

**Anglo-American Conservative
Ideology After The Cold War**

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Summary of Thesis

This thesis sets out and examines the distinctive features of Anglo-American conservative ideology after the Cold War, in terms of its continuities with and differences from conservative doctrines of the past. The basic proposition explored is that despite conservatism's victory over socialism it too has been disoriented by the ending of the Cold War, and is possibly even exhausted as an ideology of contemporary relevance. Suggestions that conservatives have been left in a position of ideological hegemony are therefore questioned.

A number of reasons are considered for supporting this belief: that the loss of their Cold War opponents has deprived conservatives of any distinctive purpose; that free market agendas are discredited by the critiques of ideologies such as communitarianism and environmentalism; and that traditional beliefs and values have been undermined by developments such as the spread of moral relativism. Moreover, the possibility is considered that the end of the Cold War has exacerbated tensions between varieties of conservatives – for example, free market and 'traditionalist' thinkers – because of the lack of common unifying purposes.

The main body of the thesis is presented in two parts. Part I considers how the key traditional elements and themes of conservative ideology relate to the circumstances of the post-Cold War world, whilst Part II examines in detail its responses to a number of specific contemporary challenges. The purpose of this division is to facilitate a reflection upon the status of the ideas traditionally central to conservatism, together with an assessment of conservatives' abilities to engage with contemporary ideological developments.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to set out and examine the distinctive features of Anglo-American conservative ideology after the Cold War, in terms of its continuities with and differences from conservative doctrines of the past. The main rationale for this examination is – as will be discussed – the inadequacies of the secondary literature in relation to contemporary conservatism. The basic proposition to be explored is that despite conservatism's victory over socialism, it too has been disoriented by the ending of the Cold War, and is possibly even exhausted as an ideology of contemporary relevance.

However, before it is possible to address the substantive concerns of the inquiry, a number of preliminary questions regarding the framework within which it is to be conducted need to be considered. Specifically, two sets of issues must be examined in this introductory chapter: first, the methods employed and the theoretical assumptions underpinning the research; and second, the contextual background of the post-Cold War world. In addressing these issues, what will also be provided is an overview of the existing literature – on conservatism in general and its contemporary forms in particular – and a presentation of the specific hypotheses to be explored.

Yet one issue that is best clarified at the outset is specifying more precisely what constitutes the subject matter of the thesis. Perhaps most important, it is necessary to emphasize what the thesis is not about: it is not, except tangentially, about the fortunes of conservative political parties (that is, the Conservative or Republican Party), or of those campaigning organizations (such as the Christian Coalition) frequently associated with conservatism. Rather, its concern is restricted to an understanding of conservatism as an intellectual force.

Nonetheless, one of the characteristic features of conservative ideology is that it is not merely – or even largely – an academic construct: from Edmund Burke onwards,

politicians have clearly played a significant role in the development of conservative thought, as have numerous writers and essayists operating outside of academia. Moreover, specifically in relation to the present context, whilst the influence of intellectual figures (such as Michael Oakeshott, F. A. Hayek and Leo Strauss) upon conservative thinking undoubtedly remains strong, today only a very few of those responsible for defining conservative ideology are academics. As one commentator surveying the condition of American conservatism at the close of the 1990s rightly observes: 'The characteristic figures of conservative intellectual culture are no longer professors and intellectuals. The characteristic figures are lawyers and journalists.'¹ As will be seen, 'non-intellectual' figures are similarly central in the definition of contemporary British conservative ideology.

Acknowledging this truth, the net is therefore to be cast widely in terms of the writings to be examined, including those not only of intellectual conservatives, but also of politicians, journalists and think-tanks, insofar as these concern more than simply policy issues. Of course, one problem in adopting a broad perspective is that determining whom it is legitimate to include within the purview of consideration becomes in itself a significant challenge – as another observer notes, it 'is often very difficult to say whether or not a person is conservative'.² For reasons to be discussed below, self-descriptions are not always adequate. This being the case, it will be unavoidable to apply some amount of judgement as to what constitutes the boundaries of conservative ideology. However, the principles informing this determination will also be made apparent within this chapter.

A further related issue is a terminological one. Discussion within the thesis is to include consideration not only of 'traditionalist' forms of conservatism but also free market doctrines – yet this then raises the question of whether 'conservative' is the correct umbrella label. One way to avoid difficulties or contrived circumlocutions is instead to employ the term 'the New Right'. However, this is itself problematic, for two reasons. First, because the term has different meanings within British and American politics: whereas in the former the New Right is used to refer to the whole

¹ T. Lindberg (1999) 'Conservatism at Century's End', *Policy Review*, No. 94, p. 4.

² J. Kekes (1997) 'What Is Conservatism?', *Philosophy*, No. 72, p. 351.

spectrum of right-wing ideologies that became resurgent in the 1970s and 1980s, within the latter it refers specifically to those campaigning organizations concerned with moral and religious issues.³ Second, because it would implicitly suggest a basic continuity in terms of ideas and concerns between conservative ideology of the 1990s and that of the preceding decades, which it is a central aim of this thesis to question. Thus, whilst the term the New Right will inevitably feature within the thesis – understood in the broader British sense – it will be treated as pertaining essentially to the 1970s and 1980s.

Other alternatives that might be utilized are the more general labels of ‘Right’ or ‘right-wing’. However, again the contemporary context militates against their appropriateness, in that it is also to be argued that Left and Right are far from unproblematic designators of positions within today’s ideological spectrum. Thus although no single term is wholly satisfactory, ‘conservative’ will have to suffice. At the very least, this may be justified by reference to common American usage, in which the ‘conservative movement’ is typically taken to include libertarians alongside traditionalists.⁴ A more principled justification for considering the two sets of thinkers together will be set out below.

Theory and Methods

Four main sets of theoretical and methodological considerations need to be examined: the research methods employed; the understanding of conservatism adopted; the nature of the comparative Anglo-American approach; and the differentiation of strands of conservative thought.

³ For example, M. Hayes (1994) *The New Right in Britain* (London: Pluto Press) uses it in the former sense, whilst G. Peele (1984) *Revival and Reaction: The Right in Contemporary America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) uses it in the latter.

⁴ As does G. Nash (1996) *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (2nd edn.) (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute).

i) Research Methods

Two main methods were employed in the research: textual analysis and in-depth interviewing, each possessing attendant advantages and disadvantages.

A text may be understood as any written source, either published or unpublished.⁵ In the case of this thesis, it was the former which were examined, principally books, pamphlets, and journal and newspaper articles. The main reason for examining written documents is obvious: since the major part of human knowledge, at least within Western societies, is contained within written sources rather than individual human minds, the value of this method to the researcher requires little elaboration.

Nonetheless, even the use of so commonplace a method is not without potential problems. Fortunately, many of these – such as questions of authenticity – do not arise in relation to this research, since it is concerned purely with published sources of contemporary origin. Yet one which does is the problem of representativeness. That is, since there is a vast – not to mention ever increasing – quantity of written sources extant in the world, it may not be certain that the researcher has identified or obtained every possible item of relevance. If all that is relevant to a topic is not found, distorted conclusions based upon an unrepresentative sample of writings may be drawn.

It must indeed be admitted that it is not possible to examine every conceivable source that may be of value to a piece of research. In terms of this thesis, one way in which this problem may be overcome is to take individuals as representative of particular styles of conservative thought, and in this manner aim to cover the spectrum of conservative ideology. In places, this is by necessity the strategy employed. Yet of course, the serious danger exists of simply assuming individuals to be representative of strands of thought when in fact their arguments may be atypical. At the very least, what is required is as comprehensive a coverage as possible, of a range of writings illustrative of each strand of conservatism's concerns.

⁵ For the basic issues concerning documentary research see C. Hakim (1987) *Research Design* (London: Routledge), pp. 36-45; K. MacDonald and C. Tipton (1993) 'Using Documents', in N. Gilbert (ed.) *Researching Social Life* (London: Sage), pp. 187-200; T. May (1993) *Social Research* (Buckingham: Open University Press), pp. 133-51.

However, even this may not be entirely sufficient to meet the problem, since what is equally problematic is the fact that the typical divisions drawn between ‘types’ of conservative are frequently simplistic and misleading (as will be examined). Thus, in ambition at least, the intention of the thesis is to use individual writings as a means of exploring the subtleties of the similarities and differences between conservatives, rather than relying upon a purely abstract typology.

Even more thorny problems relate to the theoretical issues of how texts should be treated and understood. In particular, these problems have been brought to the fore by the challenges presented by contemporary theories such as postmodernism; for example, to the very possibility of an objective reading of texts.⁶ Whilst it is not possible to discuss these issues here in depth, questions relating specifically to this research may again be considered. Thus, although it is to be presumed that an objective understanding of knowledge is possible, this thesis is not an exercise in ‘unmasking’, imputing motives or interests to individuals not derivable from explicitly set out arguments. As will be apparent in subsequent chapters, evidence for contradictions within (as well as the problematic implications of) conservatives’ arguments are amply provided by their own writings, without needing to recourse to suggestions of nefarious external motivations. In other words, although belief in an objective reality distinct from discourse is avowed, the substantive analysis nonetheless proceeds from an examination of the arguments contained within conservative discourses. The objective aspects of the analysis that are to be employed in the thesis – principally concerning the wider social and historical context of the post-Cold War era – will be discussed and defended later in this chapter.

The second method employed by the research was the use of in-depth interviewing of a range of contemporary conservatives.⁷ In terms of interview technique, a loosely structured approach was adopted rather than the use of a set of rigid, predetermined questions, since the aim was to match the content of the interviews to the particular

⁶ See D. Haworth (1995) ‘Discourse Theory’, in D. Marsh and G. Stoker (eds) *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (London: Macmillan), pp. 115-33.

⁷ On the use of in-depth interviewing see G. Moyser (1988) ‘Non-Standardised Interviewing in Elite Research’, in R. Burgess (ed.) *Studies in Qualitative Methodology* (London: JAI Press), pp. 109-36; D. Richards (1996) ‘Elite Interviewing’, *Politics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 199-204.

concerns of each interviewee. The main advantage of interviewing as a method is that it allows the researcher to obtain information not contained within written sources, or at least to obtain clarification and expansion of points that are.

Again however, a particular problem with this method is that of representativeness. Indeed, this is a much more serious issue in the case of interviews than of written sources, as far fewer subjects can be interviewed than texts examined, due to constraints both of time and access. Many subjects are unwilling or unable to grant interviews, and thus the obvious danger of obtaining only an unrepresentative sample. Moreover, interviewees may be 'unreliable' in a number of ways: for example, they may deliberately attempt to overstate their roles in events, or the value and significance of their ideas. Even if this is not the case, an interviewee's responses are certainly highly subjective in nature. Furthermore, a particular problem with loosely structured interviews is that subjects may more easily 'manipulate' them, in terms of leading the interview on to topics they wish to discuss rather than those that are the concern of the researcher.

All of these issues clearly need to be minded when considering interview evidence, though once again there are reasons why for this thesis many are of only minimal significance. For example, whilst a number of those interviewed are (or were) involved in policy-making, this area is not the major focus of this thesis's interest, and the issue of individuals inflating their own importance or distorting the historical record is therefore not of great concern. On the question of representativeness, what may be signalled here is the fact that the interview material is deployed within the thesis only alongside that drawn from written sources, and not treated as possessing any greater weight or importance. Indeed, largely it is used simply to add an extra dimension to the arguments developed from the textual analysis, rather than as the primary source of understanding. In this way, most of the problems of representativeness should be obviated.

ii) *Understanding Conservative Ideology*

Without wishing to pre-empt the conclusions of the discussion that is to follow, it may nonetheless be emphasized that conservatism is to be treated in this thesis as an ideology. One implication therefore is that not only must the question of how conservatism should be characterized be addressed, but also that of how the concept of ideology should be understood.

Whilst as many issues are raised by the attempt to determine the meaning of ideology as of conservatism, for present purposes it will be sufficient to highlight a number of relevant aspects. Thus, without detailing the long and complex history of the concept, it is worth considering the fact that despite repeated efforts to pronounce the End of Ideology – the most recent provoked by the collapse of Soviet communism and subsequent assertions of the End of History – questions surrounding ideology continue to figure prominently within political science. Indeed, recent years have seen a spate of textbooks devoted to the subject, notable especially for the self-consciousness with which they reject the notion that the era of ideologies is over.⁸

Such a degree of continuing attention might be thought to suggest that good starting points for a contemporary understanding of ideology were therefore readily available. However, as is observed by at least one critic, these textbook approaches possess severe limitations.⁹ Many define an ideology in remarkably similar ways – as a body of ideas or a system of thought, in some way concerning the social world¹⁰ – yet the problem with such definitions is what is absent. That is, any *critical* dimension: treated as simply differing ways of viewing the world, such ‘neutral’ conceptions insufficiently locate ideologies within the conflicts and practical debates of the societies in which they function. As Michael Freeden suggests, one of the key features of ideologies that

⁸ For example, R. Eccleshall, V. Geoghegan, R. Jay and R. Wilford (eds) (1992) *Political Ideologies* (London: Unwin Hyman); R. Eatwell and A. Wright (eds) (1993) *Contemporary Political Ideologies* (London: Pinter Publishers); A. Vincent (1995) *Modern Political Ideologies* (2nd edn.) (Oxford: Blackwell).

⁹ R. Gann (1995) ‘The Limits of Textbook Ideology’, *Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2., pp. 129-30.

¹⁰ Eccleshall *et al.* (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 8; Eatwell and Wright (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 9; Vincent (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

distinguishes them from political philosophies is that they ‘straddle’ the worlds of political thought and political action.¹¹ Adopting a neutral conception is therefore inadequate to the task of gaining a critical grasp on ideology in terms of its rootedness within social reality.

