

The Post-Liberal Turn and the Future of Conservatism

Edited by

Daniel Pitt – Phillip Blond



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Budapest, 2024

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*This book is dedicated
to my wife, Karoliina*
Daniel Pitt

*To my boys Orlando and Noah
who love discussing politics
and philosophy with me*
Phillip Blond

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Daniel Pitt
Churchill College, Cambridge
August 2023

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Phillip Blond

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August 2023

Introduction: British Politics and the Future of Conservatism

The American conservative thinker Russell Kirk wrote, in January 1955, in an article called *The Dissolution of Liberalism* that “[t]he liberal imagination has run out; the liberal myth, feeble in its beginnings, is now exhausted; and what is best in our society will have to be saved [...] by the advocates of some older and more stalwart system of thought”.¹ Indeed, it seems that our culture, in the West, is going through such an epochal shift. Perhaps, the exhausted lingering of liberalism as the hegemonic philosophy is over. Liberalism has been the dominant economic political philosophy of the right since 1979 and the governing social philosophy of the left since the 1960s across the West. Enthroned in Western Conservatism after the election of Mrs Thatcher (1979) in the UK and Ronald Reagan (1980) in the United States. Its economic ascendancy has only seriously been challenged after the financial crisis in 2008 and socially only after the great immigration crisis that in different ways affected Europe (Bataclan Massacre and Merkel opening Germany’s borders 2015), the UK (Brexit Referendum 2016) and America (election of Donald Trump 2016). The two crises of liberalism economic and social conjoined to produce, politically at least, a rejection of liberalism in numerous Western nations as the appropriate governing philosophy for the country.

In this introduction we focus on British Conservatism in the light of the aforementioned shifts noted above. Why? Because the collection itself is cast between those who would repudiate liberalism in its entirety and expunge its current foundational status from Conservatism and those who wish to retain or in some manner recover the presence of liberalism on the right. As such the current travails of British Conservatism serves as an ideal fulcrum point to chart

¹ See PANICHAS 2007: 23.

the path of a post-liberal Conservative ideation and what it may or may not include. In the light of this the essays herein refer to developments in Europe and the United States but for this volume our governing and organising focus is on British Conservatism and its possible and desirable futures and from this we read outwards to the rest of Europe and America.

As indicated above, the conservative moral imagination and the content of conservatism is being seriously questioned from numerous perspectives. Perhaps, this is for the first time since Margaret Thatcher became the leader of the Conservative Party on Tuesday the 11th of February 1975. Indeed, the role of the state, public religion, the nation-state, free markets, the very metaphysics of Conservatism, the place of individualism, conservatism's relationship with liberalism, and family policy are all being debated at an intensity and level not seen since the 1970s. Within the British Conservative Party, MP groupings such as the New Conservatives articulate a fully formed post-liberalism, where they increasingly ally with the social conservatism of the CommonSense Group and of course the 1980's vision retains its attraction with for example Liz Truss' new Popular-Conservatism grouping with its atavistic but powerful appeal to a renewed Thatcherite settlement. Similar debates echo within the Republican Party in America where Trump is the primary scission, and a new economic and social nationalism has taken hold – leaving Reaganite Conservatives confused and increasingly isolated on the right.

Yet, the British public, and especially Conservative voters, are predominantly post-liberal conservatives.

The Conservatives, under Boris Johnson's leadership, won a landslide victory with 43.6% of the vote, which resulted in an 80-seat majority at the 2019 general election. The Conservatives at this election won many of Labour's traditional workingclass constituencies in the Midlands and the North of England and North Wales. Thus, significantly refiguring the Conservatives' geographical and class base.² Johnson's electoral coalition was fundamentally different from the one that got the Conservatives, under David Cameron's leadership, over

² See TONGE et al. 2020: 1–6.

the line just a few years earlier. The supporter base in 2019 was “older, more working class, more socially conservative, less ethnically diverse and more supportive of redistributive measures”,³ than the 2015 electorate that backed the Conservatives under Cameron. Relatedly, Brexit and pre-Brexit, there has been dealignment and realignment⁴ owing in part to an increase in the salience of “socio-cultural” questions, which have been amplified due to the rise of “woke” activism. As well as the increase in the import of “socio-cultural” debates, there has been a process of partisan class dealignment. David Denver, writing in 1994, suggested that “[l]arge sections of the electorate could stop identifying with one party and start to identify with another; some social group as a whole might switch its party allegiance”⁵ and this has largely been the case with working class voters, switching their vote to the Conservative Party. In short, the aforementioned shift or realignment could and should have been a great opportunity for the Conservatives to reimagine or to reshape their intellectual traditions recovering principles that have been underutilised or marginalised in the past. Such a task, of course, was always going to be difficult to achieve due to the tensions and competing tendencies within the Conservative Party and the largely liberal make up of its MPs.⁶ The latter matters because Brexit which reshaped the electoral foundation of Conservatism was largely a movement led by libertarians but voted for by communitarians. And the offer of Conservatism to its voters after the 2019 electoral victory was in economic terms wholly inadequate given the structural disadvantages they faced, levelling up being more a use of Johnsonian rhetoric than any genuine industrial or economic transformation. Moreover, Boris Johnson remained a social liberal and simply ignored the war that the progressives were making on the values and settled norms of ‘ordinary folk’. Needless to say, the horrendous rise in migration from the rest of the world that followed on from the reduction in EU citizens coming to the UK made a mockery of Brexit and all that these

³ CUTTS et al. 2020: 22.

⁴ See EVANS–NORRIS 1999; NARDULLI 1995: 10–22.

⁵ DENVER 1994: 53.

⁶ PITT 2021: 267–291.

voters had hoped for. But in point of fact the MPs in the Parliamentary Party after 2019 were wholly unsuited to the mandate that they had been given. Those who were elected before this shift in voting allegiance remained in terms of values, southern market or social liberals, they were never going to understand what the abandoned or ignored needed from Conservatism. Similarly, many, but not all, newly elected Tory MPs in 2019 were often the last Thatcherites left standing in the local party. And again, opening up northern economies to global competition was never going to raise the living standards of the poorly skilled or renew their areas or lives. The misalignment of Tory MPs and their electorate is not remarked on enough, but it is the weight of Parliamentary opinion that also guides policy and Government direction. These tensions are noteworthy as according to Rose “the realignment of policy groups within and across party lines has been as significant, if not more significant, than shifts in government caused by general elections”.⁷ Competing “attitudinal clusters”⁸ within the party matter a great deal and in terms of MPs there were and are still not enough who understand the new 2019 coalition and what it needed to mean in terms of policy and practice.

Christopher Fear writes that “conservative theory and conservative practice are different things and are discussed differently. But they are not separable things; in reality, they continuously modify and delimit each other.”⁹ T. S. Eliot, in his *The Literature of Politics*, wrote of two discernible and distinct approaches to the development of political thinking. At the beginning there is “a body of doctrine” or “a canonical work” and a group of “devoted people can set out to disseminate and popularise this doctrine through their emotional appeal to the interested and the disinterested”. After this, according to Eliot, a political party will “endeavour to realize a programme based on the doctrine”. Therefore, even before being in a position to govern a country, the “mechanical” political thinkers “have envisaged some final state of society of which their doctrines give the outline”. The consequence is that “[t]he theory has altogether preceded

⁷ ROSE 1964: 36.

⁸ WEBB 1997: 89–110.

⁹ FEAR 2020: 197–211.

the practice". This approach to political thinking and to governance has been rejected by conservatives. The reason for this being they embrace the "organic" approach to political thinking. To explicate let us turn to Eliot again. He wrote that when a "political party may find that it has had a history, before it is fully aware of or agreed upon its own permanent tenets; it may have arrived at its actual formation through a succession of metamorphoses and adaptations, during which some issues have been superannuated and new issues have arisen". He then also notes that what "its fundamental tenets are, will probably be found only by careful examination of what its more thoughtful and philosophical minds have said on its behalf" and that "only accurate historical knowledge and judicious analysis will be able to discriminate between the permanent and transitory".¹⁰ Yet even this discernment assumes too much continuity between past and present for it excludes from consideration what happened. That Conservatism in Britain in the 1960s atrophied and was in essence replaced in the 1970s by a supremacist Whig ideology that privileged individual freedom above duty, obligation and in a refrain Eliot might have endorsed: the hegemony of the good. A longer study is required to chart the eclipse and loss of post-war Conservatism to Liberalism in the British Conservative party but for now it suffices to name that this indeed is what happened, and the full consequence is yet to be fully experienced (an electoral defeat worse than that of 1997) and that any putative or envisaged recovery is even further off.

At the time of writing (Spring 2024) the current British political climate in Conservatism is characterised by four key factors:

1. The Failure of the Liberal Conservative/Thatcherite Political Economy. Growth has been stagnant since the 2008 financial crisis, productivity and investment have never recovered and the failure of all the above has pushed the state to the edge of collapse and hugely increased public expenditure and taxation to compensate. The economic legacy of Liberal Conservatism whose under performance preceded Brexit and reached a nadir with the Truss budget has yet to be appreciated or corrected. A failure which is

¹⁰ ELIOT 1955: 13–14.

explicable only in terms of ideology, as many in the Parliamentary Party want more of the same. That Conservatism requires an entirely new political economy is an inescapable conclusion that eludes most Conservative MPs and virtually all Governmental thinking.

2. The failure of Brexit – while partisan debate continues on the precise economic cost of Brexit it is genuinely hard to quantify the current economic gains. Our regulatory divergence from the EU has not happened or if it has it has not gained any discernible advantage – mainly because our customers in economic and regulatory blocks require us to converge to gain market access including those in the EU. The UK has embraced nationalism at the same time as the world appears to be deglobalising into regional civilisational blocs with increasing barriers to trade and investment betwixt and between them. The trade deals we have struck so far, have not served the national interest, risking food and environmental insecurity at a time of heightened international tension and ever greater threat to global supply chains. But the main rationale for voting for Brexit was a new largely class-based economic settlement for the 2019 electorate and control of migration. As concerns the latter there were 968,000 non-EU long-term arrivals in the year ending June 2023, over two and a half times more than the number recorded in 2019 (368,000) a number itself which has been rising steadily since 2010.¹¹ The additional import of 600,000 non-EU migrants into the UK in 2023 is perhaps Brexit's most manifest default. Yet the failure to deliver policy adequate to Boris Johnson's avowed wish to level up remains the most pernicious failing of the Brexit realignment.
3. Absent Boris Johnson, the Conservatives have been unable to provide any convincing or long-lasting leadership figure. One might surmise that if Covid and the ensuing Party Gate scandal had not occurred Johnson would still be in office but in all likelihood the Party would still be in trouble by not levelling up sufficiently before the election. Primarily because of Johnson's inability to action any positive domestic policy demands or offer.

¹¹ See The Migration Observatory 2024.

After the travails of Liz Truss who offered proof positive that even if the classical liberals had faith in the markets, it did not mean the markets had faith in them, the Conservatives opted for competence rather than vision and installed in Sunak not revival but managed decline.

4. Given all the above there is a philosophical crisis in the Party that the next election may well not solve. Will the Party revert to its Home Counties liberalism, or will it make the post-liberal turn that other right of centre parties have been doing with marked success across Europe and in the US? Such is the hold of the 1980s on the Parliamentary Party and looking at the MPs who are likely to survive the coming election, continuance of this failed agenda seems most likely. Given the first past the post system of the United Kingdom the emergence of any genuine post-liberal offer on the right (though polling suggests it would be highly popular) looks a remote possibility.

In consequence, the future of British conservatism seems to be open, but highly fractured, contested and polarised. In truth the Party seems incapable of re-inventing itself or its offer and the question remains in terms of British politics what happens if it does not? Will it suffer the fate of the Liberals after the First World War and be gradually erased over a succession of general elections, or will it somehow manage to get the right MPs who are intellectually capable enough to lead a Post-Liberal revival and recast Conservatism? We obviously favour the latter but the former seems more likely. What does not seem to offer any future electoral success or support is 'double liberalism' which would focus on extending economic and social libertarianism, though ongoing economic stagnation in the UK will no doubt promote calls for exactly that. In consequence, and in the hope of an alternative to the presiding and failing order, the book aims to tackle both explicitly and implicitly key and pressing questions such as: how can post-liberal conservatism serve the common good? Can post-liberal conservatism provide economic and cultural security for working people? What is conservatism's relationship with liberalism and what should it be? What is the role of the nation state within conservative thought? Re-imagining

a conservatism that cares and advances all, that sustains the environment in which they live and that can provide economic growth and economic stability to working people, whilst robustly defending their culture is, we would argue, paramount. It is or should be the future of the Conservative party.

STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

The aim of this volume is to provide a variety of perspectives on the future of British conservatism, from the most interesting thinkers in the field, including authors who are both critical and supportive of conservatism and/or post-liberalism. In this volume you will find both agreement and disagreement between authors that are situated in differing traditions, such as social democracy, traditional conservatism, classical liberalism, Thatcherism and, yes, post-liberalism. All the authors do share a common interest in the future of conservatism, even if there is evident disagreement on what that future is or should be.

The embryo of this book was the conference that was co-organised by the Eötvös József Research Centre of the Ludovika University of Public Service and the Danube Institute. The conference served as a platform for an assessment of the current state of affairs in British politics and within post-liberalism. The conference's special flavour came from being organised in Budapest, which is in the focus of much conservative attention at an international level. This edited book is the flourishing of the conference proceedings, but it is not merely that as some of the contributors to this volume have been selected to contribute to the work after the conference that took place in March 2022.

We have divided the book into three distinctive sections; part one of the book focuses on the debate around internationalism and the Nation State in the future of conservative thought and politics. Part two evaluates the different traditions of conservatism and its relationship with both liberalism and post-liberalism. Part three draws on perspectives on conservatism from the USA and Hungary and the relationship with British conservatism, if there is indeed a relationship at all. In the first chapter, Phillip Blond writes on the universal

and the particular in conservatism, nationalism and post-liberalism. This is followed by Cornelis J. Schilt whose chapter is on post-liberal conservatism and the nation state. Then moving into part two of the volume, Christopher Fear's chapter is on the post-liberal climate and the Tory faith. In the fourth chapter, Kevin Hickson discusses the relationship of Liberalism and Conservatism within the British nation state and Matt Beech analyses God, Marxism and the Culture War in the fifth chapter. Daniel Pitt makes the case that there is a conservative environmentalism in his chapter. In the seventh chapter, David Jeffery analyses the evidence (or lack thereof) of a post-liberal turn in the British Conservative Party. Henry George's chapter provides the reader with a perspective on disability and post-liberalism that is aimed towards the common good. Eric Kaufmann, in the ninth chapter, writes about a liberal post-liberalism and Andrew Roberts brings part two of the book to a close with his reflections. Part three of the volume opens with a chapter by Imogen Sinclair on the uses of Freud after faith and the order of the covenant in conservative thought. In the next chapter, Ferenc Hörcher elaborates on Anglophilia in Hungarian political thought and Ishaan Jajodia writes on the demise of fusionism and the rise of American post-liberalism in the final chapter. Daniel Pitt, in the conclusion, provides a personal perspective on the future direction on conservatism.

Daniel Pitt
Phillip Blond

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Part One:
Internationalism
or the Nation State

Phillip Blond¹

The Universal and the Particular Conservatism, Nationalism and Post-Liberalism

One of the marks of the present moment is the rise and pre-eminence of post-liberalism and the increasing distinction and debate between post-liberal thinkers. Unsurprisingly, and I write as a post-liberal, we often all broadly agree on the relative demerits of liberalism and differ, sometimes sharply, on the remedies required. It's a mark of intellectual and analytic success that it is now a commonplace to admit that our current travails are in part generated by the presiding beliefs of liberalism, when some 10 to 15 years ago the very idea that liberalism had any serious intellectual limits or opposition would have been laughed at.

The central message of the Post-Liberal, at least when I articulated it back in 2010 in *Red Tory*, was that social liberalism and economic liberalism were the same phenomenon, and both were to be repudiated. Why? Because liberalism was and is the governing ideology of a segregating, divisive and decadent class that in its ascension has un-homed humanity and unhinged the world from its continuance. It has, moreover, exposed the West to its enemies who are clearly both foreign and domestic.

Back then post-liberalism had no contemporary advocates in any sort of power in the West. Virtually everyone on the left was a social liberal and virtually everyone on the right an economic liberal. This is no surprise they had happily conspired as such from the 1960s onwards, allies unbeknownst to themselves, against better, older, higher things. Today, remarkably, everything has changed. The post-liberal has defined the last decade and is very likely to determine the next.

¹ Earlier version of this piece was published in *The Modern Age* (Fall/Winter 2023). Phillip BLOND (2023): The Nationalist Mistake. *Intercollegiate Studies Institute*, 24 April 2023. Online: <https://isi.org/modern-age/the-nationalist-mistake>.

Post-liberalism is in power, has had power (and mostly squandered it), or is on the verge of getting power. The post-liberal often encompasses both populism (think Italy and Trump) and populist events (such as Brexit), as well as the election of mainstream parties (captured in part by post-liberalism) and insurgent parties campaigning most notably for immigration reform. Post-liberalism occurs overwhelmingly on the right (surely a cause for reflection), and the most important lesson for centre-right parties seems to be: adopt elements of this offer or perish, as the CDU did in Germany in 2021 and the Australian Liberal Party in 2022.

We should not really be surprised by the collapse of mainstream liberalism. Economically, modern liberalism, founded as it is on the fiction that extreme autonomy provides for everyone, has dramatically widened inequality in the West. In dubious alliance with failing welfare states, liberalism has proved utterly unable to distribute and share economic gains equitably. Modern liberalism has presided over the creation of new vast monopolies and oligopolies, concentrations of market power that would have made the executives of Standard Oil blush. Modern right-liberals are manifestly (for they do nothing about it) in favour of monopoly, oligopoly, and the plutocracy that inevitably results. And modern left-liberals, happy in sinecures at the aforementioned state/market monopolies, feel themselves deeply righteous in administering the welfare states that ensure the survival and subsidy of the indentured working class; but, equally they ensure that none will escape the new feudal bonds and a servile class is permanently on hand to tend to their needs.

Socially, liberalism atomises. It makes the family unit unviable and increasingly restricts the formation of strong families to the upper echelon that liberalism now exclusively serves. Social liberalism enfranchises family formation above (increasingly it is only the upper class that marry) but penalises the birth and care of children below. It eschews and demeans all wider forms of social and civic fraternity as it privileges the maintenance of the ascendant class and its autonomy above all else – which is why of course its children have crafted and embraced woke culture.

After all, the aim of political identity politics is to mask the reality and cost of class (which remains the most pernicious and widespread Western disadvantage)

by denying the possibility of shared values and wider goals that can alleviate or remove the penalties of placement at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Cancel culture allows the children of the haute bourgeoisie to remove any impediments to their own advancement. The argument from elite replacement theory is in this regard not without merit, the children of the ascendant class must fight for the continuance of their privilege and erecting new morals and codes to ensure that it is ringfenced for them, and them only, is how it is done. For in the end, the culture that is cancelled is anything that is not of them and for them. So conceived, social liberalism suppresses the lives and hopes of ordinary people, and it is the means by which their agency and purpose can be contained, denied and ultimately eclipsed.

Politically, liberalism achieves the opposite of what it promises. Because it denies the importance of tradition, social cohesion and the formation of shared values, it produces a fragmented and warring populace that requires the Leviathan to police it. Far from being anti-statist, liberalism introduces the state as an absolutist policing power that ensures partisan rule by empowered and enriched minorities over subjugated majorities. The freedom it secures is the freedom of the abandoned, the freedom not to have a home, and the freedom for example to pitch your tents on the grass verges of America's highways – perhaps the last genuine commons in the United States. The ultimate political legacy of liberalism is an isolated individual, bereft of family and friends, utterly powerless against an absolutist state and a monopolised market.

Philosophically, liberalism is founded on the exercise of untrammelled human will, as ontologically liberalism has already vacated the idea that we live in an objective world whose universals exist and can be known. Instead, human fiction supplants truth and is enthroned over it – such that sex, for example, is now made mutable and men are now claimed to be women and women lose all ontological distinction and purpose. Far from liberalism freeing women from patriarchy and domestic oppression, it has erased them entirely.

Theologically, liberalism is atheist in belief and nihilistic in practice. Liberalism denies the existence of objective goods. It expunges objective universals from the reality of the world and replaces them with subjective assertion, which

in a cruel parody it then declares is the sole self-evident universal. The only law or constraint we can know under such a rubric is that which we give ourselves. In a Feuerbachian inversion, all that is human is recast as a new divinity, and all that transcends us is denied any purchase on reality or the world.

Given all the aforementioned, it is not surprising that with the financial crash in 2008, rising concern about mass migration, and the ongoing offshoring of industry and manufacturing that what is termed 'populism' was at least partially enthroned. Inchoate and outraged, with marginalised majorities fearing their relegation was about to deepen, a new politics repudiating the liberal legacy was born.

The results are all around us, from Brexit in the UK and Trump in America to the gilets jaunes protests in France and the many irruptions of the anti-migrant vote in Italy and most recently the Netherlands with Geert Wilders election victory in 2023. Populists cum post-liberals attained power in America; in Britain and in Italy and they made inroads; and they had moments of political opportunity virtually everywhere else. Post-liberalism was always an element of this resistance, but it never held the hegemonic position in the ideological matrix that came together under personality and charisma to resist the Western liberal legacy. If there was any coherence it was all too often around a reduction of post-liberal philosophy to a nationalist politics and offer.

This equation is not necessary fatal. In central Europe post-liberalism allied with nationalism has governed very effectively in Poland and in Hungary. It has its limits which I will explore later but the domestic success of its policies cannot be denied. But elsewhere this mix has failed – and failed spectacularly.

From Trump's post-factual claims to electoral fraud and then an erstwhile coup, to Boris Johnson's ambush by birthday cakes and parties, the absurd and the fantastical have combined in the post-liberal Anglo-Saxon demise. In France, Marine Le Pen was easily beaten by Emmanuel Macron. Even if the subsequent parliamentary elections left him domestically moribund, his Presidential authority still gives him great agency as can be seen with his subsequent and successful attempts to drive through pension reform. In Brazil, an incoherent and demagogic Bolsonaro lost to a cogent leftist platform that sought

to secure ordinary people. In Spain a new centrism parasitic on the failings of the left, pervades the right, while the country's political spectrum continues to fragment and polarise. In America as mentioned above, the travails of 6 January 2021, still suffuse the Republican Party. Its base now ineluctably working class, is caught between the return of Trump which despite or because of his many indictments looks almost certain, and a new paraclete that might yet align the middle classes to working class interests into a new Republican majority.

The overwhelming conclusion on post-liberalism outside of central Europe is that despite clear opportunity it has been a manifest and ongoing failure. There is a conventional explanation of this which is not wrong – but by the same token is not right enough – and that is the absolute lack of any serious policy offer from post-liberals or those populists who purport to be.

In Britain the Conservative Party simply ignored the needs of the new electorate and recycled ersatz Thatcherism instead. Inexplicably they disregarded the demographics of Boris Johnson's 2019 victory when the working class shifted decisively in just the right places, towards the right. They still to this day behave as if a Tory majority can only reside in the affluent southeast of the country, and they are continually demanding as a consequence, that we perpetually re-offer the policy ideas of the 1980s.

In America, with Trump the shift towards the post-liberal has been somewhat more pronounced: we saw successful tariff-led protectionism direct policy abroad, but witnessed the avid continuance of monopoly practices at home. A coherent narrative to secure the nation and its workers and their families was patently available, but never delivered.

The second and for me more telling account of post-liberalism's demise is that we have not been romantic enough, that we have disastrously eschewed the language of the universal and ignored the innate idealism of human beings. In short, looking at the major nations where the opportunity has been the greatest – America, the UK and France – the post-liberal right has taken the nationalist path. This is historically odd but sociologically predictable as all of these countries are currently or formerly empire nations with multi-ethnic polities coupled with increasing migration and a sense of impending cultural threat.

Where post-liberalism has manifestly succeeded is in Central Europe, with Poland and Hungary. Here an exclusive focus on the fears of mass migration can command popular support – yet is it highly questionable that either Fidesz in Hungary or the Law and Justice Party in Poland have sustained their massive popular support as governing parties through an exclusive focus on the dangers of non-white and/or Muslim migrants. Rather they have both developed a sophisticated pattern of government intervention and support for families and those who are economically marginalised. They both favour the rural periphery over the cosmopolitan centre and have developed effective policy means of securing the welfare of their citizens and crucially of distributing assets and social and cultural security to their populations.

This more than anything else has enabled them to govern successfully. Sociologists and anthropologists would agree that ethnic homogeneity helps foster civic and social solidarity. But for both nations such an ethnic concentration was achieved at a horrific price. Before the 20th century both countries were parts of wider empires: Hungary increasingly powerful within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland unhappily partitioned across the territory of three different empires. In terms of the composition of their population, they were then highly variegated, with Germans, Russians, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians and Jewish people all living in multivalent but shared societies.

One might conclude that places where the disasters of the 20th century have destroyed multi-ethnic polities and replaced them with ethnostates are the only context in which post-liberalism or post-liberal nationalism might succeed. Yet I do not think such is a necessary precondition of Polish or Hungarian post-liberal success. Indeed, when one looks at the unprecedented Polish embrace of the Ukrainian population that fled the Russian invasion, and the military support and succour unilaterally offered by Poland one senses at least in part a Christian idealism more than a desire for ethnic homogeneity, and crucially an appeal to the Western universal in defence of Ukraine and her citizens. As such, one can discern in Poland an emergence from nationalism in the face of a threat from an imperialist and deeply nationalist Russia and an opportunity to form a broader more coherent philosophy and polity. And perhaps this universalism played a role in the 2023 elections

in Poland where Donald Tusk won back the country through a coalition against Law and Justice. This result, a victory for liberals, perhaps testifies as I will go onto argue that nationalism is not enough, and that Polish voters wanted to be part of a broader Western universalism that the Poles felt was being eschewed.

The above notwithstanding the malfunction of post-liberalism in the Anglo-Saxon world lies in a failure to choose and think clearly. No doubt because so many party members and political representatives remain either economically or socially liberal or indeed both. Hence the peculiar and incoherent hybrid of post- and neo-liberal policies which the American Republicans and the British Conservative Party have followed. And in Western Europe the relative demise of post-liberalism lies with a monomaniacal focus on migration, coupled with an inability to tackle that issue and an inability to turn political attention and policy formulation to anything else.

But in all these places post-liberalism's error lies mostly with a failure to cater to the needs of the working class and a consequent inability to persuade the middle class of the merits of such an endeavour. Happily, there are attempts – especially in America – to address this, but unfortunately that effort too, in its nationalist guise, is a cul-de-sac.

In 2022 *The American Conservative* published a statement of principles for National Conservatism.² It attempted to encapsulate and legitimise the new nationalism that conservatives in America and elsewhere are avowing as their best defence against “universalist ideologies seeking to impose a homogenizing, locality-destroying imperium over the entire globe”.

By such a recasting, nationalism becomes for them the succour that will save us all. It will restore: patriotism, loyalty, religion and family. Globalist liberalism has undermined the general welfare through imperialism and the imposition of liberal norms on differing populations and diverse peoples. In contradistinction nationalism will deliver us freedom, security and prosperity.

As a conservative, one is sympathetic to the outcomes claimed for such an approach. After all, globalised markets in people and production alike

² See www.theamericanconservative.com/national-conservatism-a-statement-of-principles.

have despoiled the life, security and hope of the American working class, and indeed those of the working class throughout the developed Western world. Through mass migration and the offshoring of manufacturing and services, wages have been depressed and the idea of supporting a family through ordinary labour at median wages now appears delusional. Moreover, an unconstrained individualism that eschews human solidarity has shattered the nuclear and extended family. It has deprived the marginalised of societal security and has begat a class of fatherless children who will also repeat this social structure when fully grown.

The signatories to National Conservatism's manifesto then rightly decry racism and propose that their nationalism escapes any reduction to ethnicity and (somewhat magically) restores the rule of law and therefore social and political peace as well.

But unfortunately, it is not remotely clear that any of this is true. Nationalism as a first premise does not lead to any of these purported outcomes. One need only turn to history for the refutation. It is a historical axiom that the great killing organisation of the modern age is nationalism in the form of the nation-state. Nationalism is not historically civil; rather it almost universally tends to the monocultural and monoethnic, and in its modern form it is often marked by a reduction of an earlier and far more plural political and racial identity to ethnic homogeneity. Hence it is the nation-state that historically has tended to extinguish diversity and racial heterogeneity; whereas empires that encompassed many nations are those that have sustained ethnic and religious diversity and protected minorities.

In addition, the economic globalism that National Conservatism's authors protest was not created by an ill-defined cadre of globalists but by nation-states (the very entities they eulogise) that wished to dominate and determine the international trading system. The entire liberal global trading system that came into being after the Second World War was implemented and driven not by many nations but by one following its own quite explicit self-interest: the United States. Globalism in its current form only happened because it was deemed to be in the interests of the most powerful nation on earth.

Not only is the entire thesis as to the merits of nationalism wrong historically, it is also wrong politically, philosophically and theologically. Politically, nationalism does not provide peace and security; on the contrary it provokes conflict both domestic and foreign. Externally nationalism cannot forge common bonds and shared values with other nations, as doing so would compromise the inalienable sovereignty of the nation-state and its “people”. Indeed, almost by definition the nationalist state must always be in actual or suspended conflict with others, as any affinity or shared purpose between states is a dangerous chimera that suggests governance by the supranational and dissolution of the nation.

Similarly, in terms of domestic concerns, I know of no “civil” nationalist state either historically or currently. There are certainly states that are civil and peaceful, but they are largely social democratic (think Scandinavia). There are states that one might call “nationalist” but they are ethnocentric states – again, think of Poland and Hungary – yet such states are not necessarily peaceful or if they are it is because of the empire that protects them and sustain them (America and the West). If they were really on their own – they would have suffered the fate of Ukraine. Bosnia and Serbia are ethnically segregated and in effect nationalist states and not unsurprisingly conflict appears likely to break out at any moment, and is only prevented by the presence of ‘international peacekeepers’. And most clearly China is an ethnic nationalist Han state and its intentions are global, expansive, violent and imperial.

Moreover, the state that this idea of conservative nationalism is crafted for, the United States, is particularly ill-suited to peace through nationalism, again largely because it is a multicultural empire composed of many racial groups whose civitas relies not on nationalist but on imperialist foundations. Avowedly nationalist parties always have to justify exactly who they speak for and what indeed constitutes, or does not constitute, the nation. It is self-evident that the overwhelming majority of nationalist appeals and politics in the past and at present are ethnically grounded either tacitly or explicitly. And it is hard to see how it could be otherwise in large multi-ethnic nations. Nationalism falls neatly under Carl Schmitt’s rubric of the political, defined as friend–enemy

relations where the overwhelming mark of belonging lies in the intensity of an association or disassociation. As such the word “civil” applied to nationalism is really a misnomer.

In short civil nationalism does not exist, but nationalism certainly does, and the nationalist states that do exist are neither necessarily civil nor peaceful – rather they are violent and imperial. Both Russia and China are expansionist nationalist states. The claim that nationalism delivers peace appears to be utterly bizarre.

Philosophically the authors of the National Conservative statement of principles are understandably, and rightly, trying to marshal conservative forces against liberalism and the damage it does to human flourishing in general and to working-class life in particular. It is then doubly perplexing that the authors chose nationalism as their means, for nationalism is liberal in both origin and practice. All the great nationalist revolutions in Europe after 1848 were liberal revolutions that went on to construct nation-states that then engendered the carnage of the 20th century. Each ethnic state destroyed the multiculturalism of the empires or polities they broke up, and any number of these new nations pursued subsequent war and colonisation. The paradoxical truth is the liberal regimes and revolutions of the 19th century eradicated the very differences that they claimed they wished to protect, and they created in ideation the ethno-nationalist states that then produced in the following century, inestimable conflict and destruction of human life.

And nationalist states in practice operate very clearly on explicit and extreme liberal principles. Liberalism is not a nice ideology about being kind and sharing and welcoming to minorities. At base, in all its foundational works by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, liberalism is an extreme panegyric to human freedom and the denial of any other value or standard except that of unconstrained human will. It denies relationships, solidarity, shared purposes and objective standards, and indeed objective reality. Its ultimate outgrowth is more akin to that of Nietzsche’s philosophy than any other political ideology. So, we should not be surprised that nationalism, which is liberal, behaves at the level of the nation-state pretty much as liberal individuals behave: prioritising their

own needs above all others' and sacrificing or denying any shared interest or concern. And since liberalism ultimately just endorses and celebrates power, which is what nationalist states also do, why would we think such states would somehow not produce tyranny, elected or otherwise?

Finally, it is simply untenable to argue one of the merits of nationalism is that it enables the defence of religion. The National Conservatives inveigh against universalism as if liberalism somehow owns all universals and particulars are where the good resides, while the domain of evil is the universally applicable. To avow Christianity and Western Civilisation – which of course includes the Greek legacy of Plato and Aristotle as well as the unique mediation of Christ – and then deny the claim of universalism is to say the least quixotic, and at the most it is patiently ignorant and indeed heretical.

Liberals also deny objective universals. They reduce them to their own subjective takes which they then claim are the only possible things one can think. Liberalism denies the existence of universals (e.g. God or objective things) saying they do not exist and if they did they still could not be known, and all that exists is human projection and human assertion. Monotheism is ineluctably universalist: it says that truth, beauty and goodness are real qualities in the world and the cosmos, and these transcendentals can be known and followed by all of humanity regardless of their race, locale, or culture.

Of course, Catholic monotheism is a story of mediation, not of univocal religious Maoism where everything must be the same. Not one thing stands for God, so many things are a better account of Him than one thing. A philosophy of mediated universals is what Christianity is best understood as – it accounts for, generates and protects distinction, cultural difference, and differential expression through participation in a universal which sustains but exceeds all example.

What is foundationally at play here is a particularly idiosyncratic reading of Judaism. God is first known by one people, but Judaism is not just a religion of one people, it is the faith that is enjoined to introduce God to all the nations of the world. Monotheism by its very nature refuses a reduction to particularism: if there is but one God, he is therefore also a God of all of creation

and all the peoples of the earth. It is a curious reading of Jewish history and theology that ignores Genesis 12:1–3 where all nations are blessed through the blessings that are given to Abraham and that through his actions (Exodus 9:14–16) God's name will be proclaimed across all the earth. Israel was consecrated as a priestly nation so that all nations of the earth shall praise God and be judged and governed by him (Psalm 67). Analogously, Christianity is not just for one people or one nation but for all the people on the earth.

If one is generous, nationalist mistakes stem from a false opposition currently in vogue in American conservatism. Many conservatives rightly wish to oppose libertarianism's domination of conservatism. They have opposed it with nationalism. But they are in fact only opposing extreme liberalism with extreme liberalism. They would be better advised to embrace universalism in the manner of Edmund Burke did by moving from love of the particular to love of all mankind.

What has happened here is that the transition from love of the particular to recognition of the universal that intellectual reflection would normally facilitate, has stalled in American conservatism. In part, these nationalists are so appalled by liberal universalism and the world that it has created, that they recoil from universality as if it belonged for all time and by right to liberalism. Yet they remain resolutely and properly attracted to the protection of the particular – their own nation and the people who live and work in it. They have backed into nationalism because it looks at first sight, like a solution to the unhinged universalisation of liberal ideology. But this is to misread the universal and to surrender the language of truth, goodness and beauty to the liberals – who, unopposed and philosophically uncontested can then happily deny the existence of such things.

To endorse a particular socio-economic and cultural practice and then seek metaphysical and philosophical justification for it is not unusual. Indeed, it is how most ancient civilisations proceeded when thinking about themselves. What this tended to do was to legitimise the status quo and preserve the ascendancy of those already in command. If we remain in this intellectual mode – which is the philosophy that conservative nationalism in effect spouses – it will

prove to be a dangerous paradigm, as it will sacralise the existing power structures of liberalism when they are ascendant and relegate any opposition to a lower philosophical and ontological level.

Universalism did not come about to oppress us. The birth of the universal is the origin of freedom, and of politics. For only by positing a power beyond that currently ascendant, can one posit how we ought to live and what we should value and do. To abjure the universal and embrace particulars is to retreat to a losing position and rely on little more than human assertion backed by violence.

The relationship between state formation and philosophical conceptualisation has a profound, if under-examined, philosophical history. The merits of the universal and the limits and dangers of a nationalism focused on the nation-state are best discussed in this context.

Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilisations explains part of where we are. We need to realise that the idea of "The West" is operative again and that its recovery is paramount to our survival. But before we tackle the subject of the West, we must speak of what the philosophy of nationalism purports to anathematise: empire. To oppose both universalism and empire is tantamount to being against the two organising principles of human history itself.

Most human beings that have lived, have done so under the auspices of empire. Once one moves from kith and kin social structures one inevitably moves not into nation-states but into empires. Apart perhaps from certain geographically isolated polities (and they often do not develop beyond tribe) the nation-state does not really exist outside modern human history. What there is, however, is the perpetual competition between smaller states that to a greater or lesser extent are all imperial and that process of competition itself produces empires – often, paradoxically, in resistance to outside imperial incursion. In short, humanity was either in an empire or trying to build one in order to defend from imperial intrusion. If indeed the overwhelming majority of human beings emerge from tribal settlements into quasi-federal and imperial structures, where they are in suzerain or vassal relations or contesting such roles, then empires rather than nation-states are the more natural historical

structures for humankind. Even the Greek city states are not independent precursors of self-defining polities: on the contrary, they were all imperial and trying to be so to secure themselves against each other. Even today's late-modern European nation-state emerged from the breakup of Empires, yet it too either becomes a form of empire itself (the EU for example) or is secured by another empire, such as America.

Yes, America is not a nation-state, it is an empire. To pretend the contrary is to make a category mistake. American supremacy, for better or worse, has kept the peace in Europe and much of Asia for over half a century and has secured nation-states that would otherwise have been overrun long ago by other empires, most obviously those of Russia or China. There is no truly autarkic state in Europe that survives without the protection of an empire like America, and many of Europe's states depend economically on the civic imperial variant that is the European Union. Note that I believe empires can be civil. And if one needs proof of empire's inexorability even in Europe, consider the fates of Belarus or Ukraine – the first now absorbed into the Russian empire and the second the subject of an expansionist invasion by the same, with quite possibly the Baltics next. And by parallel the fate of Taiwan is tied precisely to the writ of the America Empire and the coalition it is trying to assemble to contain China.

There are few regions of the world where such contests between power blocs and competing empires are not playing out. And the conflict is values-saturated and cultural rather than merely the product of mechanistic or anonymous forces.

Here one should mention the work of Eric Voegelin. He traced the rise of universals in emerging empire cultures and linked these developments inextricably and rightly. For Voegelin realised that it was the violent imperial extension of empire that gave birth to universality. Before such extension, humanity had been in a closed universe where the cosmos related only to them and their kin – but upon expanding and encountering others' beliefs and gods this internal group cosmology had to adjust. In some expansive cultures, it became ever more repressive, producing a closed empire that subjected the dominated to permanent slavery and suppression. In other, more ecumenical imperialisms,

the universal expanded and incorporated those it conquered into the polity itself – in the case of Rome, making them equal citizens within an astoundingly short period. Voegelin's essential insight is that empire cultures create universals that then apply to the multitude of people that live under empire. And even though empires at first proceed with violence, it is often the universal values they generate that domesticate this ferocity and extend civilisation.

Perhaps nationalism is best understood as a form of cultic citizenship in tension with the philosophical tendency of universalisation. The West, though, is not and never has been a mere collection of nation states – it is a politics and a philosophy turned by Plato and Aristotle away from the particularisms of self-interest to the idea of participating in universal and abiding goods and truths. And it is a polity shaped ineluctably by Catholic Christianity, which fashioned the ideals of Roman participation into a vision of full equality for all humanity and all that that required. To hand this universality over to liberalism seems to be at best ill thought through, and at worse acquiescing to evil.

All politics is about universals, and human conflict is both between and within universal frameworks. What those of us who are opposed to both economic and social liberalism often forget is that liberal hegemony has come to pass *because* we have ceded the universal to liberals. Yet the very things most post-liberals want to defend, such as religion and order, have historically only been defended by a more universalist account of what is at stake than nationalism provides. We now know that liberal universalism itself only serves a narrow, empowered and self-interested group. Better to recover the defence of national difference through the notion of subsidiarity, within and under the auspices of the universals that we in the West share and that others outside the West want to have and uphold as well. Paradoxically, it is universalism that can best sustain nations, for if nations do not buy into something bigger than themselves, they will be erased by those that do. This is the unavoidable lesson of history.

Cornelis J. Schilt

Post-Liberal Conservatism and the Nation State

INTRODUCTION

In late 2022, a remarkable scandal emerged. In the wake of the controversial Qatar World Cup, several EU officials were arrested and charged with corruption and money laundering, most notably European Parliament Vice-President Eva Kaili. Roberta Metsola, President of that same body, used very strong language to condemn what until then were still only allegations and charges – a common trope these days: apparently accusation entails guilt, and virtue signalling goes a long way. Metsola went as far as to say that “European democracy [...] open, free, democratic societies are under attack”.¹ European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acted along the same lines – not when she referred to the accusations as “very serious”, but when she immediately insisted that a new ethics body be created, to battle these threats. Lest we forget, back in 2019 von der Leyen was not even on the shortlist of nominees when she was elected, a move back then unanimously rejected by the European Parliament under the header.²

The irony of the situation was not lost on several democratically elected European leaders who in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and amidst the ongoing war in Ukraine had been on the EU’s radar for alleged corruption and anti-democratic tendencies. Most notably, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, whose conservative party Fidesz had won the Hungarian elections with an overwhelming majority earlier that year, tweeted a “Good morning to the European Parliament!” – the accompanying image showing

¹ GREGORY 2022.

² STONE 2019.

some hearty laughs: “And then they said: The EP is seriously concerned about corruption in Hungary.”³ Speaking at the World Economic Forum, Polish President Andrzej Duda suggested that “representatives of EU and European institutions should finally stop throwing around the rule-of-law platitudes which, as one can see, do not have much to do with their own actions” and that “[i]nstead of lecturing others, they should start dealing with the rule of law in their own ranks”.⁴ Indeed, although both Hungary and Poland have their own share of issues – there is, I believe, rightful concern about the independence of both countries’ judicial institutes – the EU’s own past – and present – is filled with corruption scandals.

Still, the charges of corruption and “illiberal” democracy flow all too easily from Brussels in other directions, in particular to Hungary and Poland. Perhaps it did not help that Orbán, in an address at the 2014 edition of the festival of the Hungarian Right, seemingly directly promoted that idea, “illiberal democracy”.⁵ On the left end of the spectrum, hardly anyone tried to understand what the Hungarian prime minister actually meant when he spoke those words – a focus on community, rather than on unbridled individualism – or perhaps, they could not care less: clearly, Orbán had openly declared himself an enemy of liberalism, and thus of democracy, as if the two are the same. Remarkably – or rather, obviously – both Hungary and Poland have in recent times set forth a political course that is at loggerheads with that of the EU. Whereas many other European nations have more or less given up any pretensions to that description – nation – Poland and Hungary, but also the United Kingdom, instead strive for a strongly defined, and often shared idea of what constitutes their national identity. Indeed, if anything, these nations do no share in the general Western “malaise” that Roger Scruton termed *oikophobia*:

[This] peculiar frame of mind that has arisen throughout the Western world since the second world war, and which is particularly prevalent among the intellectual and political élites [...]

