family, which has a culture, which is situated within a country. In other words, we are settled beings, we are someone, living somewhere in our “little platoons”.

#### TORY WELFARE AND PROPERTY

Thinkers such as Aristotle and Hegel recognised the relationship between family, household and property. We need an economic model, and a welfare system that can integrate family and work pressures. The State is, of course, a means, not an end in itself, the end is a flourishing civil society, but the State needs to become the means to conservative ends. The welfare system requires reform to facilitate marriage, having children and owning of one's home. Our welfare system requires further reform to remove the couple penalty, and a truly pro-family and pro-marriage system. In short, the answer is not “no welfare state” but Tory Welfare. The Conservative Party ought to be doubling down on the concept of a property-owning democracy as conservatives ought to assist those without independent wealth to own property and to put down roots of their own. Moreover, inheritance also brings some measure of personal responsibility. This is a responsibility of conservation, creation and the duty not to destroy. Indeed, owning property brings duties as well as freedom and we should desire that more of our fellow citizens embrace these duties by owning property. After all, there is a cross-class interest in having a pro-family welfare state, as family impacts all, and it is increasingly recognised that marriage should be seen as a social justice issue.

Thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith have articulated that the market is the only known solution to the problem of economic coordination. This coordination is beyond a moral foundation that develops from below. It is dependent on a culture in which people honour their contracts, are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their dependences, be it an elderly parent or their young children, and who trust their neighbours. Thus, conservatives should not over-emphasise the economic status of individuals. Indeed, we should not define in a narrow economic way what Disraeli spoke of, in his Crystal Palace speech in 1872, as the “elevation of the condition of the people”. The condition of the people requires to be defined in a holistic way to capture the social, cultural and religious needs of the people. Joseph Schumpeter warned us in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* about the decay in our essential social and institutional framework as the buttress of our enterprise economy.

#### ORDERED LIBERTY NOT LICENCE

David Hume’s quip about the human person that “some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and the serpent” should be headed. Conservatives should try to develop policies that allow people to develop, flourish and to protect children from the predatory culture and an attempt must be made to tackle pornography. Conservatives should advocate a cultural policy that reaffirms our national heritage. This policy should provide our fellow country men and women with our institutions, our traditions and customs and Britain’s achievements that generates an upbeat and optimistic patriotism. Conservatives will have to battle against “woke” cancel culture and will have to make the intellectual case against “sensitivity editors” whose job it is to vandalise our cultural and literary heritage. New cultural institutions may be required if the long march through the institutions cannot be addressed or balanced. Fred Astaire profoundly articulated the challenge that our children face as “[t]he hardest job kids face today is learning good manners without

seeing any”.<sup>2</sup> Conservatives will require role models who live a conservative life and who advocate the dignity of the human person from the beginning to the end as well as demonstrating civility and manners in dealing with one’s foes.

### NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE NATION-STATE

Indeed, building trust and civil society requires trust and a common loyalty and a territorial legal system. Thus, both the Nation State and the rule of law are in need of defence. A common national identity is required that is built upon the foundations of the local identities and communities within the British Isles.

A national image or identity, be it English or Finnish or Hungarian, is closely connected with a sense of sharing a common tradition, and an awareness of a common history that members of that society identify with. This is a backwards-looking process and the story we tell each other about events, victories and losses create “a nation’s story” that can manifest itself in the form of myths or perhaps myth is not quite the right word; however, it shall be used due to a lack of a superior word. These myths will hold up heroes for reference and imitation, and therefore shall set standards and ideas that members will aspire to and imitate where possible. As George Orwell suggests “myths which are believed in tend to become true, because they sum up a type or ‘persona,’ which the average person will do his best to resemble”. Or as David Archard writes:

[A] false self-attribution of some property may lead to a situation in which the property is correctly attributed. A group of individuals united in and by the false belief that they share a common history might act collectively and thereby initiate a common history.

In other words, the myth can create a true-belief or true actions. These myths can take different forms. Robert Tombs in his majestic book *The English and Their History*, notes that there are different myths of national identity. For

<sup>2</sup> Fred Astaire as cited in BARNES–BARNES 2010: 12.

example, the Magna Carta myth<sup>3</sup> has become a fundamental part of the British self-image especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, in post-war Britain the Dunkirk spirit myth, and in Finland to this day the myth of *sisu*, that is, the courage that Finns showed during World War Two, are ways of sharing the idea of who we are. These myths facilitate a bond of sympathy between the members who share it, creating a national spirit, which is manifest in language, customs, laws and ideals. Additionally, Englishmen may feel that Nelson belongs to them, or the Finns feel Kekkonen belongs to them. It could also be suggested that Englishmen belong to a tradition that Nelson symbolises for them. This idea of belonging to a historical tradition leads one to experience oneself as part of a larger whole, into a collective national identity and creating a group image. These myths need to be seen in their context, of course, as ways of recruiting loyalty to a place where one resides. These stories or myths are a product of a shared loyalty, not the producer of them; they are believed because loyalty needs them.

### OUR INSTITUTIONS AND THE CONSTITUTION

The protection of the institutions and especially the British constitution should be a high priority. The British constitution has been through some rather disruptive changes in recent years, including joining and leaving the European Union, Tony Blair's constitutional vandalism of the New Labour years and more recently the judgements of the Supreme Court. Conservatives must stay on the course of national sovereignty and should defend the sovereignty of Parliament and our laws should be made in Westminster, by common law courts and not by European judges.

To address the recent abysmal constitutional changes, an Oakeshottian approach should be used as a framework for solutions: that is, a politics of repair rather than destruction and recreation. Despite the ill-thought through

<sup>3</sup> NORTON 2015.

changes addressing these grievances in our constitution with concrete policies shall require delicate policy skill. Conservatives should not turn to snake oil fixes, such as a “written” or a codified constitution. A codified constitution for the United Kingdom would be too restrictive, it would lack flexibility and it would run contrary to our constitutional traditions and customs. Two Acts that should be prioritised for repeal are the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equalities Act 2010.

### PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Conservatives must make the environment a priority. I have written at length in this book about what a traditionalist conservative environmentalism is and the principles it draws on, in chapter six, and repetition of it here is not necessary. It should be stated here that, conservatives do need to take back control of environmental politics and the politics of settled communities and not allow the scare mongers to take control of the narrative around climate change because conserving and enhancing our environment, the fields, the rivers, our houses is deeply Tory.

### THE SOUL OF A SOCIETY: EDUCATION

Education is paramount to a conservative future as G. K. Chesterton expressed that education is “the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another”.<sup>4</sup> The type of education that we provide for our children must reflect the real interest of the unborn as well as the present generations. A conservative policy must provide the environment for more private provision in higher education. It must also free our educational institutions of the burdens of

<sup>4</sup> By Gilbert Keith Chesterton (in “Sayings of the Week”. *The Observer*, 6 July 1924).

non-educational directives and to reduce the bureaucracy on schoolteachers. The doubling down on academies is a must.

Liberalism has been in the driving seat for decades, but the British public<sup>5</sup> and especially Conservative voters are predominantly post-liberal conservatives. It is time for Conservatives to get into the driving seat and to drive Britain forward with a philosophical, cultural and social conservative engine.

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<sup>5</sup> PITT 2021: 267–291.