A more useful way of conceiving ideologies is suggested by István Mészáros, who argues for an understanding which recognizes ideologies to be ‘concerned with the articulation of rival sets of values and strategies that aim at controlling the social metabolism’.¹² One important guiding principle of this thesis therefore is that ideologies are not constituted simply as sets of free-floating ideas about the world, but are centrally concerned with offering differing views as to how society should be organized. For this reason, conflicts between ideologies cannot be understood merely within the domain of abstract theory: as will be illustrated throughout the thesis, conservatives’ engagements with contemporary ideological adversaries can only be understood in terms of the real-world implications of their respective positions.

A further principle emphasized by Mészáros is the importance of understanding ideologies in terms of the specific historical context in which they function.¹³ The problem with ahistorical understandings – focusing solely upon the internal characteristics of sets of ideas – is that they are unable to grasp the dynamics of ideologies in the context of societies in motion. That is, an historical approach is necessary to account for the way in which changes in ideologies are intimately related to wider social changes. Relating this principle to present concerns, it is for this reason that the post-Cold War setting is argued to be central to understanding contemporary conservatism.

A further implication of adopting a dynamic, historical approach is that employing a purely abstract definition of conservatism must also be rejected. The general limitations of a ‘definitional’ approach to social inquiry are well highlighted by Henryk Grossman. He emphasizes that social phenomena ‘have no “fixed” or “eternal” elements or character, but are subject to constant change. A definition fixes the

¹¹ M. Freeden (1996) *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 76.

¹² I. Mészáros (1989) *Power and Ideology* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), p. 10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

superficial attributes of a theory at any given moment or period, and thus transforms these attributes into something permanent and unchanging.’¹⁴

In terms of the approach thus outlined, the study of conservatism which perhaps comes closest to the ambitions of this thesis is George Nash’s comprehensive account of post-war American conservative thought. Nash argues that the effort to determine an *a priori* definition of conservatism is ‘misdirected. I doubt that there is any single, satisfactory, all-encompassing definition of the complex phenomenon called conservatism, the content of which varies enormously with time and place’.¹⁵ Nash thus presents his own method simply as being to examine ‘conservatism as an intellectual movement *in America, in a particular period*’.¹⁶

The impatience Nash displays towards the attempt to determine any simple or straightforward definition of conservatism – in his words, a ‘dubious enterprise’ – is undoubtedly an attitude for which sympathy is easy to express. Thus, in terms of Nash’s methodology, all that might need to be said of this thesis is that it aims to provide an examination of conservatism as an ideology in Britain and America, in the post-Cold War period.

Nonetheless, attractive as Nash’s stance may be, an obvious criticism to level at the rejection of *a priori* definitions is that it leaves no satisfactory basis for determining what should and should not be considered within a concept’s boundaries. In relation to conservatism therefore, the only basis for deciding who is and who is not a conservative would seem to be self-avowals. Yet this fails to resolve a number of important issues. For example, one of the most difficult in analysing conservatism is the placement of free market liberals: that is, are they conservatives? As will be seen, the dispute over this question cannot easily be settled simply by considering free marketeers’ own contentions, since both denials and affirmations can be found within their arguments.

This being the case, it is unfortunately not possible simply to follow Nash in

¹⁴ H. Grossman (1990) ‘The Evolutionist Revolt Against Classical Economics, Part II’, in B. Jessop and C. Malcolm-Brown (eds) *Karl Marx’s Social and Political Thought* Volume I (London: Routledge), p. 264.

¹⁵ Nash (1996), *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

sidestepping the many vexing questions regarding conservatism's characterization. However, whilst it is therefore necessary to consider these in some detail, it is nonetheless important to emphasize that the conclusions drawn possess a highly tentative and conditional quality. That is, it is to be maintained that a more definite account can only be offered *a posteriori*.

Bearing this important caveat in mind, the question of what constitutes the principled content of conservative ideology may now be explored. Considering the literature in this area, two observations of Freeden's usefully highlight potential obstacles to understanding: one, that most studies of conservatism are written by conservatives, with those that are not typically little more than out-and-out attacks; and two, that most conservatives deny that theirs is an ideology.¹⁷

It is certainly true that many conservatives are keen to distance themselves from the label of ideology. For example, Russell Kirk describes conservatism as representing the very 'negation of ideology'.¹⁸ In particular, many conservatives articulate a disdain for the abstract theorizing supposed to characterize ideological thinking.¹⁹ Indeed, a characteristic common to many is a distrust of intellectuals in general: 'One of the principal lessons of our tragic century, which has seen so many millions of innocent lives sacrificed in schemes to improve the lot of humanity is – beware intellectuals.'²⁰

Probably the most popular style of argument amongst conservatives for presenting conservatism as other than an ideology is to suggest that it is instead a temperament or disposition.²¹ One of the most notable exponents of this idea is Oakeshott, for whom being conservative simply reflects the natural disposition of human beings 'to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried'.²² The problem with the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

¹⁷ Freeden (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 317-19.

¹⁸ R. Kirk (ed.) (1982) *The Portable Conservative Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. xiv.

¹⁹ See, for example, K. Minogue (1985) *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson); L. Allison (1984) *Right Principles* (London: Basil Blackwell), pp. 7-9.

²⁰ P. Johnson (1988) *Intellectuals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), p. 342.

²¹ A. Vincent (1994) 'British Conservatism and the Problem of Ideology', *Political Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 210-23.

²² M. Oakeshott (1962) *Rationalism in Politics* (London: Methuen), p. 169.

ideologue's dependence upon abstract reason is that, in attempting to condense reality into a limited number of set principles, he distorts the subtleties and nuances of actual experience. By contrast, the conservative defers to the insights derived from a practical or empirical basis, understanding reality via the accumulated wisdom of past experience as embodied in custom and tradition.

An interesting recent example of anti-ideological argument is provided by Shirley Letwin, in her analysis of Thatcherism. Thus, according to Letwin, Thatcherism cannot be considered an ideology because it does not offer an abstract blueprint for shaping society – it 'is neither a theory nor concerned with establishing an eternally correct programme of action'.²³ Instead, it should be viewed as 'a historical phenomenon, addressed to the concerns of a particular time and place'.²⁴ The major dilemma faced by ideologues is that their abstract ideals are not readily translatable into concrete proposals relevant to particular circumstances. This is purportedly shown by the fact that Lenin was forced to rely upon practical prescriptions of his own devising in light of Marxist ideology's failure to provide sufficient concrete guidance.

One reason that may lend credibility to the notion that conservatism is not an ideology is the evident weakness of those accounts which attempt to understand conservatism as a set of substantive shared principles, common beliefs that are adhered to by all conservatives in every time and place. A modern exemplar of this approach is Kirk who, though not believing conservatism to be an ideology, nonetheless identifies six essential 'canons' of conservative thought.²⁵ Typical suggestions for eternal conservative verities are: the importance of order and authority; a respect for history and tradition; a preference for gradual over revolutionary change; and a belief in a divine order.

One problem with this approach is that little agreement exists even as to how many principles should be enumerated. For example, although Kirk believes it should be six, Charles Dunn and J. David Woodard suggest ten, and Clinton Rossiter no less than

²³ S. Letwin (1992) *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (London: Fontana), p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁵ R. Kirk (1953) *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co.), pp. 7-8.

21.²⁶ Yet however many tenets are chosen, the most serious problem with this approach is that no single set of unchanging substantive beliefs can encompass the concerns of conservatives in every time or place. That is, whatever list is drawn up as supposedly constituting the core of conservative belief, examples of conservatives who do not hold to any number of them may always be found. Thus, as W. H. Greenleaf concludes from his detailed examination of conservatism's history, it has clearly contained a wide range of differing ideas and commitments, from individualist to collectivist and from libertarian to authoritarian.²⁷ Upon this basis he therefore argues that there is nothing that can be said to constitute a common conservative ideology.

It may be noted that the 'core values' approach is especially common amongst writers on American conservatism, with Nash a notable exception. One of the more sensitive attempts to identify the core of conservative belief is presented by Melvin Thorne, who argues that two fundamental beliefs are shared by conservatives – belief in an objective moral order and belief in an unchanging human nature – yet also demonstrates an awareness of the difficulties involved in attributing these ideas to all conservative thinkers.²⁸ Moreover, in that he restricts the applicability of his argument to American conservative thought of the post-war period, it is less open to refutation by counter-example, as well as avoiding the trap of erroneously eternalizing conservative beliefs.

Even so, as an approach it remains deficient, especially in terms of explaining changes and differences within conservative ideology. In particular for this thesis, even if a restricted historical perspective is taken, it remains extremely difficult to identify a single set of core values when undertaking an analysis of both British and American conservatism.

However, whilst the flaws of this approach provide one of the strongest supports for the non-ideology position, this too suffers from a number of serious weaknesses. For

²⁶ C. W. Dunn and J. D. Woodard (1996) *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), p. 48; C. Rossiter (1982) *Conservatism in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), pp. 64-6.

²⁷ W. H. Greenleaf (1973) 'The Character of Modern British Conservatism', in R. Benewick, R. N. Berki and B. Parekh (eds) *Knowledge and Belief in Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.), pp. 177-9.

²⁸ M. J. Thorne (1990) *American Conservative Thought Since World War II: The Core Ideas* (New York: Greenwood Press), pp. 5-10.

example, considering the dispositional argument, in that it depends upon an essentially ahistorical psychological proposition about human nature, it is of little value in explaining conservatism in any historically specific manner. That is, it cannot satisfactorily explain why conservatism should have emerged as a specific doctrine of the modern era, or easily account for changes that occur in its orientation.

At the same time, the reliance upon an eternalized conception of human nature sits uncomfortably with an emphasis upon the particular of custom and tradition as the sources of knowledge.²⁹ Moreover, without admitting the need for appeal to any abstract principles, conservatives are left with scant basis for discriminating between customs and practices, not all of which – such as the traditions of the decried ‘ideologue’ – are likely to find conservative favour. Finally, in that the distinction relied upon between abstract and practical styles of reasoning is itself a conceptual distinction not derived from a tradition-based form of understanding, the very basis for distinguishing a disposition from an ideology may be considered ‘ideological’.

Yet the denial that conservatism is an ideology may also be deemed ideological in the sense in which the concept is employed in this thesis, in that the argument is evidently deployed by conservatives as much as part of an effort to assert conservatism’s superiority over competing doctrines as simply to describe what being conservative means. Indeed, this is a principal reason why the fact that so many accounts of conservatism are penned by conservatives may be problematic for attempts at understanding. Nonetheless, it may be agreed that conservatives do not typically lay the same weight upon abstract principles as do proponents of other ideologies, and perhaps even have a particular affinity for experience-based modes of understanding. However, as outlined earlier, ideologies should not in any case be understood simply as sets of abstract or eternal principles. Thus the possession of a strongly practical orientation is no reason for denying a doctrine the status of ideology.

Of course, it is not only conservatives who may deny that conservatism has any definite principled content; so do many critics. Possibly the crudest attempt to ‘empty’ conservatism of any real substance is presented by Ted Honderich, who argues that

²⁹ Vincent (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 224-5.

conservatism should be understood as, at heart, little more than selfishness.³⁰ Yet if this is so, there hardly seems any point in paying conservatives' arguments serious attention at all. Such approaches thus indicate the problems with looking to many non-conservative accounts to gain an understanding of conservatism, as much as there may be problems with conservative ones.

A different way of characterizing conservatism that suggests it lacks any definite principles, which may or may not be forwarded critically, is to argue that it is simply a form of pragmatism, merely responding to each situation upon whatever basis is deemed appropriate.³¹ Thus, at one time conservatives may argue for a greater role for the state, whilst at another for less, depending upon what circumstances demand. Importantly, this understanding underpins Hayek's rejection of the conservative label, since if conservatism possesses no principled foundations it cannot be trusted to follow consistently a definite course, such as opposing collectivism.³²

However, although this characterization has the advantage of allowing the accommodation of a diversity of positions within conservatism's boundaries, its failure to specify any definite content for conservatism is again problematic. For example, it presupposes that in any given situation a 'pragmatic' solution will simply be apparent, without the need for principled reflection. Yet in any set of circumstances a number of options are always likely to suggest themselves, and it is hard to see how without some form of more principled discrimination either a definite stance or course of action can be decided.

At this stage, it is worth noting that by no means all conservatives reject the label of ideology or disdain the need for theorizing. Thus, for example, many of the New Right period became quite willing to describe their beliefs in ideological terms, as part of their more combative attitude towards the consensus politics of the post-war era. For instance, although Letwin may disapprove of applying the ideology label to Thatcherism, Thatcher herself spoke of the ideological battle needing to be fought by conservatives against socialism, and a flurry of thinkers also welcomed the return of the

³⁰ T. Honderich (1992) *Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

³¹ Vincent (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9.

³² F. A. Hayek (1976) *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 398-9.

intellectual into conservative politics.³³ Thus in the introduction to one volume of conservative writings Maurice Cowling asserts – contra Oakeshott – the importance of conservatives theorizing a definite public doctrine.³⁴ Similarly, Roger Scruton argues that ‘troubled times’ – such as he perceives the late 1970s to be – require conservatives (even if reluctantly) to make their doctrines explicit. Indeed, Scruton sees his own effort at doctrinal exposition as aiming to express the ‘root ideas of a conservative ideology’.³⁵

Undoubtedly the most common type of definition of conservative ideological principles is in terms of a desire to conserve. One of the more interesting developments of this idea is that of the ‘positional’ understanding of conservatism argued for by S. P. Huntington.³⁶ According to Huntington, although conservatives do not offer blueprints for how society should be organized, they nonetheless possess a definite positional commitment: that is, opposing any fundamental challenge to the existing social order, whatever that order may be and in whatever context. The positional argument thus has the advantage of allowing a wide variety of conservative ideals to be incorporated within conservatism’s boundaries, yet by suggesting that these are always employed in the defence of established institutions affirms that conservatism operates upon more principled ground than a pragmatic understanding would suggest.