³ ORBÁN 2022.

⁴ First News 2023.

⁵ SZILVAY 2022.

its symptoms are instantly recognised: namely, the disposition, in any conflict, to side with “them” against “us”, and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture and institutions that are identifiably “ours”.⁶

This expresses itself on several fronts, but not necessarily the ones that come to mind first, such as immigration or minority rights. For example, while the UK has adopted strong immigration laws, both Poland and Hungary have accepted hundreds of thousands of immigrants over the past year, primarily Ukrainian refugees. Poland and Hungary have taken a highly critical approach towards LGBTQ rights, whereas regarding these the UK is as liberal as most other parts of Europe.

What Hungary, Poland and the UK share, is a sense of preservation of national identity against what is perceived and sometimes directly expressed as European hegemony. Indeed, back in 1988 when the British Conservative Party was still a conservative party and the EU still the European Economic Community, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher expressed concern for a Europe that would erase all sense of national identity. Extolling Britain’s contributions to Europe, she began listing its virtues by stating that “[o]ver the centuries we have fought to prevent Europe from falling under the dominance of a single power”. Expressing how Europe should never be an end in itself, she stated several guiding principles how to continue the project of European cooperation by maintaining strong national identities: “Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality.”⁷

It is exactly that “identikit European personality” several European nations feel forced down their throats today. Had that personality be more alike to their national identity, it might have been perceived differently and considered more palatable. Yet to many former Eastern Bloc countries and their citizens, Europe’s über-liberalism, combined with the forceful approach with which

⁶ SCRUTON 2006: 36.

⁷ THATCHER 1988.

the EU promotes, or rather, dictates, its identikit, all too eerily resembles the authoritarian life behind the Iron Curtain.⁸ These are peoples who, in the words of Thatcher, “once enjoyed a full share of European culture, freedom and identity” but “have been cut off from their roots” and in the process of rediscovering these roots find in the EU a persistent weed trying to subdue that original culture once again. Obviously, not all former Eastern Bloc countries perceive EU identity that way. Many revel in what they consider their full share of European culture, freedom and identity, as per Thatcher’s words. But others consider that the culture, freedom and identity on offer by the EU today are very different from those described by Thatcher in 1988.

In this chapter, I argue that the revival of the nation state, exemplified in theory by political philosophers worldwide, and, more importantly, in practice by Hungary and Poland, is a direct response to what theorists like Francis Fukuyama perceive as the excesses of liberalism, others like Patrick Deneen as its inherent – and fatal – consequences.⁹ Indeed, the “New Right” conservatism of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, attempting to fuse cultural conservatism with market liberalism, must be considered as deeply flawed. Little cultural conservatism is left in the American Republican Party and in the British Conservative Party today, who have given in to what Fred Dallmayr describes as “the derailment of liberalism and liberty into radical individualism and self-centredness”.¹⁰

Yet where authors like Fukuyama and Dallmayr consider post-liberalism as repairing liberalism’s defects, some are willing to dig deep into their national histories to revive a conservatism long since forgotten or abandoned by others. Proponents of strong nation states consider liberalism a threat, both culturally and politically, that must be battled by a re-emphasis on exactly the conservative ideals it so opposes. In its cultural guise, liberalism is considered to erode

⁸ Similar sentiments are found in the USA regarding the left-wing bulwark over the past decades erected by the Democratic Party, most of academia and many nationwide corporations; see e.g. the many interviews recorded in DREHER 2020.

⁹ FUKUYAMA 2022; DENEEN 2018; 2023.

¹⁰ DALLMAYR 2019: 2.

traditional institutions such as marriage, the family, the Christian religion. In its political guise, liberalism's "globalist" ideals are perceived as authoritarian, imperialist, paradoxically leading to less freedom, despite its name – and thus the nation state re-emerges, providing ways for its peoples to live freely in a post-liberal conservative society.

POST... LIBERALISM?

But what exactly is post-liberalism? As with most modern concepts, no single definition exists, and there is surprisingly little literature discussing the exact term. Even the term itself might be misleading, for example when compared to that most famous of posts, post-modernism. Post-modernism clearly distances itself from modernism by rejecting the latter's claims to absolute truths, and generally maintaining a certain philosophical scepticism towards the latter's grand narratives. Not so much with post-liberalism, whose interlocutors – because we cannot speak of "post-liberals" – cover a spectrum ranging from, for want of a better word, anti-liberal, to clearly pro-liberal.

John Gray, in the revised introduction to his *Post-Liberalism*, summarises his concept of post-liberalism as a "post-Enlightenment, pluralist view", arguing that the Enlightenment project ended in a failure, that it was self-undermining, and that we need something different entirely:

Pluralism is a response to the diversity of incommensurable values and perspectives that is a peculiarly prominent feature of early post-modernity. It relinquishes the universalist ambitions of the Enlightenment project and of liberal theory, and maintains that the terms of a peaceful coexistence must be worked out locally and in practice, vary considerably along with cultural and historical contexts, and will only sometimes encompass the construction of liberal institutions [...]. There can be no return to tradition as a solution for our ills.¹¹

¹¹ GRAY 1996 [1993]: ix.

In what way the pluralism Gray discusses is any different from Thatcher's "identikit" is unclear, but it is very clear that with the statement with which the quote ends – "there can be no return to tradition" – Gray directly referred to conservatism. The impossibility thereof he worked out in more detail in his *Enlightenments' Wake* of 1995. The latter volume's criticism of the Enlightenment, Gray argued, was:

[A]mong other things [...] a critique of conservatism. It suggests that the historical space in which a coherent form of conservative political practice could occur no longer exists in most Western countries: it has been destroyed by New Right policies whose effect has been to accelerate and deepen all the forces in late modernity which weaken its ties with its past.

It is a sentiment Gray would echo in yet another revised preface, this time of the 2007 edition of *Enlightenment's Wake*, where he stated that there is "no historical possibility [...] of a return to traditional conservatism".¹² The New Right policies Gray so much lamented obviously prioritised market liberalism, and though they might have paid lip service to social conservatism, in the wake of the often unbridled capitalism they promoted little of that survived in actuality. But although Gray's diagnosis of the underlying pathology might have been spot on, his historical pessimism regarding conservatism seems to be ill-founded. To exclude any "historical possibility" of a return to traditional conservatism at best underestimates the strength of that traditional conservatism; at worst, it is simply bad historiography.

Perhaps we ought to give it to John Gray that already in the 1990s he perceived how deeply the ideals of the Enlightenment had taken root in Western society, and how these ideals subsequently turned out as aberrations. Today, even Francis Fukuyama, one of liberalism's staunchest defenders, has realised that not all is well at the liberal front. From his vantage point, though, there is nothing wrong with liberalism itself, but rather with what (economic)

¹² GRAY 2007 [1995]: viii.

liberalism “evolved into”, that is, neoliberalism. “It is this [economic] inequality [between wealthy elites and ordinary people] that is at the core of the progressive case against liberalism and the capitalist system with which it is associated”, Fukuyama argues in his latest, *Liberalism and its Discontents*, effortlessly alternating between various ill-defined concepts of liberalism. Strangely, Fukuyama seems to consider “evolution” as something unnatural: clearly, neo-liberalism has nothing to do with what liberalism is *really*, but is rather the result of artificial tampering with its nature.

Others are less keen on believing that liberalism is inherently good. The Polish philosopher and MEP Ryszard Legutko is very clear on the matter:

[L]iberalism, as a specific political doctrine, has coalesced into liberalism as a super-theory that has enforced itself on modern society as the best regulator of human diversity. All attempts to deprive liberalism of its imperial bent [...] have failed. It does not matter, whether liberalism follows Rawls’s social democratic model, if it is more market-oriented, or even anarcho-libertarian. In each version, the problem remains the same.¹³

The problem that Legutko refers to, is that liberalism ultimately leads to suffocation: “The liberal order requires social engineering to be implemented and this, in turn, means not only restructuring society but marginalizing those who oppose the process.”¹⁴ There is a clear tension between liberalism and egalitarianism, the two political projects that emerged in the Enlightenment and in the Romantic period. Yet the two central values these projects promote are mutually exclusive. As Andreas Kinneging put it, following Alexis de Tocqueville:

The large-scale and structural pursuit of equality unavoidable and *linea recta* leads to tyranny and repression [...]. Indeed, the strife for equality demands ever more centralisation of ever more power with government, ever more government regulations and ever more government supervision and enforcement, thus diminishing the sphere of freedom until

¹³ LEGUTKO 2021: 170.

¹⁴ LEGUTKO 2021: 171.

in the end she disappears completely [...]. Those who are too passionate about equality contribute to the establishment of slavery.¹⁵

Patrick Deneen, in his *Why Liberalism Failed*, argues that liberalism's aberrations are not the result of liberalism *gone wrong*, but instead the result of liberalism *as such*. "Liberalism has failed – not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself. It has failed because it has succeeded."¹⁶ According to Deneen, the Enlightenment project – to use Gray's term – was destined to fail from its conception, carrying the seeds of its own destruction deep within. Instead of providing liberty, liberalism undermines freedom. Indeed, Deneen ends his insightful analysis with the following:

What we need today are practices fostered in local settings, focused on the creation of new and viable cultures, economics grounded in virtuosity within households, and the creation of civic polis life. Not a better theory, but better practices. Such a condition and differing philosophy that it encourage might finally be worthy of the name "liberal". After a five hundred-year philosophical experiment that has now run its course, the way is clear to building anew and better. The greatest proof of human freedom today lies in our ability to imagine, and build, liberty after liberalism.¹⁷

Deneen thus emphasises practice over theory: building liberty after liberalism. If we are to believe Gray, these new "buildings" by definition cannot be conservative, or at least not conservatism as it once was. But then again Gray is reasoning from theory, based on very unclear premises and with as little empirical evidence as Hobbes and Locke had with their ideas of man and the state.

¹⁵ KINNEGING 2020: 559. Translation by the author.

¹⁶ DENEEN 2018: 27.

¹⁷ DENEEN 2018: 197–198.

“MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL”

Having discussed post-liberalism in its many interpretations and guises, all of them theoretical, let us turn our gaze towards post-liberal conservatism in theory and practice. First, let me state the obvious: post-liberal conservatism is conservatism looking within, rather than without. One of the major reasons why liberalism was allowed to derail modern society to the extent it has today – whether the flaw is in liberalism itself or its excesses – is because conservatism critiqued it with its mouth yet embraced it with its heart. Many modern day so-called conservatives are deeply liberal at heart, and not just in the economic sphere. Core ideas of liberalism, most notably its focus on an unbridled individualism, are so alluring that entire parties have fallen for it hook, line and sinker. Indeed, there is a rot at the heart of many modern day conservative movements. Frequently, it is disguised by the use of obscurantist terms that belie their true meaning. Frank Meyer, the founding father of American fusionism – one such term – honestly believed that “the rigid positions of doctrinaire traditionalists and doctrinaire libertarians were both distortions of the same fundamental tradition and could be reconciled and assimilated in the central consensus of American conservatism”.¹⁸ Even the term “libertarian” as used by Meyer was a neologism, and obscurantist; as its inventor, Leonard Read argued:

There was a word that I always liked; the classical economists used it: liberal. The word liberal really meant, in the classical sense, the liberalization of the individuals from the tyranny of the State. That word was expropriated by our opponents and it has now come to mean liberality with other people's money. The word was taken over. And so I, more than anybody else, was responsible for introducing and publicizing and perhaps making world-wide the word libertarian. I am sorry I ever did it. Why? Because the word libertarian has now been just as much expropriated as the word liberal.¹⁹

¹⁸ MEYER 1996: 156.

¹⁹ READ 1975: 12.

Of course, the word “liberal” in the classical sense meant not “the liberalization of the individuals from the tyranny of the State”, as Read put it, but instead the liberalization of the individual’s heart from the tyranny of his passions. To become a free man, in the *artes liberales* tradition, meant to be able to restrain oneself, to be in control of those passions, to not be governed by those passions but instead to govern those passions. Freedom meant constraint, frequently by voluntarily accepting the “tyranny” of the State, or of a certain sets of rules for life, because, paradoxically, only through accepting these boundaries would the individual experience true freedom. Yet this is only paradoxical because of what 21st century individuals have come to understand by the term “freedom”: an aberration of its original meaning.

At the same time, this blindness to the liberal rot at its root has led many conservatives to underestimate, or willingly or unwillingly be blind to, liberalism’s true nature. For example, by the mid-1990s when the world was already showing ample signs of liberal decay and John Gray had moved on to post-liberalism, Irving Kristol was still oblivious to what was at stake. Indeed, Kristol truly believed that the identification of one third of Americans as “conservative” as opposed to 17% as “liberal” by 1995 – which he attributed to the influence of Leo Strauss’s writings – showed that “contemporary liberalism [...] its simplistic views of human nature, its utopian social philosophy, its secularist animus against religion [...] [had been brought] into disrepute”.²⁰ If anything, Kristol’s definition and interpretation of liberalism showed a very shallow understanding of its nature, and a total blindness of how deeply his own brand of Republicanism had been under its influence.

In order to set aside this theoretical discussion and look at the actual practice of recent conservative governments, it appears we must distinguish between conservatism and Conservatism; or rather, between parties and governments that call or consider themselves conservative, and governments that do in fact live up to its standard. Indeed, frequently conservatism and liberalism cannot be separated easily, to the extent that people associate one with the

²⁰ KRISTOL 1999 [1995]: 380.

other, and for good reasons. One desperately tries to list what it is the UK's Conservative Party has tried to conserve over the past decades, and whilst the Tavistock GIDS clinic has been ordered to close down – finally, long overdue, and, alas, delayed – the Party continues to endorse very liberal economic and socio-cultural policies.²¹ In a recent opinion piece, Daniel Pitt argues that out of the “Scrutonian Triptych”, that is, “get married, start a family and set up a business”, the government has scored a single cheer for their bringing down of the employment rate. Unfortunately, when it comes to the other two-thirds, the government has brought down figures that should have gone up, and vice versa: over the past decades marriage rates have lowered, divorce rates have gone up, and fertility rates have gone down again. As Pitt suggests: “It is time for Sunak to realise his priorities by building on solid foundations. It is only by repairing the social fabric more broadly conceived that the Conservatives could earn three cheers.”²²

Perhaps, when it comes to the Conservative Party being conservative, there is one other major exception: the nation. As badly executed as it was – and the full economic and political consequences are still not clear today – the same Conservative Party initiated the UK's leaving the European Union in 2016. As David Cameron put it in his EU speech of 2013, “there is a growing frustration that the EU is seen as something that is done to people rather than acting on their behalf”, whereas instead, according to Cameron, the EU should always be “a means to an end – prosperity, stability, the anchor of freedom and democracy both within Europe and beyond her shores – not an end in itself”.²³ Echoing Thatcher's Bruges Speech, Cameron strongly argued against the EU's “insistence on a one size fits all approach which implies that all countries want the same level of integration. The fact is that they don't and we shouldn't assert that they do.” Throughout, Cameron emphasised the need for strong, independent nations, working together under the umbrella of the EU on issues of “security and diversity of our

²¹ MOSS 2023.

²² PITT 2023.

²³ CAMERON 2013.

energy supplies [...] climate change and global poverty [...] terrorism and organised crime”, adding, “[t]his vision of flexibility and co-operation is not the same as those who want to build an ever closer political union – but it is just as valid”. Moreover, as Cameron reminded his audience, “power must be able to flow back to member states, not just away from them. This was promised by European leaders at Laeken a decade ago. It was put in the treaty. But the promise has never really been fulfilled. We need to implement this principle properly.” In more than one sense, Brexit was a response to that unfulfilled promise, with the Conservative Party reclaiming, or perhaps, conserving, Britain’s autonomy.

POST-LIBERAL CONSERVATISM IN PRACTICE: GOD, HOMELAND, FAMILY

Yet there are other European nations that have gone over and beyond reclaiming autonomy whilst remaining part of the European Union; at least, for now. Most recently, Italy saw a resurgence of conservatism with the newly installed Meloni Government, immediately labelled as fascist and a direct continuation of the Mussolini regime. Why? As the Italian journalist Roberto Saviano puts it: “The Brothers of Italy leader denies she is a fascist but clings to the Mussolini-era slogan ‘God, homeland, family’.”²⁴ Apparently, what were once perfectly normal political principles for politicians on all sides of the spectrum are now exclusively fascist, making anyone still fighting for these causes, but in particular Giorgia Meloni, “a danger to Italy and the rest of Europe”, as the title of Saviano’s piece has it. Most of the backlash around Meloni was based on a speech from the 2019 World Congress of Families that went viral in September 2022 when the Italian elections were incumbent. Here, Meloni engaged in a frontal attack on the values of modern liberalism:

²⁴ SAVIANO 2022.

Why is the family an enemy? Why is the family so frightening? There is a single answer to all these questions. Because it defines us. Because it is our identity. Because everything that defines us is now an enemy for those who would like us to no longer have an identity and to simply be perfect consumer slaves. And so they attack national identity, they attack religious identity, they attack gender identity, they attack family identity [...]. We will defend God, country and family.

Moreover, and once more reminiscent of Thatcher's Bruges speech, Meloni directly confronted global financial and economic politics, perhaps with an eye on the World Economic Forum, stating:

I can't define myself as Italian, Christian, woman, mother. No. I must be Citizen X, Gender X, Parent 1, Parent 2. I must be a number [...]. Because when I am only a number, when I no longer have an identity or roots, then I will be the perfect slave at the mercy of financial speculators. The perfect consumer [...]. [But] we do not want to be numbers. We will defend the value of the human being.²⁵

How, and to what extent, Meloni will succeed in implementing policies that defend these conservative values remains to be seen, but it is telling that she provided a very similar rhetoric during her campaign, which suggests that these values are indeed shared by her electorate.

Needless to say, most of Meloni's critique went over the heads of the liberals she was referring to, with one *Washington Post* columnist asking, with seemingly authentic bewilderment, "who considers family to be an enemy or frightening, and in what way?"²⁶ But it is exactly Meloni's insistence on traditional institutions such as the family that makes her an enemy of the left. As Ben Shapiro, the influential *Daily Wire* co-founder put it: "To them, traditional roles are themselves fascist institutions; those who promote such roles suggest that human happiness can't be found in atomistic individualism, supplemented

²⁵ Illinois Family Institute 2022, quoted from 11:30 onward.

²⁶ BUMP 2022.

by collective social welfare schemes. And so true freedom requires that those like Meloni be fought.”²⁷

Unsurprisingly, although no one disputed the electoral process that saw her become prime minister, Meloni’s critics considered her party Fratelli d’Italia’s rise as undesirable. Delivering a keynote address at Princeton a few days before the Italian elections, Ursula von der Leyen stated that “whatever democratic government is willing to work with us, we’re working together [...]. If things go in a difficult direction, I’ve spoken about Hungary and Poland, we have tools.”²⁸ Needless to say that this thinly veiled threat, as even mainstream media called it, did not go down well with the involved conservative parties. Von der Leyen’s statement reveals the issues some of the bloc’s member states have with the European Union’s definition – or interpretation – of democracy. Implicit in her remarks is the idea that Meloni’s government, though democratically chosen, either might not be a democratic government, or might need to be coerced via “tools” to cooperate with the EU. And what “tools” she is talking about, is very clear from her reference to Hungary and Poland: infringement procedures, embargoes, and sanctions involving the withholding of funds.

In the end, however, conservatism is not a theory: it is a practice. And if we are to understand what post-liberal conservatism looks like, both Poland and Hungary are prime examples. Both resist, to a certain extent, Europe’s liberal agenda, instead insisting that the EU take seriously the voice of their domestic electorate. Both have been drawing from their own histories, both have been searching for, and attempting to define, their national identity. Both Poland and Hungary are exemplars of a movement that only in recent years has been given a proper name, and indeed a proper theoretical foundation: national conservatism. Yet both would be the first ones to tell us that all they do is hark back to the past.

It is often argued that conservatism was created by Edmund Burke, in response to the atrocities of the French Civil War. Indeed, Burke was one of the first to give voice to the idea of conservatism, but as Yoram Hazony argues,

²⁷ SHAPIRO 2022.

²⁸ Reuters 2022.

conservatism is much, much older, dating back to the 15th century English Chief Justice and politician John Fortesque and his posthumously published *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* [In Praise of the Laws of England, c. 1543].²⁹ Fortesque wrote his treatise whilst in exile in France during the Wars of the Roses as an exposition of the English constitution, or rather, as Hazony argues, “a theorist’s explanation of the reasons for regarding the English constitution as the best model of political government known to man”.³⁰ Here, too, conservative thought is formulated in response to a particular series of events; as such, it is very clear that actual conservatism is much older. Both Fortesque and Burke saw the need to define, and put to paper, their ideas about the state, in response to adversity: the just order had come under attack and needed defending, thus necessitating defining. Yet that does not mean that those ideas did not exist before that; indeed, it argues for the exact opposite. Before Adam Smith launched his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776, people had been inquiring into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations for centuries; yet no one had put their thoughts on the matter to paper systematically.³¹

Thus, it should not come as a surprise to see several European countries respond to liberalism by formulating ideas rooted in national history and tradition. In Poland, the national conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party of Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński first came to power briefly in 2005, and regained their position in 2015. Their party programme immediately makes clear their position towards Europe: “We want the whole of Europe to be a sphere of freedom, equality, solidarity and justice, and we believe that a model of social life based on the values of our tradition, when put into practice, can have a significant impact by setting a good example. However,

²⁹ HAZONY 2018: 25–26; 2022: 2–7.

³⁰ HAZONY 2022: 4.

³¹ Just one example: as Warden (1696) and then Master (1699–1727) of the Royal Mint, Isaac Newton (1642–1727) developed quite sophisticated theories about the national and global economy, currency rates, precious commodities and the efficiency of production through specialisation, as can be learned from his ample notes on these matters, for which, see <https://newtonandthemint.history.ox.ac.uk>.

we reject any moves aimed at cultural unification.”³² Yet aside from stating what the party is against, Law and Justice also makes clear what they are *for*:

A sovereign nation state of our own is a key value for us since other values which we consider fundamental cannot be attained without it. A sovereign, democratic, law-abiding state, and an efficient one at the same time, where Polish families can survive and develop. Such a state is feasible provided that we keep developing as a nation, a community of free Poles, a community of Polish families, an economic organism, a political entity and a cultural model.³³

Note, that at the heart of the Polish nation stands the family, not the individual; this too is post-liberal conservatism in action. As Legutko argues, “[H]uman societies have never been simply collections of self-contained, isolated individuals, but have been perceived as consisting of beings with larger social, historical, ethnic, and religious identities”.³⁴ According to Hazony, the core social identity of any conservative is again, the family, and not just the so-called nuclear family consisting of parents and their children; no, Hazony advocates for the multi-generational traditional family.³⁵ Indeed, one of the reasons for discussing Hazony’s work under the practice section, is because his is a theory directly enacted in practice, as the extensive personal chapters at the end of his *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* demonstrate.

It is not just “family” that receives an extensive section in the index to Hazony’s latest; another recurring theme is religion. In Hazony’s personal case, this means the modern orthodox Jewish faith, but in his theorising about the nation state, and its practical implementation of public religion, it is the dominant historical religion of the nation:

Conservative democracy regards biblical religion as the only firm foundation for national independence, justice, and public morals in Western nations. In America and other traditionally

³² PiS 2014.

³³ PiS 2014.

³⁴ LEGUTKO 2021: 151.

³⁵ HAZONY 2022: 207–216.

Christian countries, Christianity should be the basis for public life and strongly reflected in government and other institutions, whenever a majority of the public so desires.³⁶

It is this same strong focus on religion we find in Balázs Orbán's *The Hungarian Way of Strategy*. Here, the author, political director and strategic advisor to Viktor Orbán, provides a unique insight into a decade of post-liberal national conservative policy in practice. Rooted in Hungarian history and culture, and full of practical examples, Orbán ends his treatise with a series of principles he labels "the Hungarian Guide", the first and foremost of which is "a conception of mankind based on Christian culture".³⁷

It will not come as a surprise to find in the Hungarian Guide other principles found in Hazony, in Law and Justice's party programme, and in the programmes of conservative parties worldwide, such a focus on the family, on the uniqueness of each human individual (contra "Identikit"), on private property and on the importance of the nation state. Apart from certain points particular to Hungary – including a fierce nationalism – what Orbán's work uniquely adds is how these principles have been made operational. It is one thing to say that the family is the cornerstone of society, it is another thing altogether to develop a political strategy based on these values, and act on it. In the Hungarian situation, direct incentives – often financial – are put into place to reward marriage, the creation of large families, home-buying support, active participation in religious groups or other forms of communal activities, and so on. As per 2021, the figures look promising, with Orbán suggesting that, indeed, the proof is in the pudding:

As far as academia goes, after 2010 there was a general professional consensus that the model expounded by the Orbán cabinet, and the measures it proposed, were doomed to failure. Academics, of course, find it easy to pass judgment on that which they do not understand. Only later, as experience grows, does the overall picture become clearer.³⁸

³⁶ HAZONY 2022: 341.

³⁷ ORBÁN 2021: 172–173.

³⁸ ORBÁN 2021: 71.

When in 1990 the European Council assembled in Rome to discuss its plans for what would eventually become the current EU, Margaret Thatcher famously opposed these plans in a statement in the House of Commons that would become known as “No. No. No.”³⁹ In more than one sense, the UK’s Brexit, Italy’s election of Giorgia Meloni, Poland’s choice for Law and Order, and Viktor Orbán’s premiership are all similar “No. No. No.” responses to the EU’s liberal agenda. At the same time, they are a resounding “Yes. Yes. Yes!” to virtues deemed unsalvable by most “academics”, virtues that turn out to be very much alive in a post-liberal Europe.

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³⁹ THATCHER 1990.

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Part Two:
Traditions of Conservatism,
Liberalism and Post-Liberalism

Christopher Fear

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.¹ 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.² 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

¹ FEAR 2020: 197–211.

² 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.³ 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,⁴ the political centre ground among Britain’s working-class voters is elsewhere: more interventionist in economics, and more conservative on social and cultural issues.⁵ 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

³ BALE et al. 2020: 13.

⁴ LIND 2020: 72–73.

⁵ 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*,⁶ 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,

⁶ 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.⁷ 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”.⁸

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

⁷ GRAY 2000: 3, 17, 30.

⁸ 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.⁹ 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.

⁹ *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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹

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

¹⁰ OAKESHOTT 1996: 32–34.

¹¹ 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 20th 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”¹² *poles* between which the practical activity of governing always fluctuates, and which gives politics its practically mixed and ambiguous character:¹³ 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.

¹² OAKESHOTT 1996: 21–22.

¹³ OAKESHOTT 1996: 17, 21.

Since the statist turn of the Liberal party in the late 19th century, the “politics of faith” in Britain has been mostly understood in its egalitarian version.¹⁴ 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.

¹⁴ 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”.¹⁵ 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”.¹⁶ 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

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

¹⁶ 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 society¹⁷ – 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)

¹⁷ 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*.¹⁸

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".¹⁹

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.²⁰ Haidt's work has revealed that liberal moral thinking is based on three "foundations", which he expresses as conceptual pairs: "care-harm",

¹⁸ HICKSON 2020.

¹⁹ BLOND 2010: 283.

²⁰ 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”.²¹

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.²² “Established” is an important qualifier, because there is a crucial difference between those institutions that are old and real – which foster personal

²¹ HAIDT 2013: 180–216.

²² 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.²³

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

²³ 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.²⁴

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”²⁵ – 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.

²⁴ See BLOND 2010: 255.

²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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;²⁷ 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:²⁸ 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.

²⁶ See BLOND 2010: 18.

²⁷ BLOND 2010: 34.

²⁸ 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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Kevin Hickson

Liberalism, Conservatism and the British Nation State

*A hyper-liberal ideology has developed
that aims to purge society of any trace
of other views of the world.*

John Gray¹

*Ultra-liberalism on the right
is matched by ultra-liberalism
on the left.*

Nick Timothy²

Conservatives, if they allow their imaginations to run away with them, can see the heavy hand of Marxism almost anywhere. This was true of the earlier economic form of Marxism at the height of the Cold War, which the Conservative Right thought was rampant in the Universities, the BBC and the trades unions – the latter being seen as both a bastion of domestic Marxism and a Trojan horse through which the USSR could infiltrate British politics. The Monday Club, that redoubtable source of right-wing Conservatism in the 1960s and early 1970s, before it was itself undermined by extremist infiltration of a different kind, detected the communist menace in domestic and foreign issues facing Britain. Marxism, it seemed, was everywhere. So too, today, some believe that Marxism has marched a long way through the institutions – not so much the old economic form of Marxism, though no doubt some fear that the recent wave of strike action is a return to the 1970s, but more so the rise of “cultural” or “Western” Marxism.

¹ GRAY 2018.

² TIMOTHY 2020: 40.

I am not seeking to ridicule such notions, but rather to suggest that the conservative's identification of Marxism as the main foe is misplaced. Firing in the direction of Marxism is to miss the target. Wiser conservatives, even in the 1970s, recognised that the problem was not so much Marxism – since few actually believed in its theories – but rather a particularly authoritarian form of liberalism. Today, it is not so much Marxism which challenges the traditions, customs and values of the British people but rather a cosmopolitan liberalism, which far from valuing the classical liberal belief in tolerance and diversity of opinion is increasingly intolerant. Moreover, the prevailing economic viewpoint in the UK in the last half century also owes much to the ideas of economic liberals. The argument in this chapter is that these are two faces of liberalism, one from the right and one from the left, which conservatives (again of the left and the right) should reject as they search for a politics of the common good.³

The chapter begins by analysing the dominance of liberalism in both its economic and social senses, showing how this has undermined traditional conservative values. It then explores the ways in which those of a more conservative disposition can best respond. In so doing, it revisits thinkers and themes I examined in my book, *Conservatism in a Cold Climate: Traditional Toryism since 1945*.⁴

THE CHALLENGE OF ECONOMIC LIBERALISM

In 1970, Lord Coleraine argued that the Conservative Party had been far too willing to compromise with a mythical “centre ground” in British politics in order to win elections.⁵ Much of the blame for this was put on Stanley Baldwin and R.A. Butler. Instead, Coleraine argued for a more principled form of Conservatism, which for him meant a commitment to reducing the size and functions of the state in favour of the economic market. Of senior postwar

³ I use Conservatism to denote the ideas and political practices of the Conservative Party and conservatism as a wider philosophy or instinct.

⁴ HICKSON 2020.

⁵ COLERAINE 1970.

Conservatives at the time he wrote, only Enoch Powell had argued for this. Coleraine started from a pessimistic view of the human condition in which the irrational nature of the fallen man was paramount, but this did not stop him from arguing that the free market should be pursued as far as possible in order to set the people free. The economic crises of the 1970s gave encouragement to this free-market counter-revolution.

The economic liberals appeared, in such a climate, to have ready-made answers to these problems.⁶ Friedrich von Hayek mounted a sophisticated philosophical critique of social democracy which, his supporters claimed, exposed the moral vacuum at the heart of the ideas which had underpinned government policy since 1945 irrespective of which party happened to be in power at a particular time. All of the central nostrums of social democracy – equality, welfare rights, the positive conception of liberty and social justice were found wanting. Instead, argued Hayek, the superiority of the free market over the welfare state was twofold. Firstly, it was more efficient than government planning and would better tackle poverty than the welfare state had done since the rising tide of capitalism would raise all ships even if some rose faster than others. The gap between the rich and poor was unimportant. What mattered was the increase in absolute incomes. This would happen through the so-called “trickle down” effect of markets. Secondly, the market did not distribute according to any preconceived idea of fairness. The unlimited interactions of supply and demand produced an entirely random set of outcomes. This would overcome the arbitrary nature of patterned distributions of income, itself an unfairness since there was no way of deciding objectively between different principles of distribution such as equality, desert, merit, effort, need etc. The lack of an objective basis for redistribution had resulted in pressure group competition for government resources and a bidding up of commitments between parties at election time. By the 1970s these economic consequences of democracy, as Samuel Brittan called it, were all too apparent.⁷ The market would overcome these distributive dilemmas.

⁶ See HICKSON 2020: 121–133.

⁷ BRITTAN 1977.

The ideas of Hayek were augmented by a range of neo-liberal political economists who put forward various theories. Milton Friedman argued that Keynesian counter-cyclical budgeting had resulted not in the intended aim of reducing unemployment – since only the freeing up of labour markets could do that – but in ever higher rates of inflation. The aim of government policy should not be to increase employment to levels above what the market could “naturally” create, but rather the reduction of inflation through control of the money supply. Hayek contested even this limited role for government by arguing that currency should be denationalised. Crowding-out theorists, such as Bacon and Eltis, argued that the wealth-consuming public sector used resources necessary for wealth creation in the private sector. Public choice theorists argued that the civil service operated in its own interests and had grown accordingly, needing to be cut back. Finally, supply-side economists argued that taxation levels were now too high and had a disincentive effect. Taken together these arguments amounted to a wholesale attack on the social democratic state.

The influence of these ideas was initially limited but through the campaigning of think tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and their articulation in the national media they became influential on the Conservative Right. This was especially so in the 1970s when the economic problems of the day made them seem much more relevant. They were taken up from the late 1960s by Enoch Powell, and then in the 1970s by Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher. In the internal battle of ideas within the Conservative Party they won out, with the One Nation Conservatives and the more traditional right – which had been committed to a political economy of protectionism – being marginalised in the party.

From 1979 onwards, the Conservative governments of Mrs. Thatcher made decisive moves in the direction of economic liberalism, beginning with monetarist policies to control inflation. These appeared to be a straightforward solution to an evident problem, but in reality proved much more complex. In the second term, privatisation became the flagship Thatcherite policy. Privatisation had always been part of the Thatcherite agenda, starting with the sale of council housing in 1979 to tenants at significantly reduced prices. Her ideological opposition to

state provision meant that councils were not permitted to use the receipts from house sales to build new social housing. State holdings of companies began to be sold off tentatively, but in the second term whole industries were privatised in an attempt to foster a “popular capitalism”. Finally, in the third term, reform of the welfare state and local government finance took on a greater priority. Throughout the period these free-market reforms in the domestic economy were accompanied by free-trade measures including the removal of capital controls. By opening the domestic economy to international competition it was believed that inefficient parts of the economy would be forced to reform or go bankrupt. Often these policies were introduced cautiously and developed their own momentum, but the general thrust was clear from the time when Thatcher was Leader of the Opposition and had said that Labour had a philosophy and she must therefore have one too. Following her fall from power in 1990 the nature of governing changed considerably with the more consensual style of John Major, but the policy agenda was maintained with key measures such as privatisation of the coal mines and railways occurring in his administration. After the 1997 General Election defeat, the economic liberal agenda was never seriously challenged. New Labour’s social policies were grafted on top of an economy which retained its neoliberal character. Inevitably, government policy has to take account of administrative, political and financial constraints, meaning that for the free-market purists insufficient progress had been made, but not withstanding these objections economic liberalism had acquired a hegemonic status in government policy. Critics were dismissed as failing to understand realities, those who sought to compromise were seen as “wets” and organised interests who opposed the tide were identified as “enemies”. Thatcher famously said there was no alternative (Tina). Neo-liberalism was reinforced by a rhetoric of globalisation – the argument that nation states had to adopt economic liberal policies in order to succeed in the global economy.

The extent to which neo-liberal ideas dominated the Conservative Party is evidenced by the debate around the turn of the millennium between so-called “mods” and “rockers”. This was a debate over social morality, between social liberals and social conservatives. On the economic front, both sides remained

committed to economic liberalism. With the third successive Conservative election defeat in 2005, the party seemed finally willing to break with economic liberalism. David Cameron was elected Leader and the party became interested in the ideas of “Red Toryism” put forward by Phillip Blond.⁸ However, in a cautious note Blond comments at the end of his book that these ideas were far from hegemonic. Economic liberals were still in powerful positions within the party. Following the banking crisis of 2008, the narrative became one of the bloated state under New Labour. Cameron won the election but a programme of austerity began, with George Osborne being the main driver of policy from the Treasury. As a result of government policy, the levels of poverty and inequality again increased. The twin developments of Brexit and the 2019 General Election results allowed for a recalibration of policy, but this never materialised.

The embrace of free markets in the 1970s left the traditionalists with a dilemma. Some were sceptical of Thatcherism, requiring time to be converted. This was the case with Roger Scruton, for instance, who wrote *The Meaning of Conservatism* in the belief that Thatcher had been too strongly influenced by the neo-liberals.⁹ However, he was won over by the non-economic aspects of Thatcherism. The Falklands War was a particular turning point in Scruton’s understanding of Thatcherism. Others moved in the opposite direction, for example John Biffen, who had been a close associate of Powell’s and one of the committed monetarists in the 1970s. However, Biffen parted company over the style of government and pace of change.¹⁰

The tensions between the traditionalists over the nature of Thatcherism is most clearly seen in the contrasting views of Shirley Robin Letwin and Peregrine Worsthorne. Letwin was a close associate of Michael Oakeshott and key figure in the “LSE Right”. Through her writings and think tank contributions, Letwin helped develop Thatcherite policies in the 1980s. Her sympathy for Thatcherism is seen in her book, *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* published after her fall

⁸ BLOND 2010.

⁹ SCRUTON 2001.

¹⁰ See HICKSON 2020: 135–136.

from office.¹¹ Letwin argued that although many of the reforms associated with Thatcherism were economic, the ends were not. Instead, the economic policies were the means to bringing about a change in morals. There were two sets of virtues, according to Letwin, softer and harder. Softer virtues, such as care and compassion, were legitimate but harmful to society if pushed too far as they had been since the end of the Second World War. What was needed was a restoration of the harder, or vigorous virtues. These included hard work, self-help, individual responsibility and the family, and all had been undermined by the growth of the welfare state. Thatcher understood this and sought a moral revival, what she herself would frequently call the “Victorian values”. This was a brilliant thesis, quite different from many accounts of Thatcherism, which tended to focus exclusively on economics. It was also deeply flawed.

In contrast, Worsthorne argued that Thatcherism was doing nothing of the sort. Instead, her governments had encouraged greed, materialism and self-interest.¹² Success was measured increasingly in terms of the possession of material goods and high incomes. It mattered little what people had done to deserve this good fortune. Thatcher had been dismissive of the traditional, aristocratic ruling-class which had governed Britain – successfully according to Worsthorne¹³ – who she believed were soft, all too willing to compromise, and imbued with a sense of aristocratic guilt. After all, many of her “wet” opponents had come from aristocratic backgrounds. The central task for conservatives, Worsthorne argued, was the preservation of an effective ruling class, imbued with a clear sense of a public service ethos. In this task, Thatcher had failed. In order to defeat her perceived enemies, Thatcher was forced to rely on the assistance of undesirables. Hence the rise of the Murdoch press. A sense of duty and public service was eroded, culminating in things such as the excesses of corporate greed and financial scandals. The new rich in the City of London were little better, if at all, than football hooligans.¹⁴ She may have started off

¹¹ LETWIN 1992.

¹² WORSTHORNE 2005.

¹³ WORSTHORNE 2004.

¹⁴ WORSTHORNE 1988.

with good intentions – the values of her father with a strong attachment to work, place and family – but she ended up creating a society fit only for the likes of her son he stated.¹⁵ The new “meritocratic” liberal elite was not up to the standard of the old ruling order he claimed to speak for. The only skill that mattered in these days of meritocracy was having elbows sharp enough to push others out of the way.¹⁶ Although it would be easy to dismiss these thoughts as those of a snob with a highly romanticised view of the past, there is considerable truth in them also. Indeed, Thatcher could be considered naïve for believing that the rich, safely retaining more of their own income, would necessarily act more philanthropically.

THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL LIBERALISM

Complementing the rise of economic liberalism was social liberalism. In the 1960s and again more recently social liberal ideas have been hugely influential. It has attracted its critics, but they have had limited impact.

The 1960s is often seen as a golden age of social liberalism, though in fact it began in the previous decade. Labour Party Revisionists such as Hugh Gaitskell, Tony Crosland and Roy Jenkins all argued for a social liberal reform agenda. A similar direction was advocated by moderate Conservatives, notably R.A. Butler as Home Secretary between 1957–1962. During this time, Butler began to relax what he regarded as the Victorian corsetry. However, the extent to which he could move on issues such as the death penalty and homosexuality were constrained by the presence of social conservatives on the backbenches. The election of the Labour government in 1964 allowed this agenda to be pursued much faster. Measures were introduced – largely by backbenchers but with the support of the government, especially the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins – to decriminalise homosexuality, legalise abortion, relax rules around censorship, make divorce easier and abolish the death penalty. All of these measures were seen as “civilising”

¹⁵ See comments by Peregrine Worsthorne in *IQ* 2013.

¹⁶ WORSTHORNE 2007.

by their supporters and “permissive” by their opponents. They were very much in keeping with the spirit of the age as reflected in music, literature, broadcasting, satire and so on, all championing the “new” and rejecting the “old”.¹⁷

Social conservatives opposed specific measures and also sought to formulate more general critiques. One such person was the journalist, T. E. Utley, who argued that this was the triumph of Millian-type liberalism as it rested largely on John Stuart Mill’s distinction between self- and other-regarding conduct.¹⁸ The state had no right, according to Mill, to restrict a person’s freedom unless they directly harmed others. Since many of the reforms addressed what people did in their private lives they were justified. They should not be matters of state interference. However, Utley argued that there were, in fact, few areas of a person’s private life that were entirely of a purely self-regarding nature. This can be seen in the campaigns of Mary Whitehouse, who argued for greater restrictions on what could be viewed on television – the explicit portrayal of sex and violence was not just a matter of individual choice but had wider implications for society since they encouraged undesirable conduct. Similarly, divorce was not just a matter between two individuals but had wider implications for their children and for wider society. Later Ian Crowther, a regular contributor to the *Salisbury Review*, argued that very few actions have no social impact.¹⁹

An alternative critique of the social reforms of the 1960s can be seen in the sociological writings of Christie Davies,²⁰ who argued that they constituted a rejection of the “moralist” arguments of the past in favour of a form of social utilitarianism, what he termed “causalism”. Although many of the campaigns for legislative reform were accompanied with rights-based arguments (the right to abortion, divorce etc.) they were more often justified in terms of reducing/eliminating a known harm (the consequences of illegal abortions, violent marriages etc.). Davies argued that many of the reforms of the era had been beneficial in reducing harm and extending freedom, but it had also undermined

¹⁷ See BOOKER 1969.

¹⁸ UTLEY 1989.

¹⁹ CROWTHER 2007.

²⁰ DAVIES 2007.

a shared sense of moral community leading to individualism and alienation. Into that void has come, what Scruton has termed, the inflation of rights.²¹ Rights have been detached from corresponding responsibilities and the lack of a moral consensus means that there have been no limits to rights claims.