Nonetheless, defining conservatism in terms of the desire to conserve is notoriously problematic; as Scruton scornfully writes, in itself it may be considered a wholly ‘limp’ definition.³⁷ Specifically, the positional argument is flawed because it inevitably leaves

³³ See J. D. Fair and J. A. Hutcheson, Jr. (1987) ‘British Conservatism in the Twentieth Century: An Emerging Ideological Tradition’, *Albion*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 567-8.

³⁴ M. Cowling (1978) ‘The Present Position’, in M. Cowling (ed.) *Conservative Essays* (London: Cassell), pp. 20-4.

³⁵ R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), pp. 16, 7. Furthermore, at least two studies of conservatism may be identified which do not reject the idea that conservatism is an ideology. Thus Noël O’Sullivan hopes to counter the ‘mistaken prejudice’ that conservatism is not an ideology (N. O’Sullivan (1976) *Conservatism* (London: J. M. Dent), p. 31), whilst Robert Nisbet thinks it ‘a narrow and stunted’ view of the word ideology to eschew its use for conservatism (R. Nisbet (1986) *Conservatism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), p. vii).

³⁶ S. P. Huntington (1957) ‘Conservatism As an Ideology’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2. See T. Tännsjö (1990) *Conservatism for Our Time* (London: Routledge) for a more recent expression of a similar idea.

³⁷ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

vague the circumstances requiring conservatism's defensive efforts. For example, no specification is given of a timescale to tell how long an institution must have been in existence before it is to be considered established. Equally, in that few conservatives have ever opposed all change, without further principled appeal the line between unacceptable 'radical' change and acceptable piecemeal reform is similarly unclear.

Moreover, taking an attitude to change as defining of conservatism leads on the one hand to the denial of the label to the many avowed conservatives who have embraced substantial degrees of change (for example, New Right advocates of dismantling corporatism), and on the other to the inclusion of many within the ideology's boundaries who would not ordinarily be considered conservatives (such as Soviet or Chinese communists defending their respective regimes). As will be discussed, excluding proponents of 'radical' change from conservatism means excluding significant strands of contemporary conservative ideology, whilst including those who are typically seen by conservatives as ideological enemies can only render analysis hopelessly confused.

Ultimately, the most fruitful approaches to conservatism are those which emphasize the reactive side of conservative ideology. There is much truth therefore in Karl Mannheim's description of conservatism as essentially a 'counter-movement', its doctrines developed largely in reaction to those of its ideological adversaries.³⁸ One way of conceiving conservatism in this way is suggested by Lincoln Allison, who describes conservatism's basic orientation as anti-humanism, opposing the 'overweening' pretensions of humanist ideologies' beliefs in such notions as rationality and progress.³⁹ With similar intent, Noël O'Sullivan describes the common foundation of conservatism as a notion of limits, a recognition of the inherent imperfectability of the human condition.⁴⁰ What all conservatives take as starting point is thus a belief in an objective limit to humanity's capacity either to comprehend or shape society. Such

³⁸ K. Mannheim (1986) *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), p. 84. See also Freedden (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 335-44.

³⁹ Allison (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ N. O'Sullivan (1976), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-14. See also W. H. Greenleaf (1983) *The British Political Tradition* Vol. II (London: Methuen), p. 191. An American conservative who similarly emphasizes the importance of limits is Bruce Frohnen – B. Frohnen (1993) *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism* (Lawrence, K.S.: University of Kansas Press), ch. 6.

a notion can be seen to influence the whole range of conservative thought, from respect for custom and tradition over the new and untried, to the rejection of planning and a commitment to unconscious market forces.

Of course, a commitment to a limited style of politics is, in itself, not unique to conservatism – it may also be found amongst many liberals – and a bare notion of limits can seem a broad and vague idea.⁴¹ However, what both O’Sullivan and Allison also highlight is a historically specific dimension: that is, conservatism’s distinctiveness resides in its emergence as reaction to the ‘hubristic’ ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. By locating conservatism within the matrix of ideological conflict of the modern era, it is also therefore possible to avoid the pitfalls of an ahistorical understanding. As O’Sullivan suggests, in this way the ‘conservatism’ of the caveman clinging to stone-age traditions may be distinguished from that of a modern thinker like Burke.⁴²

Nonetheless, a problem with conceiving conservatism as a largely negative ideology remains, which is that it becomes easy to lose sight of the truth that many conservatives do display core commitments to substantive, even programmatic ideals. That is, whilst the ‘shopping list’ approach of writers such as Kirk and Rossiter may rightly be rejected, it remains the case that for many conservatives ‘positive’ commitments are at the heart of their concerns. Whilst these cannot be specified as a single set of eternal verities, such commitments will, of course, be considered in subsequent chapters.

Moreover, it is necessary to repeat the point that no final word on how conservative ideology should be understood can be given in this introduction. In fact, the most important questions raised by the issues discussed here will only be answerable during the actual analysis: for example, conservatives’ rejections of humanism will be explored in relation to environmentalists’ rejections of anthropocentrism, whilst a conservative emphasis upon limits will be considered in relation to the standpoint of postmodernism. Indeed, the nature of conservatives’ reactive stances – including their attitudes towards such notions as rationality and progress – will be shown to have become in many

⁴¹ See D. Y. Allen (1981) ‘Modern Conservatism: The Problem of Definition’, *Review of Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 588 for this line of criticism on the idea of limits as defining conservatism.

⁴² N. O’Sullivan (1976), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

respects transformed by the circumstances of the post-Cold War context.

iii) Comparing British and American Conservatism

A further issue requiring consideration is the relationship between British and American traditions of conservatism. In particular, in that one of the key arguments of this thesis is that the contemporary orientations of both can be understood within the same framework, it is necessary to offer justification for analysing the two together.

Probably the most significant challenge to the legitimacy of talking of Anglo-American conservative ideology is to be found in the notion of American exceptionalism, the idea that America's peculiar history has led it to develop an ideological spectrum qualitatively different to those of its European counterparts. Of particular significance is the claim that within this spectrum no specifically conservative ideology has evolved, or at least one that is not simply a variety of liberalism. If this is so, to treat British and American conservatism as sharing significant common characteristics is clearly a mistake.

The basic case for the exceptional view of American society was most famously articulated by Louis Hartz. Hartz's argument is that since America does not have the legacy of class relations which European societies inherited from their feudal pasts, neither has it developed the polarized ideologies of socialism or conservatism.⁴³ Instead, the universal American ideology is a form of Lockean liberalism, based around the values of individual liberty, progress and democratic capitalism. To attempt to be a conservative in the European mould – implying a commitment to such lingering feudal notions as hierarchy and order – is to fail to be true to the American experience; the only tradition Americans can authentically 'conserve' is therefore a liberal one.

Such an understanding was certainly common intellectual currency during the

⁴³ L. Hartz (1955) *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich), p. 151.

immediate post-war period.⁴⁴ Moreover, it is one evidently accepted by at least some American conservatives themselves. For example, Rossiter avers that ‘the one glorious thing to be conservative about has been the Liberal tradition of the world’s most liberal society’.⁴⁵ The notion is also one accepted by many British conservatives, especially those who regard American conservatives as little more than defenders of economic laissez-faire. For example, according to Peregrine Worsthorne, ‘American conservatism is basically a free market, anti-statist political doctrine’, lacking the ‘crown and altar’ perspective of British conservatism.⁴⁶ Thus, like Hartz, he believes that the values American conservatives seek to conserve are liberal ones. (Moreover, a historicist defence of American liberalism might also readily lend itself to conservative appropriation – on this possibility see Chapter 6).

However, although it may be agreed that the specifics of national context are necessary to understand any ideology, the idea that conservatism is in some sense alien to American society, or at least possesses an identity wholly different from that of its European relatives, ought to be rejected. In truth, the exceptionalist argument can best be understood by recognizing, as Daniel Bell suggests, that the term ‘exceptional’ is typically used by writers on American society not simply as a synonym for different, but superior.⁴⁷ In other words, its usage implies not only a descriptive but also a normative motivation, as a means of asserting the superiority of the liberal and progressive American ‘way of life’ over the backward-looking perspectives of European societies. Understood in this way, it can be seen as very much a thesis suited to the America of the immediate post-war decades: having emerged from the Second World War as the dominant world power, asserting a unique American ideology served as a means both of distinguishing itself from the conflict-ridden European powers it had definitively eclipsed, and of presenting a unified and attractive ideological alternative in the new Cold War.

⁴⁴ See A. Aughey, G. Jones and W. Riches (1992) *The Conservative Political Tradition in Britain and the United States* (London: Pinter Publishers), pp. 3-6; Nash (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 124-5.

⁴⁵ Rossiter (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁶ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998. See also P. Worsthorne (1956) ‘The Misreading of American History’, *New Republic*, 13 February.

⁴⁷ D. Bell (1989) ‘American Exceptionalism Revisited: The Role of Civil Society’, *Public Interest*, No. 95, p. 41.

Furthermore, even in its own terms the argument is flawed. For example, a number of aspects of American history – such as the practice of slavery – clearly do not accord with a universal or straightforwardly liberal spirit. Moreover, even though ideologies may strongly bear the stamp of their national locale, no modern society is wholly isolated from all others and nor therefore are ideologies formed purely within a national context. In the American case, even if its history is regarded as a purely capitalist one, its immigrant population clearly brought over a whole store of ‘pre-capitalist’ ideas and values from Europe, most notably religious beliefs. Indeed, church attendance in America remains amongst the highest in the Western world.⁴⁸

None of this is to say that such ideas were simply transposed unchanged, or have not significantly altered during America’s development. Rather, the point is simply to recognize that pre-capitalist and non-liberal ideas can find a place even in so thoroughly bourgeois a country. Certainly at least, a significant number of American conservatives have sought to forge a conservatism analogous to European varieties. For example, Kirk attempts to legitimate a ‘Burkean’ conservatism in the American context by arguing that the American way of life is simply an import of traditions from seventeenth century Britain.⁴⁹ Similarly, Thomas Fleming (editor of *Chronicles*) disputes the conventional view of the Republic’s origins by contending that ‘the Founding Fathers of the United States were not particularly liberal’, many being staunchly British and basically ‘reactionary’.⁵⁰ In fact, as will be seen, few contemporary American conservatives do not place some emphasis upon non-liberal values and traditions as necessary supports for a market-based system, even if disagreeing over the extent to which liberal and non-liberal elements are compatible.

Yet as much as the problem with the exceptionalist thesis lies with its depiction of American society, so too – as Arthur Aughey *et al.* point out – does it imply a simplistic view of British society and British conservatism.⁵¹ That is, the assumption that America cannot possess a true conservative philosophy implies accepting as model

⁴⁸ On this see Chapter 4, pp. 164-5.

⁴⁹ Kirk (1953), *op. cit.*, p. 286. See also R. Kirk (1993) *America’s British Culture* (London: Transaction Publishers).

⁵⁰ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

a highly simplified ideal-type of British conservatism: as anti-modern, anti-liberal and pre-capitalist in orientation. Whilst such characteristics certainly are to be found within British conservatism, it hardly exhausts its range. For example, as will be discussed below, a non-feudal free market liberalism has been advocated by British conservatives from Lord Hugh Cecil to Margaret Thatcher, not to mention Burke.

The gulf between the two nations' ideological systems should therefore be regarded as far less wide than the exceptionalist argument suggests. However, as well as this relatively general justification of a comparative Anglo-American approach, a more specific historical one may be given for considering British and American conservative ideologies side-by-side. The basis for this justification is well outlined by Noël O'Sullivan, who points out that the dissimilarities between national schools of conservative thought were much more striking before the First World War than after.⁵² The reason for this is that the challenges posed by the twin enemies of Soviet communism externally and collectivism internally, presented conservatives across Western societies with a set of pressing universal preoccupations which previously they had lacked. It is thus a uniformity of concern which also underpins the legitimacy of understanding contemporary conservative thought in supra-national terms.

Indeed, it is perhaps even easier to draw parallels between the concerns of British and American conservatives since the emergence of the New Right and the clearly related phenomena of 'Thatcherism' and 'Reaganism'; as John O'Sullivan argues, both conservative and liberal trends in Britain and America 'have tracked each other closely in the last two decades'.⁵³ In terms of conservative ideology, this is well attested to by the fact that numerous of the studies of conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s adopt a trans-Atlantic focus.⁵⁴ During this period, clear and direct links were forged between British and American conservatives, with an evident shared belief in the priority of undoing the corporatist settlement of the post-war era. Similar issues were thus raised,

⁵¹ Aughey *et al.* (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

⁵² N. O'Sullivan (1976), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵³ J. O'Sullivan (1997a) 'Blair's New Class', *Prospect*, May.

⁵⁴ For example, K. Hoover and R. Plant (1989) *Conservative Capitalism in Britain and the United States* (London: Routledge); A. Adonis and T. Hames (eds) (1994) *A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher-Reagan Decade in Perspective* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

together with similar responses: defeating the Left and rolling back the frontiers of the interventionist state.

As is to be argued, the context of the post-Cold War world is very different, yet one continuity that will be demonstrated is the fact that both British and American conservatives continue to address similar issues. Equally, the cross-fertilization of ideas remains very much in evidence: for example, British think-tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Social Affairs Unit regularly publish the writings of American conservatives, whilst many British conservatives contribute to American conservative journals.⁵⁵ Similarly, a cross-over in personnel is also common: for example, for a time in the 1990s John O'Sullivan became editor of leading American conservative magazine the *National Review*.

Qualifications must, of course, be duly noted. Thus despite arguing for the legitimacy of understanding British and American conservatism together, it barely needs stating that important differences exist between the two. For example, one worth noting here is that within discussions of American conservatism the idea that it constitutes some form of 'movement' is commonplace – a label which is only rarely applied to British conservatism – reflective of the fact that American conservatives typically possess a much stronger and more self-conscious belief in the need to pursue definite, goal-driven agendas.⁵⁶

It should be obvious therefore that discussion needs to take note of such differences, with the aim certainly not being to treat American and British conservatism simply as a single entity. At the same time however, nor is it the intention merely to present a bland checklist of similarities and differences: the contention of the thesis is that the same basic paradigm should be utilized to understand both. As such, the form of presentation will not be of separate accounts of each tradition, but a side-by-side

⁵⁵ For example: M. Novak (1995) *Awaking from Nihilism* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit); P. Berger and I. Kristol (eds) (1991) *Health, Life-Style and Environment: Countering the Panic* (London: Social Affairs Unit); K. Minogue (1996) 'Does National Sovereignty Have a Future?', *National Review*, 23 December; R. Scruton (1993) 'The Harrowed Tradition', *Partisan Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2.

⁵⁶ As well as appearing in the title of Nash's study, the term is also to be found in that of Paul Gottfried – P. Gottfried (1993) *The Conservative Movement* (2nd edn.) (New York: Twayne Publishers).

consideration of material.

A final point worth highlighting here is the relative importance of each national tradition in defining contemporary conservative ideology. In fact, in terms of the most distinctively contemporary themes it will be apparent in the following chapters that many of the debates are primarily American-led. For example, Madsen Pirie (President of the Adam Smith Institute) believes that whereas in the 1980s free market ideas ‘flowed almost entirely from Britain to America’, in the 1990s this trend ‘to some extent reversed’, citing the strong influence of libertarian think-tank the Cato Institute and libertarian journal *Reason* upon the Adam Smith Institute.⁵⁷ Similarly, as will be illustrated in Chapter 2, in debates concerning welfare and the ‘underclass’, figures such as Charles Murray are frequently cited by British conservatives. Yet this flow is more than simply of free market ideas: as will also be seen, themes concerning issues such as the fabric of communities and standards in education are also ones particularly emphasized by American conservatives, yet also adopted by British. (Indeed, it is not solely American conservatives who appear influential upon British writers – as will be seen in Chapter 3, British conservatives also often cite American communitarians such as Amitai Etzioni.) This does not necessarily imply any greater originality or creativity on the part of the American conservative tradition – for example, American writers on community never tire of invoking Burke – but simply that *au courant* issues are typically more central to American conservatives’ concerns.

iv) Varieties of Conservatism

Another important qualification to note in this chapter is that conservatism does not, of course, constitute a single, homogenous doctrine. It is therefore important to differentiate between varieties of conservative argument.

One of the major difficulties in constructing any ideological typology is that whatever

⁵⁷ Interview with M. Pirie, 19 June 1998.

categories are identified rarely possess discrete boundaries, in terms either of ideas or individuals. Moreover – as already noted in relation to defining conservatism in general – attempting to establish set definitions generally provides a poor basis for a dynamic understanding. As will be seen, the concerns and arguments of each strand of conservatism clearly change over time (and thereby brings strands either closer or further apart) which it is difficult to account for within fixed categories. Furthermore, these problems are inevitably magnified when attempting to construct a supra-national typology. For these reasons, no definitive categorization is to be attempted. Instead, what will be offered is an account of the broad orientations of different types of conservative, without claiming category boundaries to be either final or closed.

A variety of classifications of conservatism are suggested within the secondary literature, yet no clear consensus exists as to where distinctions should be drawn, with anywhere from two to half a dozen strands seemingly identifiable.⁵⁸ However, history may be seen to have dispensed with the value of at least some categories: for example, a number of writers on American conservatism define anticommunists as a discrete strand, whilst amongst British conservatives imperialists may be classified as a particular group. Clearly, neither of these is any longer of significance. Other groups frequently differentiated are the Religious Right and campaigning organizations, yet as indicated at the outset these are not to be focused upon in this thesis.

Probably the most common single distinction made by commentators is between proponents of a traditionalist conservatism and proponents of a free market ideology. A variety of labels are suggested: for example, traditionalists may also be described as ‘organic’ or ‘Burkean’ conservatives, whilst free marketeers may be grouped beneath the banners of ‘libertarianism’, or ‘neo-’, ‘classical’, ‘market’ or ‘economic’ liberalism. A different way of suggesting the same cleavage to be found within American accounts

⁵⁸ On categorizing British conservatism see P. Norton and A. Aughey (1981) *Conservatives and Conservatism* (London: Temple Smith), pp. 53-89; Greenleaf (1983), *op. cit.*, pp. 189-346; A. Gamble (1994) *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), ch. 2. On American conservatism see Peele (1984), *op. cit.*; N. Ashford (1986) ‘The New American Right’, *Social Studies Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2; M. Foley (1991) *American Political Ideas: Traditions and Usages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), ch. 7; Dunn and Woodard (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 102-110; R. Nichols (1997) “‘Conservatism’ and ‘the Right’ in America: Ideological Conflict, Categories and Language”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 2, No. 3. One useful map of both the British and American New Right is provided by R. Eatwell (1989) ‘Right Or Rights? The Rise of the “New Right”’, in R. Eatwell and N. O’Sullivan (eds) *The Nature of the Right* (London: Pinter Publishers), pp. 6-13.

is the employment of the labels 'social' and 'economic' conservatives. All of these labels clearly imply differing shades of meaning, yet nonetheless possess broadly similar contents.

Sensitivity to the problems with this division may also be found in the literature. For example, Greenleaf – who marks a distinction between collectivist and libertarian traditions within conservatism – emphasizes that both are to be found within all strands of conservative thought, rather than arguing that they should be viewed as distinct streams in themselves.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, especially within writings on the New Right, it is not uncommon to find relatively simplistic portrayals of the differences between conservatives. It will thus be useful for discussion to proceed by dissecting the common two-fold distinction.

Beginning with the category of traditionalists, exponents within British conservatism include Worsthorne, Scruton and writers for the journal the *Salisbury Review*. Characterized by a distinct ambivalence towards the modern world and the rationalist legacy of the Enlightenment – as well as frequently pessimistic in outlook – this strand of conservatism rejects individualism and emphasizes instead the priority of organic communities. As much therefore as they share other conservatives' distaste for socialism, such conservatives also possess a strong aversion towards liberalism, often including economic liberalism. Regarding themselves as followers of Burke, traditionalist conservatives are also frequently nostalgic, if not positively reactionary, in seeking to restore 'lost' virtues and practices. Key ideological touchstones are the notions of continuity, order and authority, as well as beliefs in natural inequality and hierarchy. Amongst American conservatives, a traditionalist orientation is most apparent within those attempts to graft a Burkean-style conservatism on to American conditions already noted (for example, that of Kirk). Similar perspectives are to be found within the writings of Robert Nisbet and Richard Weaver. A notable American traditionalist journal is *Modern Age*.

However, one problem with any easy distinguishing of this strand is that its emphasis upon the values of order and authority does not necessarily translate into a straightforward defence of a strong state. Indeed, as will be shown in the following

chapters, many traditionalist conservatives have great reservations about an expanding state, and seek to defend civil society from political intrusions. Whilst the grounds for their concerns are often very different to those of libertarians, there are nonetheless therefore affinities between their perspectives.

A further difficulty in defining this category can be seen from considering an important strand of contemporary American conservatism, that which has been dubbed 'paleoconservatism' (to distinguish it in particular from neoconservatism).⁶⁰ Main proponents of this perspective are Fleming, Samuel Francis and the journal *Chronicles*. Holding to a broadly traditionalist perspective – though distinctive in their emphasis upon specifically Southern conservative traditions – paleoconservatives adopt especially antagonistic stances towards other conservative strands. Most notably, paleoconservatives are suspicious of what they regard as the globalizing zeal of mainstream conservatives (supporting the isolationist and protectionist position of Pat Buchanan) as well as their supposed acquiescence to 'big government' and the welfare state. Indeed, they often consider mainstream conservatives to be little different to their enemies on the Left.⁶¹ Thus paleoconservatives frequently align themselves with libertarians rather than other conservatives, and adopt a radical 'anti-establishment' perspective towards the federal government usually imagined to be alien to traditional conservatism.

Another problem with the 'traditionalist' label is that many conservatives who focus upon social and moral questions do not share the anti-modernist perspective of arch-traditionalists. For example, the social conservatism of Washington-based think-tanks such as the Heritage Foundation by no means rejects modernity, as well as such conservatives being very much prepared to work with and within existing policy-making structures. This perspective is typified by journals such as Heritage's *Policy Review* and writers such as William Bennett. In fact, the mainstream of American conservatism has never sought any form of rolling back of modernity, and in this sense

⁵⁹ Greenleaf (1973), *op. cit.*

⁶⁰ See Gottfried (1993), *op. cit.*, ch. 7.

⁶¹ According to Fleming, on points of substance, 'There is nothing to distinguish Newt Gingrich from Bill Clinton' – interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998. Moreover, Fleming disputes whether what is generally called the 'conservative movement' deserves to be accorded the conservative label.

a positively reactionary component may be said to be much weaker than within the British tradition. However, as already suggested, it is also not possible to identify mainstream American conservatives simply with the defence of a rationalist liberalism. As will be shown in later chapters, although many are prepared to accept the Enlightenment-derived foundations of their society, at the same time it is typical for American conservatives to argue that it is a pragmatic and sceptical, rather than utopian, variety of Enlightenment thinking which informs their doctrines.

One of the more difficult strands of post-war American conservatism to place within the conservative spectrum is neoconservatism, although also one of the most clearly intellectual.⁶² Notable figures include Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell and Norman Podhoretz, whilst an array of journals may be identified with a neoconservative standpoint: *Commentary*, the *Public Interest* (focusing especially upon public policy issues), the *National Interest* (foreign affairs) and the *New Criterion* (culture and the arts). The difficulty in placing neoconservatism derives from the fact that most originally regarded themselves as liberals, who became disaffected with the 'leftward' turn taken by liberalism in the 1960s. Reacting to what they saw as the overextension of the state's role by the Great Society programmes of the era, together with the growing influence of a managerial 'New Class', neoconservatives nonetheless continued to see themselves as defenders of the New Deal settlement of the 1930s and thus (qualified) supporters of the welfare state. Importantly, nor have neoconservatives been advocates of laissez-faire or the untrammelled marketplace.

For these reasons, neoconservatism might be considered a relatively 'moderate' strand of conservative thought – as S. M. Lipset conjectures in attempting to find parallels with British conservatism, in the 1980s neoconservatives may have been closer ideologically to Tory 'wets' than Thatcherites, at least in terms of their attitude to the

⁶² As well as the subject of most intellectual analysis: for example, A. Etzioni (1977) 'The Neoconservatives', *Partisan Review*; N. Ashford (1981) 'The Neo-Conservatives', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 16, No. 3; P. Steinfels (1980) *The Neoconservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster); S. M. Lipset (1988) 'Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality', *Society*, Vol. 25, No. 5; J. Ehrman (1994) *The Rise of Neoconservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press); M. Gerson (1996) *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books).

welfare state.⁶³ However, on two other issues neoconservatives have been far more combative: opposing the forces of the counterculture and fighting communism (which Lipset does note). Indeed, in both arenas neoconservatives have been at the forefront of ideological battle, resolutely defending traditional moral and social values against enemies within, and liberal democracy from what was seen as the mortal danger posed by the enemy without. The peculiar character of neoconservatism is perhaps best indicated by Bell's contention that he is a conservative with respect to culture, a socialist with respect to the economy and a liberal in politics.⁶⁴ Although it would be difficult to apply this formula to all neoconservatives, it nonetheless gives a sense of the ambiguities involved in locating neoconservatism within the conservative camp.

However, the failure of definitions to capture the essence of historically evolving ideologies is well shown by the case of neoconservatism, in that it is arguable that the distinction between neoconservatism and other forms of conservatism no longer holds much meaning. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, there is little remaining attachment either to the welfare state or political liberalism amongst neoconservatives to continue to warrant the 'neo-' prefix. Equally, the demise of communism and the attention presently paid by all varieties of conservative to cultural issues also make neoconservatism a far less distinctive perspective. This is a fact recognized by many neoconservatives themselves. For example, according to Podhoretz, neoconservatism has now 'merged into the general conservative movement'.⁶⁵ A similar view is shared by Irving Kristol.⁶⁶ Moreover, a younger generation that has inherited the neoconservative label, typified by writers for the William Kristol edited *Weekly Standard*, display few differences to other mainstream American conservatives.

As mentioned above, within British conservatism a further perspective is of those conservatives who during the 1980s became labelled 'wets' (in contrast to Thatcherite 'dries'). More generally classifiable as One Nation conservatives, key exponents of this

⁶³ Lipset (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁶⁴ Cited in Peele (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Interview with N. Podhoretz, 11 September 1998. See also N. Podhoretz (1996) 'Neoconservatism: A Eulogy', *Commentary*, Vol. 101, No. 3.