A further critique of Thatcherism, in addition to those outlined above, has been that her governments did nothing to reverse the social reforms of the 1960s. Thatcher did allow votes on restoration of the death penalty, but even some of her supporters argued that she did little to encourage its return.²² No other reforms were reversed. The clearest example of social conservatism in the 1980s was in terms of the teaching of homosexuality in schools, where its promotion was outlawed by Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. This followed concerns that left-wing councils had been pushing this agenda against the wishes of more conservative-minded parents. Social conservative commentators, notably Peter Hitchens, argued that the Thatcher governments had done little to reverse the tide of social liberalism.²³

Events since the fall of Thatcher have only demonstrated how inept social conservatives have been. The “back to basics” campaign of John Major was much lampooned, especially when the financial and sexual conduct of some of his own ministers was revealed repeatedly up until the 1997 General Election. After the election defeat, the party struggled with how best to respond to New Labour’s reform agenda. The “mods versus rockers” debate pitched social liberals against social conservatives. In reality, few people advocated a clear social conservative agenda at this time, despite the utterances of MPs such as Ann Widdecombe and elder statesmen including Norman Tebbit. The social liberals argued that the party should move in their direction not just out of principle, but also for electoral reasons – they needed to be more representative of modern Britain. The attitude was summed up in Theresa May’s famous comment that the party was increasingly seen as “nasty”. Throwing off social conservative policies would make the party more attractive to voters, it was argued.

²¹ DOOLEY 2022.

²² HICKSON 2020: 167–170.

²³ HITCHENS 1999.

When Cameron was elected in 2010, the social liberal agenda triumphed in the Conservative Party. The clearest example of this was the legislating for same-sex marriage. Cameron believed in this personally, but his backbenchers were less convinced with him relying on the votes of his Liberal Democrat coalition partners to get the measure through. Cameron argued that the Act was consistent with social conservatism as it encouraged stable relationships, whether they were between a man and a woman, or between two people of the same sex. Social conservative opponents argued in contrast that it undermined the traditional, Christian conception of marriage.

Another consistent approach of social liberals has been to support greater levels of immigration. This goes back to the high point of social liberal legislative achievement in the 1960s with Roy Jenkins advocating the economic and cultural benefits of immigration. The New Labour era also saw mass immigration with the enlargement of the European Union eastwards. Although the Conservatives have repeatedly argued for greater immigration control, from Enoch Powell's notorious immigration speeches of the 1960s through to today, socially conservative critics of Labour and Conservative governments have persistently argued that irrespective of who is in power, the government of the day has failed to significantly reduce net migration.

Those of a more socially conservative disposition also argue that we are now in an era of further social and cultural liberalisation with issues such as transgender rights and critical race theories dividing opinion. These and other issues are said to reveal a "culture war" in which the social liberals are making great strides. Their critics have argued that social liberalism is intolerant of differences of opinion and has sought to suppress alternative viewpoints as an increasingly restrictive form of political correctness takes hold.

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE

Economic and social liberalism have made great advances in the past half century and at times have appeared hegemonic. The failures of economic liberalism

are now apparent, while the rise of social and cultural “hyper-liberalism” poses new challenges. British politics is now firmly socially liberal with none of the major parties advocating conservative/communitarian views. For a brief period, Theresa May and especially Boris Johnson seemed to offer a One Nation revival in which it looked as if they may break with economic liberalism, but that moment now seems to have passed. Economic liberalism is once again firmly entrenched. Despite this, there is clear public demand for a different politics, with clear public support for a “top left” (that is to say left-communitarian identity) ideological position. If a new ideological approach among the political class is to emerge which would bring it closer to that of the wider public then it has to come from outside the body of ideas which has motivated the political class for some time. However, surveying the arguments of the critics of liberalism reveals that there is scope to develop such an alternative agenda.

Firstly, in terms of economic policy there is scope to develop a clear alternative to the economic liberal belief that “free” markets are almost without exception desirable. There have been clear instances of market failure, both in specific cases and in more general terms. It is necessary and desirable to once again reassert the superiority of the state over the market in numerous areas of economic activity. Privatisation has clearly failed in key areas and public ownership is once again popular and necessary. The railways would seem an obvious case in point, with privatisation having clearly failed. Some operators have been brought back under public control but the whole sector, fragmented as it is, currently needs to be renationalised. Similarly, the water industry has seen little to no investment since privatisation and there is now widespread evidence of poor customer and environmental standards from current providers. Further extensions of national, municipal or cooperative ownership may be justified on a case-by-case basis. This can be justified in conservative terms as the organisation of the economy in the national interest, which is not synonymous with corporate interests.

A fundamentally different approach to industrial democracy to the one pursued by Conservative (and Labour) governments since 1979 is now needed. Again, one can draw here on approaches within conservative thought which

rejects the neo-liberal approach. Writing in the 1970s, Ian Crowther drew on the distributism of G. K. Chesterton to argue in favour of worker directors as a way of overcoming industrial tensions.²⁴ More recently, this approach has been revived by Phillip Blond in his notion of “Red Toryism”.²⁵ In her 2016 leadership campaign, Theresa May argued in favour of worker directors on company boards, although later backtracked on the idea. Alongside this, ideas around mutual forms of ownership could be reconsidered. In key areas of health care, schools and universities it is necessary to revive the idea of professional autonomy in place of a neo-liberal audit culture.

A “One Nation” approach would recognise the ways in which the economy is fundamentally imbalanced – income and wealth inequalities have increased substantially since 1979. Taxation and public expenditure should seek to reduce the gap between richest and poorest. There should also be a revival of interest in regional policies. The 2008 crash exposed the dangers of relying on an expanded financial sector. Rebalancing the economy should also take into account the need to preserve the environment, as Roger Scruton highlighted in some of his later writings,²⁶ and include a new industrial policy to develop “green” technology.

Finally, in terms of economics, the ideology of free trade needs to be challenged. This has already happened in areas such as agriculture where consumers are more aware of what is produced, how and where, with a strong support for localised production. But this needs to be extended to manufactured goods. There are other factors which would encourage national over global production including national security. The war in Ukraine has exposed the dangers of being over-reliant on one country for energy supplies. There are clear security risks in allowing China to build a mobile telephone network in the UK. This has led to a divergence of opinion within the Conservative Party between those who continue to believe in universal free trade as a matter of principle and those who see limits to globalisation as a result of the rise of China. There is

²⁴ HICKSON 2020: 139–140.

²⁵ BLOND 2010.

²⁶ See DOOLEY 2022; SCRUTON 2012.

scope to revive earlier ideas of protectionism divorced from the imperial context within those ideas were proposed by Joseph Chamberlain and his followers.

In short, the economy needs to be reformed in such a way that prioritises the needs of the nation as a whole. A politics of the common good. However, a more patriotic appeal which this approach would require is undermined by the social and cultural developments associated with hyper-liberalism. More generally, certain strands of thought oppose the boundaries which nation states inevitably create. More specifically, there have always been intellectuals who dislike the British (and especially the English). In more recent times this can be seen in the revival of the declinist discourse since Brexit and the ways in which lofty Remainers have spoken of their fellow citizens who voted Leave. It can also be seen in the persistent denigration of British/English history. While Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalisms are often justified by anti-colonial discourses, England is usually seen as the oppressor and held as the supreme example of everything backward and conservative. If an economic approach which prioritises the needs of the nation is to succeed and carry popular support then it is necessary to challenge these simplistic “anti-British/English” attitudes which sap the morale which such an approach requires.

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Matt Beech¹

God, Marxism and the Culture War: Recovering Liberalism

INTRODUCTION

Post-liberalism is a slippery concept. Whereas, liberalism is widely known as one of the great traditions in political thought, and arguably the mother of the modern West. In contemporary British politics it is known to comprise two component traditions: economic liberalism and social liberalism. Post-liberalism can be used to suggest something about the character of the age in which we live. As being either after the high watermark of liberalism or understood as a normative project which seeks to supplant liberalism with a variant of conservatism. It is the latter definition that concerns this essay. If post-liberalism is a declaration, it is necessary to grapple with the reasoning behind such a declaration. My working understanding is that in Britain, but also elsewhere in the Anglosphere, there is a call for orthodox conservative politicians and thinkers to reflect upon the extent to which their governments and parties have been compromised by liberal tendencies and policy agendas.

By orthodox conservative, I mean those whose thought emanates from the tradition of Edmund Burke. I interpret this tradition as giving tribute to the primacy of the origin of English culture, namely Christianity and how it developed into English Protestantism through the Reformation. This tradition is neither nostalgic nor curmudgeonly. It grasps that change is a condition of human life and experience. And yet, there is within this stream of thought

¹ I am grateful to colleagues at the workshop for questions and comments which have helped refine the argument. In particular, my thanks to Dan Banks, Phillip Blond, Christopher Fear, Andrew Jenner, Noël O'Sullivan, Daniel Pitt and Sean Oliver-Dee for reading an earlier draft. Any errors are, of course, my own.

a sensibility about the proper handling of the past and what that means for the temporary role of guardianship of each generation. Gratitude for the gifts that have been bequeathed by our forebears: institutions, practices, dispositions, language, literature and law. Put simply, the material that shapes a nation.

Orthodox conservatism opposes socialism and libertarianism in equal measure, seeing the narcissism of self-will in both political projects. It has a deeper connection to liberalism, but the family relationship is strained in critical places. As for Marxism and fascism, they are regarded as aliens, and hostile ones at that. The charges against orthodox conservatives are for the socialist and the libertarian, parallels. For the socialist, the conservative is a defender of the atomised individual, drunk on the magic of the market, ignorant of the effects of poverty, and concerned with the preservation of vested interests, whilst for the libertarian, the conservative is a sell-out to soggy social democracy, who clumsily uses state power to over-regulate and fund public services paid for by other people's money.

The call to post-liberalism is a call to orthodox conservatives to genuinely engage in self-reflection, and this is indeed healthy. And in the contemporary British case, given the fact that many (if not most) Members of Parliament who stand on the manifestoes of the Conservative Party are heterodox and can be described as liberals, libertarians or progressives of varying hues,² then such a call to post-liberalism has some value. Whilst the Conservative Party is necessarily a broad church comprising a plurality of intellectual traditions, orthodox conservatives (within and without) ought to be concerned when the influence of their tradition declines within this great party of state. Moreover, for five years, from 2010, the Conservative Party was in full coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. It oversaw distinctly liberal reforms in political economy (austerity) and social affairs (gay marriage). Given this ideational and policy context, the declaration for a post-liberalism is not unreasonable. But how conservatives meaningfully extricate themselves and their party from the broad political tradition of liberalism (or *liberalisms*), is a different question. It is made more problematic by the simple fact that the liberal tradition houses great treasure as well as trash.

² For a discussion of the ideological traditions in the contemporary Conservative Party see BEECH 2023: 11–24.

CHRISTIANITY, LIBERALISM AND WESTERN CIVILISATION

The problem with the notion of post-liberalism is partly one of definition and partly one of emphasis. What I mean by this is, if liberalism is restricted to the economic doctrines of free markets, the minimal state, modest regulation and competition, and social liberalism pertains to ethical warrant in spheres of consensual adult appetites and relationships (a form of non-discrimination and non-interference), then it is simple to define and to apprehend as a political tradition. Once identified, one can engage in reasonable critique and, in turn, propose counter-perspectives. And for the purpose of this project, orthodox conservative counter-perspectives.

However, whilst I think this definition and emphasis of the liberal tradition is necessary, it is not sufficient. Why not? Because, what is identified as liberalism does not merely comprise the twin components of economic and social liberalism. In fact, liberalism's ontological starting point emerges out of the Christian presupposition of the equal moral worth of each human being. Christian thought explains this through the idea of *imago dei*; the image of God; that the apotheosis of God's creation are humans and every human is an image-bearer. Put slightly differently, that all people bear the Maker's mark and possess something of His dignity. From this theological source flows the belief in the inherent equal value of human life. When one reads the intellectual history of the West, which starts with Ancient Greece but is swiftly supplanted by Christianity and its holy scriptures, one sees gradually crystallising the centrepiece of its thought: the incarnate life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The West, as a civilisation, is predicated on the Gospel.³

This story is of a person; or to be precise, it is *the story of the person*. It is a story of sacrifice and redemption. Once, for all who will believe. The Holy Scripture gifts the world the story of creation, the fall of man, divine rescue (sacrifice and redemption), commission, judgment and recreation. Amongst these

³ See HOLLAND 2019.

truths, is the idea of the primacy of the equal moral worth of individual human beings:⁴ our creaturely uniqueness, evincing the spark of the divine. And what is more, though hostile resistance, discrimination, war and persecution is frequent, this idea is incrementally recognised by civil authorities, monarchs and empires, throughout two-thousand years of Christendom. This metaphysical understanding in Christian thought surfaces upstream with the Apostle Paul, flows through the Apostolic Fathers, deepens in the work of Augustine, down through the scholasticism of the Middle Ages to the lake of thought that is Aquinas, then meanders into the canon lawyers, and floods the many plains of the Reformation in the wide basin of Protestantism, from where it irrigates tributaries of political thought in the 17th century including (but not limited to) Germany, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scotland and England.⁵

It must be said that though liberalism was the first to possess this beautiful, good and true realisation, it is not alone in doing so: conservatism does too.⁶ This is evident in the words of Roger Scruton appraising the significance of T.S. Eliot as the pre-eminent conservative thinker of the 20th century, marrying faith to modernity:

To rediscover our religion is not to rise free from the temporal order; it is not to deny history and corruption, in order to contemplate the timeless truths. On the contrary, it is to enter more deeply into history, so as to find in the merely transitory the mark and the sign of that which never passes: it is to discover the “point of intersection of the timeless with time”, which is, according to *Four Quartets*, the occupation of the saint.⁷

Whilst liberalism and conservatism are different, and often counterposing, their starting points are the same because they are, in effect, Christian traditions.

⁴ Galatians 3:28.

⁵ See SIEDENTOP 2015.

⁶ One can argue that other long-standing political traditions (e.g. social democracy) scaffolded upon liberalism bear some of the same qualities. And yet, some expressly European traditions have emerged in contradistinction to the theology and ethics of Christendom (e.g. feminism, ecologism, fascism and Marxism).

⁷ SCRUTON 2019: 204.

Perhaps, it might be better to say that in Western forms liberalism and conservatism are part of the political thought and practice of Christendom. Problems, very serious problems, occur when Christian thought is divested from such political traditions. In the wake of the dominance of the spirit of anti-Christian liberalism (better explained as progressive humanism) in the middle decades of the 20th century, individual and social practices were reformed ostensibly upon liberative foundations. Such “liberation” – often but not exclusively in the campaigns of the New Left – yielded the assault on holy matrimony, the celebration of divorce, the growth of absent fathers, the warrant for sexual licentiousness, the emergence of radical feminism and the curse of abortion. The formal decision-making of British society was initiated by a small proportion of progressive humanists within Parliament and without. At times such voices of “reform” came from so-called “shepherds” and progressive theologians. And when scrutinised closely, this spirit of progressive humanism resembled the loan shark pushing a payday loan to a fool; weak-minded enough to buy an unnecessary product: “self-realisation”. This product, gleefully sold by the loan shark deploying the lie of small costs, was like all usury – nothing more than a bad debt; a bad bargain for generations of Britons to come.

PHILLIP BLOND, POST-LIBERALISM AND MARXISM

Phillip Blond is one of the leading intellectual proponents of a post-liberal politics. His Red Tory⁸ platform and Christian worldview offer a distinct and different direction of travel from humanist progressivism on the one hand and populism on the other. And in one review article, Blond explicitly calls for a post-liberal, Catholic social teaching to fill the ideational and policy void left by liberalism. He argues: “The Catholic Church must return to the political fray, not as a chaplain to the left or right but as the herald of a new order.”⁹ This is interesting and points to a rich communitarian conservative tradition, in which post-liberals

⁸ BLOND 2010a.

⁹ BLOND 2017.

might discover, or rediscover, old solutions to contemporary problems. Many years ago, Blond described the provenance of liberalism and what it evolved into:

[W]e must first note that philosophical liberalism was born out of an 18th-century critique of absolute monarchies [...]. But so extreme did the defence of individual liberty become that each man was obliged to refuse the dictates of any other – for that would be simply to replace rule by one man's will (the king) with rule by another. As such, the most extreme form of liberal autonomy requires the repudiation of society – for human community influences and shapes the individual before any sovereign capacity to choose has taken shape. The liberal idea of man is then, first of all, an idea of nothing: not family, not ethnicity, not society or nation.¹⁰

Blond sees the pathogen of the West in general, and Britain in particular, as liberalism. It is for Blond the clear and present threat to the life of virtue and the common good. Building upon this argument, in an article in 2010 he argued that forms of state liberalism and market liberalism have caused Britain to become the *Shattered Society*.¹¹ In contrast, my diagnosis identifies Marxist ideas and values, albeit cultural forms rather than classical Marxism or liberalism as the pathogen in Western societies and especially in Anglo-Saxon societies. Such forms of Marxism are the issue and thus the agents of challenge and attack on the hard-won wealth of Western civilisation. Contra Blond, liberalism cannot be the adversary of a society predicated upon centuries of Christian thought through which liberalism emerged. Marxism, to the Christian mind, is idolatrous. Liberalism, properly understood, is the product of Christian society. Therefore, Marxism and liberalism are enemies. They do not cohere; nor can they peacefully coexist. We know this from history because Marxism was as full a reaction to 19th century liberalism in Britain, as Burkean conservatism was to 18th century radicalism in France. In a speech to a conference in 1992, Doris Lessing reflected on her experience as a one-time Communist intellectual. She noted how ideas, such as Marxism, can captivate and if left unexamined can possess people resulting in unexamined mental attitudes:

¹⁰ BLOND 2009.

¹¹ BLOND 2010b.

Exciting ideas have always swept across countries, nations, the world. There have always been people high on ideas. They used to be religious emotions, a fact we might usefully keep in our minds. (They still are religious in some areas, and spreading fast.) But in all our minds are patterns which we do not examine that govern our behaviour.¹²

Like Lessing, I too think that people, especially young university educated folk, are very often “high on ideas”. The crucial observation is that Marxism, in its cultural guise, is extant and maintains its allure. It is a formidable tradition of thought with many intellectuals, academic outlets and subject-specific fields of enquiry. And Marxism possesses a property that is overlooked, namely, emotion. For all of the supposed scientific socialism and anti-clericalism of its founder, the Marxist tradition remains because it mingles rationality with romance; it blends realism with the promise of utopia. Within Cultural Marxism – from Critical Theory¹³ (pioneered by the Frankfurt School) or its offshoots, Critical Legal Theory,¹⁴ Critical Race Theory,¹⁵ radical feminism¹⁶ or gender theory¹⁷ – the humanities and social sciences contain sub-fields which employ the “oppressor–oppressed” analytic frame to detect social injustice. The reality of injustice, and the ever-present maltreatment of fallen creatures by their fellow fallen creatures, means that Marxism sustains genuine emotional force and moral purpose. It does this whilst shrugging off the inconvenient historical record: the rule of Marxist-Leninist regimes with enough famine, suppression, brutality and bloodshed to fill reservoirs;¹⁸ nothing short of evil on an industrial scale. We know them by their fruits.¹⁹

¹² LESSING 1994.

¹³ See for example, ADORNO–HORKHEIMER 1973.

¹⁴ See for example, CRENSHAW 1989: 139–167.

¹⁵ See for example, DIANGELO 2018.

¹⁶ See for example, BINDEL 2021.

¹⁷ See for example, BUTLER 1990.

¹⁸ Space restricts the listing of the many studies of the evils of Marxist rule which have been documented in every country that has had the misfortune to suffer its utopianism. For a classic study see SOLZHENITSYN 1973.

¹⁹ Matthew 7:15–20.

In his article in *First Things*, Blond initially identifies Marxism as: “Among the ideas that compete to determine the world’s future, one can count Catholicism, Islam, and (until recently) Marxism.”²⁰ In this sense Blond is thinking about ideas at a civilisational level and then mentions liberalism as, “dominant, hegemonic, and all-pervasive”.²¹ Marxism for Blond *was*; it is a former worldview of note; a one-time, historic challenge to the West, now obsolete. I understand how one can draw such a conclusion given the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Marxist-Leninist empire. But through my teaching and reading of post-war Britain, I am led to discern cultural turns in British Marxism, especially after the death of Stalin in 1953 and Khrushchev’s “Secret speech”; the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956; and the Prague Spring in 1968.²² The exodus of gifted scholars, men and women, from the Communist Party of Great Britain and their fellow travellers across Western Europe, maintained the utopianism and intellectual energy of Marxism divested of Soviet Communism.²³ British Marxist intellectuals turned their attention and energy to critique institutions, practices and traditions; from welfare capitalism and education, to art, entertainment and above all, the Church and Christian morality. Marxism did not disappear or die; it evolved. It turned its attention from violent revolution and classical proletarian struggle, to what Rudi Dutschke, a student-leader in the American New Left movement, dubbed “the long march through the institutions”.²⁴ Herbert Marcuse argued that universities (both established and new) were essential institutions for counter-revolution:

I have stressed the key role which the universities play in the present period: they can still function as institutions for the training of counter-cadres. The ‘restructuring’ necessary for the attainment of this goal means more than decisive student participation and non-authoritarian learning. Making the university “relevant” for today and tomorrow means,

²⁰ BLOND 2017.

²¹ BLOND 2017.

²² See DWORKIN 1997; SCRUTON 2015.

²³ See DAVIS 2006: 335–358; HICKS 2019.

²⁴ See MARCUSE 1972: 55.

instead, presenting the facts and forces that made civilization what it is today and what it could be tomorrow – and that *is* political education. For history indeed repeats itself; it is this repetition of domination and submission that must be halted, and halting it presupposes knowledge of its genesis and of the ways in which it is produced: critical thinking.²⁵

If anti-Christian liberalism in its progressive humanist guise has been the tradition that has attacked Christian thought and simultaneously influenced contemporary conservatism, how does Blond account for post-war Cultural Marxism? This was, more or less, the question I posed to him at the conference in Budapest.²⁶ Blond's response to the question interpreted Marxism in its various forms as part of the broad, historic consequence of Enlightenment humanism and, in particular, a consequence of the impact of the political thought of Rousseau. For Blond, Marxism is downstream of Enlightenment humanism and liberalism. Rather it is anti-Christian liberalism, with its gradual usurpation of Christianity, which has ascended to its current position as intellectual and cultural hegemon of the West.

RECOVERING LIBERALISM: AND WHY IT MATTERS FOR THE CULTURE WAR

In my contribution to this volume I am attempting to deepen the appreciation of the liberal tradition. This I do, not merely to prompt a sympathy in the mind of the reader for some of its richness (though I declare that I hold such a sympathy) but also, to caution against dismissing the value of the liberal tradition because several generations of progressive humanists sought to jettison it from the established moorings of Christian thought. Let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater. It is true that the liberal tradition became the hand-maiden of a different ideational project; figuratively speaking, the bastard child

²⁵ MARCUSE 1972: 56.

²⁶ *The Post-Liberal Turn and the Future of British Conservatism*, Ludovika University of Public Service and the Danube Institute, Budapest, 19 March 2022.

of progressivism and humanism. It is certainly the case, well made by orthodox conservatives, that unfettered economic liberalism (let alone libertarianism) and social liberalism, has furnished those societies which have pursued them, with a litany of negative externalities, tragedies and ongoing dilemmas. With a heavy heart but with clear eyes one can apply the prophetic judgement on the West, that the sins of the fathers have been visited upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.²⁷ So numerous are such consequences in British society, that they are almost too vast to map and measure. Not that there appears to be much public appetite to undertake such an audit of morality. And the conscience of so-called “bishops” in the Established Church is more concerned with affirming the Left – with all of its perversities of wokery – than with godliness and humility.²⁸

Here is the crux of the matter. The conversation about post-liberalism is germane because its participants acknowledge the moral failings of much of the dominant modes of anti-Christian liberalism – progressive humanism. Blond et al.²⁹ offer counter-prescriptions. And whilst, naturally, there is a range of prescription, there is broad agreement that liberalism and Marxism (in its various forms) cannot deliver the common good. Christianity can. And, the orthodox conservative tradition is best placed to draw upon the wellspring of Christian thought. So, the recovery of liberalism aids the recovery of conservatism. Such is the paradigmatic place of Christianity in the history and formation of the West, a little intellectual archaeology will expose troves of cultural riches, available to use and to invest in the present age.

And there is requirement for such riches. If we comprehend the conversation about the need for post-liberalism as means to engage effectively in the Culture War, it may cast light on the need to recover liberalism (properly understood). For orthodox conservatives and their allies, without recovering liberalism and expressing its Christian foundation, it is likely that the Culture

²⁷ Numbers 14:18.

²⁸ See Church of England 2020.

²⁹ For other thinkers who are engaged in the conversation about post-liberalism, albeit from a centre-left position, see MILBANK–PABST 2016; PABST 2021.

War will grind on with the Left as victors in certain spheres. In fact, their flags of victory are literally raised over an array of institutions. In some theatres of the Culture War, attritional identity contests drag on. Still elsewhere, conflicts about free speech and the role of the university are in the balance. Whilst I do not know the extent to which the Culture War can be won or whether an armistice is possible, I remain convinced that how the war is waged matters as much as the outcome of the war itself. By seeking to dignify one's adversaries and seeing in their creative endeavour a distant family resemblance, the ultimate peace can be kept. The Culture War can be maintained as a conflict involving argumentation about principles, visions, moral presuppositions and, above all, words than violence. *But aren't words violent?* They can indeed be harmful and hateful, but they remain in a different category. If that category is merged, blurred or allowed to bleed into the other, the Culture War, I fear, will soon cease to be in the realm of ideas and values alone. Hence the urgent need to recover liberalism; to recover something of the story of ourselves; the fundament of our shared nature.

There exists common territory between my position and that of Blond; we have overlapping theological and political convictions. For example, Blond once listed the following as the urgent prescription for British politics: "a civil state, a moralised market and an associative society."³⁰ Here we are in concert. But despite some personal influence, Blond's appeal to David Cameron ultimately fell on deaf ears. I am unsurprised that the Governments led by Cameron did not live up to Blond's communitarian conservative vision. The evidence and the legacy of the Cameron years is one which is more socially and economically liberal than orthodox conservative.³¹ And this verdict holds for the leaders of the Conservative Party who followed Cameron in swift succession. Orthodox conservatives seem to have a similar experience as their socialist opponents in being perpetually disappointed by party leaders. Part of the issue is to fully realise that state managers and economic managers operate in particular

³⁰ Phillip Blond: *The Future of Conservatism*, speech to launch ResPublica, London, 26 November 2009.

³¹ BEECH 2015:1–15.

social environments and ethical ecosystems removed from the mass of the people. One cannot do without the state or the market and pragmatic reforms are possible. But, neither the state, nor the market, nor government is the author of virtue and the common good. Such a noble and weighty burden is assigned to us all; the civil association of citizens.

CONCLUSION

Orthodox conservatives have much hard thinking to do to formulate mitigations; persuade their supporters; and, most crucially, convince the British public that a meaningful prescription exists to recover that which was lost and to conserve the things of greatest worth. This is not the task for the futurist or for pseudo-religious seers. Rather, it is the task of the likeminded to contend for the permanent things in the modern era. To make a fresh case to cherish those traditions, institutions and morals which preserve virtue and the common good, understood in the classical Christian sense. And to do this for the benefit of generations to come, whether confessional, humanist or religious minorities. Here Burke is instructive:

People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors. Besides, the people of England well know that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement.³²

Such an undertaking begins with conversation and culminates in a shared story; a living tradition. A living tradition which accounts for what has past, what the present is, and what the future ought to be. Conservatism is one such tradition embedded within an ongoing conversation with countless interlocutors, both living and dead. As G. K. Chesterton famously wrote:

³² BURKE 1790: 47–48.

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who happen to be walking about.³³

Due to the grace of memory we can read, recall and reapply stories within a living tradition. Canonical stories are the best stories; they are central to the culture of the West and to the beliefs and practices which they help to sustain. Therefore, canonical stories can be understood to be part of culture, and akin to what Matthew Arnold described as culture's purpose: "To make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere."³⁴ This is where the orthodox conservative has the advantage. Because possessing a reverence for what has been thought and known – an historical disposition – means not being coy about learning from the best of one's past, and being thereby fitted with the requisite confidence. Such confidence enables one to ignore the neophile with his fetish for novelty and fashion – like all fetishes, they lead to perdition – and to smile at the nostalgist and sing to the curmudgeon. For orthodox conservatives, such is the West's storehouse of practical wisdom; food for the heart, the soul and the mind; a feast, richly laid upon our table. If we chose to revisit and then dwell here for a while, what could be done? What could be imagined?

³³ CHESTERTON 1908: 45.

³⁴ ARNOLD 1961: 31.

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Daniel Pitt¹

Oikophilia and the Poetics of Conservative Environmentalism

In 1948, Richard M. Weaver reminded us that ideas have consequences.² This is why conservatives should engage their opponents on any issue on the ideational level – and no issue should be seen as intrinsically left-wing. This includes environmental issues. As in rugby, if you do not commit players to the maul, you cannot win the ball. Yet some conservatives seem to have accepted that they cannot be environmentalists; that the idea of conservative environmentalism is a paradox, an oxymoron. As Katey Castellano observes, environmentalism “is usually affiliated with liberalism” and “woke” politics.³ That assumption has led Jonathan Bate, in his work on Wordsworth’s “ecological” poetry, to conclude that Wordsworth must also have been a liberal.⁴ Roger Scruton remarks: “Conservatives then wrongly dismiss the whole environmental movement as a socially divisive one [...] and try to pretend that the environment is an exclusively left-wing concern, and one that has no place in conservative political thinking.”⁵ As a result, as John R. E. Bliese points out, conservatives have tended to give their support instead to businesses that prefer less environmental regulation.⁶

¹ I am most grateful to Dr Sebastian Morello and Christopher Fear as well as the participants of *The Post-Liberal-Turn and the Future of British Conservatism* conference for their comments on my presentation and on earlier drafts of this chapter. Indeed, any mistakes and/or typos are mine alone.

² WEAVER 2013.

³ CASTELLANO 2011: 73–91.

⁴ BATE 1991.

⁵ SCRUTON 2006: 19.

⁶ BLIESE 2002.

I will argue here, however, that there is a traditional conservative perspective upon the politics of the environment, non-liberal and anti-woke, that is plausible, coherent and persuasive – and probably also popular. Similarly, Peter Huber argues that modern liberal environmentalism is deceptive, and actually harms rather than protects the environment. For Huber, the environment needs saving from the so-called environmentalists. My method for recovering the conservative perspective on environmental politics is holistic, drawing on key conservative thinkers, writers, poets and politicians – historical and contemporary – from Edmund Burke to Wendell Berry. We can discover, I think, that a thread of environmental protection and enhancement runs through the Tory tradition. Recovering that perspective is worthwhile for not merely academic reasons. Maintaining a stable and flourishing natural environment should be a concern for everyone, especially for conservatives. But despite the comprehensiveness of the literature, we also discover seven basic principles emerging from it, which suggest certain policy proposals.

A CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL TRADITION?

Although “conservative intellectuals have largely ignored the environment”, as John Bliese observed in 1997,⁷ “politicians who call themselves conservatives have not”.⁸ However (he explains), they have attended to environmental debates only to attempt “to block virtually every attempt to clean up pollution, protect the environment, and conserve”.⁹ It is little surprise, then, that, as Scruton explains:

Environmentalists have been habituated to see conservatism as the ideology of free enterprise, and free enterprise as an assault on the earth’s resources, with no motive beyond the

⁷ BLIESE 1997: 1.

⁸ BLIESE 1997: 1.

⁹ BLIESE 1997: 1.

short-term gains that animate the market. Those who have called themselves conservatives in the political context are in part responsible for this misperception.¹⁰

Conservatives have indeed emphasised economic choice – and have been right to do so, to a certain extent. But choice has limits, and unfortunately Conservative politicians have said much less about the unchosen obligations that maintain the conditions of meaningful choice. There are of course exceptions. Margaret Thatcher in a speech called *Dimensions of Conservatism* said, to a meeting of Young Conservatives at Caxton Hall in London, in 1977:

Free enterprise has a place, an honoured place in our scheme of things, but as one of many dimensions. For Tories became Tories well before the modern concept of a free market economy meant anything.¹¹

R. V. Young, Jr., too, argued that – though “discussion of the relationship between conservatism and environmental affairs seems a hopelessly complicated task”¹² – “it is possible to maintain a coherent conservative attitude toward the environmental controversy”. Young added that a “conservative must insist that the only answer to our current ecologic crisis is to recognize it as a moral crisis and return to traditional virtues. Self-restraint, humility, and (Weaver’s term) piety are all important features of the conservative temper”.¹³ Profoundly, Weaver perceived that “the attitude toward nature [...] is a matter so basic to one’s outlook or philosophy of life that we often tend to overlook it”.¹⁴ He then precognitively remarked that “if we do overlook it, we find there are many things coming later which we cannot straighten out”.¹⁵

¹⁰ SCRUTON 2006: 7.

¹¹ THATCHER 1977: 4.

¹² YOUNG 1979: 253.

¹³ YOUNG 1979: 253.

¹⁴ WEAVER 1987: 209.

¹⁵ WEAVER 1987: 209.

MEMORY, IMAGINATION, COUNTRYSIDE AND PRINCIPLES

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* trace the growth of the mind, and both note the positive impact that nature and the countryside can have on our mental state, such as memory, imagination and sympathy:

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought¹⁶

Indeed, Bliese provided nine principles in his work and these are: (1) realising a conservative is not a materialist; (2) observing piety, especially piety toward nature; (3) practicing prudence; (4) understanding society is intergenerational; (5) respecting the freedom of the individual; (6) taking responsibility for one's actions, the corollary of freedom; (7) respecting private property rights; and from the marketplace, (8) internalising negative externalities in prices; and (9) ending harmful governmental interventions in the market. There is considerable overlap in the principles that emerged from the literature. These principles that together underpin a traditionalist conservative environmentalism: (1) oikophilia; (2) trusteeship; (3) localism; (4) intergenerational obligations; (5) piety; (6) embeddedness; and (7) prudence. This conservative environmentalism is a moral one, rather than an economic or

¹⁶ WORDSWORTH 1850: 335.

“resource-based” position. It seems that one of the advantages of this moral position is that liberal and woke positions for the environment are generally considered to be the only two moral positions available and that conservatism does not have a moral position.

OIKOPHILIA: THE LOVE OF HOME

Three powerful words, “love – of – home”, provide the starting point for a traditionalist conservative view of the environment. Scruton believed that “nobody seems to have identified a motive more likely to serve the environmentalist cause than this one, of the shared love for our home”.¹⁷ I will follow Scruton and call it “oikophilia”: as he explains, the “oikos is the place that is not just mine and yours but *ours*”.¹⁸ Indeed, it is fundamental to conservative environmentalism that my neighbourhood, my town, my country and my planet are also *yours*. Only then do *we* begin to acknowledge the obligations entailed by such a viewpoint: obligations to each other, but also *our* obligations to others, including those who are yet to be born. Future people will also need a home, and therefore they will need what homes are made of. Most obviously homes are *places*, and this means more than just “spaces”: places are limited, shaped, organised and customised. Hence our intuitive admiration for the towns that others have made and adapted for good living and meaningful activity, and maintained with care and attention: elegant buildings and street-scapes, squares that draw you in and foster civility, thriving and well-managed plants and wildlife, good use of water, and so on. This is not entirely about material. Building and maintaining a home, and living well in it, requires that the inhabitants have some sense of the shared history and “memory” of a place in which they participate, and some sense of the customs of the place. At the very least, they should have a basic idea of their role in upholding

¹⁷ SCRUTON 2006: 18.

¹⁸ SCRUTON 2013: 106 (emphasis added).

decent “household management”. As Wendell Berry puts it in *A Place on Earth*: “Nobody can discover the world for somebody else. Only when we discover it for ourselves does it become common ground and a common bond and we cease to be alone.”¹⁹ Thus, we discover the immanent obligations of the shared home: they are not imported from without – whether the lofty announcements of transnational institutions or international pressure groups – and we cannot substitute our own selfish preferences unilaterally, like angry adolescents who try to live only by their own principles while expecting to share the benefits of their parents’ household.

A positive environmentalism requires popular consent and “buy-in”. Indeed, David Hume taught us that without promises there can be no long-term relations, and that the institution of promise-making depends upon trust. That is why woke groups, such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, do more harm to their causes than good. They try to remedy their lack of local “buy-in” by adopting the tactics of inconvenience and moral browbeating, but this erodes even further the basic fund of trust between adult strangers that they might previously have enjoyed: thus, clumsily putting their untrustworthiness on public display, they alienate ordinary, civically-minded local people. By stark contrast, the traditionalist conservative perspective recognises that environmental sustainability depends upon trust, and that trust is nourished by actions that communicate love of the fabric, history and customs of the *oikos*. Consequently, environmentalists should not see themselves as local agents of a universal global movement, but responsible stewards of the going concern of the particular parish. This does not leave global problems unaddressed, since the universal is made of those very particulars: if you look after the pennies, the pounds will look after themselves. Global problems are resolved by the invisible hand of place-based solutions. This position does contradict the dominant narrative and belief system of most of the world’s non-governmental organisations (NGOs), so there is even some working consensus with those who apply more directly Peter Singer’s premise that moral obligations cannot

¹⁹ BERRY 2001.

be geographically contingent – even while, on other grounds, we might at least call that premise into question.

If this sounds like a “Tory” attitude to the landscape, rather than a “Whig” one – to draw on Everett²⁰ – then I would agree. For Everett, the Tory view of the landscape emphasises the traditional, the natural, the Christian and the organic; whereas the Whig view foregrounds ownership of the impersonal, and prizes a concept of improvement based upon utility.²¹ What I am calling conservative environmentalism prioritises the Tory view, and recognises the shortcomings of the Whig. Not everything that we love can (or should) be given a monetary value, including in nature. Theodore Roosevelt observed that “to waste, to destroy, our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the day of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed”.²²

Our landscape, countryside and urban dwellings are meaningful and irreplaceable, and understandably many feel a moral duty to our environment and also an emotional desire to work to conserve them. It is a long-standing thesis that beauty is an intrinsic value. To look on a thing as beautiful is to value it for what it is, not for what it does, or for the external end it serves. We need to enhance the beautiful and overcome uglification and the fake in our landscape. Doing so will protect, enhance, and safeguard the place where we live and our environment. As Wordsworth writes:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; –
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

²⁰ For an analysis of how this typology is still impacting the Conservative Party see PITT 2021: 267–291.

²¹ EVERETT 1994.

²² ROOSEVELT 1907.

The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.²³

EMBEDDEDNESS IN PLACE

Mark Mitchell writes of the allure of home: we “live and breathe and have our being in the context of a particular place in time”.²⁴ Mitchell also notes that “each place has a unique history embodied in the land, the people, the human artifacts and the stories”. He concludes from this that without these we are “nomads” and become “strangers in a strange land”.²⁵ In the *Quest for Community*, the social scientist Robert Nisbet indicated a similar argument regarding identity. For Nisbet, the autonomous individual as abstractly construed in modernity was left isolated, without context and barren before the state. Moreover Simone Weil, in the *Need for Roots*, remarks that “[t]o be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”.²⁶ It seems then that the need for roots is also important if the environmental perspective is to be coherent and motivating, especially for those left cold or repelled by the forms that mainline environmentalism currently takes. This is a core and pressing task, for any of us who aims to be, as Weil puts it,

²³ WORDSWORTH 1807: 122.

²⁴ MITCHELL 2012: 57.

²⁵ MITCHELL 2012: 57.

²⁶ WEIL 2001: 40.

[A] human being by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in the living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.²⁷

Berry wrote that “[t]he care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope”. Indeed, “we pray, not, for new earth or heaven, but to be quiet in heart, and in eye, clear. What we need is here.”²⁸ This traditionist view suggests that conserving one’s local culture and one’s environment go hand in glove.

LOCALISM: OUTWARDS AND UPWARDS

Tocqueville wrote that “the strength of free peoples resides in the local community”.²⁹ Indeed, localists, who look after the place that is theirs with local attention, are easily motivated to take the first and most necessary step towards sustainability, which is to identify a territory as *theirs* and to form free associations, “little platoons”, to sustain it as a neighbourhood. According to this perspective, such a neighbourhood is to be protected, embellished and looked after for the benefit of descendants. This is, as Berry puts it, “thinking little” (i.e. thinking local, rather than global), like farmers with established “connection[s] to their land”, which are “often hereditary and traditional”. Berry observes that:

The corporations [...] will never be bound to the land by the sense of birthright and community, or by the love that enforces care. They will be bound by the rule of efficiency, which takes thought only of the volume of the year’s produce, and takes no thought of the slow increment of life of the land [...].³⁰

²⁷ WEIL 2001: 41.

²⁸ BERRY 2017.

²⁹ TOCQUEVILLE 2003: 62–63.

³⁰ BERRY 2017.

Perhaps, we should start local but not finish local. Burke's thinking is useful here, as he notes the series by which we proceed toward the love of our country and beyond. Burke writes:

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind.³¹

Indeed, living a conservative life,³² and settling down and marking time,³³ will lead us to love of mankind and respect for the planet. Wordsworth wrote about the love of nature leading to love of man:

Thus was man,
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
And thus my heart was early introduced,
To an unconscious love and reverence,
Of human nature; hence the human form,
To me became an index of delight,
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness.³⁴

The nation-state or the “community-through-time”³⁵ is fundamental to conserving our environment. As Scruton wrote:

Rather than attempt to rectify environmental and social problems on the global level, conservatives seek local controls and a reassertion of local sovereignty over known and managed environments. This means affirming the right of nations to self-government and to the adoption of policies that will chime with local loyalties and sentiments of

³¹ BURKE 1790: 68.

³² HAZONY 2022.

³³ SCRUTON 2017a.

³⁴ WORDSWORTH 1850: 218.

³⁵ SCRUTON 1980: 48.

national pride. The attachment to territory and the desire to protect that territory from erosion and waste remain a powerful motive, and one that is presupposed in all demands for sacrifice that issue from the mouths of politicians [...]. For this motive is the simple and powerful one, of love for one's home.³⁶

He argues that, without the nation, the long-term perspective is seemingly impossible to grasp as part of politics.³⁷ It is the last concrete relationship before relationships become an abstraction, and abstract relationships are unable to support what effective environmentalism requires: trust and the long-term perspective.

TRUSTEESHIP AND THE OBLIGATION OF STEWARDSHIP

According to Burke the present generation are always trustees of the heritage and culture that have been inherited. Likewise, Scruton writes:

The purpose of politics, on this view, is not to rearrange society in the interests of some overarching vision or ideal, such as equality, liberty or fraternity. It is to maintain a vigilant resistance to the entropic forces that erode our social and ecological inheritance. The goal is to pass on to future generations, and if possible to enhance, the order and equilibrium of which we are the temporary trustees.³⁸

Weaver writes that:

Man has a duty of veneration toward nature and the natural. Nature is not something to be fought, conquered and changed according to any human whims. To some extent, of course, it has to be used. But what man should seek in regard to nature is not a complete

³⁶ SCRUTON 2006: 15.

³⁷ SCRUTON 1980: 48. See also HAZONY 2018 for the case of the nation state.

³⁸ SCRUTON 2006: 8.

dominion but a *modus vivendi* – that is, a manner of living together, a coming to terms with something that was here before our time and will be here after it.³⁹

T. S. Eliot provided typology between using and exploiting nature.⁴⁰ This orientation leads to stewardship over nature and of husbanding resources. Indeed, the conservative environmental perspective argues that this burden of stewardship that we inherit cannot be sustained unaided, and that the disposition to give thanks for our existence and reverence to the world on which we depend is deeply engrained in Tory thought and also necessary for protection of our environment.