⁶⁶ I. Kristol (1995) *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Free Press), pp. 37-8.

outlook have been Harold Macmillan and Ian Gilmour.⁶⁷ Like the British traditionalists already considered, such conservatives are typically more concerned with the moral and cultural fabric of society than with economics, yet are far less confrontational and more accommodating towards key aspects of modern society and politics. Indeed, they are most noted within contemporary British politics for distancing themselves from the combative ideological stances of the New Right. One Nation conservatives thus display less hostility – even qualified enthusiasm for – the welfare state and mass democratic politics. Within this strand, one important element is an aristocratic/paternalistic component, informed by a modern sense of *noblesse oblige* towards the welfare of the ‘lower orders’. Such a perspective is undoubtedly largely lacking in the American context, though it may be possible to identify some element of ‘old money’ paternalism within American conservatism.⁶⁸

Compounding the problems of classification further is the fact that a number of streams of conservative thought are based upon highly distinctive positions. This is particularly so in the case of intellectual figures such as Strauss and Oakeshott, together with their respective disciples. For example, whilst Oakeshott may be a firm believer in the value of tradition, not a few commentators have been struck by the affinity of his arguments with liberal principles – in terms of his preference for a non-instrumental conception of civil association – which may thus distinguish them from those of more illiberal traditionalist conservatives (even if similarly distinguishable from those of ‘rationalist’ liberals).⁶⁹ Indeed, Oakeshott’s philosophy may even be described as libertarian. The influence of Oakeshott is certainly strong amongst British conservatives, such as Letwin and Kenneth Minogue, yet their arguments do not therefore fit easily into a libertarian/traditionalist system of categorization.

In terms of American conservatism, Dunn and Woodard suggest that ‘classical conservatives’ (such as Strauss and Eric Voegelin) be considered to constitute a distinct strand of conservative thought, those who seek a return to the concerns of

⁶⁷ See I. Gilmour (1978) *Inside Right* (London: Quartet); I. Gilmour (1992) *Dancing with Dogma: Britain under Thatcherism* (London: Simon and Schuster).

⁶⁸ As does N. C. Rae (1994) ‘Moderates Lost and Found: Centrists in the Conservative and Republican Parties’, in Adonis and Hames, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁶⁹ See J. Gray (1993a) *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (London: Routledge), pp. 40-6.

classical philosophy.⁷⁰ The difficulty of placing such thinkers is well shown by the case of Strauss. Thus, like many traditionalist conservatives, Strauss exhibits a manifestly anti-modern and anti-individualist outlook; yet his emphasis upon the value of reason, the universality of natural law, and his preference for specifically ancient conceptions of politics and society is far more distinctive.⁷¹ Moreover, one commonality that may be identified between Oakeshott and Strauss – even if there are not many – is that both thinkers are concerned essentially with the nature of philosophy⁷²; thus the translation of their perspectives into political ideologies is not necessarily a wholly comfortable proposition. Nonetheless, Straussians such as Allan Bloom, Harvey Mansfield and Thomas Pangle are significant voices within contemporary conservative ideology, especially in relation to such issues as cultural and moral relativism.

Turning to the question of the free market's proponents, opinion divides sharply over whether or not their philosophy should be considered a part of, or at least reconcilable with, conservatism. As seen, Hayek rejected the conservative label (preferring his philosophy to be seen as that of an 'Old Whig'⁷³), although his basis for doing so – viewing conservatism as a form of unprincipled pragmatism – has already been shown to be flawed. However, a number of contemporary proponents of market liberalism also disavow any connection with conservatism. For example, Edward Crane and David Boaz (President and Vice President of the Cato Institute) argue that it is a doctrine too resistant towards change to fit with their libertarian agendas.⁷⁴ Similarly, Pirie also argues that he is not a conservative, describing himself rather as a supporter of free markets.⁷⁵

Of course, the belief that economic liberalism is unconnected to conservatism is also frequently shared by critics. For example, John Gray believes free market liberalism to

⁷⁰ Dunn and Woodard (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9. Ray Nichols also believes such thinkers may be considered to form a particular strand, which he labels 'neoclassic metaphysics' – Nichols (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁷¹ See L. Strauss (1953) *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁷² See Oakeshott (1962), *op. cit.*; L. Strauss (1959) *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press).

⁷³ Hayek (1976), *op. cit.*, p. 407.

⁷⁴ D. Boaz and E. H. Crane (eds) (1993) *Market Liberalism* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute), p. 8.

⁷⁵ Interview with M. Pirie, 19 June 1998.

be alien to 'real' conservatism, since it is incompatible with the latter's concern for the values of community and continuity.⁷⁶ Indeed, many traditionalist conservatives believe the same. Thus John Vinson wishes to deny libertarians the conservative label on the basis that they are 'more concerned with cash than character, possessions than posterity'.⁷⁷

However, at least some supporters of free markets argue that a commitment to individual liberty and liberal economics are compatible with traditional conservative concerns. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is the typical position of conservative politicians who advocate free market agendas. For example, David Willetts argues that the needs of free markets and communities in fact exist in harmony.⁷⁸ Yet it is not solely politicians who believe this. For example, Murray – who sees himself as a conservative libertarian – argues that: 'My brand of libertarianism is very respectful of Edmund Burke and I think that a libertarian society is only going to function if in fact there are a great many very strong conservative institutions in place.'⁷⁹

One problem with excluding conservative exponents of classical liberal ideas – a tradition including conservatives from Lord Hugh Cecil to Keith Joseph – is that it would require a substantial reassessment of the place of numerous key figures within conservatism's history. Indeed, a strong affinity with classical liberalism is apparent from conservatism's modern beginnings: thus, as Nisbet notes, there was no serious difference between Burke and Adam Smith in their assessment of the correct role of government and laissez-faire economics.⁸⁰ Moreover, it would be especially difficult to consider American conservatism distinct from the classical liberal tradition. As one writer suggests, Hayek's version of free market liberalism was 'the bedrock on which the generation of American conservatives who came of age after 1945 built a political

⁷⁶ J. Gray (1993b) *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment* (London: Routledge), p. 102. See also J. Gray (1995) *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge), ch. 7.

⁷⁷ J. C. Vinson, Jr. (1996) 'Conservatives and Environmentalists', *Chronicles*, Vol. 20, No. 6, p. 30.

⁷⁸ D. Willetts (1992) *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), pp. 79-91.

⁷⁹ Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998. See also C. Murray (1997) *What It Means to Be a Libertarian* (New York: Broadway Books), pp. xii-xiii.

⁸⁰ Nisbet (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 37. This is a point noted by many conservatives – see also Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

movement'.⁸¹ If this argument may in some respects be an exaggeration, it nonetheless testifies to the significance of free market ideas to American conservatives.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify a principled basis upon which market liberalism may legitimately be considered within the boundaries of conservative ideology. One argument for this legitimacy is suggested by Daniel Finkelstein (Head of Research at Conservative Central Office), who defends conservatives' adoption of neo-classical economics on the grounds that 'from the conservative point of view there's always an attraction in classical, neo- or not'.⁸² Of course, few conservatives have upon this basis been attracted to classical Marxism. However, a more compelling argument can be developed.

In fact, probably the most persuasive argument for believing there to be a particular affinity between market liberalism and conservatism is provided by Gray's reading of Hayek (prior, of course, to Gray's more recent rejection of neo-liberalism). The important element in Gray's account is his insistence on the need to focus upon the epistemological foundations of Hayek's arguments. In particular, Hayek's belief that the major part of human knowledge is tacit in nature – knowledge of which the subject is not explicitly aware – underpins his faith in the superiority of unconscious market processes over state planning.⁸³ Thus Hayek's standpoint may be understood as premised upon a similar view of the limited nature of human capacities to that of a sceptical conservatism.

Moreover, Gray emphasizes the importance in Hayek's philosophy of the notion that human individuality owes its existence to 'a cultural matrix of traditional practices', leading him to side Hayek with Oakeshott in recognizing the compatibility of libertarian individualism and cultural traditionalism.⁸⁴ Most significantly, and in contrast to Gray's latter interpretations, what will be documented in subsequent chapters is how beliefs in the social constitution of individuality and the importance of tradition and communal bonds are in fact widespread amongst contemporary free market thinkers. Thus,

⁸¹ D. Glasner (1992) 'Hayek and the Conservatives', *Commentary*, Vol. 94, No. 4, p. 49.

⁸² Interview with D. Finkelstein, 5 June 1998.

⁸³ J. Gray (1984) *Hayek on Liberty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), pp. 14-15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30. See also Gray (1993a), *op. cit.*, pp. 32-9.

whether or not they accept the conservative label, 'conservative' concerns clearly inform their arguments.

Even so, this is not to suggest that significant tensions do not exist between market liberals and (other) conservatives, the former evidently attaching a greater priority to economic questions and the importance of individual liberty. Equally, there are significant differences between economic liberals themselves. For example, at one end of the spectrum are libertarians who believe in the dissolution of all state activity, whilst at the other are those who wish simply for its role to be circumscribed, seeking limited government rather than the end to all government. Both of these sets of differences will thus need to be accounted for in the following chapters.

Understanding Conservatism After the Cold War

The remainder of this chapter is to focus upon the historical background against which contemporary conservatism operates, and the influence of this context upon the orientation of conservative ideology. A useful place to begin is with the secondary literature on post-Cold War conservatism.

Review of the Existing Literature

Undoubtedly, more attention has been paid to British and American conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s than of any other period, with a wealth of literature analysing both the ideology of the New Right and the policies of the Thatcher and Reagan governments.⁸⁵ By comparison, relatively little in-depth analysis of subsequent

⁸⁵ As well as those already noted see N. Barry (1987) *The New Right* (London: Croom Helm); D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon (eds) (1989) *The Thatcher Effect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); S. Blumenthal (1986) *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* (New York: Harper and Row); G. Hodgson (1996) *The*

developments within conservative ideology – as distinct from conservative politics – has been undertaken. In fact, it may be argued that no fully satisfactory study of post-Cold War conservatism has yet been produced. In terms of the secondary analyses that do exist, whilst many present valuable insights, most suffer from significant limitations. To understand these, it will be useful to consider six categories of secondary writings:

First, a number of general studies of conservative thought written or updated in the 1990s pay some attention to contemporary developments. However, typically this is within a concluding chapter rather than throughout the study. For example, this is the case with Nash.⁸⁶ A major limitation of such works therefore is that the contemporary material is discussed outside the main framework of analysis, in far more general and speculative terms, with issues sketched out rather than examined in detail. Perhaps the most illuminating of such texts is that of Aughey *et al.*, who consider conservative conceptions of civil society and identity in light of the end of the Cold War and Francis Fukuyama's End of History thesis.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, discussion is brief and concerned more with highlighting issues than considering their implications in any depth.

Second, there are a number of book-length studies written by American conservatives which do engage more substantially with contemporary developments.⁸⁸ However, one problem with these is that whilst often strong descriptively – providing useful maps of key figures and institutions within present-day conservatism – they are much weaker in their discussions of ideas. Even more problematic is the fact that they are frequently more concerned with infighting (for reasons to be discussed below) than objective analysis. For example, paleoconservative Paul Gottfried devotes one chapter of his study to documenting the various conflicts recently fought between conservatives, and another to exposing the supposed partisanship of neoconservative think-tanks and foundations.

Third, another variety of more detailed study is that written by conservatism's critics. Most notable examples are by Gray on British conservatism and Michael Lind on

World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company).

⁸⁶ Nash (1996), *op. cit.*, Epilogue. See also Dunn and Woodard (1996), *op. cit.*, ch. 7.

⁸⁷ Aughey *et al.* (1992), *op. cit.*, ch. 8.

American, though both writers are themselves former conservatives (Lind having been an executive editor of the *National Interest*, Gray an exponent of a classical liberal philosophy and subsequently a traditionalist conservatism).⁸⁹ However, whilst the intimate knowledge of their subjects both thus possess is of great value in their writings, these are also very much coloured by concerns to denounce one-time intellectual allies. For example, Lind emphasizes throughout his analysis his contention that intellectual conservatives have succumbed to the 'extremist' ideological demands of the Religious Right on moral and cultural questions, which frequently precludes any more subtle analysis of the dilemmas and ambiguities relating to conservatives' engagements with these issues. In Gray's case, the subtlety apparent within his reflections upon the relationship between the 'liberal' and 'conservative' elements within Hayek's thought is often lost in the vituperativeness of his attacks upon more recent proponents of free market ideologies, whose positions are at times reduced to caricature.⁹⁰ Even so, it is interesting to note that critics not formerly associated with conservatism have displayed far less interest in studying the ideology since the New Right era.

Fourth, although book-length treatments are noticeable largely by their absence within the academic literature, a number of useful articles devoted to particular aspects of contemporary conservative thought are to be found.⁹¹ Of course, in that such articles focus upon specific facets of conservative thought, they do not necessarily present wholly rounded or contextualized pictures.

Fifth, there are also journalistic articles.⁹² As well as engaging with the most up-to-

⁸⁸ For example, Gottfried (1993), *op. cit.*; D. Frum (1994) *Dead Right* (New York: Basic Books).

⁸⁹ M. Lind (1996) *Up from Conservatism* (New York: Free Press). Gray (1993b), *op. cit.*, especially ch. 4; Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, especially ch. 7.

⁹⁰ This is particularly evident in works such as J. Gray (1998) *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books). See especially his view of American conservatives in ch. 5, who are portrayed as little more than cheerleaders for global capitalism.

⁹¹ Amongst the most interesting are P. Ireland (1995) 'Reflections on a Rampage Through the Barriers of Shame: Law, Community and the New Conservatism', *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2; N. Barry (1997) 'Conservative Thought and the Welfare State', *Political Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2.

⁹² On British conservatism see, for example, K. Milne (1994) 'Community: The Tories Fight Back', *New Statesman*, 22 July; C. Leadbeater (1996) 'Seven Blue Moods', *New Statesman*, 4 October. On American conservatism see P. Starobin (1995) 'Right Fight', *National Journal*, 9 December; P. Starr (1996) 'Restoration Fever', *American Prospect*, No. 25.

date developments, some at least offer relatively rounded depictions of contemporary conservatism. Their obvious limitation is, inevitably, a lack of depth. Nonetheless, a number of pieces of journalism prove to be more valuable sources of insights than an academic literature in which understandings of conservatism often appear not to have progressed from New Right analyses.

Sixth, studies of contemporary conservative politics do possess some worth for an examination of conservative ideology.⁹³ Although such works are obviously more concerned with policy issues than ideas, in that substantial areas of cross-over exist between conservative politics and conservative thought, there is clearly value in considering them. However, it remains true that the arguments of conservative thinkers are not generally considered within such studies, although some coverage of think-tanks is typical.

Context and Hypotheses

It is left next to consider the actual circumstances of contemporary conservative ideology. On the surface, the suggestion raised in the introduction – that conservatism may be exhausted as an ideology – may seem a surprising one. Indeed, at the beginning of the 1990s a propitious set of circumstances appeared to exist for the flourishing of a confident conservative ideology. History seemed to be on conservatives' side: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the defeats suffered by labour movements and left-wing parties throughout the West, together with the discrediting of many of the Left's most cherished ideals – such as centralized planning and the nationalization of industries – all appeared to indicate that the 1990s would be a decade in which conservatism would be at its most triumphant. In fact, as suggested most explicitly by Fukuyama, the disappearance of the only seeming alternative to Western capitalism could be read as having brought to a close the history of ideological conflict

⁹³ For example, D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon (eds) (1994) *The Major Effect* (London: Macmillan); S. Ludlam and M. J. Smith (eds) (1996) *Contemporary British Conservatism* (London: Macmillan).

itself.⁹⁴

At the decade's start therefore, triumphalism was loudly trumpeted by many conservatives. For example, Podhoretz felt able to assert that 'unreconstructed hard-line anti-communist cold warriors' like himself had been proved by communism's demise 'right about everything, wrong about nothing'.⁹⁵ Following from over a decade of setting the domestic political and intellectual agenda as well, conservatives might justifiably feel a certain sense of self-satisfaction. Thus Edwin Feulner (President of the Heritage Foundation) claims that 'Nowadays Conservatism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition in America.'⁹⁶

However, what is less immediately understandable is that a sense of disillusionment and uncertainty has also proven at least as common amongst conservatives. For example, a distinct mood of pessimism was identified by Minogue at a conference of British and American anti-communist intellectuals meeting in Berlin in 1992, including American conservatives Podhoretz, Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb, and British conservatives Worsthorpe and Ferdinand Mount. Despite the meeting's celebratory intent – the aim being to 'enjoy some of the pleasures of triumph' – Minogue testifies that instead 'a sense of gloom [was] more real among the participants than any sense of triumph', with speaker after speaker simply identifying new threats to Western society to replace the one just vanquished, ranging from anti-Western hatred to political correctness.⁹⁷ In other words, conservatives may not be wholly comfortable with the world they have won.

This sense of malaise amongst conservatives has been observed by a number of writers.⁹⁸ What is interesting to note is how little enthusiasm has been mustered for the

⁹⁴ F. Fukuyama (1989) 'The End of History', *National Interest*, No. 16; F. Fukuyama (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press).

⁹⁵ N. Podhoretz (1990) 'Right About Everything, Wrong About Nothing?', *Encounter*, Vol. 75, No. 1, p. 9. A less strident celebration of the victory of Cold War anti-communism can be found in K. Minogue (1990) 'Societies Collapse, Faith Lingers on', *Encounter*, Vol. 74, No. 2.

⁹⁶ E. Feulner (1998) *The March of Freedom* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company), p. ix.

⁹⁷ K. Minogue (1992/93) 'Uneasy Triumph', *National Interest*, No. 30, pp. 81, 83.

⁹⁸ For example, M. Steyn (1997) 'With Newt and the Lady', *Spectator*, 4 October and M. Scully (1997) 'The New Malaise?', *National Review*, 27 October both identify a similar air of malaise and uncertainty amongst British and American conservatives attending the First International Conservative Congress held in Washington, D. C. See also C. R. Kesler (1998) 'Statesmanship for

notion that history has reached a harmonious end-state, Fukuyama's thesis in particular seeming to have found few friends. That is, few appear to have embraced the optimistic belief that humanity's greatest struggles have been consigned to the past. Whilst this might have been expected from Fukuyama's radical opponents, it may seem more surprising in the case of conservatives. Thus conservative reviewers of Fukuyama also typically emphasize that there are many problems still besetting Western societies, such as crime and social disorder.⁹⁹

Moreover, it is by no means certain that conservatives have achieved any form of intellectual predominance. Indeed, a number of writers have suggested precisely the opposite, that the strength of conservative ideology has in fact diminished: thus Paddy Ireland argues that 'the intellectual hegemony of the once all-powerful "New Right" has receded', whilst Lind, more forthrightly, believes that American intellectual conservatism is 'dead'.¹⁰⁰ Even conservatives themselves may not believe that they have won any straightforward ideological victory. For example, Willetts opines that: 'Despite all the advances we have made since 1979, the collapse of the socialist left has not given Conservatives the intellectual dominance we deserve.'¹⁰¹

What then accounts for this situation? One possibility is that, just as socialism may have been proven to be an anachronism in the post-Cold War world, so too may conservatism.¹⁰² Although concurrence with Fukuyama's thesis may be rare, a view more widely endorsed is that all traditional ideologies have been rendered obsolete by the conclusion of the Cold War conflict. For example, Geoff Mulgan, writing at the

America's Future: The Value of Conservatism', *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 64, No. 20 for another account of contemporary conservatives' sense of disquiet.

⁹⁹ See I. Crowther (1990) 'Is Nothing Sacred?', *Salisbury Review*, December; K. Minogue (1991/92) 'Review of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*', *National Interest*, No. 26; P. Johnson (1992) 'Review of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*', *Commentary*, Vol. 93, No. 3. Of course, Fukuyama's thesis was not the unqualified celebration of liberal capitalism's triumph it is often taken to be. Even so, his subsequent writings have displayed a noticeably less optimistic view of history's end-state, highlighting the moral and cultural problems not addressed by the triumph of market forces – for example, F. Fukuyama (1995) *Trust* (New York: Free Press).

¹⁰⁰ Ireland (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 189; Lind (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 1 (see also M. Lind (1995) 'Why Intellectual Conservatism Died', *Dissent*, Vol. 42, No. 1).

¹⁰¹ D. Willetts (1996) 'The Free Market and Civic Conservatism', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), p. 82.

¹⁰² This is suggested by Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 118 and T. Hames (2000) 'Would the Real Tory Party Please Stand Up?', *Times*, 6 September.

beginning of the 1990s, contends that: 'The end of the cold war does not seem likely to bring a simple victory of capitalism over socialism, of market over state. Rather, both look set to be pulled into the same ideological vortex.'¹⁰³

A number of reasons may be given for believing this. One suggested by Mulgan is the inadequacy of both free market and socialist visions in dealing with environmental concerns, whilst others often pointed to are the inability of conventional ideologies to cope with such trends as increasing social diversity, post-materialism or the realities of globalization. In relation to such developments, ideologies of the Right may be deemed as deficient in the post-socialist world as those of the Left. In this vein, Christopher Lasch thus argues that both left and right -wing ideologies 'have exhausted their capacity either to explain events or inspire men and women to constructive action'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the very labels of Left and Right may be regarded as having lost their significance.

To proceed further, it will be useful to consider five particular hypotheses relating to the idea of conservative disorientation (not all of which may be mutually compatible). Whilst the aim of the thesis is not straightforwardly either to prove or disprove these contentions, establishing a set of specific propositions will provide a clear framework within which the discussions of subsequent chapters can be understood:

- 1) Conservatives no longer possess any significant defining purpose, either enemies to fight or 'big ideas' to promote.
- 2) Despite the absence of viable alternatives to capitalism, free market liberalism appears bankrupt.
- 3) The main focus of conservatives' concerns has shifted away from economics and politics to more pessimistic ones around culture and morality.
- 4) Despite a social and intellectual climate hostile to 'radicalism', traditionalist

¹⁰³ G. Mulgan (1990) 'The Price Is Right: Review of Arthur Seldon's *Capitalism*', *Marxism Today*, August, pp. 44-5.

¹⁰⁴ C. Lasch (1991) *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton), p. 21. See also E. Hobsbawm (1992) 'The Crisis of Today's Ideologies', *New Left Review*, No. 184; A. Giddens (1994) *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

conservative doctrines lack purchase.

- 5) Contemporary conservatism is characterized by an increasing factiousness and disunity.

1) Conservatives no longer possess any significant defining purpose, either enemies to fight or 'big ideas' to promote.

One major argument for regarding conservatism as obsolete is that its historic mission, combating the hubris of progressive ideologies, has concluded. Thus the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the coincident demise of left-wing parties and ideologies within Western societies – thanks in part to conservatives' own efforts – may be argued to have robbed conservatives of the foci around which an ideology could cohere. Certainly, if conservatism is to be understood as a reactive ideology, the disappearance of its historic opponents would seem clearly to have deprived it of any strong *raison d'être*.

In relation to American conservatism, the case for seeing the Cold War conflict as central to its past orientation is not difficult to make. Indeed, the very creation of the post-war conservative movement in America would be hard to understand outside of the context of this struggle.¹⁰⁵ However, its centrality to British conservatism is perhaps less obvious, and thus the Cold War's conclusion may seem to possess far less significance. For example, Cowling argues that since anti-communism was of much lesser importance in Britain than America, 'I don't see that the ending of the Cold War ... made very much difference to English politics.'¹⁰⁶

It is necessary therefore to examine in more detail the Cold War's significance for conservatives. In its most narrow sense, the conflict was about the threat posed to Western societies by the Soviet Union. Whilst the threat to Western security was

¹⁰⁵ See Nash (1996), *op. cit.*, ch. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with M. Cowling, 18 May 1998.

undoubtedly a fear most prominent within American conservatism, it was far from unimportant to British conservatives. For example, Worsthorne argues that ‘during the Cold War there can be no doubt that the most sensible party to have in power was the Conservative Party, which is a tough party and is prepared to fight when it goes to war’.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the resurgence of an assertive conservatism during the 1970s and 1980s may be linked to what was viewed as a revived danger of Soviet aggression.¹⁰⁸ Yet as Worsthorne therefore continues, whilst ‘the Cold War years suited the Conservative Party ... increasingly I think the zeitgeist of the future doesn’t’.¹⁰⁹

However, the Cold War conflict was also of much broader and deeper significance for conservatives. This is implicit, for example, in Novak’s argument that the end of the Cold War marked the conclusion of the ‘war of 1848-1989’.¹¹⁰ In other words, the conflict with Soviet communism should be seen as a stage within the longer struggle against socialism. Yet nor was the Cold War solely about the threat of revolutionary Marxism; rather, it was intimately connected to the conflict with all left-wing ideologies. As leading American anti-communist Whittaker Chambers asserted:

When I took up my little sling and aimed it at Communism, I also hit something else ... What I hit was the force of that great Socialist revolution which in the name of liberalism, spasmodically, incompletely, somewhat formlessly, but always in the same direction, has been inching its ice cap over the nation for two decades.¹¹¹

In other words, just as revolutionary socialism was conservatives’ Cold War foe, so too were collectivism and state planning even in more moderate ‘liberal’ (in the terminology of British politics, social democratic) forms.

Even more fundamentally, Gray argues that not only left-wing ideologies but all those imbued with Enlightenment aspirations to construct universal, rationalist doctrines

¹⁰⁷ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

¹⁰⁸ See Gamble (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

¹¹⁰ M. Novak (1997) *The Fire of Invention* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), p. 23.

¹¹¹ W. Chambers (1952) *Witness* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway), p. 741.

stand discredited in light of communism's failure, including rationalist forms of liberalism.¹¹² Although many of Gray's contentions are to be contested in this thesis, his understanding that the collapse of communism has much wider implications than is frequently recognized represents an important and valuable insight, and it is in such a way that the 'post-Cold War' paradigm utilized by this thesis is to be understood. In this sense therefore, the end of the Cold War may be viewed as representing as much a victory for counter-Enlightenment conservatives such as Burke as it was for more contemporary cold warriors. Yet if the aim of exposing the follies of all humanist ideologies has been achieved, then modern conservatism as it has existed since the Enlightenment may be argued to be redundant.

Amongst conservatives, many agree that the issues left to be fought in the post-Cold War world do not possess the same weight as those of the past. For example, Christopher DeMuth (President of the American Enterprise Institute) argues that whilst there are important problems with which to contend, 'these are not a fundamental threat to society in the way the Cold War was'.¹¹³

Moreover, the success of conservatives in advancing their agendas of economic freedom and limited government during the 1980s, as well as converting their opponents to these beliefs, may similarly be felt to have robbed them of distinctive agendas to pursue. Thus Stephen Dorrell argues that for conservatives after Thatcher it became 'much less obvious actually what the big issues were ... it was much less easy to create a single dominating purpose'.¹¹⁴

Of course, it is possible to regard a lack of substantial issues or conflicts in a positive light, whether or not history is believed to have reached its end. For example, Todd Lindberg argues that the fact that the era of conservative 'intellectual ferment' has been brought to a close should be viewed as a tribute to conservatism's success.¹¹⁵ Similarly, Douglas Hurd welcomes the fact that we are 'left with humdrum politics' in

¹¹² Gray (1993a), *op. cit.*, pp. 245-52.

¹¹³ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

¹¹⁴ Interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998.

¹¹⁵ Lindberg (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

the absence of mortal threats to society.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Owen Harries (editor of the *National Interest*) dismisses what he terms the 'enemy deprivation syndrome' of conservatives who bemoan the lack of opponents in the post-Cold War era.¹¹⁷

Nonetheless, if there are neither dragons to slay nor 'big ideas' to promote, the possibility that there is a vacuum at the heart of contemporary conservative ideology is regarded by others more uneasily.¹¹⁸ In fact, as will be seen in later chapters, threats to the integrity of Western society may still be identified by conservatives (political correctness being one already noted), as well as 'new' ideas forwarded. Even so, the questions remain of how significant or convincing contemporary threats are in comparison to socialism, and whether new agendas can provide conservatives with a distinctive purpose comparable to those of defeating communism or undoing the post-war consensus.