INTERGENERATIONAL OBLIGATIONS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

According to Rossiter “[t]he spirit of trusteeship – the sense of receiving a precious heritage and handing it on intact and perhaps even slightly strengthened – pervades Conservatism”.⁴¹ Trusteeship is a core principle of conservative environmentalism, and this provides the link to our intergenerational obligations. The need to take seriously our unchosen obligations and the conservation of our environment is core to Toryism. We know that we have obligations to honour parents that we did not choose, to defend a country that we did not choose, and to conserve places – landscapes – that we did not choose. We need to take these unchosen obligations seriously, and they ought to be the basis of any Conservative platform – as Disraeli did in his *Vindication of the English Constitution*, when he defended it on the basis that it was made by something that is “ten thousand times better than choice. It is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions and moral, social civil habitudes of the people, which disclose

³⁹ WEAVER 1987: 220–221.

⁴⁰ ELIOT 1949: 26.

⁴¹ ROSSITER 1955: 64–66.

themselves only in a long space of time”.⁴² Indeed, the social conditions, such as the family, transfer social capital from one generation to the next, and the utmost significant renewable resource is, of course, us. Scruton argues that “when family life fails to play its part, we must expect our culture to deteriorate”.⁴³ Under such conditions, I would argue, we should also expect the “family estate”, our shared environment, to deteriorate, too. As Burke observed, “the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement”.⁴⁴ Our obligations are not a contract between the living only, but between the living, the unborn and the dead.⁴⁵ Scruton wrote that it is not “a contract at all, but a relation of trusteeship”.⁴⁶ Yes, intergenerational obligations, but what about intergenerational fairness?⁴⁷ First, what does a conservative think of fairness? It seems an inclination towards Aristotle’s “proper proportion” view of fairness – meaning that it would be unfair for a person to receive a greater or smaller proportion of the good than what he himself has earned. Thus, tying together Aristotle’s “proper proportion” and Burke’s transgenerational view of society, we can see that debt, deficit, environment and pollution are matters for the yet-unborn, for us, and perhaps also for the dignity and memory of our forebears. It is incumbent upon the present-day generation to take only our proper proportion, and not to rack-up debts for the unborn, or to bequeath to them a huge and complex ecological crisis.

⁴² DISRAELI 1835: 24.

⁴³ ELIOT 1973.

⁴⁴ BURKE 1790: 48.

⁴⁵ BURKE 1790: 143–144.

⁴⁶ SCRUTON 1980: 10.

⁴⁷ I thank a delegate at the conference on *The Post-Liberal Turn and the Future of British Conservatism Conference* for the question on fairness and not just obligation.

PRUDENCE:
A MODERATING PRINCIPLE

Some conservatives have seen environmentalism as single-issue fanaticism which is hostile to politics of prudence.⁴⁸ Burke, Kirk and other conservative thinkers have placed a high value on prudence.⁴⁹ It is useful here to quote Ferenc Hörcher:

Politics is done by political agents (individuals and communities), who talk, decide and act in order to influence their political environment, and to change the world around them as far as it can be changed by human, political means. They interact with their natural and social environment, and by this praxis try to have an impact on both. To achieve success in these interactions, they need a kind of applied, embodied knowledge, which is unlike *epistémé*, *scientia* or *sophia*, in our terms, unlike abstract, conceptual knowledge. What they need is not necessarily reflected, but rather experience-based, practice-oriented, pragmatic knowledge. This sort of knowledge is called “prudence” (Latin *prudentia*, Greek *phronesis*, English practical wisdom). Practical knowledge may have different forms, not all of them politically oriented. This book is interested in practical political knowledge.⁵⁰

Thus, any statesman putting “conservative environmentalism” into practice and policy should do so with prudence and practical wisdom. Conservatives do not aim to create a green Utopia or restore the Garden of Eden. Thatcher herself rejected the promises of Green Pelagianism in 1978: “As a Christian, I am bound to shun utopias on this earth and to recognise that there is no change in Man’s social arrangements which will make him perfectly good and perfectly happy.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ For an in-depth work on prudence and conservatism see HÖRCHER 2020.

⁴⁹ KIRK 2023; ROSSITER 1955.

⁵⁰ HÖRCHER 2020: 163.

⁵¹ THATCHER 1978.

NATURAL PIETY:
THE CROWNING CONCEPT

Wordsworth evoked the concept of “natural piety” in *My Heart Leaps Up*:

A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.⁵²

In *Human Nature*, Scruton explains that the “main task of political conservatism, as represented by Burke, Maistre, and Hegel, was to put obligations of piety back where they belong, at the centre of the picture”.⁵³ Maistre argued that we ought to have piety towards established things, and placed divinely ordained traditions above the urges of self-interest. Similarly, Weaver defines piety as “a discipline of the will through respect. It admits the right to exist of things larger than the ego, of things different from the ego”.⁵⁴ The concept of piety is also raised in the *Euthyphro*, one of Plato’s early dialogues. Answering Socrates’s challenge, Euthyphro defines piety as “what all the gods love”.⁵⁵ It is, as Weaver explains, a cooperation with the “gods in the kind of order they have instituted”, and is thus part of a “larger concept of justice”.⁵⁶ Weaver adds that “[p]iety is a discipline of the will through respect”.⁵⁷ Moreover, Weaver believed

⁵² WORDSWORTH 1807: 44.

⁵³ SCRUTON 2017b: 126.

⁵⁴ WEAVER 2013: 154.

⁵⁵ Pl. *Euthphr.* 9e.

⁵⁶ WEAVER 2013: 154.

⁵⁷ WEAVER 2013: 154.

that we are required to “regard the spirit of piety” to three things. These are (1) nature; (2) neighbours; and (3) the past.⁵⁸ According to Bliese, piety in this area is “based on the humble acknowledgment that we live in a world which we did not create, and that we inhabit it for only a brief span of time”.⁵⁹

We can also learn from the Roman view of piety: that we are required to honour our parents and ancestors, the household deities, the laws and the civil order; that we keep the appointed festivals and public ceremonies, and maintain a punctilious respect towards sacred things. In short, piety is the recognition of the limitations of human understanding and control; and obligations to the landscape, both rural and urban. Like Weaver and Bliese, I see piety as a “crowning concept”,⁶⁰ and agree with Bliese that it is “the over-arching attitude which should govern our attitudes toward everything else in the world”.⁶¹ Indeed, a natural gratitude is due for what is given and we express it, in part, by fulfilling our unchosen obligations. Burke wrote that those who do not offer due piety to those of the past will never find any real concern for their children or grandchildren.⁶² In terms of our relationship with nature and our environment, we require is diffuse gratitude or a shared gratitude diffused amongst different generations – including the dead. But, as Weaver asks, “are those who died heroes’ and martyrs’ deaths really dead?” He suggests that they are not, as they live in how they shape(d) “our dream of the world”.⁶³ More concretely, they have maintained and bequeathed that world to us. Scruton points out that people make sacrifices for the things that they love,⁶⁴ and asks, “[a]nd when do these sacrifices benefit the unborn?”⁶⁵ His answer was “[w]hen they are made for the dead”.⁶⁶ These ideas of “givenness”, piety and respect for the

⁵⁸ WEAVER 2013: 154.

⁵⁹ BLIESE 1997: 1, 7.

⁶⁰ WEAVER 2013: 154.

⁶¹ BLIESE 1997: 1, 7.

⁶² BIRZER 2016.

⁶³ WEAVER 2013: 159.

⁶⁴ SCRUTON 2009: 191.

⁶⁵ SCRUTON 2009: 191.

⁶⁶ SCRUTON 2009: 191.

past, present and future are fundamental to the Tory love of country, and the homes we build within it. Part of settling down is protecting our environment and a disposition to accord and to recognise our environmental obligations.

FINDING THE OLD WAYS FORWARD⁶⁷

Burke told us that “[p]eople will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors”.⁶⁸ We need to look back at ancestors and draw on their knowledge, understanding and inspiration. We need to draw on the past for inspiration for the future and current proven environmental grievances can be addressed. As Burke put it in his *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*:

The reformer must understand the reason behind an abuse before trying to remedy it. The underlying principle may be sound, and the abuse merely a perversion; hence the necessity of caution and wisdom in reform. A spirit of reformation is never more consistent with itself than when it refuses to be rendered the means of destruction.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, like Virgil in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, our lantern is behind us, illuminating past events and societies, but we must keep moving forward into the darkness. We cannot go backwards, therefore we must use this light to assist us in drawing knowledge from the past. We can improve our society and our environment through prudent and humane use of the knowledge that we glean. Conservatives do have a proud history to draw on from establishing the Board of Agriculture Act 1889, when Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden’s the Clean Air Act, the creation of the Department of the Environment with its first ever Secretary of State for the Environment and the “Blue Belt” in 2017.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ This subsection title has been inspired by O’HEAR 2000.

⁶⁸ BURKE 1790: 47–48.

⁶⁹ BURKE 1791: 48.

⁷⁰ See PITT 2023: 161–177.

Margaret Thatcher was right when she said, at the Conservative Party Conference in 1988, that “[n]o generation has a freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy – with a full repairing lease.”⁷¹ We have to remember the terms of the *full repairing* lease. The key goal for policy in terms of the environmental issues is to ensure that externalities are directed inwards, so that the individual, or the business, or the state has to bear the cost of its own actions. Since economies depend upon social capital, so ecological obligations, the renewal of trust, responsibility, and the little platoons and sustainable family structures are paramount to the sustainability of both economy and environment. As Russell Kirk noted, “we ought to employ our techniques of efficiency in the interest of posterity, voluntarily conserving our land and our minerals and our forests and our water and our old towns and our countryside for the future partners in our contract of eternal society”.⁷²

Here are a few areas that ought to be of concern to conservative environmentalism: sustaining neighbourhoods, minimising food waste, responsible local food sourcing, effective recycling, conserving our green spaces and natural features, aiming for tree-lined streets, and “Bottle return” schemes (which I have been in favour of for almost 18 years, since visiting Finland). But most importantly we need to throw away our fast food culture and back the “fixers”. Indeed, as T. S. Eliot taught us, life is a circular journey whose end is to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.⁷³

⁷¹ THATCHER 1988.

⁷² KIRK 1989: 81.

⁷³ ELIOT 1953: lines 241–242.

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David Jeffery

What Evidence for a Post-Liberal Turn in the British Conservative Party?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the extent to which the Conservative Party has been receptive to postliberal ideas, through a longitudinal analysis of the leadership launch speeches given by all candidates in Conservative Party leadership contests since Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016.

There has been much debate among commentators, academics and politicians about the nature of the relationship between post-liberalism and the Conservative Party, which started with Phillip Blond's seminal book *Red Tory*.¹ *Red Tory* concluded with an assessment of the then nascent Cameronism. For Blond, Cameron's speeches given at Davos in April 2009 and the Hugo Young Memorial Lecture in November 2009 represented "a genuinely new civic conservatism that privileges human association above the state and market ideologies", with Cameronism offering a blueprint of "an associative society that is based on human relationships", in contrast to the failed social and economic liberalism of both Thatcherism and New Labour.²

Of course, Blond – and other post-liberals – would soon become disillusioned with Cameron and his governing project. Cameronism turned out to be a combination of social and economic liberalism, marred by aggressive austerity, with the Big Society acting to paper over the cracks of a retreating state.³ Instead, after the 2015 general election the search for Conservative post-liberals shifted – Pabst identified Michael Gove and Robert Halfon as potential

¹ BLOND 2010.

² BLOND 2010.

³ BLOND 2021.

standard bearers, and approved of the Conservative's support for a national "living wage" and apprenticeship levy to support a social-market economy.⁴

The result of the 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the EU, when Britain narrowly voted to leave the EU, was understood by postliberal commentators as representing a desperate cry of anguish from left-behind voters who were keen to give a bloody nose to the elites who forced a socially and economically liberal status quo onto an unwilling population. These voters, it was argued, had seen globalisation and immigration change the profiles of their areas, and rarely for the better. The vote to leave the EU was not, in this reading, really about the EU – it was about bringing down the existing political economy. For postliberals, it "was a vote against all that liberalism has wrought and all that liberalism has brought: a world of rampant social, economic, and cultural insecurity" fuelled by mass immigration, without thought of cultural compatibility, or whether recipient communities actually want inward migration.⁵

This was certainly how Theresa May read the situation.⁶ Careful not to blame her predecessor (or indeed Thatcher/Thatcherism), May instead claimed the referendum result was "not just about a vote to withdraw from the EU" but "was about something broader – something that the European Union came to represent", namely the liberal status quo. May "presented Brexit as an opportunity to address Britain's long-term economic problems [...] low productivity and an overreliance on the financial services industry based in London".⁷ In a direct repudiation to the Thatcherite strain in the Conservative Party, May stated that she believed in the "good that the government can do".⁸ May also claimed that her Industrial Policy White Paper "epitomises my belief in a strong and strategic state that intervenes decisively whenever it can make a difference".⁹

⁴ PABST 2015: xxvii.

⁵ BLOND 2019.

⁶ COSTELLO 2023: 69–92.

⁷ GOES 2017.

⁸ ESPIET-KILTY 2023.

⁹ HM Government 2017: 4.

The Mayite mix of one nation conservatism, Christian democracy and social democracy – or, “One Nation blue to its fingertips, but with a hint of papal purple and a dash of Labour red”¹⁰ – won the support of postliberal commentators. Blond argued that May’s popularity was at its highest when “she announced on the doorstep of No 10 a clear *Red Tory* agenda. It collapsed when she tragically turned out to lack the necessary electoral charisma and policy options to realise any of it”,¹¹ although this reading obviously ignores the Brexit melodrama, and its clear electoral consequences, cf. coming fifth in the 2019 European Parliament elections, or her broader failure to exercise statecraft.¹² The postliberal wing of the Labour Party – Blue Labour – also warmly welcomed May as “the inaugural Prime Minister of a ‘postliberal’ age that marks the return of national jurisdiction over free markets, the bringing back of lawmaking within national borders, and the reprisal of national-communitarian forms of political belonging”.¹³

Pabst, to some extent, agrees with Blond’s analysis. “May’s early pronouncements as Prime Minister offer a glimpse of what could have been for postliberal policy making – instead of just using the state to protect people from the hard edges of capitalism, Mayism promised fundamental reforms to change the nature of the market itself, greater local and regional self-government, and an industrial strategy.”¹⁴ Furthermore, he approvingly notes how May was “prepared to underpin her rhetorical commitment to greater economic justice and social cohesion with a more explicit political economy [...] not so much to offer mere compensation for the side effects of globalisation as to provide fundamental reforms which would begin to change the nature of the market itself”, but does critique May for not significantly departing “from the liberal-progressivist fusion of state with market power, in particular her commitment to state-sponsored free trade” and for focusing on a “form of liberal meritocracy which sees individual

¹⁰ GOES 2017.

¹¹ BLOND 2019.

¹² ROE-CRINES – JEFFERY 2023.

¹³ BOLTON-PITTS 2020: 88–109.

¹⁴ PABST 2017.

merit as the key driver of individual success, with state intervention there to boost one's odds of success", which ignores or sidelines the intermediary institutions championed by postliberals.¹⁵

The Conservative Party has always been a broad church, and as such not everyone agreed with this reading of Brexit. As Blond himself has noted, economic liberals represent the "overwhelming majority of the Conservative government".¹⁶ For some, such as the former MEP and leading Brexiteer Dan Hannan, the purpose of leaving the EU was to go even further with free-market economics. This platform became known as "Singapore-on-Thames", and was primarily pushed by the Conservative Party's libertarian wing and free-market think tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute for Economic Affairs. However, research found that leave voters were less likely to support Singapore-on-Thames, and more likely to support a "Belarus-on-Trent" vision of Britain,¹⁷ one that is more socially conservative and more economically protectionist – more postliberal (although Pitt argues a Tory Socialist agenda would serve to exacerbate existing dividing lines within the party).¹⁸

Others Conservative MPs were committed remainers, who saw the job of the government to minimise the economic disruption of formally leaving the EU – one of the foremost being May's chancellor, Philip Hammond. For those advocating for a postliberal political economy, remaining in the Single Market, or even remaining closely aligned in goods and services, was anathema. As a result, there was no consensus around what the political economy of a post-Brexit Britain should actually look like during the May era – indeed, arguably, there still isn't.

Johnson's emergence as party leader, and thus prime minister, was off the back of his position on Brexit. As mayor of London he was broadly seen as a cosmopolitan liberal, although he was widely seen as ideologically chameleonic – perhaps best epitomised by writing an article in favour of both leave

¹⁵ PABST 2017.

¹⁶ BLOND 2019.

¹⁷ DUNIN-WASOWICZ 2018.

¹⁸ PITT 2021: 267–291.

and remain during the referendum process, purportedly to help him choose a side to back – he placed himself firmly in the one nation territory at his first party conference speech as leader.

Beyond Brexit, and before Covid-19 appeared on the scene, the focus of Johnson's "people's government" was levelling up, a place-based economic policy which sought to use the state to address issues of regional inequality, which, in Hickson and Williams' view, represented "an ideological shift from the heyday of economic liberalism".¹⁹ While this could be seen as a postliberal policy, at its core was the idea that these left-behind areas were underperforming economically, and increased state involvement in local economies was necessary to boost GDP. The logic was still that of the economic liberal. On a practical level, the effectiveness of the policy of levelling up was hamstrung by limited state resources, a demand for economic resources from other geographic areas, "decisions and outcomes ultimately favouring Conservative-run areas",²⁰ ably shown by Hanretty's analysis of how the Towns Fund was allocated.²¹

For Blond, Johnson's 2019 victory was symbolic of the success of the Red Tory message:²² he later wrote "Boris as a Whig is empty and conventional (it is hard to name any of his achievements as London's liberal mayor) and won't help anyone. But Boris the Red Tory, well, that is and would be a different matter".²³ For Pabst, however, the Johnsonian agenda was confused: while it did break with the social and economic liberalism of previous eras, it also combined "Keynesian state activism with deregulated free trade" – levelling up meets global Britain is not, for Pabst, a coherent postliberal position, and while there was a flirtation with social conservatism, the Johnson Government "embraced a brand of state centralism that undermines community and does little to support the family".²⁴

¹⁹ HICKSON–WILLIAMS 2023.

²⁰ HICKSON–WILLIAMS 2023.

²¹ HANRETTY 2021: 7–13.

²² BLOND 2019.

²³ BLOND 2019.

²⁴ PABST 2021: vii–viii.

Of course, Johnson was not brought down by policy but morality. His successor, Liz Truss, was a committed free-marketeer Thatcherite, and in turn her successor, Rishi Sunak, has no clear policy goals beyond a grey economic managerialism that seeks to placate markets and remove barriers to growth. One example of this is the role of the state vis-à-vis childcare. State-funded childcare is good insofar as it gets mothers back to work – the role of the family in providing care, and the importance of a mother–child bond so vital to postliberals is lost in this managerial GDP-at-all-costs economic liberalism, a critique not lost on members of his own party, for instance Miriam Cates.²⁵

The direction of the Conservative Party, and its political economy, is by no means settled. The likely Conservative loss in the next general election will give the party time for either soul searching or brutal in-fighting. But before we can map out a future, we must understand the past. This chapter will shed light on the contours of the debate around social and economic policy in the Conservative Party during the leadership elections of 2016, 2019 and 2022, and explore the extent to which postliberal ideas could be identified. Before this exercise, however, we should define what we mean by postliberalism.

POST-LIBERALISM AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

What do we mean when we talk about postliberalism? This is a question that has been addressed in more detail in the other chapters of this volume, but it is worth establishing a basic framework before moving to the leadership speeches. Postliberalism is often – incorrectly – conflated with simply going left on the economy and right on culture, but as social democratic and socialist governments have shown worldwide it is completely possible to be economically left-wing and still prioritise the state as the main vehicle of delivering socially equitable outcomes. Similarly, as centre-right or right-wing governments have

²⁵ CATES 2022.

shown, one can support “family values” and see the state as the ideal motor for encouraging them – see, perhaps, Poland and Hungary today.²⁶

For Pabst, postliberalism sits at the intersection of one-nation conservatism and ethical socialism.²⁷ Flaherty proposes “conservative-liberal-socialist” as a potential – if not confusing – label for postliberal ideology.²⁸ It is conservative in the sense that it seeks to conserve natural human institutions beyond the state – families, communities, Burkean little platoons – against an abstract notion of the individual. For postliberals, liberalism divides “communities, social and economic classes and nations into a constellation of individuals warring among each other in search of self-advantage” and as a result “liberalism negates any possibility of collective action or solidarity”.²⁹ Thus postliberalism cautions against liberal excesses such as individualism, market fundamentalism and identity politics. As Franklin notes, postliberals “do not believe that the maximisation of personal freedom is the be-all-and-end-all of politics”, but rather is just one instinct competing against others, such as “family, community, nation, fairness and beauty”.³⁰

Postliberalism *is* liberal in the sense that it values key liberal rights such as freedom of speech, thought, and association – all of which underpin a healthy and vigorous civil society. This is why Pabst claims it is wrong to hold Poland and Hungary up as examples of postliberal states – their pro-family policies are not rooted in a postliberal political economy, but instead are supported by “fiscal dumping and deregulation to attract foreign capital”. Furthermore, they are sliding into an authoritarian nationalism, undermining constitutional freedoms – postliberals support the liberal notion of representative government – and this authoritarianism threatens the very organic associational bodies postliberals claim to value.³¹ This last point provides a key dividing line between libertarians and postliberals: whilst both distrust the state, the former sees the state as

²⁶ ROUSSINOS 2021.

²⁷ PABST 2021: 19.

²⁸ FLAHERTY 2021.

²⁹ ROUSSINOS 2021.

³⁰ FRANKLIN 2019.

³¹ PABST 2021.

inherently dangerous to individual liberty, but postliberals critique the state as crowding out other forms of associational life.

Finally, postliberalism is socialist in that it argues everyone should have a stake in the common wealth of a society, in contrast to the winner-takes-all and beggar-thy-neighbour approach of global modern capitalism. Not everything has to be run for profit, but rather should be run for the public good – public utilities being a prominent example. Postliberals believe that the interests of capital – especially Anglo-American capitalism – need to be recalibrated, for instance “by aligning the executive with the long-term interests of the company, its shareholders, employers and consumers”.³²

This approach to the economy is not, however, reheated post-war social democracy. It is not the state that should be the primary deliverer of these outcomes. Public utilities should be run by mutuals; the family is a key site of childcare provision, not private nurseries; trade unions and employers should provide workplace insurance-based welfare, as should religious organisations and employers (possibly big businesses but ideally locally-rooted firms, co-operatives or mutuals, which would also be represented by their own employers’ associations). Local authorities should have much greater powers, both because they can act as a counterbalance to the central state, but also because they are more closely rooted in their local communities.

So, then, we have a postliberalism that is conservative in the sense that it wants to support organic society at the expense of the state, liberal in the sense that it recognises this organic society requires individual liberties such as freedom of thought and association, and socialist in the sense that the common wealth is best supported by this associational culture rather than market-fundamentalist capitalism. It is an ideology that rejects the supremacy of both the state and the market, and seeks to undo the crowding out of mediating institutions. It seeks to empower these institutions in order to deliver a socially and economically just society based on reciprocity, rooted in meaningful social relations that go beyond atomistic individualism, which it rejects as the basis for social and political life.

³² MILBANK–PABST 2016.

THE 2016 CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP ELECTION

Following Britain's vote to leave the European Union, Prime Minister David Cameron resigned and thus triggered a leadership election. Five candidates made it to the ballot of MPs: the eventual winner, Home Secretary Theresa May, Andrea Leadsom, the Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change, Michael Gove, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Stephen Crabb, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and backbencher Liam Fox, who had previously been the Secretary of State for Defence. Leadsom, Gove and Fox had backed leave, while May and Crabb had backed remain.

Fox was eliminated in the first ballot, and Crabb withdrew after winning just 10% of the vote. Gove was eliminated in the second round, and four days later Leadsom withdrew before the contest could move to a ballot of the full membership. A study of MPs' voting behaviour found that May's base was among remain-supporting MPs (who formed a majority of the party at that time), whereas leave voters were split between a socially-liberal bloc, backing Gove, and a socially-conservative bloc, which backed Leadsom.³³

Each candidate chose to set out their stall through a campaign launch speech. There were three common themes throughout all leadership pitches. The first was how to "do" Brexit (the process and what form it should take), the second was the need to unite the country, and the third – and most pertinent for our analysis – was what exactly the vote to leave the European Union represented. All candidates interpreted the vote to leave as a signal that the economic status quo was not working for a majority of voters.

May sought to promote a sense of stability: she spoke about the underlying strength of the British economy and its position in international markets. She rejected freedom of movement, but at the same time sought access to the single market in goods and services, a circle which would prove impossible to square.

In terms of policy, she took aim at poor job security for the working class, the growing costs of home ownership, and the quality of local services for those

³³ JEFFERY et al. 2018: 263–282.

who do not have recourse to private alternatives. Although these ideas were not fleshed out, it was a clear rejection of the Thatcherite view of public services which had taken hold of the Conservative Party. May's pitch is perhaps best represented by her "burning injustices" line:

If you're born poor, you will die on average nine years earlier than others. If you're black, you're treated more harshly by the criminal justice system than if you're white. If you're a white, working-class boy, you're less likely than anybody else to go to university. If you're at a state school, you're less likely to reach the top professions than if you're educated privately. If you're a woman, you still earn less than a man. If you suffer from mental health problems, there's too often not enough help to hand. If you're young, you'll find it harder than ever before to own your own home. These are all burning injustices, and – as I did with the misuse of stop and search and deaths in police custody and modern slavery – I am determined to fight against them.³⁴

However, attempting to address social inequities is not necessarily postliberal in and of itself: the one nation tradition has a long pedigree of social reform. Furthermore, in other areas, especially around Brexit, May sounded like an unreconstructed economic liberal: she sought to assuage fears that Britain would withdraw from the global marketplace after Brexit ("we are the same outward-looking and globally-minded and big-thinking country we have always been – and we remain open for business and welcoming to foreign talent") and that Britain needed to remain competitive internationally. She was also vague on ending austerity, stating "if before 2020 there is a choice between further spending cuts, more borrowing and tax rises, the priority must be to avoid tax increases since they would disrupt consumption, employment and investment".³⁵

Her main rival, Leadsom, also recognised that the current economic system failed many, and her pitch was boldly for the lower-paid, even going as far to say "the richest people of Britain should know that they will not be my priority" (a bold statement to make when you want the approval of Conservative Party

³⁴ MAY 2016.

³⁵ MAY 2016.

members), and “those people who have become rich by winning boardroom pay rises that bear no relation to company performance should be aware that I find this unacceptable”.³⁶ She also claimed that her “real passion in politics is my desire for social justice – for a transformation of our society” – but this transformation was, again, within an economically liberal framework.

There was little discussion of intermediary institutions: Whitehall would redirect funds for roads, railways and broadband, house building would be delivered by a new ministerial post, and the state would deliver skills policy. Support for the lower paid would come from tax cuts, and the tax system would be simplified, all while reducing the deficit. The Northern Powerhouse was name-checked, but of course this is largely a centrally-funded project rather than an alternative site of democratic, communitarian power to rival Westminster.

Like his rivals, Gove understood the vote to leave the EU as showing voters “want an end to politics-as-usual and they want a new direction for this country”.³⁷ He highlighted his reforms in education and the justice system – especially around the rehabilitation of criminals – before railing against globalisation and free movement as creating an unequal society that has left people behind. “Background matters far too much” and those at the bottom of society “are flotsam and jetsam in its powerful flows of global capital and free labour”.³⁸

Although powerful, this was not a postliberal critique of the status quo but rather an attack on managers and shareholders. Privatisation of public utilities, for instance, is not seen negatively, but rather has become discredited because of poor pay and reward structures:

I am a passionate supporter of free markets, free trade and free enterprise [...]. But in our own country far too often the rewards have gone not to risk takers and job creators but insiders in our financial system and big business who have rigged the market in their interests.³⁹

³⁶ LEADSOM 2016.

³⁷ GOVE 2016.

³⁸ GOVE 2016.

³⁹ GOVE 2016.

Instead of a postliberal alternative, which would see utilities and firms come under greater local democratic control, Gove instead argues for a fairer form of economic liberalism: “We must think how we can reform capitalism, give shareholders more control over how public companies operate and ensure pay once more incentivises the right sort of corporate behaviour.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in Gove’s vision, government funding in science and technology is geared towards strengthening the economy, as is tax reform and free trade deals.

Fox took a similar approach to Gove: he began his speech with a paean to globalisation, arguing that Britain is well placed to seize the benefits of global trade, but noting that British capitalism has lost its way:

I’m also a capitalist – but not a corporatist. My capitalist heroes are not the big bankers who pocket bonuses whether or not they are successful, but the corner shop owners and the small businessmen and women who make sacrifices throughout their lives, including family time and holidays in order to pass something on to the next generation. I believe that innovation, talent and effort must be rewarded and that our economic system must reflect these values.⁴¹

For Crabb, the bulk of his speech focused on telling people who he was, the importance of delivering Brexit (and controlling immigration), and of Conservative Party unity. Free trade agreements were a priority, but beyond that little was said about policy. Crabb had a “one nation vision”, and stated that he “joined the Conservative Party under John Major because that’s what the Conservative Party represented for me”⁴² – which is ironic given that Major would go on to oppose the exact type of Brexit Crabb was proposing. This was, ultimately, a policy-light speech and where vague platitudes were mentioned, the focus was on traditional one nation conservatism – economic liberalism with a bit more spending on public services.

⁴⁰ GOVE 2016.

⁴¹ FOX 2016.

⁴² CRABB 2016.

For all leadership contenders, we see no evidence of a nascent postliberalism emerging in the 2016 leadership contest. The pitches were more one nation than postliberal: they all focused on how to better manage economic liberalism. Capitalism was seen as good, but also as having lost its way. The answer was various forms of muscular economic liberalism, which would use the power of the state to shape markets and deliver socially desirable outcomes, in a top-down manner, rather than truly a postliberal approach of empowering communities to democratically shape their own social and economic futures.

In this contest, the individual loomed large, and there was very limited talk of communities as meaningful units of political association, nor of creating a framework within which intermediary institutions could thrive, nor empowering people to exercise direct democratic influence over their economies or their public services. For all the talk of the vote to leave being a wakeup call that the status quo was not good enough, the 2016 leadership contest promised more economic liberalism and more social individualism: *plus ça change, plus la même chose*.

THE 2019 CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP ELECTION

The 2019 leadership election followed a period of Conservative Party infighting over Brexit (the calls for party unity in 2016 being roundly ignored). Ten MPs were nominated, including previous candidates Gove and Leadsom, who were joined by eventual winner Boris Johnson, Rory Stewart, Esther McVey, Jeremy Hunt, Matt Hancock, Dominic Raab, Sajid Javid and Mark Harper. There were five rounds of voting by MPs and then a membership vote between the final two candidates. Academic research found that, in the final ballot of MPs, Johnson won the support of leavers, Hunt of remainers, and Gove of those who backed May's Withdrawal Agreement in the first meaningful vote.⁴³

⁴³ JEFFERY et al. 2020: 113–134.

Like the 2016 leadership election, this was a contest structured around Brexit and economic policy. In terms of Brexit, the debate focused on whether formally leaving the EU on 31 October was a dealbreaker, candidates' willingness to countenance a "no deal" Brexit, and candidates' views on Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement. Economically, there was a general agreement that austerity had to end, especially in terms of education and skills spending, with the differences being around the appropriate levels of taxation and spending. Many candidates continued the 2016 refrain of the economy not working for the average person, of a broken capitalism that could be fixed through free-market reforms.

A prime example of this is Raab, who clearly, if not charismatically, combined the key mantras of the 2016 leadership election: "Too often, for too many people today, capitalism looks like some kind of stitch up amongst the corporate vested interests." He would stand up for the "economic little guy", reducing national insurance on low earners, and promoting "a revolution in competition policy to smash monopolies, to liberate the startups and to strengthen consumer clout", but this would be within the framework of a "buccaneering approach to global free trade".⁴⁴ These views were largely shared by Leadsom, Harper, Hunt and Stewart (whose speech is worth watching just for how weird it was, being structured around a series of "energies" his leadership would embody, namely "the energy that comes from prudence, the energy that comes from shame, the energy that comes from seriousness, the energy that comes from action, the energy that comes from conviction").⁴⁵ Broadly speaking, all these candidates wanted to strengthen capitalism through free-market reforms, competition and free trade, and use the tax revenue generated to spend more on public services.

Javid offers a similar policy platform, albeit that he self-identifies as a libertarian. He claimed "I first took an interest in politics when I realised the power of government and the power it had to give people the opportunities they deserve"⁴⁶ – which is an interesting understanding of libertarianism.

⁴⁴ BrexitCentral 2019a.

⁴⁵ Guardian News 2019.

⁴⁶ JAVID 2019.

He wanted to take on public and private cartels to build world-class public services, and recognised “the vital role that is played by families and communities” to support individuals to “achieve their potential” – but this potential is framed as economic potential. The broad thrust of this argument, shared by other candidates, is that intermediary institutions, like the family and communities, are only good insofar as they support an individual’s ability to thrive in an economically liberal free-market economy. In this instance, being “left-behind” means failing to contribute your optimum amount of tax revenue to HM Treasury, rather than achieving *eudaimonia*.

Hancock’s pitch is perhaps the least post-liberal of the lot, and was built around the reliability of progress and the role of technology in promoting that. Technological change is an unalloyed positive due to the rocket boosters it would put under economic growth, even if it results in radical social change – in Hancock’s view, the role of the state is to prepare the country for this new industrial revolution, rather than recognising the damage rapid economic change could bring on society. Hancock’s vision of how a good society leaves no space for the local, for the little platoons – unless they want to develop an app.

Even MPs with the greatest potential for postliberal thought came up short. Gove, for instance, had the right instincts when he based his speech around “our undervalued communities and our overlooked families”,⁴⁷ but his solution was one nation in practice, emphasising free trade and minor welfare reform. Similarly, Esther McVey, who founded the Blue Collar Conservatism group of Tory MPs, devoted around just 10% of her speech to non-Brexit policy, essentially promising a pay rise for public sector workers, more police and scaling back the aid budget. Finally, Johnson’s speech – less important in this analysis because we’ve seen how he governed (or failed to) – was essentially centred on levelling up and post-Brexit free-trade deals.

None of these politicians even began to articulate what a genuine shift in the relationship between individuals, communities and the state would look like – and perhaps in the context of the Brexit drama the fact the Conservative

⁴⁷ BrexitCentral 2019b.

Party retreated to the safe space of economic liberalism should not be much of a surprise, but it does mean there was scant evidence of a groundswell of postliberal thought among the leadership candidates. In terms of social policy, whilst candidates vary on specific policy issues there is no real challenge to the idea of the individual as sovereign, or supporting the idea that community should be a key site of political life: the two poles of political life, as preached by these candidates, remain the individual at one end and the state on the other.

The difference between candidates was one of degrees, or of how far to go: all candidates sought to use capitalism, boosted by post-Brexit free-trade deals, to generate higher tax revenues to spend on public services or to cut taxes for lower-paid workers. This speaks to Blond's post-2019 general election warning that "economic liberals constitute the overwhelming majority of the Conservative government [...]. In the short term it is unlikely that the Tories can tack to a truly postliberal stance [...] they remain convinced that a new global trading nation will lift all boats".⁴⁸

THE 2022 CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS

There were two Conservative Party leadership elections in 2022. The first took place from July to September, following the resignation of Boris Johnson. The second took place in October 2022, following Liz Truss' disastrous premiership.

The first contest saw eight candidates stand – Truss, Rishi Sunak, Penny Mordaunt, Kemi Badenoch, Tom Tugendhat, Suella Braverman, Jeremy Hunt and Nadhim Zahawi – with Truss and Sunak making it through to the final membership ballot. Truss then defeated Sunak with 57% of the members' vote. As with previous contests there was no real challenge to the idea of the liberal status quo. Academic analysis has found that, in the final round of the ballot of MPs, Sunak won the support of remainers, Mordaunt of leavers, and Truss of the hardline-Brexiteer European Research Group.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ BLOND 2019.

⁴⁹ JEFFERY et al. 2023: 555–572.

Truss' speech was only short, but it was unashamedly free-market. The focus was on supply-side reform: lower taxes, lower regulation, lower government spending. Levelling up moved from a state-led process of increased funding to a happy consequence of greater economic growth. There was one policy which did seek to recentre the family – a review of “the taxation of families to ensure that people aren’t penalized for taking time out to care for children or elderly relatives”⁵⁰ – but this was part of a broader liberal review of tax policy, rather than a postliberal package of reforms.

Most candidates followed Truss' tax-cutting lead. Zahawi also pledged to cut the lower rate of income tax by 2p in two years.⁵¹ Mordaunt sought to return the Conservative Party to “the good old stuff”, of low taxes, a small state and personal responsibility. Her government would focus on economic growth, competition and tackling inflation, VAT on fuel would be reduced, income tax thresholds would be increased and the tax system would be simplified.⁵² Tugendhat outlined a ten-year plan for growth, which relied on the party “returning to the core values that unite us all as Conservatives: I believe in liberty and the low taxes necessary to defend it”, including reducing fuel duty and reversing the national insurance increase.⁵³ Ironically, for those who followed subsequent events, Hunt also positioned himself as a low-tax Conservative. He did not go as far as Truss, but he sought to reverse the rise in corporation tax (which went from 19% to 25%) and then cut it to 15%, and cut business rates. His main point of differentiation was to not have served under Johnson.⁵⁴

Braverman's campaign sought to combine economic liberalism – “proper tax cuts” and shrinking the size of the state – alongside railing against so-called “woke rubbish”.⁵⁵ In her leadership campaign video, she railed against unfair

⁵⁰ Guardian News 2022.

⁵¹ WALKER 2022.

⁵² Sky News 2022b.

⁵³ Sky News 2022a.

⁵⁴ RILEY-SMITH 2022.

⁵⁵ DIVER – RILEY-SMITH 2022.

taxes and ineffective public services, and claimed that the British people could turn Britain around – “if only the government would allow them to do it”.⁵⁶

Sunak, however, pitched himself as the only one willing to make serious alternative to Truss’ low-tax liberalism with [...] slightly-higher-tax liberalism, in order to control inflation and debt, alongside public sector reform involving the integration of technology.⁵⁷ Similarly, Badenoch’s pitch echoed Sunak’s in that she would not promise unfunded tax cuts, but she did focus on how the economy was overburdened and overregulated. Indeed, in a very un-postliberal turn of phrase, she claimed “the right has lost its confidence and courage and ability to defend the free market as the fairest way of helping people prosper” and that businesses’ main aim is “productivity and profits”.⁵⁸

Unlike 2016 and 2019, where the focus was on responding to Brexit as a cry of anger from those left-behind, and a rejection of the Thatcherite austerity economic liberalism, the first 2022 leadership election was essentially a call for a return to a low-tax, low-regulation economic system. Where there was to be intervention into the economy or society, it was to be the state that did it, either by lowering or simplifying taxes, or reshaping public services so individuals could return to employment quicker. The postliberal unit of analysis – families and communities – barely featured in the debate, and with the victory of Truss, any nascent postliberal strand within British Conservatism withered on the vine.

The second leadership election was a much shorter affair. The threshold for nominations to make it onto the ballot of MPs was set to 100 MPs, much higher than the 20 needed in the previous election. Only Rishi Sunak submitted the requisite number of nominations. Johnson withdrew from the race, despite reportedly having over 100 backers, knowing he could not unite the Conservative Party. Mordaunt withdrew a minute before the deadline, having failed to reach the nomination threshold. Thus, Sunak became the new party leader and prime minister.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ BRAVERMAN 2022.

⁵⁷ SUNAK 2022a.

⁵⁸ BADENOCH 2022.

⁵⁹ BOOTH et al. 2023.

Given the fast nature of the contest and how rapidly it followed the previous contest, there were no launch speeches to analyse. But in his first speech as Prime Minister, on the steps of Downing Street, Sunak reiterated his commitment to the 2019 manifesto and restoring the economy.⁶⁰ Once again, the opportunity was not taken to rethink the liberal status quo: instead, the public were promised more of the same.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the extent to which leadership candidates articulated postliberal values in the post-Brexit Conservative Party leadership contests. For British postliberals, it does not make for happy reading. Whilst the candidates are more than capable of identifying the economic and social issues that face our country, including the failure of 21st century capitalism to deliver for society as a whole, they are completely unable to think beyond the liberal-individualist status quo.

There has been no real postliberal candidate in any of the Conservative Party leadership elections: all have promised a variation of liberal economic reform, which would boost tax revenues and allow the state to spend more on public services. Completely absent from all of this is any reformulation of the role of associational society: the relationship between the individual and the state is still the key frame of reference within British Conservatism, the good life is still measured in terms of economic contribution, and local democratic control of markets remains as distant as ever.

The 2016 and 2019 leadership elections were a false dawn for postliberal thought, and by the 2022 leadership contests the postliberal ship had sailed. Perhaps this was inevitable – the current British postliberal intellectual movement is dwarfed by their free-market rivals and false friends like the National Conservatism Conference, which does not know whether to be a cheerleader for Singapore-on-Thames-style

⁶⁰ Sunak 2022b.

rampant economic liberalism or state-directed social authoritarianism – either way, it is no ally of those who value community-driven associational culture.

Some postliberals might believe that there never was much hope, just a fool's hope, for postliberalism to thrive within the Conservative Party. But given the likelihood that the next general election will see the Tories heavily defeated, they will be spending their time in opposition looking at where it all went wrong. It should be the role of postliberals to both remind the party of the four missed opportunities to adopt a more postliberal direction post-Brexit, and also to offer the Conservative Party a postliberal policy platform that is able to meet the challenges of our time.

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Henry George

Disability and Right-Post-Liberalism: The Common Ground of the Common Good

INTRODUCTION

The liberal worldview within which Western politics has sat since the Second World War, and particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War is under greater strain than ever before. This is even more the case on the Right, where ideas and beliefs that have been taken for granted are now subject to greater scrutiny and interrogation than at any time for decades. It is clear that something has to change. The crises at home and abroad in politics, economics and culture that are obvious to anyone who has a look around them at the world demand something different to what came before.

What does any of this have to do with being disabled? Simply this: the whole point of government is to uphold “the duty of state”.¹ Rooted in natural law and expressed through the Anglo-American tradition, the goals of “good government are abundance, peace and justice”.² The right-neo-liberalism of the last 13 years of Conservative Party rule has failed in these duties, with Britain a poorer, less cohesive and more unequal country. This is particularly so for the disabled, myself among them. The economic, political and cultural consequences of Conservative rule have left disabled Britons poorer, disenfranchised and alienated.

However, these failings are not merely because of various political decisions taken at different times, but stem from the fundamental flaws in the worldview that these political decisions articulated. It is this chapter’s contention that liberalism is inimical to the flourishing of the disabled due to

¹ PAPPIN 2022a.

² PAPPIN 2022b.

its denigration of limits, embodiment, our social interdependence, and the ties across time that bind the generations. In order to enable the recovery of the common ground of the common good, British right-wing politics must move away from being a party of right-neo-liberalism to right-post-liberalism. Those whose physical infirmity leaves them at greater risk when the structures that undergird the common life grow unstable have as much interest in those in government fulfilling their duty of state. The need for such a recovery and restoration are urgent.

In light of this, this chapter will, in part one, consider the origins of liberal principles that undergird liberal practice. Part two will reflect on the flaws in liberal premises as it concerns disabled people, and how this works in the world. Part three will turn to the aforementioned common good post-liberal alternative, looking at how it differs to the right-neo-liberalism practiced by the current Tory party. This part will briefly detail how this worldview can better provide for the flourishing of disabled people, not as a hermetically sealed identity, but as part of the common life rooted in the common good. A new British right-post-liberalism, a national politics of the common good, is the way forward for all people regardless of whether they are disabled or able-bodied.

LIBERALISM: DESCRIPTION AND DIAGNOSIS

The word “liberalism” signifies a philosophy the foundation of which is liberty. But this is liberty not as understood by the ancient Greco-Roman world, of restraint of man’s lower animal nature in service to the articulation of man’s higher, rational nature. Christianity adopted this view, but leavened the Greco-Roman emphasis on will to achieve one’s higher nature, and universalised the potential of such an attainment, through the instrument of grace that stemmed from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that redeemed anyone who repented and chose Him. The key to this liberation from one’s lower self was constraint, gained through cultivation into the lifeways of a family and education in the

wider tradition. Liberty “had long been believed to be the condition of self-rule that forestalled tyranny, within both the polity and the individual soul”.³

Liberalism saw liberty not as placing limits on one’s baser desires in service to pursuing excellence, practicing virtue and receiving the glory of God through grace. Instead, “liberalism is most fundamentally constituted by a pair of deeper anthropological assumptions that give liberal institutions a particular orientation and cast: (1) anthropological individualism and the voluntarist conception of choice, and (2) human separation from and opposition to nature. These two revolutions in the understanding of human nature and society constitute ‘liberalism’ inasmuch as they introduce a radically new definition of ‘liberty’.”⁴

A succession of thinkers, from the 17th century on, built upon “three basic revolutions of thought” that redefined “liberty as the liberation of humans from established authority”, saw the goal of politics and economics as the “emancipation from arbitrary culture and tradition”, both achieved through “the expansion of human power and dominion over nature through advancing scientific discovery and economic prosperity”.⁵ These philosophical principles, along with their political, cultural and economic expressions, are ultimately inimical to the flourishing of disabled people as part of a national community engaged in building a common life together.

This anthropology and its practical implications is seen in the work of the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Hobbes prepared the ground for liberalism’s new vision of liberty. He attempted to solve the problem of religious strife and political authority by removing any sense of human life and politics being ordered towards the transcendent good, over which the monarch, the head of the state Leviathan, was now sovereign. For Hobbes, the people do not constitute a whole, with a culture and society that stretches backwards and forwards in time. Rather, the basic needs shared by all isolated individuals of security and peace comprise the foundation of political legitimacy, which guarantees such

³ DENEEN 2018.

⁴ DENEEN 2018.

⁵ DENEEN 2018.

individual needs.⁶ These atomistic individuals consent to obedience towards the sovereign to escape the state of nature, where one finds oneself outside obedience to the city state or Church. From here, individuals can construct a monarchical political organism that solves the theological-political problem.⁷ Hobbes called the insecurity that preceded such a resolution the “war of all against all”.⁸ As a result, Hobbes can be labelled liberalism’s founder because of his articulation of the “liberal interpretation of the law, a pure human device, rigorously external to everybody. Such a law does not transform or inform the individual atoms whose peaceful coexistence it is limited to guaranteeing.”⁹ The result is that Hobbesian thought provides the underlying framework of modern democracy and liberalism. This is “because it develops the notion of sovereignty established on each subject’s consent. It founds the liberal idea because it develops the notion of the law as device external to individuals.”¹⁰

The upshot is that Hobbes develops a new view of society. Power, resting in the Leviathan, is employed by solitary individuals to secure their rights. Hobbes anticipates and prepares the way for what became liberalism. It will entail giving the Hobbesian idea of political power “its full scope by modifying its beginning and its end”.¹¹ Individuals acquire intrinsic rights, for which power will be limited in service to their protection.¹² Hobbes was followed by John Locke (1632–1704). Locke begins in the same way: a state of nature from which individuals wish to secure their existence. For Locke the primary threat is not violence from others, but hunger. For Locke, the solitary individual’s right to the fruits of the land is inherent, independent of consent in order to survive as an individual. Ownership of such resources is gained via mixing one’s individual, private labour latent in one’s owned person with these fruits to satisfy one’s hunger, conferring legitimate ownership. One’s labour, the product of

⁶ MANENT 1994.

⁷ MANENT 1994.

⁸ HOBBS 2009 [1651].

⁹ MANENT 1994.

¹⁰ MANENT 1994.

¹¹ MANENT 1994.

¹² MANENT 1994.

one's owned personhood, introduces property to the world.¹³ Liberty makes the ownership of property, through the ownership of one's person and their labour, the basis of society for it nourishes the individual and protects him from the hunger in the state of nature.

Later, the product of one's labour and the monetary value attached would take precedence as the grounding for political economy.¹⁴ This had implications for Locke's political philosophy. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke writes that individuals are born in "perfect" freedom and equality.¹⁵ For Locke, one enters political society for the pursuit of life, liberty and property. These are attained and secured through a social contract between individuals rooted in consent, which allows the formation of civil society and from which a legislative assembly can be formed.¹⁶ Over this sits the executive, possessor of ultimate sovereignty and guarantor, in conjunction with the constraining assembly, of justice as right to property.¹⁷ This can be derived from universal principles, must be applicable everywhere and always, accessible to individual reason.

For Locke, individual rationality and knowledge are sufficient for social and political formation. The bonds of family, community and nation that comprise mutual loyalty¹⁸ are stripped away in a placeless, timeless, universal void. And yet, "Locke's approach [to political justice] is just as 'absolutist' as Hobbes's. The original right [to property] of each person is essentially above discursive reasoning, above any objection, because it is based on a solitary and silent activity: labour for consumption."¹⁹ The power of the legislature "is the direct extension of the individual's desire for self-preservation. And it is sovereign or 'supreme' because it directly expresses the desire for preserving property, the origin of the political institution."²⁰

¹³ MANENT 1994.

¹⁴ MANENT 1994.

¹⁵ LOCKE 1988 [1689].

¹⁶ MANENT 1994.

¹⁷ MANENT 1994.

¹⁸ HAZONY 2018.

¹⁹ MANENT 1994.

²⁰ MANENT 1994.

The individualist and voluntarist anthropology of Hobbes, Locke and their descendants is utilitarian, designed to amplify autonomy and choice through self-interest. Anglo-American law and culture have over time adopted this anthropology and expressed it in the political-legal structures of the state. Liberalism, as argued for by its advocates, sounds like the means to the best political regime possible. Regime simply “means that whole, which we today are in the habit of viewing primarily in a fragmentized form; regime means simultaneously the form of life of a society, its style of life, its moral taste, form of society, form of state, form of government, spirit of laws”.²¹ Yet, Plato argued that political regimes became more themselves over time. Their deepest presuppositions and contradictions come to the fore. In trying to reconcile these contradictions, regimes fall away from the heights promised by those who implement them: in their success lies their failure.²² As Arta Moeini has written, liberalism suffers from three sets of contradictions inherent to it and present from the beginning. The first seeming contradiction is between *domination* and *autonomy*. As has been shown, the end goal of liberalism has been to secure the autonomy of the atomised liberal subject, in order to secure his life, liberty and property as the foundation of justice in a world where a shared conception of the highest good is no longer possible. With the human agent as ultimate authority over his life’s *telos*, is achieved via a “a project of systemic liberation from the encumbering or oppressive hierarchies and norms of the past so that a new order based on the autonomy and agency of the individual can be created”.²³ However, as liberalism’s later instantiations in the 19th and 20th centuries would demonstrate, the need for autonomy and the means to achieve it lends itself to domination by those who proclaim their ability to deliver it, whether through brute force, or more usually, soft coercion. Perhaps this is not such a contradiction after all.

For Moeini, the second contradiction is between liberalism’s purported *universalism*, and its *subjectivist* ethics.²⁴ As noted, liberal principles for

²¹ STRAUSS 1988 [1959].

²² DENEEN 2018.

²³ MOEINI 2023.

²⁴ MOEINI 2023.

achieving a just society through the fulfilment of liberal anthropology are held by Locke and liberals onwards to be universal in scope, applicable in all times and places to *those capable of achieving the reason to enact it*. However, setting up the self-creating self, stripped of cultural, traditional, religious and social context as the measure of morality, in practice introduces a subjectivist ethical view that risks devolution into atomisation and moral solipsism,²⁵ evident in today's cultural obsession with self-validation and the politics of identity. Indeed, some argue that post-modernity, far from a revolt against liberalism, is its ideological child.²⁶

Finally, liberalism's conception of time presents a paradox which it cannot revolve. As Deneen argues, liberalism, through its instrument of the state of nature, presents man as a past-less, futureless and placeless being, stripped of all connection to place and time, for such limits as these constrain the realisation of one's autonomy.²⁷ According to Mocini, "in its philosophical idealism, liberalism thus privileges the perennality of man as a nominal, ideational, and unchanging category over man in real life". But, as others have also argued, the "liturgy"²⁸ of "sacramental liberalism",²⁹ rooted in its internal premises, means that liberalism has an inevitably progressive dynamic. There are always more inherited moral, cultural and socio-political strictures that prevent the increase of liberty and autonomy to remove. This *progressive* view of history conflicts with the *perennial* view of man's universal nature. Consequently, "the goal of history must be human progress toward a society, wherein all are completely equal and man is fully rational, entirely free, and perfectly productive".³⁰

Given such a state of affairs is never finally achieved, liberalism's theology of progress takes on an increasingly apocalyptic cast, while those who are unwilling, or in the case of the disabled, unable to proceed along this path,

²⁵ McMANUS 2022.

²⁶ SHULLENBERGER 2020.

²⁷ DENEEN 2018.

²⁸ VERMEULE 2017.

²⁹ VERMEULE 2019.

³⁰ MOEINI 2023.

are increasingly seen as barriers to eternal improvement, and therefore needful of correction, containment, or curtailment. The implications of this for the disabled is where we now turn.

LIBERALISM AND ITS DISABLED DISCONTENTS

Having a disability throws into stark relief the fundamental flaws in liberal premises and their articulation in political and economic practice. Liberal anthropology and its implications for life are revealed as fatuous thought experiments by those whose “social contract theories are views of childless men who must have forgotten their own childhood”.³¹ The detached individual, gaining security or bodily surcease and therefore justice through the individually consented to social contract describes nothing resembling the able-bodied human person, never mind those with disabilities. Liberalism is shown as an ideology, a blueprint that forces the world to conform to its dictates, rendered increasingly unstable by its contradictions and tyrannical by its attempt to implement its vision of the good, a good it denies in its very core.³²

I was born with a rare genetic fragile skin condition, recessive dystrophic epidermolysis bullosa.³³ This has meant that liberalism, and its right-neoliberal iteration, is a conceptual and practical impossibility. As I have written elsewhere,³⁴ my condition – with five thousand total sufferers in the UK, 500 with my subtype – is part of a wider tapestry of 14 million disabled people in Britain.³⁵ The fact of intrinsic limits is immediately seen in practice. Half of disabled people are in work as opposed to 81% of the able-bodied. One quarter have a degree, while 13% had no qualifications.³⁶

³¹ JOUVENEL 2000 [1963].

³² DENEEN 2018.

³³ Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children 2020.

³⁴ GEORGE 2021.

³⁵ Scope 2022.

³⁶ Office for National Statistics 2022.

The corollary of this is that disabled people are more likely to be subject to “want”. Disabled people are poorer in terms of money and membership, the frayed social bonds inducing an isolation that compounds the material want.³⁷ 15% of disabled were “often or always lonely” as opposed to just over 3.5% of able-bodied people,³⁸ a state of affairs I can attest to. My condition and the constraints of a broken body often prevent a normal social life, while others have often feel uncomfortable around such a disability.

The Conservative-led coalition government pursued a policy of austerity that ran from 2010–2015, which stemmed from the foundational ideological orientation of those in power, producing a “chartered libertarianism for the strong”.³⁹ It fell disproportionately on the disabled, those shoulders least able to bear the weight. Benefits sanctions and cuts threw many into dire circumstances.⁴⁰ Indeed, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, who had helped make such cuts in return for pushing his Living Wage through Parliament, resigned in 2016 over yet more cuts to the social safety net for disabled people.⁴¹

In the wider world abuse and neglect are common. A government National Disability Strategy from 2021 showed that more than half of disabled people worried about insults or harassment when out in public or on transport. Moreover, disabled children aged 10 to 15 were shown to be almost twice as likely to be victims of crime than able-bodied children.⁴² As a result of all this, it is perhaps not surprising that disabled Britons had average anxiety levels than able-bodied people, at 4.6 out of 10 as opposed to 3.0 out of 10.⁴³

Given the ideological underpinnings of our ruling class and the world they have attempted to make, none of the consequences of policy choices and political

³⁷ Resolution Foundation 2023.

³⁸ Office for National Statistics 2022.

³⁹ JOUVENEL 1993 [1945].

⁴⁰ RYAN 2018.

⁴¹ MASON et al. 2016. See also PITT 2023: 171–194 for an academic analysis of the welfare policies from 2015 to 2020.

⁴² UK Government 2022.

⁴³ Office for National Statistics 2022.

decisions should be surprising. The guiding light of the Conservative governments of the last 13 years, barring a brief hiatus under Theresa May, has been what Michael Lind calls “technocratic neoliberalism”, of which Conservative party politics is its right-wing expression. This is “a synthesis of the free-market economic liberalism of the libertarian right and the cultural liberalism of the bohemian/academic left”.⁴⁴

In economic terms, this has meant corporations “promot[ing] deunionisation and labour market deregulation to the detriment of workers”. Moreover, corporate oligarchies “have also embraced global labour arbitrage, in the form of offshoring production to poor workers abroad or employing immigrant workers, to weaken unions and escape the constraints of national labour regulations”.⁴⁵ In political terms, national parties that were conglomerations of localised organisations comprised of mass memberships are now bankrolled and controlled by corporate donors, directed by “comms” consultants. This domestic depoliticisation is mirrored on the transnational level, with national legislative powers, subject to democratic control having been hollowed out by the multiplying organs of the managerial state, the courts, and transnational bodies like the EU and WTO. As a result of education polarisation, the university educated professional managerial class have gained far greater influence and control than most ordinary voters.⁴⁶ This political hollowing out is reflected in a cultural disintegration, where intermediating institutions have been steadily eroded by the march of the market on one side, and the expansion of the central state on the other. This redounds to the benefit of what Joel Kotkin calls the new “Clerisy”, those “bourgeois bohemians”⁴⁷ in the white collar world of culture, tech, media, law, public and corporate administration.⁴⁸ This top 15% serve to legitimate the policies and actions of what Lind calls the “Overclass”, the top 5 to 10% of the socio-economic strata.

⁴⁴ LIND 2020.

⁴⁵ LIND 2020.

⁴⁶ LIND 2020.

⁴⁷ BROOKS 2000.

⁴⁸ KOTKIN 2020.

Under this ideological regime, disabled people are collateral damage in the great march of Progress. If a decent society and a conservatism of the common good is one that secures abundance, peace and justice, for those in the dawn, twilight and shadows of life,⁴⁹ Britain has failed. Deneen describes how “statism enables individualism, individualism demands statism”.⁵⁰ My dealings with the depersonalised face of the managerial state through welfare officials performing box-ticking benefit assessments, along with all the other arms of the state a disabled person must deal with and rely on are testament to this reality.

The right-neo-liberalism of our managerial overclass promises liberation but delivers economic and social incarceration for the many, the disabled in particular. Under the regime of right-neo-liberalism, “each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart”.⁵¹ The disabled are left alone and adrift in liberalism’s “anticulture”, “a tradition-destroying and custom-undermining dynamic that replaces cultural practices, memory, and beliefs”⁵² that sustain and console those less fortunate or able.

This anticulture springs from what O. Carter Snead argues is an Anglo-American law and culture grounded in an anthropology of “expressive individualism”. The roots of this anthropology in liberalism’s soil are clear. Expressive individualism bespeaks a disposition “in which persons are conceived merely as atomized individual wills whose highest flourishing consists in interrogating the interior depths of the self in order to express and freely follow the original truths discovered therein toward one’s self-invented destiny”. Therefore, “expressive individualism [...] equates being fully human with finding the unique truth within ourselves and freely constructing our individual lives to reflect it”.⁵³

As I have written elsewhere, “this conception of the human person privileges cognition, will, rationality and autonomy in defining full personhood”,

⁴⁹ CONNOLLY 2018.

⁵⁰ DENEEN 2018.

⁵¹ TOCQUEVILLE 2003.

⁵² DENEEN 2018.

⁵³ SNEAD 2020.

ignoring the limits of our embodiment and social embeddedness.⁵⁴ Expressive individualism instantiates what evolutionary psychology writer Rob Henderson calls a “luxury belief”. These are beliefs “held by the upper classes [...] are ideas and opinions that confer status on the rich at very little cost, whilst taking a toll on the lower class” and disabled people.⁵⁵

Expressive individualism is one such luxury belief, enabled by the liquefying force of the market and by the managerial state. It represents John Stuart Mill’s call for “experiments in living”. According to Mill, “the human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is a custom, makes no choice.” Therefore, that “which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences”. Those with the capacity to conduct these experiments are “more individual than any other people” and less capable of “fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides”; therefore they require “an atmosphere of freedom”.⁵⁶

This is simply the voluntarist, individualist anthropology of Hobbes, Locke and their ideological children given new shape in the 19th century, while expressive individualism updates this with the language of psychology, diversity, equity and inclusivity. Mill’s goal was the unravelling and deposition of the old elite based in kin ties and attached to people and place by social hierarchies. Mill’s new rational, clear-sighted elite represented the Lockean new elite of the “industrious and the rational”, who would overthrow and replace the old aristocratic elite. Representing the “querulous and contentious”.⁵⁷

Our supposedly “industrious and rational” elite, lacking a conception of the highest good beyond Progress, view “the vaunted freedom of the individual” as choosing “either the necessity of finding one’s role in the public engineering

⁵⁴ GEORGE 2022.

⁵⁵ HENDERSON 2019.

⁵⁶ MILL 2015.

⁵⁷ DENEEN 2018.

or the necessity of retreating into the privacy of pleasure”.⁵⁸ The end of life becomes not virtue but a therapeutic utilitarianism, based in state-engineered harm reduction and happiness maximisation. The yawning chasm between our Clerical elite’s conception of the good life and the embodied reality of disability is revealed. The “unencumbered self”⁵⁹ was always an ideological illusion, shattered by the reality limits inherent to disability. Right-neo-liberalism, and its expressive individualist articulation fail to secure the common good for disabled people because they are “forgetful of the body”.⁶⁰

For the Overclass and Clerisy, as Christopher Lasch put it, belief in the “social construction of reality [...] reflects the experience of living in an artificial environment from which everything that resists human control (unavoidably, everything familiar and reassuring as well) has been rigorously excluded. Control has become their obsession. In their drive to insulate themselves against risk and contingency – against the unpredictable hazards that afflict human life – the thinking classes have seceded not just from the common world around them but from reality itself.”⁶¹ This control of reality reaches its denouement in euthanasia portrayed as compassionate for the disabled.

By contrast, those lower down the scale of socio-economic and bodily autonomy realise that “there are inherent limits on human control over the course of social development, over nature and the body, over the tragic elements in human life and history”.⁶² Rather than a tragedy of oppression, the key conservative insight, reinforced by living with a disability, is that the acceptance of such existential limits can in fact be liberating, enabling a view of the common life, rooted in mutual loyalty and obligation, reciprocity and duty, oriented to the common good. To this we now turn.

⁵⁸ GRANT 2005.

⁵⁹ SANDEL 2005.

⁶⁰ MACINTYRE 1999.

⁶¹ LASCH 1995.

⁶² LASCH 1995.

DISABILITY AND A RIGHT-WING POLITICS OF THE COMMON GOOD

To move away from the disembedding, atomising and disorientating forces of technocratic neo-liberalism, the Right needs to restore the foundational idea of limits. The rooted universality that a truly post-liberal Right affirms will serve the common good far better than liberalism and its technocratic form ever could. This kind of post-liberal Right represents the best chance at a synthesis between the particularities of the disabled condition, and the universality of human experience, mediated by families, communities and the British nation. This view not only reaches across to bind human subjects into a wider whole today, but looks back to the inheritance of the British past, mediates it in the present, and passes it on as a legacy for the future. We are “situated beings”,⁶³ our characters and sense of self formed through the ability to pursue virtue inculcated by family, friends, community and nation. As Edmund Burke wrote, our interdependence extends through a trans-generational covenant that, undergirded by our traditions, links the dead, the living and those yet to be born.⁶⁴ Inheritance and legacy are basic to our sense of self and purpose, encouraging reflection and commitment, a responsibility to practice gratitude to what we have been given and a duty to improve or mitigate in our own sphere of action the wrongs that we can. We do not enter the world *ex nihilo*, and do not form society or culture through contract. We are born into social, cultural and, nearly always, political orders. We are imprinted by those who have gone before. As Roger Scruton writes, we “enter a world marked by the joys and sufferings of those who are making room for us”.⁶⁵

This web of relationships, in which we “enjoy protection in our early years and opportunities in our maturity”,⁶⁶ gives us the “language” of identity that enables us to say who we are, where we come from, and where we might go.

⁶³ SCIALABBA 2018.

⁶⁴ BURKE 1968.

⁶⁵ SCRUTON 2017a.

⁶⁶ SCRUTON 2017a.

Part of the “woke” New Moral Order’s appeal lies in providing such a sense of self, rooted in identitarian communities of ideological affinity, when our families and kin-networks break down, as they do all too often today.⁶⁷ When our familial and social circles are rightly ordered we can develop the extended self that becomes bonded with one’s wider community and nation. As Roger Scruton has argued so persuasively, the “me” of a grounded identity grows out of and in turn reinforces the sense of a “we”, a sense that comes from a feeling of lineage from the past, and duty to leave a worthy legacy for the future.⁶⁸ This sense of a “we” allows for peaceful, civilised politics in a democratic nation, enabling people to live together with fellow feeling and bonds of mutual loyalty.⁶⁹ This sense of a “we” holds the key to integrating the disabled into the common life of the nation, lifting them out of their alienated isolation, building attachment to past, present and future, ensuring a place in Chesterton’s democracy of the dead.

This post-liberalism of the Right is therefore “a standpoint that regards the recovery, restoration, elaboration, and repair of national and religious traditions as the key to maintaining a nation and strengthening it through time”,⁷⁰ because it “arises directly from the sense that one belongs to some continuing, and pre-existing social order, and that this fact is all-important in determining what to do”.⁷¹ The extended sense of self described above is one that has been a source of great consolation in my own life, not only for the support and strength gained from the relationships and reciprocal ties to those around me. Those in the Overclass and Clerisy who sneer at those like me who value their culture, traditions and sense of belonging to a living past forget that for the less fortunate, such elements of life are essential. As Tim Stanley writes, “[i]f you are destitute or bedridden, memory is all the more precious because it is free: no one can take it away from you”.⁷²

⁶⁷ EBERSTADT 2019.

⁶⁸ SCRUTON 2017b.

⁶⁹ SCRUTON 2000.

⁷⁰ HAZONY 2022.

⁷¹ SCRUTON 2014.

⁷² STANLEY 2021.

This is so because “the life of a social arrangement may become mingled with the lives of its members. They may feel in themselves the persistence of the will that surrounds them. The conservative instinct is founded in that feeling: it is the enactment of historical vitality, the individual’s sense of his society’s will to live.”⁷³ For me, a post-liberalism of the Right, rests in the realisation drawn from slow acculturation and initiation into a moral tradition that there is hope and consolation in such a situated view of life, easing the isolation often attendant on a life lived with greater physical constraints. Tradition, and the customs that give it voice, are a chance for us to join the song of our spirit, however great or small, in the eternal choir of history that carries the song of the past down to us and carries the meaning of our lives and deeds into the future.

This Right post-liberalism, even if affirmed by those who are not themselves believers, holds the innate dignity of the human person as rooted in their being made in the image of God. However, with this comes the moral realism of the acceptance of our fallen nature, and the sin we all carry. The brokenness of our being in a fallen world might encourage a sense of hopelessness. But the possibility of redemption retains the hope of the survival and thriving of the good, as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn saw: “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart – and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained.”⁷⁴

Far from inducing despair, such a view reminds us, disabled or not, of the limits and constraints that give a sense of what is of value, what is better or worse. This is in contrast with the liberal self-creating self, where unlimited choice paralyses and brings a sense of drowning for lack of authority as to *what* to choose, and for what purpose. A Right post-liberalism is therefore the constrained view of life,⁷⁵ as “[f]reedom is comprehensible as a social goal only when subordinate to something else, to an organization or arrangement

⁷³ SCRUTON 2014.

⁷⁴ SOLZHENITSYN 2018 [1973].

⁷⁵ SOWELL 2007.

which defines the individual aim. Hence to aim at freedom is at the same time to aim at the constraint which is its precondition.”⁷⁶

The ability to reconcile with the reality of limits is enabled by “connections to and reliance upon memory, virtue, limits, and humility, and, finally, of [it]s source in the spiritual discipline of religion”.⁷⁷ The Right post-liberal insight is that virtue comprises “modes of proper responsiveness to that which is of intrinsic value (or goodness) and which makes normative demands upon us, and in being properly responsive the virtues constitute for us the good life, that is, our human fulfilment understood as a normatively higher, nobler, more meaningful form of life”.⁷⁸ Such limiting virtues include “humility, reverence, moderation, contentment, neighbourliness, and loyalty”.⁷⁹

These are achieved through extended cultivation and habituation in family and community and are maintained by the soul’s “inner check”.⁸⁰ As such, limits are the way to the greater liberation. Aided by grace, they raise us from our lower, animal nature to the higher, civilised nature. This is achieved through the participation in the traditions of the past, themselves based in the universality of the good, true and beautiful, but revealed and practiced in particular times and places.⁸¹

Rather than the deductive rationality of liberalism, through experience that shapes our will and intuition I have found that this post-liberal conservative view of man, his beginning, his purpose and his end, resonates in much greater harmony with the experience of living with my condition than liberalism’s fantasies ever could. Having RDEB viscerally reveals the truth of post-liberal conservatism’s moral realism and its situated human anthropology. Liberalism, whether classical or right-neo-liberal, denigrates and discounts the givenness of our human condition, in all its tragedy and triumph, in its vitality

⁷⁶ SCRUTON 2014.

⁷⁷ DENEEN 2004.

⁷⁸ MCPHERSON 2021.

⁷⁹ MCPHERSON 2021.

⁸⁰ RYN 2019.

⁸¹ RYN 2019.

and existential frailty. Post-liberal conservatism speaks to the synthesis of the universality of our relational nature, with particularity of our interdependence demonstrated in intensified form by the disabled life.

Conservatism is thus no longer enough, for if it conserves the neo-liberal political order, and the liberal philosophical foundations of such an order, then the duty of state will continue to be shirked. The securing of abundance, peace and justice not only for disabled people, but for all of us in our British national home, will continue to be sacrificed on the altar of individualism, with the psalms of Progress chanted while doing so. Instead, a restoration of economy and politics by those in government upholding their obligations and duties to govern in service to the common good, will service disabled people, not only as a discreet identity, but as an intrinsic part of the common life of the whole national community.

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Toward a Liberal Post-Liberalism

Post-liberalism must, for philosophical and pragmatic reasons, embrace an emerging liberal-conservative synthesis against the threat of woke cultural socialism. Along the way, this provides the best guarantee that the erosion of bridging and bonding social capital, which is eating away at the fabric of western societies, can be arrested and reversed.¹

A prominent strand in post-liberal thought claims that liberalism has failed, with the roots of our fraying social fabric and cultural malaise lying in developments which reach back to the 18th century Enlightenment and American Founding. Adrian Vermeule, Patrick Deneen and Yoram Hazony argue for a movement to shift from positive liberal values such as equity and individualism to positive conservative values such as public religion. Vermeule seeks not constitutional originalism – the crusade of liberal conservatives for decades – but a conservative activism to replace the progressive activism that has motivated departures from originalism for over 60 years.²

It is tempting to turn the methods of the left back on it to return to a historic state-led national conservatism, as in the injunction of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to the Poles:

When first he opens his eyes, an infant ought to see the fatherland, and up to the day of his death he ought never to see anything else. Every true republican has drunk in love of country, that is to say love of law and liberty, along with his mother's milk. This love is his whole existence; he sees nothing but the fatherland, he lives for it alone [...]. The law ought to regulate the content, the order and the form of their studies. They ought to have only Poles for teachers: Poles who are all, if possible, married; who are all distinguished by moral character, probity, good sense and attainments.³

¹ PUTNAM 2000.

² DENEEN 2019; HAZONY 2022; VERMEULE 2022.

³ ROUSSEAU 2023 [1772].

My inclination is somewhat different. For both ideological and pragmatic reasons, I prefer a liberal post-liberalism. This is not a contradiction in terms. Rather than viewing liberalism *tout court* as the problem, and cleaving to the idea that negative liberal toleration leads inevitably to positive liberal indoctrination and compulsion, I believe we can have the negative liberal baby without the positive-liberal bathwater. Moreover, reinforcing our commitment to procedural liberalism can protect conservative values from erosion by checking positive-liberal attempts to indoctrinate or coerce people toward progressivism and modernist anti-traditionalism.

In place of maximalist post-liberal calls to use the state to install conservative orthodoxy in place of progressive dogma, I believe we should aim instead at a more practical and consensual goal: enforcing institutional neutrality and balance. This even as we are justified, on public interest grounds, in tilting public education toward a positive national self-conception – albeit based on a version considerably more nuanced than Rousseau’s vision.

The neutrality strategy opens space for conservative and progressive values to compete on a level playing field in public institutions such as schools or the civil service, without today’s anti-conservative discrimination. In the absence of today’s slanted institutional terrain, conservatism has a strong chance of winning hearts and minds – it accords better with human nature. This of course requires that conservative values be more effectively nurtured in civil society, which can only happen through the revival of grassroots associations and fraternal societies (i.e. American Legion, Sons of Italy, Orange Order, Daughters of the American Revolution) that have decayed over the past half century.

Against the pessimistic view that the turn toward cultural socialism, expressive individualism and anti-traditionalist modernism is baked into the DNA of liberalism, I hold that liberalism is in fact a thin-centred political ideology that can accommodate a range of variants, including national conservative ones. The East Asian or East European version of liberalism is clearly very different from the French or Anglo-Saxon type. The pathologies which concern those of us in the Anglosphere are less pronounced in non-Anglo societies with similarly procedural liberal systems such as Korea or the Czech Republic.

I do not believe other liberal societies outside the Anglosphere will fall prey to our afflictions to the same degree. Their conservative cultures coexist well with a liberal political infrastructure. Culture, in my estimation, is largely orthogonal to the procedures and constitutional underpinnings of the political-legal order. We spend far too much time on 18th century debates between political liberals and conservatives and nowhere near enough time on the 20th century onslaught of cultural liberals and radicals who have steadily rolled back conservatism's unfocused and scattered cultural resistance.

On economics, I am somewhat agnostic, only that I hold these issues to be less symbolically important. The neo-conservative right, with its emphasis on market liberalism and foreign policy, was an important bulwark against the communist threat of an earlier era. It was correct to identify the pitfalls of state-regulated economies and excessively powerful unions. These disincentivised investment and growth. Economic autarky and import substitution are inferior to more open trade while the record of "picking winners" in industrial policy and Keynesian demand management is chequered, to say the least.

However, I concur with much of the post-liberal critique of *laissez faire*. Unregulated markets have problems and can breed crony capitalism. Globalisation offshores jobs from stable communities, hollowing them out and breeding inequality. Agglomeration effects can lead to regional disparities. A balanced, evidence-led approach based on the evaluation of macro- and microeconomic policies is the soundest way forward in economics.

To reiterate: as a conservative, I am not overly concerned about the ideological aspects of economic policy, which is principally a technical-management issue with many moving parts and external constraints, involving outcomes most people across the political spectrum agree on: more growth in per capita income, less inequality, better public services. These are consensus issues rather than ideological-positional issues. For that reason, my view is that economic ideology is largely, though not completely, orthogonal to what I think conservatism should be focused on at present. The economy may often be the most important issue for voters, but it is not the most important question for defining conservatism.

One of my pleas is for post-liberals to expend less energy on economics, a highly technical task with many external parameters, and more on culture. The latter is a positional issue that starkly divides left from right, and can be swiftly changed by national policy action and contestation. We are in no danger of lurching toward an economically stultifying socialism, but are on the verge of a leftist cultural revolution that threatens the very foundations – both Enlightenment and traditional – of our civilisation.

The progressive left, which dominates the meaning-making institutions of society, has marked out a sandbox labelled “economics”, along with foreign policy, as the spaces in which conservatives are permitted to play. God forbid it strays into culture, which the left currently owns, and progressive commentators hit the roof, engaging in dishonest tactics from defamation (“racist”) to emotional blackmail (“punching down”) to shut down the conversation. Conservatives who accept the framing of the cultural left and confine themselves to “respectable” economic and foreign policy debates while abjuring the “culture war”, family policy, crime, immigration and other cultural issues are little more than the useful idiots of the cultural left.

Many of Britain’s Conservative Party MPs are either motivated primarily by market liberalism or are desperate for the status-conferring approval of the country’s media and progressive establishment.⁴ They are willing to play ball with the establishment and to turn on the cultural conservatives who represent the aspirations of most Tory voters and a majority of the country.⁵

The task before post-liberal conservatives is to put culture first for once, above the safer ground of economics and foreign policy. This means focusing laser-like on political reforms and social movements that can alter the direction of the culture and moderate the power of contemporary taboos – until such time as these have been confined to a reasonable sphere. If conservative politicians and writers in today’s progressive-alarmist high culture are not being called racists and transphobes, they are derelict in their duty.

⁴ BALE et al. 2020.

⁵ GOODWIN 2023.

Conservatives must also dispel the illusion that change can occur without using state power. The use of democratic state power is integral to both liberalism and conservatism, as I will explain, but also matters pragmatically: elected government is the only major culture-shaping institution the right can hope to control. While private action and associational activity is important, the libertarian pipe dream of “creative destruction” and parallel institutions is much more difficult in a broader cultural system that is institutionally anti-conservative. Pragmatically, this means conservatives need to make a far greater effort to intervene in mainstream institutions than has hitherto been the case.

When reputations, alumni and endowments lock in status advantages, as with elite universities, or where the value of a network increases with the number of users to create a quasi-monopoly, as with social media platforms and search engines, only regulation by the state can check progressive bias. Elon Musk’s impact on the social media sphere through acquiring Twitter is incomparably greater than Gab or Parler’s; the effect of the Supreme Court on university admissions, or red state legislators on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion regimes, is far more profound than anything Hillsdale or the University of Austin can muster. School choice can do little but nip at the edges of the school-indoctrination octopus while the banning of Critical Race Theory or gender ideology exerts massive change at the stroke of a pen. This is not to say that new institutions are not important as a way of modelling best practice, but in most policy areas interventionist reform (what Hirschman calls “voice”) matters a great deal more than libertarian “exit” for system-level change.

A LIBERAL-CONSERVATIVE COALITION?

Prior to the late 20th century, most challenges to liberalism came from conservatism, be it monarchist, religious, patriarchal or national. I am struck by the off-key claims of conservative intellectual James Burnham, in his *Suicide of the West*, regarding what he terms the “liberal syndrome”. Be this humanity’s potential for ethical development; the role of reason and discussion rather than

force in solving social problems; the need to adopt an evidence-led approach to evaluating social systems; the value of free speech; of legal desegregation and civil rights; or the importance of increasing the well-being of humanity; I find myself consistently on the liberal side, opposing Burnham.⁶

However, after 60 years of radical-progressive entrenchment, with the detraditionalising egalitarian ratchet cranked far beyond its happiness-maximising optimum, the challenges to liberalism arise mainly from the left. As Colin Wright's "the left left me" cartoon, retweeted by Elon Musk, shows, the left's overreach into cancel culture dogmatism has marooned many old-style left-liberals on the right.⁷ The aim of liberal national conservatism (or post-liberalism) must be to forge a coalition of disaffected liberals and conservatives suitable for an age of progressive extremism.

LEFT-MODERNISM: OUR DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

The dominant ideology of our age is left-modernism. This can be thought of as "equity diversity", linking the idea of cultural leftism – an attack on inequalities based on identity, with modernism, a cultural sensibility favouring expressive individualism, novelty and difference (rather than tradition and commonality). Modernism, according to Daniel Bell, begins with abstract detraditionalised art, architecture and atonal music in the early 20th century – though its post-impressionist precursors go back to around 1880.⁸ It was somewhat linked to the left due to the "liberation" potential of utopianism and Marxism, as well as the countercultural nature of bohemian life going back to the 1840s, but could also find itself paired with right-wing ideologies of transformation, as with the fascist futurism of Marinetti.

The cultural left side of left-modernism, by contrast, traces its origins to the humanitarianism of 19th century abolitionists and pacifists, and is picked up,

⁶ BURNHAM 2014: 125–130.

⁷ WRIGHT 2022.

⁸ BELL 1976.

in the US, by the Liberal Progressive and ecumenist movements of the 1900s–1920s. The Liberal Progressives sought to decentre WASP America's traditions and laud “immigrant contributions” while emphasising the psychological cost of assimilation borne by (mainly white) immigrant ethnic groups such as Italians and Jews.

The bohemian “lyrical left” of the 1912–1917 period in Greenwich Village, New York (known as the Young Intellectuals), notably Randolph Bourne, castigated the Anglo-Protestant tradition as “confining”, unexpressive and boring. This was a more direct form of cultural repudiation than Dewey's Liberal Progressive “Neither Englandism nor New Englandism [can define America]” stance. Early left-modernism mainly championed European urban immigrant groups as against the Anglo-Protestant majority but began to take a side interest in black jazz and African-Americans in the late 1910s. They built on the humanitarian liberals' ethical foundations, but delivered a more aesthetic form of cultural repudiation, turning up the volume as against the relatively subdued claims of the Liberal Progressives and ecumenist mainline Protestant elites.

Left-modernism, the ideological regime in western countries, can thus be subdivided into its modernist component, focusing on novelty and diversity, and cultural socialism, which is moralistic and oriented toward what Jonathan Haidt terms the equality and care/harm moral foundations.⁹

Since the late 1960s, the ego of moralistic cultural socialism has gained the upper hand over its modernist alter, which used to dominate the left-modernist project. Where modernism drives toward transgressions such as paedophilia, prostitution and pornography, cultural socialism's protective ethos perceives these as attacks on vulnerable or oppressed groups (which aligns them with conservatives!). Cultural appropriation and transracial identification are also viewed, unreasonably, as sins by cultural socialists, curtailing modernists' quest for the exotic or for syncretism in pursuit of their life projects of personal reinvention.

⁹ HAIDT 2012.

However, in most other realms, as with the left-modernist attack on bourgeois social mores, prestige hierarchies or ethnic majorities, leftism and modernism stand on common ground against conservatives. From the 1960s onward, left-modernism steadily overturned the liberal-conservative majority sensibility while politically-incorrect modernists such as Norman Mailer succumbed to the restrictions placed upon them by cultural socialism.

The ascent of cultural socialism was accompanied by its religion of wokeness. Woke should be used narrowly to mean the *sacralisation of historically marginalised race, gender and sexual identity groups*. While there may be orthodoxies around climate change, vaccines and other left-coded issues that lead to the social ostracism of dissenters, these are best thought of as progressive beliefs which bear a family resemblance to the dynamics of wokeness but fall outside its remit. Such material questions do not entwine group identity and political ideology in the same way as the totems of race, gender and sexuality.

Contemporary cultural socialism and transgressive modernism are offshoots of liberalism, but only in the same way that nationalism, Marxism or religious fundamentalism are – that is, they draw on some aspects of liberalism while rejecting others. In short, the fact liberalism is thin-centred enough to spawn illiberal offshoots does not mean we should reject the liberal mother ship.

Where economic liberalism and socialism fought each other to an accommodation in mixed capitalism, nothing similar has occurred with cultural socialism, which is currently running unchecked in western, especially Anglo-sphere, societies. Just as economics recognises a trade-off between growing the economic pie and dividing it up more equally, sociology should grasp the trade-off between expanding the wealth of a culture and seeking to redistribute cultural self-esteem and power.

Cultural socialism leads to cultural poverty. Categories such as sex and ethnicity are not primarily, contra Derrida, socially constructed power hierarchies but rather systems of meaning and tradition that produce immense value for most people. Attempts to denigrate white people, erase history and abolish sex binaries, for instance, destroy cultural value while doing more harm than good to disadvantaged groups. As with socialist economics, excessive equity breeds poverty.

FROM THE FIRST TO THE THIRD CULTURE WARS

In what follows, I provide a brief tour of the quantitative rise of cultural socialism since the 1960s. Its unchecked surge has decimated both cultural liberalism and conservatism. Where cultural liberalism and conservatism were once each other's principal antagonists, both are ever more aligned in their revolt against the woke tide. This liberal-conservative commonality must be nurtured into an effective alliance against the most serious threat to western civilisation since the Cold War.

The challenge of cultural socialism strikes along two dimensions. The first, which we can term "cancel culture", is a threat to the old liberal order of free speech, due process, equal treatment and objective truth. The second, which for shorthand I dub "critical race theory", challenges national conservative values such as community, cohesion and majority ethnic and national traditions, identities and memories. More recently, aspects of religion (i.e. the church's role in indigenous "cultural genocide", the right to espouse traditional doctrine on abortion and homosexuality, the sex binary, the family) have also found themselves in cultural socialism's crosshairs.

Cancel culture and critical race-gender theory are the two main fronts in the contemporary culture war. However, it is important to lay out the full chronology of cultural conflict since the 1960s because we are actually in our third culture war, which rests on foundations laid down by the first and second culture wars. These should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as overlapping processes which crested in different periods.

The first culture war pit social and religious conservatives against "secular humanists" and old-style liberals and feminists. In Europe, Christian Democracy fought a rearguard action against social liberalism.¹⁰ More importantly, the American religious right of the 1980s–2000s championed family values and faith-based welfare initiatives while advocating for the teaching of Creationism

¹⁰ INGLEHART 1990.

in schools and mobilising against abortion and gay marriage. Apart from abortion, its one success, this movement generally failed to achieve its aims.¹¹

The second culture war revolves around immigration and ethnic diversity, and begins in earnest in the 1980s with the rise of the populist right in France, Italy, Austria, Flanders and a few other European countries. Its share of the vote tripled between the late 1980s and early 2000s. In the US, it found its expression in California's anti-illegal immigration Proposition 187 of 1994 as well as Pat Buchanan's near-miss Republican primary campaigns of 1992 and 1996 – which blended first and second culture war themes. The globalist–nationalist divide next caught fire in 2014, with a surge of support (of around 30%) for the French Front National, UK Independence Party and Danish People's Party in the 2014 European elections on the back of record immigration inflows. This reached a crescendo with the 2015 Migrant Crisis, with Brexit and Trump winning in 2016, and record support for populist right parties across Europe. In Austria, the Freedom Party came within a percentage point of winning the presidential runoff while Marine Le Pen notched up unprecedented levels of support, cresting more recently at 43% of the vote.