2) Despite the absence of viable alternatives to capitalism, free market liberalism appears bankrupt.

A further problem in the post-Cold War world, at least for economic liberals, is that the demise of socialism may not automatically have translated into enthusiasm for a free market philosophy. As Norman Barry argues, 'despite the collapse of communism, and the diminishing appeal of even a less repressive socialism, economic liberalism still holds little allure'.¹¹⁹ Indeed, it may even be argued that citizens of Western societies display less faith in the values of capitalism than ever before.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Interview with D. Hurd, 25 June 1998.

¹¹⁷ Interview with O. Harries, 9 September 1998.

¹¹⁸ For example, J. Patten (1995) *Things to Come* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), pp. 1-9; S. Letwin (1996) 'British Conservatism in the 1990s', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), p. 173; J. O'Sullivan (1997b) 'A Principality in Utopia: After Reaganism', *National Review*, 21 April, p. 16. See also P. Stephens (1993) 'The End of Ideas', *Financial Times*, 21 July.

¹¹⁹ N. Barry (1996) 'Economic Liberalism, Ethics and the Social Market', in J. Meadowcroft (ed.) *The Liberal Political Tradition* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 56.

¹²⁰ P. Saunders (1995) *Capitalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press), p. 120.

Certainly at the intellectual level, critics of free market liberalism are not hard to find. Probably the most important of these to consider is again Gray. Thus, Gray argues, if even rationalist varieties of liberalism have been discredited by communism's collapse, then the 'paleo-liberalism' of free market thinkers must also accept history's damning judgement.¹²¹ In fact – outside of conservatism – 'neo-liberalism is a dead ideology'.¹²²

Gray offers a number of reasons for believing neo-liberalism to be bankrupt: its failure to understand the importance of wider cultural values and institutions in the constitution of individual identity; its neglect of all forms of social relations other than those of the market; its inability to address moral concerns such as the needs of social justice; and its lack of concern for the destruction wrought by unfettered market forces upon the common environment, both natural and social.¹²³

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the type of criticisms Gray advances are common amongst critics, especially communitarians and environmentalists. For example, Lasch writes in similar vein to Gray, berating conservatives for failing to recognize the need to place limits upon their unceasing quest for progress and economic growth, to preserve traditional forms of life.¹²⁴ Of course, these types of criticism of the free market are hardly new. However, what is of particular interest in Gray's analysis is his argument that it is the specific conditions of the contemporary context that makes neo-liberalism redundant.

Thus during the 1970s and (early years of) the 1980s 'neo-liberalism was a compelling response to otherwise intractable dilemmas', that is, those created by the 'manifest failings' of corporatism.¹²⁵ However, now that the argument against socialism and state planning has been won, a 'new' debate within society has emerged, concerning the limitations of market institutions and the cultural underpinnings necessary to sustain them. Yet in this debate, 'neo-liberal thought has little to contribute'.

¹²¹ Gray (1993b), *op. cit.*

¹²² J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 76.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-8.

¹²⁴ Lasch (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 38-9.

¹²⁵ Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 87-8.

Whether or not market liberalism is regarded as ever having been a compelling ideology, it is common to find critics suggesting that its prescriptions are especially inappropriate in the post-Cold War context – as Mulgan describes it, the ‘kindlier, gentler 90s’.¹²⁶ In other words, now that it has defeated its enemies it is necessary for capitalism to display a much less harsh, more socially concerned face. As Gray’s notion of a new debate suggests, neo-liberalism does not offer the only model for Western societies even in the absence of socialist ones. Instead it is possible to argue that a new conflict has replaced the one between socialism and capitalism, which Michel Albert dubs ‘capitalism against capitalism’.¹²⁷ That is, between a model of capitalism of free, unfettered markets and a more regulated, socially concerned one. The uncontested dominance of free marketeers’ beliefs is thus far from assured.

Other arguments may also be posited for seeing neo-liberalism as unsuited to the conditions of the post-Cold War world. For example, Robert Kuttner suggests that rather than confirming the free market’s supremacy, the end of the Cold War instead portends the ‘end of laissez-faire’.¹²⁸ Without the certainties the era of bipolar conflict provided, Kuttner argues, the post-Cold War world has become a much more risky one, more unstable and unpredictable with the world fragmented into a multiplicity of competing nations and regions. Thus without the Cold War to provide stability, new regulatory mechanisms must be put in place to do so. Moreover, the hegemony once enjoyed by a free market ideology in the non-communist world was as much founded upon the exigencies of American leadership of the Cold War alliance as upon any economic rationale. For these reasons, the logic of laissez-faire actually makes less sense in the post-Cold War world.

Furthermore, as Noël O’Sullivan notes, one of the dangers for the New Right in breaking from the post-war consensus was that its case for neo-liberal economics was premised on the contention that free market capitalism could ‘deliver the goods’; in other words, offer a materially better life for Western populations.¹²⁹ Yet if free

¹²⁶ Mulgan (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹²⁷ M. Albert (1993) *Capitalism Against Capitalism* (London: Whurr).

¹²⁸ R. Kuttner (1991) *The End of Laissez-Faire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), pp. 3-11.

¹²⁹ N. O’Sullivan (1993) ‘Conservatism’, in Eatwell and Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

marketeers benefited in the 1970s from what Gray describes as the manifest failings of corporatism, they themselves have become prone to being judged upon the subsequent records of conservative governments. Thus a further important difference of the 1990s is that free market policies have been subjected to a long period of practical testing. As will be examined, the liberalizing records of British and American conservative governments provide far from certain testimony to the merits of a neo-liberal ideology.

Whilst many free market disciples continue to defend their ideology against challenges, it is nonetheless not only critics like Gray who may believe that neo-liberalism is, if not dead, at least severely enervated. Willetts, for example, argues that: 'One of the most significant intellectual events of recent years, which has passed largely unnoticed is the collapse of neo-liberalism as a significant intellectual force within this country.'¹³⁰ The issue to be focused upon in the following chapters therefore is how vital a neo-liberal ideology remains in light of the contemporary challenges it faces.

3) The main focus of conservatives' concerns has shifted away from economics and politics to more pessimistic ones around culture and morality.

As seen earlier, it would be a serious mistake to perceive all conservatives as unalloyed enthusiasts for free markets. Nonetheless, the reinvigoration of a market liberal philosophy was possibly the most important, and undoubtedly the most commented upon, aspect of the ideological resurgence of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet whether or not a free market ideology is bankrupt, a separate question relates to its continuing strength within conservatism.

On this, it is useful to contrast two different interpretations. According to Gray, despite neo-liberalism's evident failings conservatism since the ascendancy of the New Right has become all but entirely in its grip. Indeed: 'the hegemony within conservative thought and policy of neo-liberal ideology is so complete that there is now

¹³⁰ D. Willetts (1994) *Civic Conservatism* (London: Social Market Foundation), p. 26.

no historical possibility – political or intellectual – of a return to traditional conservatism’.¹³¹

Alternatively however, it is possible to argue that since the New Right’s heyday a retreat from a full-blooded free market ideology has occurred. For example, in support of his contention that neo-liberalism has collapsed, Willetts observes how ‘Its fountainhead, the Institute of Economic Affairs, is now producing works by ethical socialists in praise of the family and by anguished Catholic capitalists’ rather than bold free market programmes.¹³²

In fact, it may be suggested that a marked shift not only from economic concerns but even conventional political ones has taken place within conservative ideology. Andrew Sullivan, writing on contemporary American conservatism, identifies such a shift thus:

The dominant ideas that have emerged in the last few years bear only the faintest resemblance to the major themes of the 1980s: economic freedom, smaller government and personal choice. Although libertarians are certainly numbered among the intellectuals of the right of the late 1990s they are clearly on the defensive. What is galvanizing the right-wing intelligentsia at century’s end is a different kind of conservatism altogether: much less liberal, far less economic and only nominally skeptical of government power. It is inherently pessimistic – a return to older, conservative themes of cultural decline, moralism and the need for greater social control.¹³³

Objections to this argument are perhaps obvious. As William Kristol argues against Sullivan’s portrayal, ‘it’s a rewriting of history to claim that in the good old days [of the 1980s] conservatives were tolerant libertarians’, unconcerned with cultural and

¹³¹ Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. viii.

¹³² Willetts (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 26. Willetts’ reference is to such works as N. Dennis and G. Erdos (1992) *Families Without Fatherhood* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit) and M. Novak (1990) *Morality, Capitalism and Democracy* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

¹³³ A. Sullivan (1998) ‘Going Down Screaming’, *New York Times*, 11 October.

moral issues.¹³⁴ Indeed, a tension between free market and traditionalist conservative beliefs was one of the most salient features of the New Right.¹³⁵

However, if the moral and cultural themes Sullivan identifies are not new within modern conservatism, it is nonetheless possible to argue that they have acquired a much greater prominence following the disappearance of conservatives' other concerns. Especially amongst American conservatives, it is thus common to find these cited as the most important to address since the end of the Cold War conflict. For example, William Kristol himself argues that it is within the arena of morality that today 'the biggest things have to be fought'.¹³⁶

Whilst adopting a particular focus upon cultural issues is most evident within contemporary American conservatism, a similar shift may also be identified within British. For example, Digby Anderson (Director of the Social Affairs Unit) also perceives a general 'move away from the grand old themes of politics – the economy, defence, that sort of thing, to what you might call cultural issues'.¹³⁷ The concerns of the Social Affairs Unit's own output certainly provides plentiful examples of this move. Thus issues such as the environment, the role of the press and the content of women's magazines are, as Anderson argues, 'not exactly the old list – taxation, inflation, privatization and all the rest of it'.¹³⁸

One way to understand this shift is that, with conservatism an essentially reactive ideology, conservatives have simply followed their opponents on to the terrain of culture, themselves having largely abandoned conventional political and economic agendas in the wake of socialism's demise.¹³⁹ Whether or not this is so, the pessimism Sullivan argues characterizes conservatives' engagement with cultural themes – as will

¹³⁴ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

¹³⁵ See D. Edgar (1986) 'The Free Or the Good', in R. Levitas (ed.) *The Ideology of the New Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press); Gamble (1994), *op. cit.*

¹³⁶ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

¹³⁷ Interview with D. Anderson, 22 June 1998.

¹³⁸ For example, J. Le Fanu (1994) *Environmental Alarums* (London: Social Affairs Unit); K. Minogue (1997) *The Silencing of Society: The True Cost of the Lust for News* (London: Social Affairs Unit); D. Anderson and M. Mosbacher (eds) (1997) *The British Woman Today: A Qualitative Survey of the Images in Women's Magazines* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

¹³⁹ See, for example, G. Mulgan (ed.) (1997) *Life After Politics* (London: Fontana).

be seen, many do appear to believe in a notion of cultural decline – may also be suggestive of a lack of affinity for the social climate of the post-Cold War world. Equally, Sullivan’s linking of this shift to a defensiveness on the part of libertarians may indicate a sense of disillusionment with conservatives’ own past economic and political agendas.

4) Despite a social and intellectual climate hostile to ‘radicalism’, traditionalist conservative doctrines lack purchase.

If a market liberal ideology faces difficulties in relating to the post-Cold War world, there are reasons for supposing that a traditionalist conservatism might fare better and its doctrines find greater intellectual resonance. Thus, in order to check what Gray describes as ‘the permanent revolution of unfettered market processes’¹⁴⁰, many of the free market’s critics argue for the need to conserve. For example, Anthony Giddens adopts what appears to be a highly Burkean stance in arguing that ‘surely there comes a point at which endless change is not only unsettling but positively destructive’.¹⁴¹ Thus issues such as the breakdown of communities and the degradation of the environment might readily be thought to be problems to which a traditionalist conservatism can provide answers.

Yet whilst scepticism about ‘endless change’ may have become widespread, it is not necessarily the case that conservatives benefit, or that others wish to associate themselves with a conservative ideology.¹⁴² Rather, if the free market’s supporters are seen as too liberal (at least in their economics), traditionalist conservatives are seen as too absolutist. In particular, they are perceived as being unable to accommodate to such realities of the contemporary world as an increasing diversity of lifestyles and ethical beliefs.

¹⁴⁰ Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁴¹ Giddens (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

A useful concept to consider here is Giddens' notion of a 'post-traditional social order', which he uses to describe the contemporary context.¹⁴³ A post-traditional order is one in which tradition has not disappeared, but has nonetheless changed in character. Whereas in the past traditions were essentially closed – not open to question and imposed upon society to consolidate hierarchy and inequality – the reality of today's global, cosmopolitan world makes such closure far less tenable. That is, traditions must now be able to command the support of those who live within them, and be open to dialogical revision; in Giddens' terms, society has become more reflexive. Whilst Giddens thus urges progressives to adopt the latter conception, those who still hold to the former are condemned as 'fundamentalists'. The problem with many traditionalist conservatives' beliefs is that since their defences of tradition rely upon the unreflective preservation of the past implied in the former conception, their ideology must be considered an outdated form of dogmatic fundamentalism.¹⁴⁴

In other words, even to the extent that concepts such as tradition and conservation are no longer solely the preserve of conservatives, the particular nature of conservatives' conceptions may still make them appear obsolete. A further issue to be considered therefore is how well traditionalist conservatives can adapt to a seemingly 'conservative' climate nonetheless frequently hostile to their specific doctrines.

5) Contemporary conservatism is characterized by an increasing factiousness and disunity.