Where religious conservative–secular liberal humanists defined Culture War I, and nationalist–globalist Culture War II, the divide in the third culture war is cultural socialist – cultural liberal that is, it pits illiberal progressivism against a coalition of liberals and conservatives. The taproots of this divide lie in liberal unease over affirmative action quotas, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. For a long period, this conflict was marked by a modest back-and-forth cycle in the courts and Congress.¹² Indeed, it can be argued that it was not until the advent of a more conservative court under Trump, culminating in the breakthrough 2023 *Student for Fair Admission vs. Harvard* case, that cultural socialism began to erode in this area.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Official English movement, aimed at bilingual Spanish–English education in schools (“multicultural education”), passed in around half of US states in the 1980s and 1990s. Old-style liberals like

¹¹ ROZELL–WHITNEY 2007.

¹² GLAZER 1987.

Arthur Schlesinger, Allan Bloom, Nathan Glazer and Francis Fukuyama warned against the threat posed by identity politics to national cohesion and individual freedom.¹³ I would also note that early Culture War III speech restrictions against opposition to immigration caused resentment and opened up a political vacuum which populist parties of Culture War II filled.

If Culture Wars I and II generally divided conservatives from liberals and progressives, Culture War III saw many secular liberals move – at least rhetorically – away from progressivism to the conservative side. While remaining in the same tribe and political party as progressives, old liberals increasingly worried about the anti-individualist thrust of multiculturalism, identity politics, cancel culture, critical race and gender theory and affirmative action.¹⁴

THE RISE OF CULTURAL SOCIALISM

The cultural socialism around which Culture War III revolves is primarily driven by a simple affective attachment: “majority bad, minorities good.” It is more emotional, bottom-up, anarchist and leaderless than economic socialism. Its stock in trade has been to leverage the sacredness of race, and its associated white guilt, to expand its moral authority and power. That sacredness exploded into view around 1965 following a set of liberalising attitude changes on race which began in the 1940s in the US and reached a tipping point in the mid-1960s.

Shelby Steele, an African-American liberal-conservative who lived through the civil rights revolution describes this as a cultural earthquake: “The lines of moral power, like plates in the earth, had shifted. White guilt became so palpable you could see it on people. At the time what it looked like to my eyes was a remarkable loss of authority. And what whites lost in authority, blacks gained. You cannot feel guilty about anyone without giving away power to them.” For Steele, the Civil Rights Act involved America and whites in particular admitting their guilt. The only way to redeem themselves was to virtue signal their fealty to white guilt and

¹³ SCHLESINGER 1993.

¹⁴ RAUCH 2021.

anti-racism. What Steele terms “disassociation” from racism, not improving the condition of blacks, is what powered policies such as affirmative action.¹⁵

Paul Krugman, writing in the *New York Times*, describes this revolution in the American moral order that ripped through polite society around 1965: “In our public discourse, overt racism became utterly taboo. And while it didn’t literally happen overnight, it did happen fast.” Krugman recalls black coachmen figurines on the doors of expensive Long Island homes being repainted from black to white in the space of one summer.¹⁶ While Britain was some 15 years behind the US in terms of mass public opinion, elites such as Roy Jenkins were already weaponising and stretching the racism charge by the early 1960s.¹⁷

This revolution in public morality simultaneously swept through the radical left, to the point that progressive intellectuals who had busied themselves with discussion of the New Deal or artistic modernism suddenly threw themselves into a new cultural radicalism based on race. Susan Sontag of *Partisan Review* thereby gushed, in 1966:

America was founded on genocide [...], [had] the most brutal system of slavery in modern times [...]. The white race is the cancer of human history; it is the white race and it alone – its ideologies and inventions – which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself [...]. This is a passionately racist country; it will continue to be so in the foreseeable future.¹⁸

Left-modernists like Herbert Marcuse abandoned the white working-class, gravitating to the more identitarian registers of black radicalism and Third World socialism. In the wake of communist disappointment with the western working class, the minority lumpenproletariat rather than the white proletariat were the chosen instrument of radical social transformation.¹⁹

¹⁵ STEELE 2006: 497–498.

¹⁶ KRUGMAN 2013.

¹⁷ HANSEN 2000: 150–155.

¹⁸ CARSON–ROBBINS 2019.

¹⁹ Literary Hub 2019.

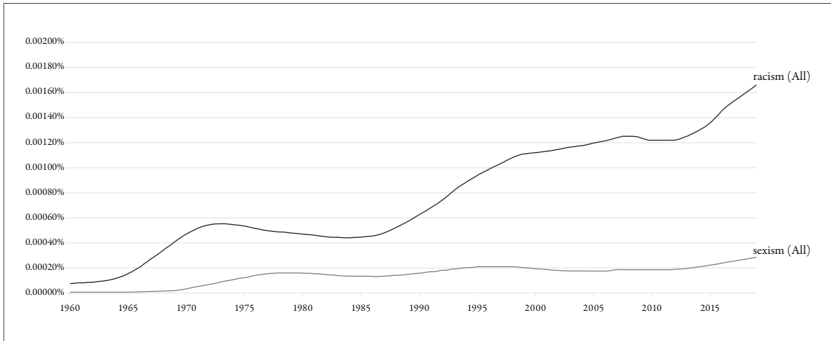


Figure 1. *Frequency of the terms “racism” and “sexism” in Google-indexed books, 1960–2019*

Source: Compiled by the author based on Google Ngram Viewer
(accessed 28 June 2023)

In her pathbreaking 1966 *Partisan Review* piece, Sontag managed a dig at American masculinity, prefiguring the feminist appropriation of the logic of guilt in a bid to ride on the coattails of black sacredness. A magical quality and suspension of disbelief which began with racial minorities was thus stretched to encompass women, and later extended to homosexuals and, most recently, to transgender people. The underlying logic was one of victimhood points for identity groups (“intersectionality”), with white male heterosexuals at the bottom of the new moral hierarchy. Minority victims were the fount of spiritual, intellectual and moral depth while once-privileged majorities occupied the role of the fallen who must beg for forgiveness and abase themselves. White men were enjoined to work off their moral stain through allyship, performative self-hatred and virtue-signalling.

The frequency of the terms “racism” and “sexism” in English-language books in Figure 1 reveals a pronounced pattern in which cultural socialism surges during periodic “awakenings” of emotional enthusiasm. The first great awakening occurred in the late 1960s, the second in the late 1980s, early 1990s and the third in the late 2010s, peaking in 2020–2021. We can track these trends in the content of books and academic articles.

However, the difference with the current awakening is that it has, for the first time, spilled out beyond the campus and literary circles. Big data analyses confirm that the frequency of Culture Wars III news content has caught up with that of academia in a way that was not true during the first and second great awakenings.²⁰ Whereas the discourse around black radicalism in the 1960s and political correctness in the 1980s and 1990s remained largely confined to the campus and literary worlds, the 2010s have swept through youth culture, high culture, pop culture and corporate culture.

YOUTHQUAKE

Young people and the highly-educated were in the forefront of the liberal secularising trends of Culture War I. This was also true, to a great degree, of the globalism of Culture War II. It is thus no surprise that we find these groups at the coalface of Culture War III. Age matters more than education in predicting progressivism in culture wars, especially for third culture war issues. For instance, in Britain, 70% of PhD holders over 60 oppose political correctness while two-thirds of those 25 and under, at all education levels, support it. Consider the question of whether J. K. Rowling should be dropped by her publishers. As Figure 2 reveals, young people are evenly split while hardly anyone over 50 favours cancelling Rowling.

When it comes to cancelling historical figures (i.e. “critical race theory”), the age pattern is likewise noticeable, but there is an important difference. Figure 3 illustrates by examining the way age and ideology interact to condition British support for a) an index comprising the cancelling of three contemporary individuals (Rowling, Stock and Cambridge postdoctoral researcher Noah Carl); and b) an index of two historical figures (removal of Winston Churchill statue and renaming David Hume Tower) alongside a question tapping whether people prefer that history emphasise national shame more than pride.

²⁰ ROZADO 2022: 16–29.

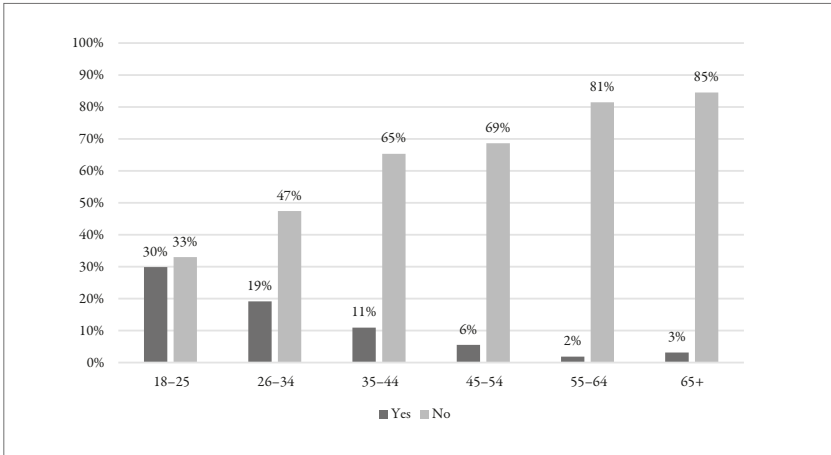


Figure 2. *Should J. K. Rowling be dropped by publishers? (by age)*

Note: excludes “don’t know” responses

Source: Compiled by the author

based on KAUFMANN 2022a: 25

Two things jump out from the charts. First, the vertical distance between the lines for left- and right-wing respondents are much wider in the right-hand chart, which captures people’s support for “critical race” approaches to the past. This tells us that editing problematic historical figures like Churchill out of the British past appeals to nearly 6 in 10 leftists under 35. Yet leftists over 55 also have a 35% chance of supporting these woke positions: there is more than a 30-point gap between older leftists and older conservatives on this question. Thus support for CRT extends well beyond the young.

On the other hand, the left-hand chart shows that leftists over 55 have only a 17% chance of supporting the cancellation of current individuals for speech, quite similar to what conservatives over 55 think. Cancel culture falls flat among older leftists, probably due to their liberal instincts. Critical race theory, by contrast, appeals to twice as many older leftists (though most older leftists also reject CRT).

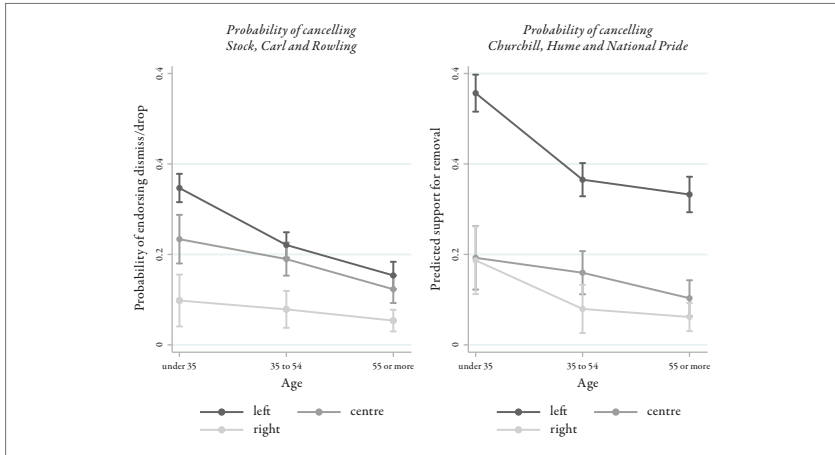


Figure 3. *Age and ideology interaction concerning woke*

Source: Compiled by the author based on KAUFMANN 2022a: 28–29

The second observation concerns similarities between the charts. The upward sloping lines indicate that support for cancellation rises with youth. This holds in both charts, across leftists, centrists and, to some extent, conservatives. Moreover, the distinctive hockey-stick pattern for the top line in each chart, which is statistically significant, indicates that young leftists stand out as especially woke. They are more intolerant than the old, but the gap between young and old leftists is the most glaring. Something unique seems to have occurred within the left over time.

I find precisely the same pattern in the United States. For instance, a majority of Democrats support CRT ideas like teaching that the United States is a racist country built on stolen land, and that whites have privilege. On the other hand, only a few percent of Republicans endorse these notions. While the partisan and ideological gap on history and CRT is massive, it is narrower when it comes to cancel culture, measured as support for firing controversial figures such as Mozilla CEO Brandon Eich or Florida academic Charles Negy. As in Britain, there is a strong age gradient for both cancel culture and CRT,

but what jumps out is how much young leftists differ from older leftists on free speech cases. Thus American leftists 25 and under are a staggering 44 to 59 points more likely to call for the firing of Eich and Negy compared to leftists over 50. The age differences among moderates (26–34 points) and conservatives (8–25 points) are smaller.

Young people in Anglophone societies stand out as being substantially more cultural socialist than their elders. Since many beliefs tend to be imprinted by people's early 20s due to this being the terminus of brain development, there is a strong likelihood that these young people will carry their cultural socialist beliefs with them across their life course.²¹ Already, commentators in the Anglo world have remarked upon the surprising stickiness of youth progressivism and left-wing voting allegiances into adulthood.²² All of which means we are likely to see the kind of cohort-led value change that occurred with the decline of religion and rise of liberal attitudes to sexual mores and race.

In Anglo societies we see a surge of parallel trends among young adults. A large jump in smartphone and intensive social media use, beginning around 2012, coincided with a tripling in LGBT identification, a surge in anxiety and depression, as well as a continuing decline in religion and patriotism. Some like Jonathan Haidt believe this arises because hyperparenting and coddling has produced a fragile, social media-addicted “i-Gen”, who in turn gravitate to victimhood culture and its associated woke ideology.²³

My more sociological outlook instead focuses on the way social media and the new clickbait journalism model served as a cultural technology which allowed pre-existing radical ideas to surge out of academia and radical arts circles into the mainstream of popular and high culture, starting in the mid-2010s. The media, schools and organisations followed up by socialising many young people who had never set foot in a grievance studies seminar into these beliefs. This transmission of ideas from radical academics to major meaning-making institutions then back to impressionable young people is what best explains

²¹ GOEL 2022.

²² BURN-MURDOCH 2022.

²³ LUKIANOFF–HAIDT 2018.

the youthquake. This reflection process transmitted cultural socialist political (i.e. “white supremacy”, patriarchy) *and* therapeutic (i.e. “emotional safety”, “trauma”) ideas to youth and left-wing activists. This explains why I find that young people’s reports about how they were parented does not correlate with their political views but media consumption patterns do.²⁴ In short, I believe it is the message and not the medium that truly matters.

The endpoint of the woke cultural revolution has been to imprint an entire generation from kindergarten to graduate school and beyond. Recent evidence from a survey I have conducted suggests that critical social justice indoctrination works to massively shift young people to the left. Instruction in the law and free speech also works to move them toward classical liberalism, but this kind of instruction is increasingly rare in schools and universities. Only online is it readily available.

THE POLITICS OF THE CULTURE WAR

In the past 60 years, we have repeatedly seen shifts from negative liberal toleration to positive liberal “celebration” or even forced affirmation, as with compulsory diversity statements or pronoun use. Patrick Deneen is correct that negative liberal toleration has led to the elevation of first individualist, then progressive values. That is, we have witnessed a negative-to-positive shift within liberalism, even as the “liberalism” packaging has remained the same. There is perhaps no better illustration of this than Lyndon Johnson’s Howard University speech where he subtly segued from equality of opportunity to equality of results, all later branded under the label “affirmative action”.

However, this is not an inevitable process, as is readily apparent from the trajectory of liberal societies in East Asia and Central Europe.

Liberal democracy offers numerous avenues to reform the system and improve the climate for conservative values. We are only at the beginning of

²⁴ GOLDBERG 2020.

using policy levers to push back. What is apparent is that the illiberalism of cultural socialism, despite trading under the “liberal” flag, is becoming evident even to liberals.

On the one hand, liberal-sounding velvet gloves such as “inclusion”, “anti-racism” or “gender affirmation” continue to fool many centre-leftists and liberals, with most endorsing or going along with “critical” positions on race and gender. On the other hand, surveys show that those on the left – especially older leftists – categorically reject cancel culture. When it comes to firing or no-platforming, there is a large divide between the relatively illiberal far left, who support this more than they oppose it, and the liberal centre left, who heavily oppose it. Centre-leftists in the US and Britain also believe in viewpoint diversity and are less likely to elevate emotional safety above freedom of expression.²⁵ A liberal post-liberalism should be seeking to peel such individuals – often older or male progressives – away from their tribal affiliation to the left.

National conservative stances likewise have some appeal to centrists. When asked whether American or British schoolchildren should be taught that their country is racist and major heroes such as Churchill are villains, opinion on the left fragments while conservatives are strongly opposed to the tune of 70–90%. The same holds for defending the integrity of the gender binary and women’s spaces. Thus on both liberal “cancel culture” questions and conservative “critical race–gender” issues, there is strong electoral potential for right parties to use culture war themes as wedges to win support from centrist liberals and progressives.

This was amply demonstrated by Ron DeSantis in Florida and Glenn Youngkin in Virginia, both of whom campaigned successfully against indoctrination in schools. Youngkin flipped a state that had voted for Biden by 10 points by attacking the incumbent as hostile to parental influence over their children’s education, illustrating the electoral potential of Culture War III questions. In Scotland, the SNP’s often progressive voters were shocked by the Isla Bryson – Adam Graham affair into revising their views, leading to Sturgeon’s ouster. Here is the liberal-conservative electoral coalition in action.

²⁵ KAUFMANN 2022a; 2022b.

CULTURE IS DOWNSTREAM FROM POLITICS

The political events of the 1960s energised the New Left, as intellectuals drew inspiration from black, female and, later, gay protest movements. While cultural shifts can presage political changes, the reverse is also true. In what follows, I follow Chris Rufo's plea for a conservative counter-revolution. Conservatives and classical liberals must understand that they are now outsiders, and will have to engage in a concerted legislative, regulatory and entryist effort to recapture elite institutions.²⁶

In broad outlines, liberal post-liberals must work within the system to reform it. Neither the Benedict Option of quietist withdrawal, nor utopian dreams of installing conservative values in courts and institutions offer the best way forward. A liberal-conservative fusion seeks instead to politically neutralise institutions or, where content is required, as with history instruction and civics, aim for balance – with a slight preference for positive conceptions of the country, justified on public interest grounds. Only this can bring a stable equilibrium outcome.

Thus, instead of aiming to restore public religion and change the valence of activism and indoctrination in institutions, as some post-liberals advocate, we should be seeking to find broad majority consensus around the neutral nation-state. Substantive conservatism can then be built from below to shift the dial of public opinion. This means universities cannot advocate on political issues. It means schools must be prevented from indoctrinating on race and gender, with much tighter guidance and enforcement of the law, backed by direct legislative scrutiny. Violators must be punished, and the media informed so as to warn progressive activists who would defy the law and the democratic majority in pursuit of their messianic moralism.

It means that politically-contentious emblems like the Pride or BLM flag must be kept off government property, with only national or municipal emblems that encompass all voters permitted (as per Norwich, Ontario's new local

²⁶ RUFO 2023.

ordinance). It means critical race and gender courses in university should be defunded (though not banned). Diversity training, with its critical social justice ideology and monomaniacal race-sex-gender cultural socialism, should be abolished. Government bodies must divest immediately from ideological third-party groups such as Stonewall or Advance HE. Equity-driven targets and timetables should be scrapped in favour of unobtrusive measures to enable access to a meritocratic process, not just for race and gender, but for class and political ideology.

“Equivalent action” in which all measures on race–gender must be matched for class and ideology, can help check cultural socialist zeal. Companies which engage in political discrimination, whether in the form of debanking or de-platforming, can be fined and compelled to comply, as appears to be the case with new British de-banking legislation in the wake of Courtts’ discrimination against Nigel Farage. When it comes to liberalism, we must eschew a purely Madisonian emphasis on institutional autonomy in favour of a more Hobbesian approach which protects individuals from corrupt and illiberal institutions.

Where content is imperative and neutrality is not an option, as with the history curriculum or visiting speakers in schools, balance is the watchword, which must be measured and enforced by regulators, backed by regular parliamentary scrutiny. There is a justifiable public interest in attaching young people to their society, hence even as a nation’s sins should not be concealed, the balance of instruction must seek to impart a positive conception of the nation. Not to the extent mooted by Rousseau, but to a greater degree than at present. National sins such as colonialism, atrocities or discrimination must be contextualised by a world-historical consideration of the history of these processes in non-western societies, and of the relatively exceptional western record of ending these practices. The current focus on stories of right-wing excesses such as Nazism and Jim Crow must be balanced by treatments of utopian left extremism, as with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Stalinism or the Cambodian Killing Fields. Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should be part of the curriculum. It is the right of the demos to set standards: when it comes to classroom instruction, teachers’ speech is not as free as it is for academics.

Teachers have a captive under-age audience whereas university students are adults who self-select into courses.

Achieving victory in these battles, and on the pivotal immigration question, will require several initiatives that are missing from conservatism at present:

A new focus on culture, rather than economics, as the reason people enter conservative politics. This needs to stem from new pressure groups akin to the National Rifle Association or March for Life who rate Republican politicians on their key issues and ask them to sign up to pledges. The same groups must spring up on culture war issues and immigration. In this manner, market liberals who eschew the culture war or are liberal on immigration – such as Caroline Nokes or Crispin Blunt in the Tory party – can be de-selected by party branches in favour of national conservatives. If national organisations such as CCHQ in Britain remain dominated by economic liberals, insurgent campaigns (i.e. Suella Braverman, Kemi Badenoch) or third-party populist movements will be needed to upend wet party establishments.

Beyond this, elite networks akin to the Federalist Society for the American judiciary must be developed for the bureaucracy. This can intensively mine the small seam of conservative graduates for talent which can be called upon to staff key government positions, many of which fall to progressives by default because no suitable conservative candidates can be found. When it comes to elite institutions, the “people are the policy”. Without committed individuals such as Arif Ahmed on Britain’s new Academic Freedom Directorate the body would simply be neutered to protect the status quo. Where institutional capture is too complete, entire bodies may need to be abolished and new nimble offices created which can reflect the ethos of the government. Where institutions like the education establishment resist, they must be defeated with stamina and patience, unlike in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s when conservative criticism of the history curriculum in the US, Britain, Australia and Canada foundered. These “battles of the books” ranked too low on conservative priority lists and naive politicians placed too much faith in the goodwill of educators.

As the right begins to concentrate on cultural issues, raising their salience with voters, this will start to decide elections and embolden moderate left-wing

politicians to clip the wings of woke or open borders activists. Over time, the aim is to shut down the progressive indoctrination apparatus and begin to re-socialise young people into a pantheon of classical liberal and conservative values.

This cultural focus must also confront the widespread anti-conservative political prejudice in Anglo societies which shapes the environment in which young people are raised.²⁷ No wonder only a minority of young people are willing to date a Republican or Conservative. When it comes to friendship, dating, hiring or patronising a business, the left is far more biased against the right than vice-versa, reflecting a moralising absolutism on race and identity that lies at the heart of the contemporary progressive media and educational establishment.²⁸

Upholding negative liberalism is a project that can break this discriminatory system, releasing young people from the grip of regime ideology and offering conservative values a more level playing field. The energy of such a political movement, in concert with debates online and in the media, can inspire cultural change. Just as seatbelt and smoking laws changed attitudes, a new campaign against the woke left and lax immigration can demonstrate to the undecided that these are unpopular values, thereby powering value change.²⁹

RETURNING TO AN EARLIER TRADITION OF LIBERALISM

A new liberal-conservative synthesis represents a return to an older liberal tradition. The anarchy of the religious wars (extending to the English Civil War) shaped the thinking of early liberals of the 17th century such as Hobbes and Locke. They rightly feared anarchy as much as tyranny, for, as Steven Pinker reminds us, anarchic societies are far more dangerous for humans than authoritarian states.³⁰ Hobbes and Locke thought of government as having an important role as a defender of natural rights such as the right to life,

²⁷ WEST 2020.

²⁸ CARL 2017.

²⁹ For more on this dynamic see SUNSTEIN 2019.

³⁰ PINKER 2011.

liberty and property. By contrast, the liberalism of American founders such as Madison and Jefferson is more squarely anti-government, focused on tyranny. Subsequent movements for women's, black and gay rights rightly inveighed against government oppression to change discriminatory laws. However, when they overreached – as with the student uprisings of the 1960s, which curtailed the rights of conservative professors or military recruiters on campus (or present-day cancel culture) – the anti-government form of liberalism failed to protect the conservatives whose rights had been abridged.

We can think of 17th-century liberalism as tripartite in outlook compared to the narrowly dualist approach of their late 18th-century successors – who grew up in a more secure period when states had deepened and consolidated their monopoly on the use of force within their territories. For Hobbes and Locke, the “war of all against all” and private violence represented a major threat to liberty which government must protect individuals from. In their view, society is made up of three levels, individuals, intermediary organisations and government. Threats to liberty can come not just from government, but from middle-level groups and institutions. Government, if democratically elected, scrutinised by a free media and acting in accordance with the constitution, has a vital role in protecting human freedom against the threat of private censorship.

The source of threats to negative liberalism is increasingly shifting back toward private rather than state forms of tyranny. As George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley writes with reference to tech censorship and organisational cancel culture, “[t]he dangers posed by private censorship for a political system are the same as government censorship in the curtailment of free speech”. Even if corporate and administrative censorship does not constitute “Big Brother” speech control, it represents multiple overlapping points of “Little Brother” authoritarianism which violates freedom of expression.³¹ In the advanced West, the Hobbesian tradition of liberal thought is more relevant than the Madisonian variant, with its focus on government. Indeed, anti-government libertarians who decry government regulation of woke institutions are the useful

³¹ TURLEY 2022: 571.

idiots of the woke authoritarians who are engaging in a censorship binge by pressuring or commandeering the administrative apparatus of organisations.

Looking ahead, the future of post-liberalism is liberal. While positive liberalism must be rejected, conservatives should draw on a Hobbesian procedural liberalism, forming a coalition with centrist liberals to push back against anti-conservatism in our institutions. This should rebalance them in a way that offers the best chance for a revival of national and social traditions.

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Andrew Roberts¹

Conservative Traditions: Remarks by Andrew Roberts

I would just like to boast about quite how august I am by saying that, seeing that photo of Lord Hinchingsbrooke, I actually met him when I was writing my first book; Michael Oakeshott was mentioned, and I knew him too; Roger Scruton and Peregrine Worsthorne were friends of mine, and I knew Shirley Robin Letwin. Margaret Thatcher appointed me to take her place in the Margaret Thatcher Archive Trust. Enoch Powell actually collapsed on top of me at a party once, and David Cameron saved my life from jellyfish. All of those people apart from David are dead now, so thank you for reminding me of my mortality. I'm in my late 50s but you've made me feel very, very old.

David Cameron, of course, won two general elections, and I think he would have won a third if he had listened to me when I told him in April 2016 that he needed to lead the Leave campaign in the European referendum. How different history would have been if he had.

We have been blessed today with these fabulous series of speeches. This is a really successful conference already. What Matt was saying about Brexit reminds me of the way in which Leave and Remain are still vital forces in understanding British politics. It's even present today in the Ukraine crisis, when you might have thought that perhaps we'd have been able to have got beyond Brexit. Yet former MP Nick Boles put out a tweet recently asking why didn't Leave feel bad that we weren't doing as well as the EU when it came to sanctions against Russia. I would just like to remind everyone that Britain was sending lethal aid far earlier than any EU country. It's disgraceful, in a way, to try and make political capital over Brexit even out of the Ukraine crisis, but people do.

¹ This chapter is an edited version of Lord Roberts' talk at the *Post-Liberal Turn and the Future and British Conservatism* conference.

You're so right, Matt when you talked about Jeremy Corbyn, but I think there was one other adjective that you could have used with regard to him, which is "anti-Semite". And that was a very important aspect, it strikes me, of his defeat. I was rather proud to be British for the way in which the British people were disgusted by that. And, of course, you saw that in the General Election poll.

When you said conservatism is alive in the academy, I am not so sure, because it strikes me that every single conservative British academic is actually present in this room!

Last night I was sitting next to a young chap who was editing the conservative magazine at Harvard. "How many conservative academics are there at Harvard?", I asked, and he was able to name all three of them. Which is rather nerve-wracking in a way. I thought David's point about liberal authoritarianism was absolutely right. Of course, we are seeing the closing down of free speech, the pulling down of statues, the cancelling of distinguished careers, and your speech was a clarion call against all that. So thank you for that, David. I was hoping that I was a post-liberal conservative, but then I saw the pyramid on your slide. And I noticed that I was the little chap in the bottom, the blue chap in the very bottom right-hand corner. So I felt rather out of place.

I was very pleased when you mentioned that Matt Hancock had said, "I love people", because that has to be the cringe-making and ridiculous statement of somebody who wants to become leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister. And of course, we know that if he didn't love one person he was caught on camera with, he probably still would be in his job. I was interested in your remark about how much he likes technology. I wonder whether or not he extends that to CCTV?

I thought it was a very interesting graph on voter placement as well, which basically says that over two-thirds of Tory voters are post-liberal. In a sense, therefore, it obviously has to be the Tory party that embraces this. It's only the Tory party that can become post-liberal and you made that very, very clear. Anybody who's got any money in this audience should be giving David some in order to do more work on this, and actually get the statistics.

It also proves that Danny Kruger is pretty much alone amongst Tory MPs, being in the same quadrant as Tory voters. So your constituents are lucky Danny, but virtually no other Tory voters are.

Daniel Pitt, the remarks that you've made about the Tory green agenda, especially quoting poets, who we learn from Percy Shelley are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind, was a great breath of fresh air, especially in the way in which you were able to go beyond economics. Wasn't it pleasing the day before yesterday when President Zelensky said to the German Parliament that all the Germans were interested in was economics, economics, economics. That is not what Toryism is about. That is not what wider conservatism is about. I thought that you made that very clear and also this idea of localism getting bigger and bigger, and beyond the nation state it getting weaker and weaker. People who say that they're a citizen of the world are so often actually a citizen of nowhere.

My question to you is how many of the seven core principles could non-conservatives and non-Tories sign up to? Because it seemed to me that you made a very good case for them all being core Tory principles. However, if you ask Sir Keir Starmer, he would say that the Labour Party could respect prudence, localism, trusteeship, piety (to a lesser extent), but also obligations. And so we can see that they are principles, but are they solely Tory principles, or are they just popular policies, things like pedestrianisation and returning otters to the wild and so on?

I do feel a little bit like the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer on Budget Day where you have to work out what you're going to say whilst the Chancellor is actually presenting it. Philip Blond asked for a collective noun for post-liberals. I'm not sure, but I've long said that the collective noun for historians is a malice. Amongst post-liberal conservatives, I wonder whether our collective noun should be "an optimist", because it seems to me this is a very optimistic movement. We're told, of course, that pessimism is an essential element of Toryism: you look at Samuel Johnson, you look at Alan Clark, you look at all sorts of Tories. But nonetheless, I think that there's something optimistic going on here this morning and this afternoon.

The demand of Boris Johnson that all of the candidates for the Conservative Party in the 2019 general election must support Brexit, I found to be an absolute key prerequisite to victory. When one thinks of the forces that were opposed to Brexit, the way in which so many of the great institutions of the nation and of our culture and society and our politics were opposed to it, I'm just going to make a quick list of them to show what the Brexiteers essentially were up against. They were up against both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition; although the leader of Opposition didn't say much, nonetheless he was on the record against Brexit. We were against *The Times*, the House of Lords, the Church of England, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Oxford and Cambridge (of which there is only now one Tory master of the 70+ colleges), the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party, the Confederation of British Industry, the BBC, the liberal press, easily the worst Speaker of the House of Commons we've had for 300 years. (He was totally against it, to the point of actually putting rude remarks about Brexit on the bumper sticker of his car.) The quangos were against Brexit, the Supreme Court – it later turned out – was against it. Much of the civil service were, especially the Treasury that put out endless prognostications about the economy, all of which have been proved to be wrong. The institutions and the great panjandra of society were all opposed to it. The only people who were in favour of it were the Brexiteers and the British people. The British people are therefore, in my view, post-liberal.

This is something to build on enormously. What we also find is, with regard to liberal authoritarianism, that free speech – which used to be the great Liberal cry – is now *our* cry. And it's a very potent one. Every time the people are given a chance to vote in local referenda about whether or not they want to keep up statues to some imperialist, they vote in favour of keeping it. We saw that recently in Watford; you also are seeing in San Francisco huge support for the traditional position. The fear, of course, is that the millennials, especially in America, are turning against free speech. It's a very worrying development that some 62% of them think that it's alright to close down debate if they don't agree with what the other person is saying. This is a nearly two-thirds majority;

we have to worry about this. But overall, as I say, the anti-woke agenda is tremendously popular in the localities.

The last thing I have to say is that so far nobody has said anything positive about Margaret Thatcher. I want to point out that if it weren't for her, Britain would have dropped into the third tier of nation states in the world. I want to say well done to the person who I see as my ultimate political heroine.

Part Three:
Christianity, Anglophilia
and Conservatism

Imogen Sinclair

The Order of the Covenant: Uses of Freud after Faith

INTRODUCTION

In his poem *Connoisseur of Chaos*, the American poet Wallace Stevens examines a plainly obvious fact of reality: there is an essential unity to the world, and the human imagination finds this coherence to life reassuring.

If all the green of spring was blue, and it is;
If all the flowers of South Africa were bright
On the tables of Connecticut, and they are;
If Englishmen lived without tea in Ceylon,
and they do;
And if it all went on in an orderly way,
And it does; a law of inherent opposites,
Of essential unity, is as pleasant as port,
As pleasant as the brush-strokes of a bough,
An upper, particular bough in, say, Marchand.¹

Stevens, by confirming that all things are in fact in their right place, alludes to some supernatural order that eludes analysis in the natural world. As if by law, disorderliness is ordered; things come good. Resisting religious explanation (“when bishops’ books / Resolved the world”), Stevens maintains that order arises organically and spontaneously and such cannot be imposed.² In fact, where order is coerced, it becomes disorderly.

¹ Wallace Stevens: *Connoisseur of Chaos*. In STEVENS 1955: 215.

² STEVENS 1955: 215.

- A. A violent order is disorder; and,
 B. A great disorder is an order. These
 Two things are one.³

Stevens had great influence on the sociologist Philip Rieff, who founded his cultural theory on the metaphysical basis that there is a transcendent order discernible in the imminent world. He calls this authority “sacred order”.⁴ In fact, according to Rieff, the sacred and the profane are intimately entwined. Much like the apparent ordered disorder in Stevens’ poem, Rieff says “meaning in the world is very near, the most personal body knowledge to be observed”.⁵

However, for Rieff, there is also a distinction, even a perpetual disconnect, between the sacred and profane. As in Stevens’ poem, the coherence of the world can be imagined, theoretically, but the origin of this sacred ordering power cannot be located in reality; theory and reality never fully meet; the two do not observably interact. For Rieff, this only further confirms that the order is of transcendent origin. This metaphysical distinction between a sacred order and the natural world in which we live and have our being forms the basis of the following inquiry into how we should then live.

In this chapter, I will explain how modernity has diminished our capacity to imagine a unified world; forcing the severance of the supernatural and natural through a process of disenchantment. This prepared the way for enlightenment thinkers to eschew non-rational directives of moral value, such as cultural practices. The consequent crisis of authority has wrought untold social damage. In order to correct course, we must respond to modernity differently, in a Rieffian way; seeking harmony, not hostility, between the sacred and the profane. A conservative interpretation of Freud can show us how this order can redirect human conduct towards the common good. I call this the order of the covenant.

³ STEVENS 1955: 215.

⁴ RIEFF 2006.

⁵ ZONDERVAN 2005: 127.

THE THIRD WORLD CULTURE

Phenomenologist Gerard van der Leeuw observed that “[o]ur time is yearning for the lost unity of life”.⁶ Lost, because the interaction between the transcendent and the imminent which represents a coherent reality (as in Stevens’ poem) is forgotten today.

During the Age of Reason, as incredulity towards the supernatural grew with scientific advancement, achieving coherence in the world meant finally severing the natural from the supernatural and banishing the latter to a fictitious sphere. This describes a disorderly approach to realising order; imposing order on reality, rather than discerning it from the phenomenological experience of “tea in Ceylon” or other such instances.⁷ Such an imposition has disordered reality and now the modern man does not attribute the trace of transcendence in reality to a sacred order. Instead, something else has been reified with sacred meaning in order to make sense of reality.

The great scientists of the 18th century emancipated imaginations from mediaeval misconceptions of geometry and astronomy, expanding the secular sphere of knowledge where facts about the natural world are uncontested by religion. Unfortunately, Newton’s discoveries soon became useful to those convinced by the exclusive sufficiency of empirical tools like reason and science. Hume, Descartes and Spinoza’s “geometrical method” attest to this.⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a key figure in the Enlightenment in Europe, was declared “the Newton of the mind” for his interest in establishing doctrines of governance using a scientific approach.⁹

This led Max Weber to proclaim that “[t]he fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world”.¹⁰ Enchantment might be broadly understood as the recognition

⁶ ZONDERVAN 2005: 132.

⁷ STEVENS 1955: 215.

⁸ JANIÁK 2021 [2006].

⁹ JANIÁK 2021 [2006].

¹⁰ WEBER 2009: 155.

that myth, inspired by perceived yet unseen divine visitation, is a useful prophet of reality. In this way, the Enlightenment project had a disenchanting effect. Weber exposes the folly of seeking to extend modern science beyond its bounds to address questions of ethics by asking: “What is the meaning of science?”¹¹ For Weber, science simply has no end because each advancement “must ask to be surpassed and made obsolete”.¹² This makes the Enlightenment belief that science can create moral value nihilistic. Here lies the great modern contradiction. In search of a unifying truth, with only recourse to science, the enlightenment thinkers’ only gift was deconstruction upon deconstruction *ad infinitum*, or, ordered disorder.

Owen Barfield, one of The Inklings, is well-placed to manoeuvre the modern mind towards acknowledging that while empirical matter is all that can be examined by science, the very same phenomena is represented in reality in more mythical forms.

In his 1988 book *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield explains how rainbows appear as an arc of many colours which seem to touch the horizon and never come to their end. He terms this appearance “collective representation” which sits alongside the unrepresented reality of raw physics; the outcome of the sun, rain and my vision.¹³ For Barfield, both the represented and the unrepresented are real, and no amount of empirical analysis of unrepresented matter can alter how things appear in collective representation, even if they propagate myths.

Barfield concludes “[t]he time comes when one must either accept this as the truth about the world or reject the theories of physics as an elaborate delusion. We cannot have it both ways.”¹⁴ In other words, reality comprises both nature and myth, and they accompany one another, even belong together; they do not contradict each other.

However, modernity *did* want it both ways. For Rieff, this marked a significant historical aberration. In his Trilogy, *Sacred Order/Social Order*, Rieff

¹¹ WEBER 2009: 143.

¹² KIM 2022 [2007].

¹³ BARFIELD 1988: 18.

¹⁴ BARFIELD 1988: 18.

tracks the shift in Western history from what he calls the first “world cultures” of paganism and monotheism to the third, totally secular world cultures. In the first two world cultures, from classical antiquity to relatively recently, cultures have been enchanted by the trace of the transcendent in reality.¹⁵ In this way, the metaphysics of modernity pulled apart things that belong together – grace and nature – and this had a profound cultural impact; namely: a crisis of authority.

THE ANTICULTURE AND THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

Theodor Adorno took the hyper rationalism of Enlightenment thinking to task in his 1966 publication *Negative Dialectics*, referring to great confidence in science as “instrumental reason”; to make what is ungraspable, graspable, through “the insertion of some wretched cover concepts that will make the crucial differences vanish”.¹⁶ The Enlightenment project represented the consuming of the sacred by the profane and is thereby a totalising idea with no exit; nature is but empirical matter and no such trace of the transcendent can be found within.

The irony is that the enlightenment thinkers failed to purge the metaphysical category of the supernatural altogether. For Rieff, the “faith instinct [...] simply cannot be killed”; as in Stevens’ poem, reality still testifies to some sacred order.¹⁷ On this basis, modernity had to build a new structure of ultimate ordering authority in the world. But what does this look like under the metaphysical conditions of modernity? In Adorno’s terms, this led to the reification of the individual in the natural world; no longer a *sacred* order but a wholly imposed, profane and disorderly one that confuses reality. The ultimately authoritative individual is the “wretched cover concept” that makes the crucial differences between the natural and the supernatural disappear; an artificial and corruptible authority.¹⁸

¹⁵ RIEFF 1987.

¹⁶ ADORNO 1973: 152.

¹⁷ RIEFF 2007: 6.

¹⁸ ADORNO 1973: 152.

For Rieff, this state of affairs is practically apocalyptic, culturally speaking. “No culture has ever preserved itself where there is not a registration of sacred order. There, cultures have not survived.”¹⁹ Rieff’s estimation that the consequences of the metaphysical conditions of modernity are borne out in culture reveals his thesis that the supernatural and natural, sacred and the profane, grace and nature are in a symbiotic relationship with one another. We will return to this idea later.

When third world enlightenment thinkers reified the individual, they also eschewed directives of moral value that did not originate in the mind of man; like cultural practices. Such norms affront the modern individualist man because they represent an unauthorised visitation of authority; outside of myself. Cultural norms too much depend on myth, the symbolic or received wisdom, rather than a rational appeal of authority. This is the outlook of liberalism, inspired by enlightenment thinkers such as Kant. For Kant, in order to establish universal maxims, one must actively discount inclinations which are vulnerable to irrational cultural forces such as hopes, fears, attachments and affections. The arrival at a Kantian transcendental perspective represents theory apart from reality; an artificially created transcendent authority with its origin in the mind of man, not sacred order as revealed in nature.

Such theses gave rise to a new, disorderly social order: liberalism. The idea that individual freedom is the only legitimate universal telos of man. Political Scientist Patrick Deneen says that the three “cornerstones of human experience – nature, time and place – form the basis of culture, and liberalism’s success is premised upon their uprooting and replacement”.²⁰ Instead, the liberal approach to moral philosophy reflects a “computer science”.²¹ These are the words of Martin Buber, a theologian who dismisses the transcendental way of establishing universal maxims which “links together citizens alien to one another in their very being, without establishing, or promoting, a being together”.²²

¹⁹ RIEFF 2006: 13.

²⁰ DENEEN 2018: 66.

²¹ BUBER 2013: 31.

²² BUBER 2013: 31.

One such example is the Blairite Equality Act 2010. According to the Act, the most salient thing about the person in law is his “protected characteristics”. In a noble bid to stamp out discrimination by elevating gender, sex and race, such characteristics have instead been reduced to commodities. But the negotiation of competing rights and responsibilities is too great for bureaucracy; it is social, not abstract or political and depends on virtue, not law. Herewith the disorder of the liberal order to which, I maintain, conservatism can offer a corrective. Rieff helps us to see how.

Beyond the Enlightenment, Rieff observes a “therapeutic culture”; the natural progression of the late modern period, where it is no longer considered rational for individuals to subjugate their desires for the sake of conforming to cultural norms.²³ Rieff describes the archetype of the therapeutic man as with “no face” – as if he is unable to be moved by summons of loyalty, honour or obligation that are fostered in culturally reinforced associations like families and communities.²⁴ The therapeutic culture is an anticulture, and it forms the therapeutic man:

[B]eyond the old deception of good and evil, to specialise [...] in techniques that are to be called therapeutic, with nothing at stake beyond a manipulatable sense of well-being. This is the unreligion of the age, and its master science.²⁵

Rieff laments that while cultural pressures such as “reticence, secrecy, concealment of self were once aspects of civility”, now these things wage sacrilegious war on my deified self (the reified individual). In his book *Sociology and the Sacred*, Antonius Zondervan explains that “[t]his sacrosanct belief in the instincts, as the true and core of the self, makes modern man blind to the central role of authority in culture”.²⁶

²³ RIEFF 1987.

²⁴ RIEFF 1987: 13.

²⁵ RIEFF 1987: 13.

²⁶ ZONDERVAN 2005: 122.

Here we find out why, for Rieff, modernity and its anticulture amounts to a crisis of authority. Institutions that inculcate virtues must be deemed illegitimate vessels of moral value. Conservatives through the ages doubt the prudence of such revolutionary instincts. For Edmund Burke, the French Revolutionaries denied “human concerns” by the “nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction”.²⁷

It is of course no surprise that without some sacred rationale, cultural norms are rejected, or subverted. But for Rieff, much more than religious accounts of reality are at stake here. In his book *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Theologian Carl Trueman explains:

Third worlds, by way of stark contrast to the first and second worlds, do not root their cultures, their social orders, their moral imperatives in anything sacred. They do have to justify themselves, but they cannot do so on the basis of something sacred or transcendent. Instead, they have to do so on the basis of themselves. The inherent instability of this approach should be obvious.²⁸

For Rieff, sacred order cannot be artificially created in the third world. Its substitute – the reified individual – is a false transcendence; imported rather than imbibed. It is on this basis that the anticulture of liberalism fails to command civility, only disorder. It fails because it is based on a unifying metaphysical theory with absolutely no bearing on the imminent conditions of reality.

USES OF FREUD AFTER FAITH

Here, in postmodernity, how can we recover civility? For Rieff, the answer lies in recovering culture from the anticulture through a restoration of a sacred order. As we have seen, this can only be a metaphysical enterprise. The subtitle

²⁷ BURKE 1790: 7.

²⁸ TRUEMAN 2020.

to Rieff's book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* is "uses of faith after Freud".²⁹ In this book, Rieff draws on Freudian psychoanalysis to make the case for a trace of the transcendent in our inclination to renounce individual desires for the sake of cultural stability. Over half a century since this book was published, and with census data recording increasing numbers of people in the West declaring no faith whatsoever, Freud might just help us to direct some faith instinct towards the common good, or at least towards order.

Rieff's interest in Stevens reflects his interest in Freud; once remarking that the former is a "poetic version" of the latter.³⁰ Like in Stevens' world of peculiar coherence, an emergent order, or authority – while not necessarily religious ("bishops' books") – is present in Freudian theory.³¹

Freud's psychoanalysis illuminated the battle set by modernity; between the desire of the individual and the wider culture. The impulse of modernity, to liberate the individual, must deconstruct stifling authoritative cultural codes that demand the renunciation of individual desires. However, Freud considered the "unbridled gratification" of every man incompatible with a functioning and resilient society.³² Freud describes something much like Rieff's therapeutic culture:

Unbridled gratification of all desires forces itself into the foreground as the most alluring, guiding principle in life, but it entails preferring enjoyment to caution and penalises itself after short indulgence.³³

Without recourse to cultural norms or habits, on the basis that the autonomy of the individual is the only measure of a legitimate social order, we cannot recommend that practices like sex are regulated by certain conditions, like marriage. In *Why Liberalism Failed* Deneen said of marriage:

²⁹ RIEFF 1987.

³⁰ ZONDERVAN 2005: 125.

³¹ STEVENS 1955.

³² FREUD 1994: 12.

³³ FREUD 1994: 12.

These arrangements exist, in part, to reduce the volatility and dangers of sex – to preserve its energy, its beauty, and its pleasures; to preserve and clarify its power to join not just husband and wife to one another but parents to children, families to the community, the community to nature; to ensure, so far as possible, that the inheritors of sexuality, as they come of age, will be worthy of it.³⁴

Deneen's rationale for regulating sex – for the sake of cultural resilience – cannot be accepted in third world cultures. However, nor can the liberal anticulture provide an alternative imperative for the proper regulation of sex. Much is made of mechanisms like consent, but this is both a weak safeguard against exploitative sex, and a very thin condition for what constitutes "good" sex.

Zondervan explains how we can see the influence of Freud's psychoanalysis in Rieff's theory of culture. For Freud, quite obviously, the widespread sexual chaos that would ensue if men were to indulge their carnal desires at every turn is not sustainable. This itself is a sound rationale for individuals to conform to more conservative cultural norms.

Here, the theory or explanation as to why, or on what authority, or by whose design it is necessary for individuals to renounce their desires is never met in reality, apart from some counterfactual scenario; chaos. As in Stevens' poem, the presence of a coherent order is apparent, but the peculiarity of unity is never resolved; reality is never identified with theory. The crisis of authority in modernity certainly begs the question for Freud: reality is governed by authoritative rules.

Rieff calls order "sacred". In order to correct course away from liberalism and its ills, we need to reconfigure the metaphysical basis of our social order. Unfortunately, the modern discovery of the laws of nature need not have given rise to secular naturalism; nature did not have to eat up grace with the advancement of science. True transcendence can be traced in the natural world, not only by some Enlightenment reduction, corruption, or reification of something profane.

³⁴ DENEEN 2018: 79.

Fiona Ellis' theory of "theistic naturalism" explains how the supernatural is "not a spooky superstructure, intrinsic or added on to a nature which is complete in itself. Rather it is a quality or dimension which enriches or perfects the natural world."³⁵ This account of the natural world is Rieffian; where the natural and the supernatural are distinct, yet entwined. Indeed, nature is naturally supernatural; wholly reliant on the supernatural "without which the world would cease to be and without which we would cease to be properly human".³⁶ On this account, there is no need to artificially create a sacred authority that disorders reality, like the reified individual. Instead, the individual must accept his created condition and seek some alignment with transcendent purposes.

TOWARDS THE ORDER OF THE COVENANT

Rieff's theory of culture maintains that culture is a transliteration of the sacred order. In Rieff's own words, the task of culture is to "transliterate otherwise invisible sacred orders into their visible modalities".³⁷ In this case, the pressure to repress individual desire does not originate in culture, but is a cultural translation of a sacred, authoritative command. Zondervan is extremely useful here. He interprets Rieff's meaning of the verb "transliterate" as the translation of the signs of the sacred into a new language of social order.

Translating is always interpreting because it is impossible to transfer the signs of one semantic field into another directly [...]. The idea of finding the "closest corresponding signs" refers to the very complex character of the transformation of the language of the sacred into that of the social order.³⁸

³⁵ MCPHERSON 2020: 158.

³⁶ MCPHERSON 2020: 158.

³⁷ ZONDERVAN 2005: 127.

³⁸ ZONDERVAN 2005: 127.

We can see again the never quite meeting of reality and theory, of the sacred and the profane, and the respect for the ontological difference between the two. And yet, according to Rieff, the two are “inseparable” because the sacred is a concrete thing, imminently real in nature, most ostensibly in code.³⁹ The habits and rituals that a culture adopts is the sacred order present in the social order, and emerges from the peculiar distance between theory and reality.

Rather unsatisfactorily, despite his protestation that cultures must register a sacred order to survive, Rieff does not prescribe which sacred order should be registered by what kind of culture.

At this point, Alasdair MacIntyre can help us imagine a Rieffian social order; and it looks a lot like conservatism. Like Rieff, MacIntyre rejects the imposition of abstract law devised by enlightenment thinkers. Instead, he maintains that there is such a thing as natural law; “those precepts promulgated by God through reason without conformity to which human beings cannot achieve their common good.”⁴⁰

What makes MacIntyre particularly relevant to Rieff’s theory of culture is his deductive reasoning. MacIntyre argues, quite simply, that a social order inspired by modern metaphysics – namely liberalism – does not stand up to scrutiny when we consider what activities the “plain person” must undertake in his day to day life, such as caring for family, learning new skills, and participating in local forms of political community.⁴¹ These things that sustain a common life are not immediately upheld by liberalism.

In *Ethics and Politics*, MacIntyre says that precepts of natural law are those “presupposed” in rational relationships between individuals, where the “common good requires, and hence the natural law requires, the making of jokes and the staging and enjoyment of entertainment”.⁴² He goes on:

It is only because human beings have an end toward which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do. [...].

³⁹ ZONDERVAN 2005: 128.

⁴⁰ MACINTYRE 1999: 111.

⁴¹ HAUERWAS 2007.

⁴² HAUERWAS 2007.

So I discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the concept of good.⁴³

In other words, MacIntyre goes further than Rieff. Not only must individuals conform to “practices, traditions and the like” for cultural purposes, but these are precepts of natural law; indeed, the very *telos* of man.⁴⁴ This alignment of social order and sacred order finds some form in the idea of the covenant; a freely chosen self-restraint that recognises the imperative for individuals to live associated not apart, and orientates all parties towards some common good.

Rabbi Sacks describes covenants as opposed to contracts:

A contract is a transaction. A covenant is a relationship. Or to put it slightly differently: a contract is about interests. A covenant is about identity. It is about you and me coming together to form an “Us”. That is why contracts benefit, but covenants transform.⁴⁵

Marriage is the obvious example of a freely entered but binding agreement that serves both parties, as well as the wider society. In order for covenants to form – for people to freely choose to self-restrain their desires for some collective good – we need to first be in relationships; to face other people.

Jewish intellectual, Emmanuel Levinas, observes that the face to face encounter fosters virtue, as the “defenceless eyes” and “impoverished face” of another stuns individuals into realising their duty to extend generosity and compassion.⁴⁶ Levinas uses biblical narrative to demonstrate the “prehistory” of the relating and related ego.⁴⁷ After murdering his brother Abel, God asks Cain: “Where is your brother Abel?” In response, Cain asks: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”⁴⁸ God does not respond, implying that indeed one is already and

⁴³ MACINTYRE 2013: xi.

⁴⁴ MACINTYRE 2013: xi.

⁴⁵ SACKS 2020: 63.

⁴⁶ LEVINAS 1996: 12.

⁴⁷ LEVINAS 1996: 117.

⁴⁸ Genesis 4:9.

always a brother-keeper. Cain fails to recognise this, and is therefore unable to experience a true sense of himself; a brother-keeper. Cain failed to freely choose self-restraint, forsaking the sacred order, or in MacIntyre's terms – natural law – that ordains we must covenant with those we face in order to honour our telos and the common good.

Fundamentally, we face other people in the imminent associations that rise above the individual: in families, communities and the nation. These associations are covenantal as they create the conditions for freely chosen self-restraint, and virtue.

In a Freudian sense, no other response to the *unchosen* reality of being born into such associations makes any sense; to refuse to conform to the cultural norms of such associations will result in penalisation “after short indulgence”.⁴⁹ Widespread repression in the human psyche is simply the experience of the sacred order regulating our behaviour, transliterated in culture. It is not a problem to be solved.

Happily, it is almost impossible for the “plain person” to live unencumbered and unrelated, hermetically sealed off from the gaze of others and our obligations towards them.⁵⁰ The recognition of others in imminent associations forces one to sacrifice the limitless possibilities that abstract freedom affords; ultimately to dominate and destroy others. This is the end of liberalism. Individuals subject to strong cultural conditions find instruction as to what to do with freedom, how to use it and how not to abuse it. This is the true and authentic trace transcendent in nature. It gives rise to a more concrete kind of freedom; to live peacefully in communion with others.

What kind of politics does this thesis recommend? Rieff says that stable cultural codes make political force unnecessary: “Culture is the form of fighting before the firing actually begins.”⁵¹ Here, there is a sense in which politicians must look to the pre-political sources of authority, rather than asserting new regimes that disorder the order that can be found in the covenantal relationships.

⁴⁹ FREUD 1994: 12.

⁵⁰ HAUERWAS 2007.

⁵¹ ZONDERVAN 2005: 126.

Simone Weil held this conviction too, observing that “[t]he state is a cold concern which cannot inspire love, but itself kills, suppresses everything that might be loved; so one is forced to love it, because there is nothing else”.⁵²

CONCLUSION

The anticulture is sacrilegious because culture transliterates transcendent truth; that the individual is teleologically oriented towards some larger order for which he must sacrifice the indulgence of his desires. We need the order of the covenant; an old–new metaphysics where the natural and the supernatural, theory and reality, and the sacred and profane mutually reinforce the right way to be human. Through a process of re-enchantment, culture can recover some directive authority.

The conservatism of those such as Burke as well as Benjamin Disraeli and Roger Scruton can hold up the order of the covenant; recommending we live by codes that serve the sacred order of the universe through brother-keeping, and other such activities of the plain person.

⁵² WEIL 2020: 111.

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Ferenc Hörcher

Central European Anglophilia: Personal and Historical Recollections

BRITISH CONSERVATISM MADE UNIVERSAL:
ANGLOPHILIA FROM A CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Anglophilia, just as much as Anglophobia, is an all-European phenomenon. Since Voltaire professed his admiration for the English in the heyday of the French Enlightenment or earlier, this movement has been widespread in Europe. Moreover, it is not simply a fashion among intellectuals. It very soon spread throughout society, affecting almost all parts of the social spectrum. While it is certainly possible to guess some reasons behind the phenomenon, it is very difficult to pinpoint one single cause. However, perhaps the most important aspect of British culture that fostered Anglophilia across Europe is British conservatism. Britain's uniquely insular location guaranteed that its social customs would develop in a particular way, unlike in the countries of mainland Europe. England, as it is called in the discourse of Anglophilia, therefore, always looked somewhat different, idiosyncratic and strange when viewed from the perspective of Europe, and when viewed from even further away, it looks stranger still. This strangeness comes from its apparent traditionalism: it does not follow all the recent trends of the continent. Moreover, its difference raises it in people's minds as an alternative to their own status quo. For the Anglophiles of the French Enlightenment, it represented an alternative to absolutist rule and lecherous Parisian manners. For the rest of the world, it came to mean the alternative to Napoleon's imperial dreams. For Germans it represented an alternative to an under-governed empire, Weimar, and later to the authoritarianism of Bismarck or Hitler. But what did it mean for people behind the Iron Curtain?

This chapter offers a partly subjective, partly more objective answer to this question. The present author will recollect some of his experiences of the phenomenon from own life, as a kind of ego-history, from before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain. To do so, he will adopt the first person singular narrative, in order to show how things appeared from that perspective. This will be followed by a reconstructive narrative of the intellectual history of Anglophilia in Hungary since the French revolution.

The moral of the story will be more than simply a refutation of the claim that the British and the Hungarian constitutional traditions are very similar, from the time of the Magna Charta and its parallel, the Golden Bull of Hungary.¹ While there were those who found such a parallel convincing and significant, legal historians to this day have always been keen to deny the supposition.² They are, of course, right, as far as actual historical parallels are concerned, although there are, no doubt, important similarities between the aristocratic strata of the two cultures. The present paper argues, however, that the ideal picture painted by Anglophilia conveys strong messages of both practical political orientation and political philosophy, which are worth reflecting on. Those messages, however, are not easily translated into generalised claims and well-formulated syllogisms. Rather, they are embedded into the very way of life which is the object of admiration and sometimes even of imitation by Anglophiles.

One further point is worth noting. Anglophilia has more than one dimension. One should not conflate its cultural manifestations with the political sides of it. A love of Jane Austen or the Beatles does not necessarily entail a love of Thatcher or constitutional monarchy. And yet they are not fully independent of each other. This is because culture is – in a surprising manner – upstream from politics. This means that whoever is in control of fashions and trends in culture will have a direct impact on politics and social matters. This is clearly the reason why soft power politics has become a key area of geopolitical contestation in the 21st century.

¹ GROSSCHMID 1928.

² For such thinkers see CONCHA 1880: 33–44.

Finally, Britain is arguably currently in the process of losing the special character which distinguished it from other parts of the world. At least that is the suggestion of Roger Scruton's book *England. An Elegy*.³ If this is true, it means that perhaps this is the last moment when Anglophiles still have a real culture to admire. Later on, it may survive as flight of fancy, a utopian vision of a non-existent entity, or simply a historical recollection, but not much more.

ANGLOPHILIA AS A FAMILY HERITAGE

Anglophilia is part of my family heritage. My father, who was an engineer, studied English at the grammar school he attended in Buda, under the famous linguist of English, László Országh. I knew this name from the cover of the English–Hungarian dictionary everyone used in Hungary when translating something from or into English – in those days in the 1970s and 1980s there was, of course, no such thing as an online dictionary. László Országh was also the author and co-author of a number of English textbooks used in secondary schools in Hungary. He was also a university lecturer, later professor, and head of the department of English at the University of Debrecen, in the “Calvinist Rome”. He would go on to be the first Hungarian recipient of the title of Honorary Commander of the British Empire (CBE), which he received for his promotion of the English language and culture.

Országh must have been a formidable character, as he kept returning in the recollections of my father. I learnt from him that Országh had lost his job at Eötvös Collegium, perhaps the most prestigious elite institution of higher education in Hungary, when the communists took over, and one of his earlier students, a classmate of my father, had even denounced him to the authorities. This made it obvious to me that Anglophilia apparently counted as a form of anti-communist sentiment.

³ SCRUTON 2001.

Owing to Országh, my father seemed to have been engaged with the Anglo-sphere. In his recollections of the Second World War he always mentioned that they listened to the BBC, because they wanted to hear the truth about the course of the war. When they left Hungary with the students of the Technical University in Budapest, they escaped to Germany, and there he managed to apply to the Americans for the refugee status. In this way he hoped to avoid being repatriated to the Soviet Union for forced labour (known in Hungary as “*málenkij robot*”).⁴ These references showed me, while still a child, that one could trust Britain (and also the US) much more than any of the other major powers in our immediate environment. This information was reinforced by what I recall from my maternal grandmother’s life. She lived with us, working as an occasional dressmaker to supplement her pension. Although as it later turned out, she and her husband, my grandfather, had supported radical revisionism and further far-right ideas in the interwar period, when she was working by the light of her desk lamp in my childhood years in the 1970s, the green eye of her short wave radio was also burning in the darkness, and I remember the announcer saying after the signal, “This is the Voice of America, from Washington”, or “Radio Free Europe”. As one of three daughters, besides the three sons of her parents, she was invited, when it was possible to do so, to visit one of her three brothers, who lived in Connecticut in the US. She brought home a lot of presents, and we kept receiving gift packages by post from my far-away American uncle.

MIDDLE CLASS ANGLOPHILIA IN CENTRAL EUROPE

My father’s and my mother’s family had different reasons to trust the English-speaking world. My father’s family originated from Switzerland, and came to Budapest from Austria at the turn of the century, as bricklayers, who ran their own building firm. They fared comparatively well, and built a three-storey

⁴ About that see PÁSZTOR – FEKETE-SZALÓKY 2020.

family residence in Rózsadomb, a posh and fashionable residential area on the Buda side. As originally German-speaking people, they were legitimists, in other words they were supporters of the Habsburg claim to the Hungarian throne. My grandfather died when my father was still a teenager and their company was confiscated from the family by the Communists. For them, as legitimists, sympathy with the British political tradition was quite natural.

My mother's family was of Hungarian origin. In the interwar period they had lived in Miskolc. My great-grandfather was the director of the bath house, and president of the local history association and an amateur photographer, as well as the president of the local volunteer firemen's association. He brought up their three daughters and three sons in the spirit of hard work, but he also wanted to provide them with a decent, cultured lifestyle. His ideal was a bourgeois lifestyle, resembling in some respects the way of life of the lower nobility. Their Lutheran ideal was hard work and gentlemanly behaviour. My grandmother would often scold by saying that a gentleman's child would not do such a thing. While her idea of an "úriember" ("noble man") was different from the ideal of the English gentleman it was still, with its social aspirations, together with the duty-bound Protestantism, not so different from the Victorian ideals of the middle classes. Notions of gentility were characteristic of the historical middle classes in both cultures, which in Hungary were often connected to covert or open anti-Semitism, in the tone of the public speech of the age. While in Hungary the aristocracy traditionally represented the Anglophile political direction, from the interwar period onwards it also became a marker of middle-class mentality and self-perception. The Hungarian middle class identity and certain gentlemanly attitudes mingled in this pattern of social behaviour. 19th-century novels in both countries provide plenty of illustrations of this combination of social status and cultural preferences. What was represented by authors from Jane Austen to George Eliot and Henry James in English literature, was also present in the novels of József Eötvös, Zsigmond Kemény, Mór Jókai and Kálmán Mikszáth. Victorian morality had an appeal among the Hungarian "gentry", a term which was used somewhat differently in the Hungarian context, denoting the nobility that had turned into a middle class, a class in the original

sense of the term, striving to preserve its social prestige and status. Although the gentry held positions in the administration of the state, they did not always fare well in their social rivalry with the traditional urban bourgeoisie or the upwardly mobile new bourgeoisie – which prepared the ground for political anti-Semitism in the country. After the communist takeover the gentry were declared public enemy number one, and the middle-class mentality was to be combatted on all fronts. English cultural sympathies and social connections were regarded as a form of betrayal of the new regime. In 1956, many young people fled to Britain to escape the suppression of the revolution.

ANGLOPHILIA OF A STUDENT OF ENGLISH IN COMMUNIST HUNGARY

I had an opportunity to get acquainted with real English people when I spent a year in Oxford in 1987–1988, as a Soros Scholar. That year, which I spent as a visiting graduate at Oriel College, one of the oldest colleges of the university, turned out to be crucial in my own character formation. The life of the researcher seems to have fitted my own natural inclinations. Yet I could not have benefited from it, if this experience had not been preceded by five years' study at the faculty of humanities back in Budapest. To become a student of English and Hungarian language and literature was only made possible by the fact that as well as enrolling me in the grammar school's English class, my parents paid for private language tuition, and I also had the chance to take part in a language course in London at the age of 17. Apparently, my parents paid special attention to improving my English language skills. As English became one of my main subjects during my undergraduate and graduate studies, they thought they had prepared me also for emigration to an English-speaking country, where they expected I could live a freer life.

It was during my university years that English culture became crucial for me. Although I could not excel with my English among the children of diplomat parents, a new world opened up to me, one which I enjoyed a great deal, and

which allowed me to see beyond the world of communist rule in my home country. There was a kind of a poetry workshop at the English Department of Eötvös University, as many of my teachers there were poets themselves. They introduced to me the world of Shakespeare (at one point in my life I translated all his sonnets into Hungarian), the British Romantics (I wrote a play about Byron, Shelley and Keats in Italy). I picked up British conservatism at Oxford, when I started to study the thought of Edmund Burke, as part of my education in the history of English language political thought. I met with representatives of the 1956 generation of refugees, including the historian László Péter, at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, as well as Mátyás Sárközi at the BBC's Hungarian department, and Lóránt Czigány. I also found student life at Oriel quite impressive, including the rather delicately arranged self-governing body of the Middle Common Room. These were real lessons in politics for me, complemented both with my regular visits to the debates of the lower house of the British Parliament and giving interviews at the BBC. Whenever I went up to London, I visited the small charity bookshop behind St Paul's, from where you could take three books free of charge on each visit, if you showed your Hungarian passport. Another person I had the chance to meet at All Souls was Isaiah Berlin, who became a kind of a role model for me. My year at Oxford, followed somewhat later by half a year at Cambridge, as a visiting doctoral student with a joint fellowship to King's and Trinity, probably the two richest colleges of the university, committed me to English culture. These were the years of Margaret Thatcher, and we were very close to the year when the Iron Curtain fell, when Hungary along with the other countries of the Eastern bloc were liberated from Communist rule. A Soros Scholarship, as it turned out, was meant to prepare the new political elite for their future jobs. Some of the recipients of this grant became active politicians later, including the future Prime Minister of the country, Viktor Orbán, who was a classmate of my wife at the Law School in Budapest, which was still an ideological hotbed of the oppressive system in those years. Although I myself did not become a politician, I became engaged with the political thought of Britain. Having been brought up in a middle-class family in Communist Hungary made me

a lifelong opponent of Communism – both of my parents participated in the 1956 revolution, so anti-Communism was part of my family heritage. However, my own personal experiences of the English way of life during my university studies made me an advocate of British freedom – as well as the British form of moderate conservatism.

ANGLOPHILIA AS A SOURCE OF HISTORICAL LEGITIMACY AFTER THE REGIME CHANGE IN HUNGARY

To show how close I came to the workshops of the politics of the new era, I have to mention that two of my closest professors at university became leading politicians in the first, right-wing Christian Democratic government of free Hungary. One of them can be regarded as a crucial player in the Atlantic orientation of the Antall Government. Gyula Kodolányi taught me at the Department of Comparative Literature. He was himself a poet, and spoke English very well. I still remember a course he held in which we translated classical poems into Hungarian from a number of languages. His father-in-law was Gyula Illyés, one of the greatest names of 20th-century Hungarian poetry, and his uncle was János Kodolányi, another leading light in Hungarian literature, who participated in the opposition movement. I later heard an accusation that he reported to the communist secret service, although I have never seen any evidence to back it up. It was from him that I learnt that I can publish wherever I want, as long as I write what I really want to write. It was also he who wrote the letter of recommendation for my Soros Scholarship. As he had spent years in the US and had established the teaching of American Studies at Eötvös University, he became a state secretary and chief advisor on foreign affairs to József Antall, the first freely elected prime minister of Hungary after the regime change.

Kodolányi's self-perception of his own role, as foreign policy adviser to the PM, was that it paralleled the role of the editors of the *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review) in the interwar period. The homepage of the journal describes this parallel thus:

In November 1992 a group of intellectuals launched the monthly *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review), a non-partisan survey of politics, the economy, society, the arts and intellectual life. In choosing their title they paid homage to an earlier review under the same title which was forced to terminate publication in March 1944 when Nazi troops invaded Hungary. Under its great editors, historian Gyula Szekfű and literary historian Sándor Eckhardt, the earlier *Magyar Szemle* was the most distinguished forum of the best minds of Hungary, of the famous and the young, right and left, government experts and opposition critics, between the two wars.⁵

This reminder of the mission of the journal explicitly refers to “the active encouragement of the then Prime Minister, József Antall” of the relaunch of the journal, and mentions its Anglo orientation, claiming to “devote special attention to fostering the idea of European and transatlantic integration in Hungary”. Its editor-in-chief was Gyula Kodolányi from 1992–2017, and the present author was a member of its editorial board as well as director of the journal.

To confirm its Anglo-Saxon orientation, the founders of *Magyar Szemle* launched *Hungarian Review*, an English language twin of *Magyar Szemle*. The first issue out of this journal appeared in 2010, when the Fidesz party won a memorable two-thirds victory in the national elections. This English language journal was inspired by the *Hungarian Quarterly*, the English language periodical of the interwar period, which was established in 1934 by István Bethlen, who had earlier been PM of Hungary for ten years, between 1921–1931, with the explicit purpose “to introduce Hungary and Hungarian topics of interest to an Anglo-Saxon⁶ readership. Moreover, it would be an important tool to win over leading personalities in the English-speaking world.”⁷ Its editor was a talented man of letters and organiser, József Balogh (Blum), who also edited the *Magyar*

⁵ GRÓH 2018.

⁶ “Anglo-Saxon” in the vocabulary of the period meant “English-speaking”. Footnote by FRANK 2003: 70.

⁷ Memorandum, 3 July 1934. Manuscript Collection of the National Széchenyi Library, József Balogh Papers: Litterae Originales (Litt. Orig.) Fond I/1525. Quoted by FRANK 2003: 70.

Szemle and the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*.⁸ One historian described Balogh thus: “Balogh, who combined the intellectual heritage of nineteenth-century liberalism with the actively anti-revolutionary attitude of the Horthy régime, had developed from a guardian of traditional values into an anti-German and anti-Nazi politician.”⁹ Bethlen himself had the most pronounced Anglophile orientation among the leading Hungarian statesmen of the interwar period.¹⁰ That this Anglophilia had a definite political meaning is underlined by Thomas Sakmyster, who argues that he “carefully nurtured this image of a responsible and moderate statesman by frequently affirming his respect and admiration for England”.¹¹ Tibor Frank quotes Bethlen writing in a letter to Archduke József Ferenc that “the Society of the Hungarian Quarterly aims not only at presenting Hungary in England, but – for the moment and in a modest way – it serves the purposes of Anglophile propaganda also in Hungary”.¹² This author also refers to Bethlen as an Anglophile: “Like so many of his contemporaries of similar social and political background in Hungary, [he] was an Anglophile.” Even the Regent (kormányzó) Miklós Horthy himself also had an Anglo orientation. Frank stresses that his whole reign would have been impossible without American backing: “If we accept Wittke’s view that ‘Czechoslovakia was «made in America»’ we could also go on and maintain that Admiral Horthy’s Kingdom of Hungary was conceived and kept alive to just about its demise with American help.”¹³ This might be a somewhat exaggerated claim, yet the fact is that Horthy maintained exceptionally friendly relationships with the representatives of that overseas power, and he enjoyed comparatively supportive coverage in the American press, where he was portrayed as the alternative to a Habsburg restoration in Hungary. Frank also demonstrates that Horthy had strong ties to Britain as well: “Admiral Miklós Horthy was tied with strong links to both the British and

⁸ FRANK 1993: 5–13; DEMETER 1999: 287–305.

⁹ FRANK 1999: 300.

¹⁰ ROMSICS 1995.

¹¹ SAKMYSTER 1978: 3–16.

¹² FRANK 2003: 78. Frank quotes from a letter by József Balogh to Count Kálmán Almásy, 12 September 1938. OSzK: Litt. Orig., Fond 1/45/262.

¹³ FRANK 1999.

the American elite.”¹⁴ According to Frank, Horthy may have actually hoped for a British victory, and counted on its political support, because he feared the Soviet Union very much.¹⁵ This hope was, of course, as it transpired, a mistaken one, but it tells us a lot about the best case scenario envisaged by Horthy and his regime, as well as the ultimate motivations of Hungarian Anglophiles. Some historians take Bethlen’s Anglo- and Francophile orientation as a lesson learnt from the history of Transylvania, from where his family originated, and where he had his first political experiences. Bethlen can also be regarded as a typical example of interwar Anglophilia, with its somewhat utopian zeal to convince the English public and the British political elite of the truth and justice of the Hungarian cause. Yet members of this Anglophile elite also had a powerful foreign policy point: when they preserved Britain as their political standard, they were rightly motivated by an opposition to the Nazi and Communist totalitarian threat. This interwar Anglophilia led to some genuine, albeit unsuccessful, political efforts during the war, to establish contact with the British Government and elite circles in Britain and manoeuvre the country’s fate through those connections towards a more promising future. All these efforts were basically rendered vain by the German occupation of the country in 1944.

CLASSICAL HUNGARIAN ANGLOPHILIA

I belong to a generation which had compulsory Russian lessons at school, as part of our ideological indoctrination. Learning English represented an alternative. Comparing the people studying or teaching at the English and the Russian Department of Budapest University, one could tell the difference, even if the then head of the English Department was an expert on Socialist Realist literature in England. Through the study of English the gates of Europe opened up for you: I was taken twice for study trips to Worcester College, England, the partner of Budapest University.

¹⁴ FRANK 2018: 176.

¹⁵ FRANK 2018: 11.

Yet it was my PhD which determined my scholarly path. After returning to Budapest from my year in Oxford, I started my doctoral studies at Budapest University with a scholarship from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, affiliated to Budapest University's Department of Moral and Social Philosophy (the concept of the PhD program was not yet known in Hungary). My supervisor was Mária Ludassy, a member of the "Lukács Kindergarten", but also an ardent and pedantic historian of philosophy, who published a collection by what she called the British Moralists. A crucial contact for me was István Hont, at King's, a major force of the second generation of the Cambridge historians of political thought. Although Hont and myself had very different perspectives on politics, we were able to work together very well. He initiated me into research on the history of early modern political thought, with special focus on Britain and its wider European and American context. This helped me to put my earlier research on Burke into context, and helped me to write my doctoral dissertation on the concept of moderation in the Scottish Enlightenment.¹⁶ In this vein I also edited a small volume of Hayek's essays on the Scottish Enlightenment, with explanatory remarks by John Gray.¹⁷ This latter project made me realise the proximity between the Austrian philosophical tradition and British conservatism.¹⁸ In Nyíri's account of Austrian philosophy, Count István Széchenyi and his father, Ferenc Széchényi both played major roles, as key figures on the Hungarian side of this tradition. While Nyíri was clearly influenced by the author of the *Austrian Mind*, he established, together with Barry Smith and Rudolf Haller, a new philosophical paradigm, a special dialect of Continental Conservatism, which is not too different from the British prototype.¹⁹

Nyíri argues that István Széchenyi should better be understood as working within this Austrian tradition of moderate conservatism. I think that Nyíri

¹⁶ I published in Hungarian a selection of sources on this topic and an edited version of my thesis as HÖRCHER 1996. For a later overview of my findings, see my paper HÖRCHER 2016b: 5–23.

¹⁷ HÖRCHER 2002.

¹⁸ The work of Kristóf Nyíri has also proved very instructive for my understanding of the conservative relevance of Austrian philosophy. My own take on this relationship is exemplified by my early piece HÖRCHER 1995: 27–34.

¹⁹ JOHNSTON 1972.

makes an important point and it is indeed possible to interpret Széchenyi's life and work in this way. His interest in promoting a more lively public life, setting a personal example by his investments in the domestic economy and his support for Hungarian culture, advocating the liberation of the regulatory environment in economy and trade, while establishing and operating cultural institutions as a way to raise up his political community indeed resembles the ideas of some of the best minds of Austrian philosophy, including Friedrich Hayek. Yet I think that Count Széchenyi's Anglophilia was most importantly a family heritage.²⁰ It was his father, Ferenc Széchenyi, a member of the reform generation, who first supported the reforms of Joseph II and it was he who made a study trip to Britain, about which he published a detailed travelogue, partly written by himself and partly by his secretary, János Dániel Ribini.²¹ His impressions of Britain, where he also met some of the best minds of the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith, the philosopher and early economist, as well as William Robertson, the famous historian, had a lasting effect on his own thought. Surprisingly, despite being a Catholic, he visited the grave of David Hume, who was generally believed to be an atheist.²² Yet it was British industry, commerce and agriculture that made the most lasting impression on him, this may explain the similarity of his ideas to those of Edmund Burke, and why he prepared two plans for a new constitution, which reflected many of the ideas that he had learnt from the British constitution.²³

²⁰ This is something that also appears in Nyíri's account of Széchenyi's achievements. Also on early modern Hungarian Anglophilia, including that of the two Széchenyis, see FEST 1917.

²¹ See CSÁKY 1981. My own take on the relationship between father and son is summarised in HÖRCHER 2016a: 22–45.

²² There is a Latin language version of the travelogue, entitled *Descriptio itineraria seu peregrinationis C. Francisci Széchenyi, per Germaniam, Belgium, Galliam, Angliam et Scotiam, Anno 1787*. (Referred to by FEST 1917: 455.) Its location is unknown however. A German language summary is available under the title: *Reise Journal vom 23. Mai 1787 bis d. 16. Juli desselben Jahres, enthaltend die Reise von Wien über Prag, Dresden, Leipzig, Dessau, Berlin, Braunschweig, Hamburg, Hannover, Kassel, Wetzlar, Coblenz, Köln, Aachen, Spa*.

²³ "Ferenc Széchenyi reacted in a characteristically Burkean way to the phenomenon of the revolution, half a year before the publication of the Reflections." KONTLER 1990: 79. László Kontler's source is MARCZALI 1907: 83.

Széchenyi played a major role in the heated constitutional debates in the period following the death of Joseph II in 1790, and proposed major changes to the constitutional arrangements, along the lines of what he conceived of as the British constitution.²⁴ Later, when the Habsburgs retaliated against what they regarded as a Hungarian coup, the elder Széchenyi withdrew into civilian life, and became one of the most important founts of a Catholic spiritual and religious regeneration, inspired by Romantic medievalism.

The most important effect of his Anglophilia, however, was the lasting impact of his educational ideals on his son, Count István Széchenyi, probably the single most important protagonist in Hungarian Anglophilia. While most of the historical literature emphasised the conflict between father and son, Ambrus Miskolczy focused instead on the continuity between the two.²⁵ Fest had earlier pointed out that for the elder Széchenyi “the country’s political circumstances, constitution” was the most important, even if there are few references to it in the travelogue, chiefly to evade the censors.

Although his son, Count István Széchenyi, was for a long time less interested in politics, it was with an unprecedented gesture that he stepped onto the stage of Hungarian politics: in 1825 he proposed to establish the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and offered a year’s income from his estates to finance the project. With that noble act he embarked on an exceptional career as the great reformer of his country, most importantly as an innovative founder of social and economic institutions for the public benefit. He travelled to Britain five times, first going shortly after the end of the Napoleonic war, in 1815. From his extant diaries an English translation has been published of his account of travels in the British Isles in 1832 and 1834.²⁶ As early as 1815 he had become fascinated by the constitutional traditions of the country: “There are only three things in England that in my opinion one has to learn, and all the others are nothing: the constitution, the machines, and horse breeding.”²⁷

²⁴ On this see CONCHA 1885.

²⁵ See most recently MISKOLCZY 2019.

²⁶ VÁCI 2021.

²⁷ On 13 December 1815. VISZOTA 1925: 167.

Like most other Hungarian travellers to Britain of his day, István Széchenyi was an admirer of the constitutional tradition of Britain. However, the absolutist nature of Habsburg rule under Francis I prevented him from becoming involved in constitutional planning. The great idea which made Széchenyi so influential as the initiator of the reform era in 19th-century Hungary was that the country's economy and social structures required smoothly executed but profound changes. Unlike his father, who spent some time in state service, as part of the Habsburg administration, István Széchenyi drew upon his own personal reserves as one of the country's pre-eminent landowners, as well as making use of his talents as one of the most enlightened and broad-minded members of the country's aristocratic elite. He realised that the global success of England was due to its innovations in economy, including an agricultural sector relying on cutting-edge technology, increasingly vigorous industrial production, vibrant trading activity, along with its dynamic social life, whose leading figures were engaged both in cultural sponsorship and philanthropic activity. He also realised that as the son of the founder of a national museum and a national library, he was expected to set a good example for his fellow citizens to follow. The success of his public donation for the establishment of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences led him to initiate further public ventures. He saw that the thriving civil life of Britain depended on the dynamic nature of social relations. In this vein he established the National Casino, a place of gathering for a new social, business and cultural elite, the members of which were all interested in invigorating both horizontal and vertical social ties. He was aware of the responsibility and the interest of the landowning class in starting industrial production. He found Austrian partners to start a ship building industrial enterprise. However, he also recognised that the legislative environment was not conducive to these initiatives – he therefore published an influential socio-political pamphlet, the book entitled *Credit*. In it he argued that both his own class, the aristocracy, and the lesser nobility must make sacrifices to invigorate the blood circulation of the country. The most important aspect of this was the need to give up the privileged institution of entail, and to take on the burden of public taxation. Széchenyi also had a keen interest in transport and communication and he realised that

the English success depended on trade routes as well as innovations in the field of transport. Széchenyi himself became involved in the development of rail and ship transport using steam engine technology. In a land-locked country like Hungary waterborne cargo transport had to rely on the River Danube and Lake Balaton. Széchenyi was the primary motor behind the building of the first stone-bridge over the Danube, connecting Pest with Buda, and through it, the two halves of the country, a move which also had a symbolic meaning. The major cinematic epic about his life was entitled *Hidember* (The Bridgeman), directed by Géza Bereményi in 2002. The reason Széchenyi has always captured the public imagination is partly due to his own cultural activity and his support of writers and actors. Having published a discussion paper on a theatre that would put on drama in the national language, he played an integral role in championing the cause of the national theatre and making it a success. By 1837 the first National Theatre was ready to open its gates in Pest.

Importantly, Széchenyi was aware that the preservation of social peace was a key to Hungary becoming a prosperous country. No doubt, he must have heard of the class compromises which had facilitated the success of the British, while social unrest hindered economic development in revolutionary and post-revolutionary France. In this as in much else, including the future of the political elites' relationship to the monarch, he proposed to take the British way, a sort of moderate social progressivism combined with a cautious political and institutional conservatism, based on trust and mutual social credit. Unfortunately, he was only able to hold the reins of political leadership in his hands for a short while. The younger generation was fired up by the parliamentary speeches and political journalism of the talented orator and political innovator, Lajos Kossuth. The radicalisation of the Hungarian elite and the short-sighted policies of the Habsburgs led to a war of independence and to the Declaration of Independence.²⁸

²⁸ For a reconstruction of the great moment of Lajos Kossuth's career and his breakthrough in persuading the Habsburgs to accept what came to be called the April Laws, in March 1848, when he still defended a lawful revolution, see DEÁK 2001 as well as HÖRCHER 2019: 91–120.

Vienna's retaliation against the rebellious Hungarians was swift and brutal. It was only after long years of absolutist rule and a process of negotiations between the Vienna court and the country that the conservative cause finally gained the upper hand, resulting in the Settlement of 1867, between Franz Joseph, in his capacity as the king of Hungary, on the one side, and Ferenc Deák, the sage of the country. Deák was a skilful lawyer and a tactical negotiator, and due to the rise of Prussia, Vienna realised it was incumbent on it to pacify the Hungarians. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy was born. Some of the later historical evaluations of this period, including that by István Bibó, claim that this was a mistaken compromise by the Hungarians, which gave up the country's independence and autonomy, eventually leading to defeat in the First World War and the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary, as a result of the fatal Treaty of Trianon in 1920.²⁹ Other works, including the detailed studies by László Péter, convincingly argue that it was in fact a rather clever move on the part of both elites, leading to a half century of peace during which Hungary flourished economically and culturally, like never before or since.³⁰ This issue became and has remained a never-ending historiographic debate ever since.

ANGLOPHILIA IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD AND BEYOND

Anglophilia once again became crucial in the interwar period, when Hungary was dominated by the political regime controlled by the Admiral-Regent, Miklós Horthy. As mentioned earlier, Horthy himself was open to developing the Anglo-American connection. However, the Treaty of Trianon and the failure to come to terms with it in the collective memory of the nation were to historically determine the immediate future of the country. Revisionism became the single biggest issue of Hungarian politics, which led inevitably to an official alliance with the Germans, because the Hungarian elite could only

²⁹ BIBÓ 2015: 199–232.

³⁰ PÉTER 2012: 213–280.

hope for the return of the lost territories from them. Yet after 1933 this was to be a fatal direction, resulting in the Holocaust, and Anglophiles in Hungary served to draw attention to this fact in a country which had a significant Jewish population. It was in this context that Prime Minister Bethlen's Anglophilia is to be interpreted. The circle of the *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review) gave voice to this alternative political direction and packaged it into a new cultural orientation. Its chief ideologue, Gyula Szekfű was one of the most prestigious historians of the age.³¹ He chose to take a path that was deliberately different from the mainstream nationalist tone of Hungarian history-writing: he wanted to show the advantages of the Habsburg influence in the country's troubled past. His grand narrative was a critical take on the achievements of the post 1848 generations of the Hungarian political and cultural elite. The narrative had a pronounced anti-Semitic overtone, even if he made every effort to criticise recent Hungarian politics, as exemplified by his term "Neo-Baroque society". By this term he meant to ridicule an ahistorical, nostalgic return to a past which never existed, in the political symbolism of the age.³²

Szekfű did, however, make a valid point: he made Széchenyi the hero of his grand narrative, presenting him as the major political force pushing the country towards "Westernisation", as opposed to the agenda of national independence, propagated by Kossuth and his followers. While in the mainstream of Hungarian history-writing Kossuth was considered to have taken the right direction, Szekfű and his undeclared but quite influential post-1945 followers, including László Péter in London, and Domokos Kosáry in Hungary, presented Széchenyi as having made the better historical choice by stressing social, economic and cultural progress (*haladás*) instead of simply the independence of the land (*haza*). Professors Péter and Kosáry had problems with the mainstream nationalist agenda for different reasons. Professor Péter was a participant in the 1956 revolution, after which he was forced to leave the country. At the School of Slavonic and East European Studies he tried to reconstruct the grand narrative of Hungarian history, from St. Stephen's coronation, through the

³¹ DÉNES 2015.

³² SZEKFŰ 1920. A later edition was published in 1934, following up events to his own days.

Golden Bull and the Tripartitum of Werbőczy, through the famous Pragmatica Sanctio and the April Laws, up to Trianon and the end of the unwritten constitution with the introduction of Act I on the President of the Republic, in 1946. He did this as a criticism not only of the mainstream nationalist narrative (eloquently defended by György Szabad), but also as a criticism of the official history-writing of Communist Hungary. Domokos Kosáry, on the other hand, made use of the political thaw after the deep freeze of the Stalinist period in the country, when the ideology mongers of the Hungarian Communist Party proposed to turn away from the nationalist discourse in any way possible. From a post-1990 perspective, the efforts of László Péter and Domokos Kosáry point more or less in the same direction, while the artificial opposition created and sustained so long between nationalists and Westernisers has turned out to be a futile and in fact misguided opposition.

CONCLUSION, OR CAN ANGLOPHILIA SURVIVE THE DECLINE OF OLD ENGLAND

For a long time, Anglophilia was viewed in Central Europe as a form of illusionary historical construction, which had nothing to offer but a false consciousness. Both historians and political scientists alike were anxious to reveal the inadequacies of these sorts of reconstructions, pointing out that personal connections could very rarely substantiate real historical influences, and that apparently similar events, documents or institutions were in fact quite different, when interpreted correctly, without the wishful thinking of the interpreter, and without giving in to anachronism. Anglophilia could never be a real alternative in this part of the world, as Central Europe was geopolitically too far away from Britain to benefit from a direct historical, political or cultural influence.

This paper has showed that there is another way to make sense of Anglophilia in Central Europe. Instead of interpreting it as a well-defined regime or an explicit cultural standard, it can be regarded as a particular political philosophy that is embodied in certain ways of life and styles of behaviour. This embodied

philosophy is deduced from centuries of British political culture, but it is not confined to that specific cultural environment. It is an abstraction from the achievements of that political culture, a form of condensed experience, translated into an idealised way of life, with certain manners and manières, and a particular posture, that of the gentleman. These principles, embedded into practical virtues, were firmly rooted in the Western Graeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian tradition, but were first condensed and crystallised in the British context. In Central Europe they served specific political and cultural aims. In the modern era it encouraged developments in business, economy, social life and cultural affinities. It increasingly emphasised the importance of the institutional guarantees of a rule of law system. Most importantly, it encouraged opposition against both the left-wing and the right-wing variants of 20th-century totalitarianism, namely Communism, Fascism and Nazism. It is not by chance that both regimes not only regarded Anglophilia with suspicion, but outright persecuted its proponents as followers of a political orientation and political attitude that they considered to be explicitly hostile to them. It is not difficult to imagine that Anglophilia might have benevolent effects in the post-1990 context as well, by way of providing a framework that can serve as a benchmark for the political system of a particular Central European political community and its elite, regardless of the British political scene at the time.

Beyond this normative point, conservative political philosophy can learn a great deal from Anglophilia. Let us recall three points already touched upon in the introduction.

1. Principles versus a certain way of life. While philosophy usually finds expression in well-defined concepts, principles and theses, and political philosophy should be no exception, conservatism is based on the assumption that politics does not allow well-defined concepts, principles and theses. Instead, it relies on practical wisdom, a certain manner of managing political affairs and on what can be termed the confines of a way of life. It means that the most precious treasure of Old England is not a particular regime of institutional arrangement, but the preservation of a way of life, which embodies the most important traditional values and virtues.

2. If the above claim is valid, Anglophilia is first of all a cultural phenomenon, the admiration of a certain manner of life, and not primarily the defence of a certain constitutional framework or jurisprudential paradigm. If we accept that Anglophilia is first of all a cultural matter, this does not preclude political consequences. Anglophilia helps us to accept the fact that culture is upstream from politics, which means that cultural matters determine what is possible in politics in one's own country. When attention is paid to soft power, it is due to the fact that through it, external powers can influence the way of thought of your own particular community. Moreover, as John Lukacs kept emphasising, your mental landscape will determine your actual political *pouvoir*.
3. This brings us to the most pertinent question: if points 1 and 2 are true, the question is how can conservatism and its external manifestation, Anglophilia survive the decline of Old England? Roger Scruton was rather pessimistic about the prospects of English culture in his book entitled *England. An Elegy* (2001). As he saw it, the most characteristic ways of English life were indeed declining, which meant that the country's future was hopeless. In another book he reflected upon the *Uses of Pessimism*. However, in books like *News from Somewhere. On Settling* (2004) he once again proved to be dedicated to defending the traditional manners of handling human and natural affairs. If culture determines politics, and culture is what we – who are not professional politicians – do most of the time when we are together, then it is up to us to decide whether the traditional ways will find defenders or not.

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The Demise of Fusionism and the Rise of American Post-Liberalism

America is the land of liberalism – of Lockean liberalism. Michael Oakeshott observed that “the inspiration of [...] [the] founders of American independence was the ideology which Locke had distilled from the English political tradition”, and praised Locke as the producer of “a brief conspectus of the manner in which Englishmen were accustomed to go about the business of attending to their arrangements – a brilliant abridgement of the political habits of Englishmen”.¹ Prominent conservatives including Peter Viereck observed rightly that even the conservative mind was shaped profoundly by liberalism and sought to preserve its value in the face of the onslaught of progressivism in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century.² It is hard to imagine American conservatism without its liberal core.³

Throughout the Cold War, American conservatism was markedly liberal.⁴ The historian of intellectual conservatism George Nash explained it through

¹ OAKESHOTT 1962: 27, 121.

² VIERECK 1965: 18.

³ As a mainstream movement with a recognised group and set of ideas, American conservatism belongs to the 20th century. In doing so it was inexorably shaped by the Cold War, which acted to excise illiberal tendencies from movement conservatism. One might go so far as to term American conservatism a species of the genus Cold War Liberalism without resorting to hyperbole.

⁴ The key tenets of the American liberal consensus, as enumerated by the British sociologist Godfrey Hodgson, are as follows: “[...] postwar American capitalism can generate abundance for all; its capacity to do so derives from the endless potential for economic growth; this creates a natural harmony of interests by promoting a more equal society; it also furnishes the resources for government to resolve social problems; the main threat to this beneficent system comes from communism, against which America and its allies must engage in prolonged struggle; America’s destiny is to spread the message of the benefits

the analogy of a three-legged barstool, propped up by traditionalists such as Russell Kirk; anti-Communists such as Whittaker Chambers; and classical liberals such as Hayek, a potpourri that was neatly labelled by Frank Meyer as “fusionism”.⁵ But even a barstool can have one leg that bears more weight than the other. The first words of the foreword to William F. Buckley Jr.’s anthology of American conservative thought read: “America celebrates itself as a nation of the liberal tradition, yet that tradition has, in fact, a strong conservative bias.”⁶

However, by the time President Ronald Reagan, the fusionist extraordinaire, stood in the looming shadow of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and entreated Gorbachev to advance the cause of peace and liberty by tearing down the Berlin Wall, there was already something hollow.⁷ The Cold War had been won for liberal democracy and against totalitarianism and communism, but liberalism itself was on the decline. When the coalition started to break down with the end of the Cold War, American conservatism oscillated between fiscal austerity and rampant foreign intervention and hawkishness, commonly associated with neo-conservatives.

The definitive moment where fusionism can be said to have died as a serious force in American conservatism was with the election of Donald Trump as President in 2016. In its stead, a new conservatism has started to take root. The collapse of fusionism and the void it created has been filled by a new post-liberal conservatism in the USA. This represents a renewed focus and concern with political life beyond the realm of economics and a turn toward defending institutions. Its main feature – indeed, its defining feature – is its repudiation of liberalism. In the land of liberalism, it is now a stranger.

I will begin by giving contours to the “Post-liberal Right” through examining the inspirations and writings of each of its constituent groups: Integralists

of capitalism to the rest of the world.” It is admittedly a vision of American politics that is undisturbed by the rancour of Vietnam, but still encapsulates the ideal type to which the American liberal mind aspired to, whether left or right. HODGSON 2017: 14.

⁵ NASH 2006; 2022; HAYEK 2011: 519–534.

⁶ LEWY-YOUNG 1970: ix.

⁷ NASH 2006: 555–574.

such as Adrian Vermeule who suggest that Catholicism presents the ultimate political answer to the problems faced by the United States today; the West Coast-based followers of Leo Strauss and Harry Jaffa, who tend to engage in and promote the rhetoric of crises and decline in close alliance with the populists, and suggest a Nietzschean solution to the problems of modernity; and communitarians, who draw from the earlier strand of traditionalists and suggest that the problems of liberal atomism can be solved with a return to local communities and seek to revitalise them. Following this, I examine the similarities between the Post-liberal Right and the early Progressives of the late 19th and early 20th century. Next, I will discuss the particular problems that attend being conservative in a liberal society, and what happens when that liberal consensus breaks down. In doing so, I express discontentment with the post-liberal turn because of the conspiratorial element and their adoption of idols outside the Anglo-American political tradition, both of which represent significant departures from the tradition in which they ought to be working within.

DEFINING THE “POST-LIBERAL RIGHT”

It is oftentimes helpful to attempt to define the things we talk about and oftentimes take for granted. Such is the case with the Post-liberal Right, which is spoken about as monolithic – and whether it is a barstool with many legs or an obelisk with many sides but one core is something we ought to consider. But for now it is essential to look at its constituent parts. First, I will examine Patrick Deneen’s *Why Liberalism Failed*, which represents right-communitarianism, and then proceed to look at Adrian Vermeule’s review of *Why Liberalism Failed*, through which he develops the integralist position.⁸ Next is Michael Anton’s *After the Flight 93 Election*, which brings together a statement of principles that West Coast Straussians affiliated with the Claremont Institute embody

⁸ DENEEN 2018; VERMEULE 2018: 202–213.

in spirit.⁹ I will conclude this section by considering the National Conservatives through the work of Yoram Hazony and the National Conservative Statement of Principles.¹⁰

Patrick Deneen's right-communitarian position is somewhat harder to define than the rest, but ought to be considered first largely because it sparked the debate about the failures and challenges of liberalism that, in this context, made post-liberalism a realistic intellectual and political ambition among those on the American Right. Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* is unique in many regards, but the first difference readers will notice, when contrasted with the other members of the Post-liberal Right, is that he accepts the liberal underpinnings of the American Founding.¹¹ "Liberalism", Deneen argues, "has failed – not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself".¹² Pointing to the failures of the American regime to respond to growing anomie and discontent among the populace, Deneen remarks that the creeping tendency of liberalism to hide under the façade of an assumed neutrality and supposed invisibility renders the public sphere impotent in light of a creeping despotism, packaged in explicitly Tocquevillian terms.

Deneen's solution to the issue is more revealing than the prognosis, which is deeply philosophical. At the very outset Deneen establishes the need to move beyond contemporary progressivism and conservatism because they "have advanced liberalism's project" and cannot "provide a new path forward".¹³ But "moving beyond liberalism" does not lead us to shoot for the stars and land up with tyrants, but rather help preserve "some of liberalism's main commitments" – "political liberty and human dignity" – which are the two specific fruits of the liberal tradition Deneen intends to preserve.¹⁴ In doing so, Deneen, while

⁹ ANTON 2019.

¹⁰ HAZONY 2022; Edmund Burke Foundation 2022.

¹¹ "A political philosophy conceived some 500 years ago, and put into effect at the birth of the United States nearly 250 years later, was a wager that political society could be grounded on a different footing." DENEEN 2018: 1.

¹² DENEEN 2018: 3.

¹³ DENEEN 2018: 19.

¹⁴ DENEEN 2018: 19.

moving beyond liberalism, tries to keep some of its rudiments alive, a critique that Adrian Vermeule levels against him.

Concluding his prognoses of the crises of liberalism, Deneen observes the tendency of liberalism to “impose the liberal order by fiat” through “the administrative state run by a small minority who increasingly disdain democracy”.¹⁵ The increasing depersonalisation of political life has adverse effects throughout the body politic, and the rise of the administrative state has accompanied the expertise fetish that early 20th-century progressivism married to ideas of national representation through the presidency.¹⁶ In other words, Deneen’s contention is that we live in a largely technocratic, managerial state, run by an impersonal bureaucracy that promotes the liberal order while feigning disingenuously both impartiality and knowledge of the science of government. The only solution that remains is that the house of cards will collapse, and Deneen heeds critics who, when “envisioning such scenarios rightly warn of the likely viciousness of any successor regime”.¹⁷ The return to local communities fosters “actual human liberty” and “civic and individual self-rule”.¹⁸ The local is the “expression of the universal and eternal, the divine and sublime”, and only by returning to it can we develop a new culture that rests on localism and “self-governance that arise[s] from shared civic participation”.¹⁹ Deneen’s solution to the collapse of the liberal order, both left and right, is to return to the small, sustainable, human-scale. This is the only antidote in his book to “the abstraction and depersonalisation of liberalism”.²⁰

Deneen’s focus on local communities, however, separates him from the others we consider, who are nationalist in orientation. His only statement on the nation-state is that “politics and human community must percolate from the bottom up, from experience and practice”.²¹ The localisation of

¹⁵ DENEEN 2018: 180.

¹⁶ DEARBORN 2021.

¹⁷ DENEEN 2018: 181.

¹⁸ DENEEN 2018: 187–88.

¹⁹ DENEEN 2018: 192–193.

²⁰ DENEEN 2018: 192.

²¹ DENEEN 2018: 188.

culture, economics and politics to create a civic life that is proximate to the concerns and lives of those invested in it is a much needed shift in American life – one which this author very much wishes would strengthen local leadership and improve the manner in which citizens interact with their communities and recognise and undertake their duties to others – but it needs to be complemented with a state and national programme that permits these communities to thrive and prosper.

This is where Adrian Vermeule and the integralists pick up. Integralists believe in the union of the Catholic Church and the American state, and its most advanced and vocal proponents are Catholic converts Sohrab Ahmari and Adrian Vermeule. Vermeule, a law professor at Harvard, has written at considerable length about the administrative state and, unlike Deneen, has no qualms about commandeering the administrative state to reach the ends he desires.²² Criticising Deneen, Vermeule recommends that “rather than retreating to a nostalgic localism, nonliberal actors strategically locate themselves within liberal institutions and work to undo the liberalism of the state from within”.²³ The locus of Vermeule’s thrust is clearly opposed to localism, which he views as nothing more than narrow-minded, backward-looking parochialism. While he agrees with Deneen’s assertion that the liberal order is decrepit and long due for replacement, he criticises Deneen for his “relapse into liberalism”.²⁴ Because Deneen is vague about what exactly post-liberal order might look like, Vermeule argues, his way has “no answer to the overhanging threat of liberalism” because localism “deliberately eschew[s] any substantive theory of the common good”.²⁵ For Vermeule, Deneen is simply another wolf in sheep’s clothing, saying one thing and doing another. To rectify this, Vermeule suggests, almost like fan fiction, “an alternate ending” for Deneen’s book, “one that yields a genuinely illiberal answer to the question, What is to be done?”²⁶

²² SUNSTEIN–VERMEULE 2020.

²³ VERMEULE 2018: 203.

²⁴ VERMEULE 2018: 209.

²⁵ VERMEULE 2018: 209.

²⁶ VERMEULE 2018: 206.

“My answer”, Vermeule asserts, “is that the state will have to be reintegrated from within”.²⁷ The apparatus of the administrative state, which on Deneen’s account is a key threat to and a driver of the deterioration of local communities, is for Vermeule a necessity, and thus, needs to be controlled by people who agree with him. Vermeule begins by arguing that “liberalism is a world religion – and one of the most successful religions in human history”, thereby setting up the stage for the replacement of one religion by another.²⁸ After all, he would say, was it not swapping out falsity for truth, the fake religion with the one true religion? Furthermore, change has to happen realistically; “the non-liberal state that emerges will have to be born from within the frame of the old order.”²⁹ The vehicle for deliverance is the administrative state, Vermeule avers, and the biblical figures of “Joseph, Mordecai, and Daniel, hold posts as elite administrators [...] they may even come to occupy the commanding heights of the administrative state”.³⁰ The integration of the Catholic Church into the American Regime will take place through “the vast bureaucracy created by liberalism in pursuit of a mirage of a depoliticised governance”.³¹

Besides stipulating government by common good and religious authority, Vermeule does not provide us with a substantive look into the world he craves. But he is confident it will be a good world, or, at any rate, better than the world we live in currently, and therefore has no qualms about pressing forward for its realisation. “It would be wrong to conclude that integration from within is a matter of coercion”, Vermeule concludes, “as opposed to persuasion and conversion, for the distinction is so fragile as to be nearly useless”.³² What Vermeule has in mind is remarkably Progressive: he shares in common with the first wave of Progressives a critique of the constitution and the refusal to do away with it, only changing it substantially from the inside out without

²⁷ VERMEULE 2018: 206.

²⁸ VERMEULE 2018: 208.

²⁹ VERMEULE 2018: 210.

³⁰ VERMEULE 2018: 211.

³¹ VERMEULE 2018: 211.

³² VERMEULE 2018: 212.

amending the formal Constitution.³³ More interesting, Vermeule is willing to co-opt the Progressive contrivance of the administrative state to reach the ends to which he aspires in the name of the common good; one necessarily wonders how far he could be from a right-wing progressive.

The third strand in this tradition is the West Coast Straussians, who stand opposed to the integralists and claim to be inheritors and preservers of the American constitutional tradition. This group largely consists of the Claremont Institute-affiliated students of Harry Jaffa, and through him, Leo Strauss, the German émigré and philosopher. Mark Lilla's complaint against Strauss is directed toward a set of his students who were "prepared to see the threat of 'nihilism' lurking in the interstices of modern life, waiting to be released and to turn America into Weimar".³⁴ For the West Coast Straussians we are always teetering on the edge of crisis, and unless we take radical actions to solve this impending crisis, doom awaits. The frequency with which this existential threat comes about becomes remarkably shorter, and soon enough we find ourselves in what could only be a state of perpetual crisis. Of particular importance to this strain of thought is the work of Michael Anton, who, under the pseudonym Publius Decius Mus, borrowed from Livy through Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, wrote the essay *Flight 93 Election* in early September of 2016, which, along with the assistance of the Mercer family, was responsible for the Trump presidency and making the American right fall in line with the Trump agenda. Anton was rewarded for his paper warfare with a post at the National Security Council.

Anton's essay is named after Flight 93, which was hijacked on 9/11 and intended to be flown into a federal building in Washington, DC. The passengers took control of the plane after fighting against the hijackers and crashed it into an empty field in Pennsylvania. The essay begins and ends with a refrain. It opens by boldly asserting that "2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway", and ends by concluding that "[t]he election of 2016 is a test – in my view, the final test – of whether there is any *virtù* left in what used

³³ RANA 2016: 41–64.

³⁴ LILLA 2016: 60.

to be the core of the American nation”.³⁵ Between the Machiavellian rhetoric and the Americanised articulation of Weimar doomerism it seems quite clear that Anton thinks we have reached a breaking point, and therefore we find ourselves in a do-or-die situation with the 2016 election. The entire essay is peppered with crisis rhetoric, and the emphasis on the crisis rhetoric cannot be overstated in this case: what separates the West Coast Straussians from their East Coast brethren and the other tents of the Post-liberal Right is their insistence on perpetual crisis and their constant emphasis on it to the point where crisis mongers might be a more straightforward definition of what is really going on in that world.

For the West Coast Straussians, the Left is the vile enemy, Bolsheviks in disguise, threatening to ruin democracy in America. They creak and groan against the hegemony of the Left, and Anton notes that “these are dangerous times” and that “the Left has made them so and insists on increasing the danger”.³⁶ The West Coast Straussian hivemind also suffers from a saviour complex. The West Coast Straussian will say things that others are unwilling to say to save the body politic from immediate dissolution. “Like Decius, Machiavelli sacrifices part of himself – in his view, the only everlasting part: his reputation, his *nome* – to save his *patria*. Like Decius (and Jesus), Machiavelli’s new orders can be implemented only through, and after, his death.”³⁷ Between the high esteem in which they hold themselves and their prescription for “stronger medicine – most potent than any hitherto administered”, the West Coast Straussians claim that fusionism and what remains of it has failed and led the conservative movement astray and into the arms of its Leftist captors.³⁸ The cards always seem stacked against them and they intend to continue believing that they are always playing against the house in a high-stakes game of blackjack, to pick up on Anton’s card game analogies.

For the West Coast Straussians, the medicine that “is effective at killing malignant cells”, is Trumpism.³⁹ Of all the constituent elements of the Post-

³⁵ ANTON 2019: 61, 76.

³⁶ ANTON 2019: 11.

³⁷ ANTON 2019: 20.

³⁸ ANTON 2019: 20.

³⁹ ANTON 2019: 20, 74.

liberal Right, the West Coast Straussians emerged with a newfound prominence when they hitched their lot to the Trump bandwagon in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, even before the primaries were over. “Trumpism”, Anton claims, is “broadly defined as secure borders, economic nationalism, and America-first foreign policy”.⁴⁰ But there is more to Trumpism that Anton deigns to mention in this pithy definition: the culture wars, punishing exponents of “managerial Davoisie liberalism as far as the eye can see”, and a no-hostage takeover and dominance of cultural and educational institutions because they “are wholly corrupt and wholly opposed to everything we want, and increasingly even to our existence”.⁴¹ Anton ridicules the right through a screed against Matthew Continetti, who put forth “the usual litany of ‘conservative’ ‘solutions,’ with the obligatory references to decentralisation, federalisation, ‘civic renewal’, and – of course! – Burke”.⁴² Clearly Anton shares Vermeule’s esteem for Deneen’s localism.

While Anton is right in following Strauss in observing the overwrought use of the *reductio ad Hitlerum*, he would do well to pay heed to Strauss’s warning to “beware of the danger of pursuing a Socratic goal with the means, and the temper, of Thrasymachus”.⁴³ And Anton is not an isolated case. In 2021, following Trump’s loss in the general election, Glenn Ellmers, also affiliated with the Claremont Institute and its de-facto university, Hillsdale College, wrote in the Claremont journal *American Mind* that those who voted for Biden should be called “citizen aliens”, and that “most people living in the United States today – certainly more than half – are not Americans in any meaningful sense of the term”.⁴⁴ Ellmers says openly what Anton stops short of saying: that “this recognition that the original America is more or less gone sets the Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy apart from almost everyone else on the Right”, and “Claremont was one of

⁴⁰ ANTON 2019: 74.

⁴¹ ANTON 2019: 76, 70.

⁴² ANTON 2019: 64.

⁴³ STRAUSS 1953: 6.

⁴⁴ ELLMERS 2021.

the very few serious institutions on the right to make an intellectual case for Trumpism".⁴⁵ In other words, the West Coast Straussians are to Trump what Machiavelli was to the new Prince.

Much less incendiary than the West Coast Straussians, who oscillate between crises and self-inflicted scandals, are the National Conservatives, led by Yoram Hazony and his Edmund Burke Foundation, after an eponymous conference the Burke Foundation hosts. The National Conservatives ought to be considered at the end because they represent the big tent approach to the Post-liberal Right: they bring together the right-communitarians like Deneen, the integralists like Vermeule, and some of the West Coast Straussians (Anton was a signatory to their statement of principles).

The National Conservative approach to the Right begins in a wholesale repudiation of fusionism and through it, liberal conservatism. Like Anton, Hazony criticises the conservative establishment because they have self-consciously said that "[w]hat we are conserving is liberalism, or that Conservatism is a branch or species within liberalism, or that Liberalism is the new conservatism".⁴⁶ The blame is placed squarely at the feet of William F. Buckley, Jr., the founder and editor of *National Review*, which "stood for a public philosophy of liberalism wedded to a private Christianity, and was consciously guided by the imperative of eliminating Burkean, traditionalist influences from American conservatism".⁴⁷ In doing so, Buckley and the *National Review* paved the way for institutionalising a conservatism that was essentially "a public liberalism with a private conservatism", paving the way for the fusionism to become "a bulwark helping to prop up the hegemony of liberalism throughout the democratic world".⁴⁸ Like the West Coast Straussians, the National Conservatives believe that the conservative establishment failed them.

Like Vermeule and the integralists, the National Conservatives believe that the impact of the privatisation of religion is a grave error that ought to

⁴⁵ ELLMERS 2021.

⁴⁶ HAZONY 2022: xvii.

⁴⁷ HAZONY 2022: 301.

⁴⁸ HAZONY 2022: xxvi.

be reversed. “The liberal doctrine requiring a ‘wall of separation between church and state,’” for Hazony, “is a product of the post-Second World War period and is not an inherent feature of American political tradition. It should be discarded”, he continues, “both with respect to majority religion and to minorities”.⁴⁹ Unlike Vermeule, however, there is no clear mechanism for this wall to be torn down, and it is not immediately clear how this will manifest itself in public life. The “biblical tradition – Christianity and Judaism – must be recovered as the standard determining public life”, Hazony avers, by “overturning the postwar Supreme Court decisions that imposed the principle”.⁵⁰

Where the National Conservatives agree with the most with the three different strands of thought we have examined so far is their visceral hatred of liberalism, both left and right. Liberal democracy, Hazony claims, is intrinsically broken, and he criticises the three “fundamental axioms” of liberal democracy: “availability and sufficiency of reason”, “the free and equal individual” and “obligation arises from choice”.⁵¹ While “in theory, one can imagine a world in which liberalism coexists with the sources of religion and nationalism”, Hazony points out that “liberalism has a tendency to give way and transfer power to Marxists [...] liberalism would merely be a gateway to Marxism”.⁵² The liberal prioritisation of universal reason and individual freedom and equality over the claims of the community and of tradition, Hazony argues, opens liberals to critiques that stem from the “many genuine instances of unfreedom and inequality in society”, and if liberals are therefore true to their stated values, they will succumb to the claims made by such critics.⁵³ Hazony’s mantra for his alternative to liberal democracy is “conservative democracy”, best summed up as “God, the Bible, the family, the congregation, and the independent nation state”.⁵⁴ The big enemy of these five shibboleths of Hazony’s “conservative

⁴⁹ HAZONY 2022: 341–342.

⁵⁰ HAZONY 2022: 345.

⁵¹ HAZONY 2022: 332.

⁵² HAZONY 2022: 333.

⁵³ HAZONY 2022: 323.

⁵⁴ HAZONY 2022: 333.

democracy” is “Enlightenment liberalism [which] is the source of the current catastrophe”.⁵⁵ The problem with liberal societies is that they thrive on pre-liberal structures, associations and sentiments, but do little to understand or nurture those very things that are foundational for liberalism’s flourishing. Thus, liberalism fosters what Hazony terms “paradigm blindness”, which is constitutional for liberalism insofar as it overemphasises the relationship between the individual and the state, and resorts to the default idiom of rights, to the detriment of all other constitutive political relationships and concepts.⁵⁶

A RETURN TO PROGRESSIVISM

United by shared critiques of liberalism, the Post-liberal Right, thus, has made an appearance in the land of liberalism. To be clearer, liberalism has no friends – left or right – in the United States today. On the Left, the Progressives, from their very first incarnation, defined themselves in opposition to liberal thought and practice, and it is no surprise that contemporary Progressivism has a markedly illiberal turn.⁵⁷ On the Right, however, liberalism ruled the roost. Hazony is not wrong in pointing out that Buckley and the fusionists took seriously their commitment to liberalism, but, unlike Hazony’s dim assessment of the *National Review* and its philosophy, these men were conservative in ways that befitted a liberal society. In this section, I will briefly consider the similarities between the early Progressives, which were the first American post-liberals, and the Post-liberal Right.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. The Post-liberal Right has, for the most part, taken up the baton of the early Progressives, and comparing what the constituent parts of the Post-liberal Right espouse and what the Progressives thought is helpful in understanding the tradition in which their post-liberalism operates. Whether they consciously know it or not, they are returning

⁵⁵ HAZONY 2022: 345.

⁵⁶ HAZONY 2022: 89–96.

⁵⁷ EISENACH 1994.

to a different tradition than what Cold War American conservatism worked within. Stephen Skowronek and Stephen Engel lay out six defining shibboleths of American Progressivism: constitutional critique, critique of rights, criticism of the party system, faith in expertise, managed economy and national community.⁵⁸

The first defining characteristic of Progressives was their critique of the Constitution. The original Progressives, by criticising the Constitution, “dispelled the notion that the Constitution was a work of timeless truth”.⁵⁹ But more importantly, “their alternative, what we today call the ‘living Constitution’, was open-ended with regard to the possibilities of government and more amenable to programmatic action”.⁶⁰ This line of attack can be found most clearly in Vermeule and the integralists, who are by no means originalists.⁶¹ Similarly, the National Conservatives, while not specifically critics of the Constitution, seek to return to an age of Biblical morality by “overturning the postwar Supreme Court decisions that imposed the principle of ‘separation of church and state’ in America”.⁶² Like the Progressives, both the National Conservatives and the Integralists seek to transform the order of government from within in light of the difficulty of formally amending the Constitution.

The next critique that the Progressives levelled was against the over-dependence on rights. “The reformers”, Skowronek and Engel note, “assaulted the old regime for turning rights [...] into impediments to the development of democracy”.⁶³ Hazony criticises the tendency of liberalism to constantly expand rights, observing that “liberal societies ceaselessly manufacture new ‘rights’ so that the young and healthy may do whatever they please”.⁶⁴ Instead of focusing on “freedoms or rights”, Hazony wants us to think about “responsibilities and constraints”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, “this activity – of fixating on a fictional

⁵⁸ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016.

⁵⁹ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 6.

⁶⁰ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 6.

⁶¹ HAMMER 2021: 917–960; VERMEULE 2020.

⁶² HAZONY 2022: 345.

⁶³ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 7.

⁶⁴ HAZONY 2022: 124.

⁶⁵ HAZONY 2022: 231.

abstract individual, declaring his rights and upholding them – is for the most part a distraction from the actual business of national politics”.⁶⁶ Deneen, too, criticises rights talk in the same idiom as Hazony, but goes further in positing that demands “for comprehensive assurances that inequalities and injustices arising from racial, sexual, and ethnic prejudice be preemptively forestalled and that local autocracies or theocracies be legally prevented [...] have always contributed to the extension of liberal hegemony”.⁶⁷ Surprisingly it is the West Coast Straussians who defend rights talk. Ellmers observes that “government derives all its legitimacy from the inalienable rights of the people, and makes their consent essential to the common good and justice”, and this is what makes America exceptional, in similar tones to Anton.⁶⁸

While the early Progressives were quick to criticise the party system, it was because the parties of old were tied up with what they perceived as parochialism, “reinforcing localism and elevating narrow interests”.⁶⁹ Localism was “ill adapted for national actions aimed at the great governing challenges of the day”.⁷⁰ The West Coast Straussians prominently criticise the parties: Ellmers writes that “American constitutionalism established a nonpartisan form of government that was genuinely unprecedented”, while Anton’s recommendation in the *Flight 93 Election* is that voters rise above party and follow the path laid down by *virtù*.⁷¹ For Hazony and the National Conservatives, the party system has produced a Right that has “had little interest in political ideas other than [...] well-known liberal views” and the Left is still animated by Marxism.⁷² Vermeule and Deneen, however, are silent on this matter.

The early Progressives were clear in their faith in expertise, which manifested itself in the creation of the administrative state and “an extensive ‘para-state’ of think tanks, universities, foundations, professional societies, and lobbying

⁶⁶ HAZONY 2022: 238.

⁶⁷ DENEEN 2018: 196–197.

⁶⁸ ELLMERS 2021; ANTON 2019: 23–61.

⁶⁹ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 8.

⁷⁰ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 8.

⁷¹ ELLMERS 2021; ANTON 2019: 76.

⁷² HAZONY 2022: xvii.

organisations [...] to surround it”.⁷³ Vermeule is the most open about co-opting the expansion of the executive and the administrative state for the purposes of integration.⁷⁴ “The vast bureaucracy created by liberalism in pursuit of a mirage of depoliticized governance may”, he hopes, “by the invisible hand of Providence, be turned to new ends”.⁷⁵ The National Conservatives are concerned about the para-state and in their statement of principles they pick up on the Progressive idiom of “national interest” to argue that “most universities are at this point partisan and globalist in orientation and vehemently opposed to nationalist and conservative ideas”, and they should not receive government money “unless they rededicate themselves to the national interest”.⁷⁶ Expertise in the abstract notions of social science ought to be replaced by religious expertise in Biblical morality and leadership, but the premise that the administrative state and the para-state institutions that surround it are here to stay is never up for question. The critique of rationalism in Hazony’s treatise is more concerned with the state of mind than of the rationalist and not with the premise that the administrative state and the expansive executive branch should be curbed.⁷⁷

The Progressives aspired to a managed economy, making “the case for using government to secure greater equity in economic relationships”.⁷⁸ While the Progressives were confronted by big business and thought trust-busting and supporting unions was the best solution to the problem, some members of the Post-liberal Right, including Senator Josh Hawley, who spoke at the National Conservatism conference in Miami, have brought that same language to bear upon technology firms.⁷⁹ The National Conservatism statement of principles notes “trans-national corporations showing little loyalty to any nation damage public life by censoring political speech, flooding the country with dangerous and addictive substances and pornography, and promoting obsessive,

⁷³ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 9–10.

⁷⁴ POSNER–VERMEULE 2010; VERMEULE 2018: 202–213.

⁷⁵ VERMEULE 2018: 211.

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke Foundation 2022.

⁷⁷ HAZONY 2022: 104.

⁷⁸ SKOWRONEK–ENGEL 2016: 11.

⁷⁹ ROSENBERG–ALLEN 2021; HAWLEY 2021; 2022.

destructive personal habits”.⁸⁰ On the other hand, Deneen tries to overcome “the illusion of autonomy in the form of consumerist and sexual license” that is implicit in contemporary liberalism and hopes that “the fostering of household economics” will “resist the abstraction and depersonalization of liberalism” while confronting “the greater challenge of minimizing one’s participation in the abstract and depersonalizing nature of the modern economy”.⁸¹

The last plank of the Progressive platform was the creation of a national community and the conscious move of politics away from the local and toward the national. While Deneen is circumspect about the nation and his thought is marked more by the absence of it, the other constituent members of the Post-liberal Right are less hesitant to pin their hopes on the nation and the national community. The West Coast Straussians only talk in the idiom of America and the American regime. Vermeule implies that the “nonliberal state” that will come after liberalism keeps the structure of the administrative state and executive action alive – only using it for different ends – and criticises Deneen’s tactic of “retreating to a nostalgic localism”.⁸² Most importantly, the National Conservatives’ first principle is grounded on the existence of a national state and public interest. Their statement of principles opens by stating that “[w]e emphasize the idea of the nation because we see a world of independent nations – each pursuing its own national interests [...] as the only genuine alternative to universalist ideologies”.⁸³ Especially for the National Conservatives, but also for the others, the “public interest” of the early Progressives is rediscovered as the common good and the national interest, and the focus of thinking is inextricably linked to the nation state.

From the brief excursus above, the similarities between the early Progressives and the Post-liberal Right are stark and, for observers of the American political tradition, establish the tradition in which the Post-liberal Right unwittingly acts. To observe agreement on and the transformation of all six shibboleths

⁸⁰ Edmund Burke Foundation 2022.

⁸¹ DENEEN 2018: 188, 192, 194.

⁸² VERMEULE 2018: 203, 210.

⁸³ Edmund Burke Foundation 2022.

reveals an intellectual and political kinship from the other side of the political spectrum. We have come full circle.

POST-LIBERALISM IN THE LAND OF LIBERALISM

What does it mean to move beyond liberalism in the land of liberalism? The conservative movement in America has been most successful when it has appealed to and acted within the liberal tradition, and the goal of the conservative movement has historically been to conserve the liberal tradition. Today, the United States has no effective liberal tradition outside the conservative attempts to preserve it, which puts American conservatives in the hard position of having to defend liberalism while also repairing the underlying damage that liberalism does to the body politic. How, then, can post-liberalism thrive in a liberal society?

In all fairness to critics of the “America is the land of liberalism”, the United States has had illiberalism in its midst: one ought only to look toward Southern Agrarianism or the thought of Calhoun and the slave-based plantation economy.⁸⁴ But that does not detract from the original characterisation of liberalism as the dominant tradition in America. Most telling is the anti-Federalist criticisms of the initial Constitution, which secured the formal passage of the Bill of Rights: the criticisms that came from its most trenchant critics were that “they saw in the Framers’ easy thrusting aside of old forms and principles threats to four cherished values: to law, to political stability, to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and to federalism”.⁸⁵ The issue was not whether the United States was broadly liberal – it was about how it was to be transformed into a regime befitting the liberal conditions that caused its creation in the first place.

Conservatism, thus, in America seems paradoxical on the surface; even more so when one considers that unlike what Hazony might suggest, liberalism is a key tenet of the conservative movement in America. Peter Viereck noted that

⁸⁴ SMITH 1993: 549–566.

⁸⁵ STORING 1981: 7.

when this successfully happens, “the liberalism thus conserved often turns out to be the conservative-tending, law-centred liberalism of Locke, Lincoln, Wilson, not the radical-tending, mass-centred liberalism of Rousseau, Jackson, Weaver, Donnelly, La Follette”.⁸⁶ Viereck’s “new conservatism” proposes a broadly liberal regime, one that focuses on solving national issues with acuity, engages in defence of the realm, guarantees freedoms and rights, and puts the impetus back to local leadership to preserve the communitarian vision. It understands that liberalism in its pure form is corrosive to the very things that sustain it in the first place – local communities, strong bonds, families, duties, obligations and elites – and seeks to preserve a genuinely communal life that is vital and provides the tools and resources for human flourishing for those who choose to desire it. This, then, is the role of post-liberalism in a liberal country: to enrich and enliven it, to sustain it, and to act as a backstop for the sterilising, atomising effects of mass society and modern life.⁸⁷

At its very best, post-liberalism can emphasise the failures of liberalism in keeping the things that matter vital: local communities, the family, patriotism, hard work and a genuine equality under the law.⁸⁸ Liberalism does a poor job tending to the very things that make it successful, and the good conservative does not rail against it but rather understands its limitations and seeks to secure its successes for posterity, while standing watch cautiously against a cult of rampant progress with no sense for the unintended consequences of progress at all costs. But its solutions, as we have seen above, have a conspiratorial bent to it; hardly does one require recourse to speculation to emphasise that the constitutional and political tradition within which it operates are less amenable to the imposition of a religious state or ignoring the national community completely to focus on local communities which exist in a state of suspended animation in an undefined ether. The nation-state is here to stay, as is the secular state. The problems of modern life cannot be solved by recourse to the pre-modern world; to turn back the clock would reproduce the same conditions that resulted in its transformation.

⁸⁶ VIERECK 1962: 246–247.

⁸⁷ VIERECK 1962: 246–247.

⁸⁸ ZITNER 2023.

At various points, liberals and conservatives in the American tradition have looked to their English cousins: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., borrowed Winston Churchill's test for liberal democracy and took inspiration from Lord Randolph Churchill in his *Vital Centre*, while Viereck looked to the squirearchy to support his brand of liberal conservatism.⁸⁹ They have emphasised the cool scepticism and pragmatism of their British counterparts which coexists with a love for decorum and proper conduct, perhaps as a safeguard against taking themselves too seriously. Dour, colourless humour and pithy wit are par for the course. When our current breed of post-liberals borrows, it ossifies fluidity into ideology; when they look abroad, it is to the continent, to de Maistre and to Viktor Orbán. Hazony, Deneen, Vermeule and Anton have either been guests of Orbán or written in effusive praise of his regime. Like the early Progressives' Germanophilia, the Post-liberal Right has found an idol outside the liberal tradition, and, like the early Progressives, will have to face an eventual reckoning on the matter.⁹⁰ The distinctiveness of the United States, Viereck reminds us, "is based on the resemblance between moderate liberalism and moderate conservatism", while the Old World "is based on the difference between extreme liberalism and extreme conservatism".⁹¹ Continental idols are ill-suited for anything but bludgeoning one's own country through praise of another while glossing over the deficiencies of the mythical society that is being lionised.

The extent to which, however, this might impact British post-liberalism is up for debate. While the current impetus for post-liberalism on the right in the United States has been largely spurred on by debates that are endogenous to it, it seems to be the case that there is also an incredible salience and kinship between the two. Post-liberals on either side of the Atlantic are concerned that in their esteem their countries are no longer ascendant superpowers, that domestically or internationally their countries are past their prime, and consequently some drastic course of action must be taken. American post-liberalism

⁸⁹ SCHLESINGER 1998: xvii, 8; VIERECK 1962: 241.

⁹⁰ EISENACH 1994.

⁹¹ VIERECK 1965: 125.

is specifically inward-looking and domestic in orientation, driven by a distaste of internationalism and its association with the coasts' cosmopolitanism. Whether this dynamic can be successfully translated to the United Kingdom is quite suspect. Furthermore, because the United Kingdom has an established church, it appears that the extent to which the integralists could hold sway even when their Catholicism – oftentimes with the zeal that only converts can bring to the table – is swapped for High Church Anglicanism, is quite suspect. In sum, the symbiotic interplay between British and American post-liberalism could be put in jeopardy by new developments on the American right.

It is hard not to be disappointed over what could have come with a new iteration of conservatism in the United States, but there is hope for the future in the twin inheritances of the American tradition. “America was not simply the expression of a monolithic Lockeanism”, Steven Smith points out, “but was a covenantal community seeking a kind of moral and intellectual perfection through the acknowledgment of sin, guilt, atonement, and eventual redemption”.⁹² It would bode well for the future of conservatism in the United States to understand the objects to which it has directed its conservation and the traditions in which it has hitherto existed, and recognise its particular genius. Viereck’s injunction, warning us against “the indiscriminate anti-liberalism of hothouse Bourbons and tsarist serf-flogger”, who “are not justified in calling themselves American traditionalists”, is one we all ought to pay heed to.⁹³

⁹² SMITH 2023: 2.

⁹³ VIERECK 1965: 125.

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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 1964.¹

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

¹ 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”.² 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

² Fred Astaire as cited in BARNES–BARNES 2010: 12.

example, the Magna Carta myth³ has become a fundamental part of the British self-image especially during the 19th 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

³ 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”.⁴ 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

⁴ 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 public⁵ 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.

Daniel Pitt

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⁵ PITT 2021: 267–291.

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Our culture is going through an epochal shift. The end of liberalism as the dominant philosophy is over. Liberalism has been the hegemonic political philosophy for many years, becoming especially prominent during and after the 1960s in the Western world. However, the British public, particularly Conservative voters, are predominantly post-liberal conservatives.

This book aims to build on a conference co-organised by the Danube Institute and the Eötvös József Research Centre of the University of Public Service. The conference provided a platform for various assessments of the current state of affairs. Its unique flavour was enhanced by being held in Budapest, a city that has garnered significant international conservative attention.

The purpose of the book to provide scholarly, rigorous, yet practical contributions to the ongoing debate within Britain and conservatism about the future of British conservatism, the Conservative Party, and the potential of the conservative movement within it.

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