A final indicator of conservatives' travails may be an increase in tensions between strands of conservatism. Although conservatives have always had differences between them, in the past a relative unity and cohesion was maintained by the existence of

¹⁴² As Gray suggests, the principal agents of conservation today are likely to be those who 'think of themselves as being on the Left' – Gray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹⁴³ Giddens (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-9.

¹⁴⁴ In similar vein, Gray denounces Scruton as a cultural fundamentalist – Gray (1993a), *op. cit.*, p. 277.

shared enemies, providing a 'glue' to hold together the disparate elements of the ideology. Thus all varieties of conservative could agree that socialism presented a malignant threat to Western societies, whether this was seen primarily in terms of economics, security or tradition. If the marriage of the various strands of conservatism may in many ways have been one more of convenience than complete compatibility, the conflict with socialism nonetheless provided conservatives with a clear unifying purpose.

The end of the Cold War may therefore be responsible for exposing and exacerbating tensions between conservatives. This is especially apparent amongst American conservatives, perhaps because of their belief that conservatism constitutes a movement. Indeed, a number of commentators refer to a so-called 'conservative crack-up' in relation to the American conservative movement, perceiving it to have dissolved into its constituent factions.¹⁴⁵ Conservatives themselves may also acknowledge this development. For example, Podhoretz argues that the 'end of the Cold War has opened up various splits that were papered over' by the existence of a common enemy.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, Feulner believes that 'when you had communism you had something to pull us together, now it's harder to find those things'.¹⁴⁷

One conflict already noted is that between paleo- and neo- conservatives. A further that may be identified is between neoconservatives and what one observer labels 'theo-conservatives', a stridently religious faction within American intellectual conservatism (associated especially with the journal *First Things*).¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the familiar tension between free market and traditionalist conservatives may be argued to have increased in intensity. For example, David Frum believes that: 'The relationship between libertarians and conservatives, never easy, has deteriorated markedly over the

¹⁴⁵ J. B. Judis has written a number of articles on this theme: J. B. Judis (1990) 'The Conservative Crackup', *American Prospect*, No. 3; J. B. Judis (1992) 'The End of Conservatism', *New Republic*, 31 August; J. B. Judis (1996a) 'White Squall', *New Republic*, 11 March; J. B. Judis (1996b) 'The Republican Splintering', *New Republic*, 19/26 August. See also R. E. Tyrrell (1992) *The Conservative Crack-Up* (New York: Simon and Schuster); *Weekly Standard* (1997) 'Symposium: Is There a Worldwide Conservative Crack-Up?', 1 September.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with N. Podhoretz, 11 September 1998.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998.

¹⁴⁸ J. Heilbrunn (1996) 'Neocon v. Theocon', *New Republic*, 30 December.

past few years.’¹⁴⁹

An important issue to address throughout the thesis therefore is the relationship between strands of conservatism. As will be seen, finding newer sources of unity may prove much more difficult in the present context, since whereas most conservatives could agree on how socialism should be regarded, it is much less obvious how other ideologies should be viewed. For example, whereas many conservatives treat doctrines such as postmodernism and environmentalism with revulsion, others are keener to recognize the affinities they may have with conservatism. As a result, the potential for ‘papering over’ tensions may be much less.

The following chapters will thus seek to explore the major themes of contemporary conservatism in relation to these hypotheses. In terms of the issues discussed, a degree of selectivity is inevitably employed. Partly this is dictated by limitations of space, but it is also based upon the objective of identifying the features most distinctive to post-Cold War conservatism. For this reason, only passing consideration is therefore given to a number of issues traditionally considered in relation to conservatism, to allow room to focus upon the most contemporary. For example, conservatives’ views of race and immigration are only touched upon in the terms in which these issues are conventionally addressed, to allow instead discussion of such issues as multiculturalism and identity politics.

In terms of structure, the rest of the thesis is divided into two parts. Part I will consider how the key traditional elements and themes of conservative ideology relate to the circumstances of the post-Cold War world, whilst Part II will examine in detail its responses to a number of specific contemporary challenges. The purpose of this division is to facilitate a reflection upon the status of the ideas traditionally central to conservatism, together with an assessment of conservatives’ abilities to engage with contemporary ideological developments. However, the aim throughout is to reflect upon the issues raised in this introductory chapter.

¹⁴⁹ D. Frum (1997) ‘The Libertarian Temptation’, *Weekly Standard*, 21 April, p. 20.

PART I:

The Conservative Tradition

Chapter 2

The State and Liberty

The purpose of this chapter is to explore conservatives' attitudes towards the role of the state and the corollary priority accorded to individual freedom. Since the intention is not merely to re-rehearse well-worn debates – the general terrain of conservative theories of the state having been amply mapped out elsewhere – the main focus will be upon those aspects most pertinent to understanding conservatism in the post-Cold War era. Specifically, the relevant background to conservatives' contemporary understandings will be argued to be four-fold: first, the seeming triumph of a global free market ideology following the defeat of communism; second, the legacy of British and American conservative governments' attempts to pursue avowedly anti-statist agendas; third, the emergence of new 'post-socialist' regulatory politics and policies of the Left; and fourth, a perceived growth of moral and cultural malaise.

However, whilst particular attention is to be paid to the most distinctive features of contemporary conservative writings this is not of course to suggest that many of the themes to be found in them are not familiar ones. For this reason, it is worth beginning with a general overview of conservative understandings as a starting point for determining what is specific to current arguments.

Background and Perspectives

Perhaps the most prevalent misperception of conservatism, certainly since the New Right era, is to perceive all varieties of conservative as sharing a common individualist and anti-statist perspective. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, conservatism does not constitute a homogenous ideology and nor therefore is there a single conservative

perspective on either the state or liberty. In terms of the common division drawn between varieties of conservative thought noted in the previous chapter, probably the most typical drawn between theories of the state is between a liberal antagonism – with a premium placed upon the role of rational, free choosing individuals – and a contrasting traditionalist preference for bolstering authority and prioritizing communal values and institutions.¹

The former perspective is in particular associated with specifically economic doctrines, proponents of which proffer a range of arguments as to why state activity should be rolled back: that state planning is far less responsive than the discovery mechanisms of the market to ever changing demand; that the state protects outmoded industries and practices which the market subjects to discipline; that state spending ‘crowds out’ private investment; and that the state distorts prices and the labour market through regulation, subsidy and the provision of welfare support. Only when individuals – both capitalists and workers – are allowed to make decisions freely will efficiency and wealth generation be maximized. The conception of liberty advocated is thus of the ‘negative’ variety, defined in terms of a freedom from restraints upon individual action.

Traditionalist conservatives typically present very different understandings. For example, both Roger Scruton and Robert Nisbet emphasize the promotion of authority as a central component of conservative philosophy, with any concern for freedom very much subordinate to this priority.² The reason for this is that, if economic liberals take a relatively positive view of the individual, such conservatives possess much more sceptical attitudes towards human nature. Strong sources of authority are therefore necessary to reign in man’s destructive passions. The implications this has for the relationship of the state to the individual is suggested by Scruton: ‘It is the absolute duty of the state to have power over its subjects ... The state has the authority, the responsibility, and the despotism of parenthood.’³

¹ For example, M. Hayes (1994) *The New Right in Britain* (London: Pluto Press), pp. 5-11, 34-8.

² R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), pp. 27-45; R. Nisbet (1986) *Conservatism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), pp. 34-41.

³ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Clearly therefore, quite different prescriptions are likely to be forwarded upon the bases of these perspectives. For example, Peregrine Worsthorne – writing on the cusp of the Thatcherite ‘revolution’ – offers an opposite diagnosis of the ills of corporatism to that of the free market’s disciples, viewing the problems of contemporary society as resulting not from too little but ‘too much freedom’.⁴ Thus, he argues, what is required is ‘not so much a splendid libertarian crusade as an ugly battle to restore some minimum of social order’.⁵ Moreover, pessimism as regards the intellectual and moral capacities of individuals frequently leads such conservatives to distrust democracy and conclude that some form of elite is best entrusted with authority. Thus Worsthorne, for example, argues for the preservation of a natural ruling class to maintain a well-ordered society.

However, a number of qualifications to the above picture need to be noted. First of course, conservative opinion is not so neatly divisible into two camps. For example, both American neoconservatives and British One Nation conservatives hold more benevolent views of the growth of the modern state not solely from a belief in upholding authority, but for its role as economic regulator and provider of welfare support. Such conservatives may be motivated either by a paternalistic concern for the poor or by fears that too much social inequality may produce instability. Neoconservatives probably articulate best the ambivalence felt by many conservatives towards free market liberalism, by no means hostile to capitalism yet distrustful of a purely individualist form. For example, both Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol worry, in similar vein to Schumpeter, about the consequences of too much freedom and innovation in the economic sphere spreading beyond its boundaries to undermine traditional values and customs more widely.⁶ Kristol is thus able to muster only two, rather than the customary three, cheers for capitalism.

Similarly, on the free market side there are clearly significant differences between the ‘anarcho-capitalism’ of the most dedicated libertarians, such as Murray Rothbard, and

⁴ P. Worsthorne (1978) ‘Too Much Freedom’, in M. Cowling (ed.) *Conservative Essays* (London: Cassell).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

the more modest aspirations for a limited state of most mainstream free market advocates.⁷ Again there is a range of possible views, but the state is typically accepted by the latter as necessary to provide the framework within which the market functions, such as the rule of law and defence against external enemies. Moreover, it may also have some role in dealing with 'market failure' in the areas of public goods and monopolies. This may also imply support for at least minimal state welfare provision.

At the same time, a commitment to limited government is not derivable solely from economic precepts.⁸ In fact, as much as it may be derived from a positive belief in the capacities of individuals, it may also be founded upon contrary anti-rationalist principles. Of most relevance here is the argument presented by Michael Oakeshott, who argues that it is precisely the fact of human fallibility that makes imagining the state capable of consciously shaping and determining collective social ends rationalist hubris.⁹ Thus, it being the folly of the ideologue to believe in the imposition of shared, substantive goals, misgivings of a different sort than those of market liberals towards an interventionist state are expressed.

Furthermore, even the most authority-centred of conservatives frequently avow anti-statist sentiments. For example, Nisbet worries that not only a decline in the strength of authority may be responsible for the enervation of traditional values, but so too may the activities of a modernizing state.¹⁰ Thus even a strong advocate of authority may be suspicious of an extended state. This potentially contradictory position is accounted for by Nisbet in terms of Tocqueville's distinction between government and administration. Thus, whereas the former ought to be strong and unified, to provide the authority necessary to preserve a traditional social order, the latter should be diffused and localized, to prevent the state's encroachment upon the independence of

⁶ D. Bell (1978) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books); I. Kristol (1978) *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books). For the similar fears of British One Nation conservatives see I. Gilmour (1978) *Inside Right* (London: Quartet).

⁷ See G. Nash (1996) *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (2nd edn.) (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute), pp. 295-301 for details of the more radical libertarian perspective.

⁸ N. O'Sullivan (1986) 'Conservatism, the New Right and the Limited State', in J. Hayward and P. Norton (eds) *The Political Science of British Politics* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books), pp. 21-36.

⁹ M. Oakeshott (1962) *Rationalism in Politics* (London: Methuen).

communities. Specifically, it is the social functions believed to be the responsibility of civil society, such as the transmission of moral values, which provide grounds for circumscribing the state's role. Indeed, even the most resolutely illiberal of thinkers such as Scruton – who, like Worsthorpe, believes that conservatives should 'resist the champions of "minimal government"'¹¹ – argues that the freedom to associate within the realm of civil society is 'the most important of forces that can delimit the state'.¹²

It is not therefore the case that traditionalist conservatives regard all forms of freedom dimly. For some at least, it may instead be that a positive conception is favoured, with freedom understood not in terms of individual autonomy but as the flourishing that can occur only within the bonds of society. For example, Scruton – evidently drawing upon just such a Hegelian notion – argues that true freedom is only possible when 'Mere individuality, relinquished first to the family, and then to the whole social organism, is finally replaced by the mature allegiance which is the only politically desirable form of "freedom".'¹³ Similarly, traditionalist conservatives frequently defend historically inherited freedoms as opposed to those of abstract principle. Thus Anthony Quinton writes approvingly of the English constitution on the grounds that it represents 'the accumulated and sifted experience of our predecessors as embodied in traditional institutions, laws and customs'.¹⁴ Upon the basis of this constitutionalism, it is therefore not impossible for such conservatives to defend constitutional freedoms and rights, if conceived of as tradition-bound.

Of course, American conservatives seeking to uphold constitutional liberties face the dilemma of seeming to defend a written constitution embodying many abstract principles. As seen in Chapter 1, some may indeed subscribe to the view that their role is that of conserving a liberal heritage. Yet a different argument that may be advanced is that the passage of time has transformed America's liberties into historical ones. For example, Daniel Finkelstein argues that 'one of the reasons why conservatism didn't

¹⁰ Nisbet (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹¹ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹² R. Scruton (1990) *The Philosopher on Dover Beach* (Manchester: Carcanet), p. 68.

¹³ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁴ A. Quinton (1978) *The Politics of Imperfection* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 90. See also Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 46-70.

become an ideology in the United States until the fifties, recognizably, is because until that point the liberties that they had were not traditional ones'.¹⁵ Thus, even though originally American liberties could not be considered traditional, today they can.

However, other conservatives, such as Russell Kirk, argue that American liberties always have been traditional – specifically British – ones; following Burke, they therefore distinguish between the aims of the French Revolutionaries to impose untested, abstract ideals upon society and the very different ambitions of their American counterparts, who are argued to have sought simply to preserve in the new world the historically accumulated liberties of the old.¹⁶ Furthermore, Thomas Fleming emphasizes that the target of American conservatives' anti-statist ire 'is not the constitutional republic that took shape in the late eighteenth century, but the Jacobin state knocked together by Wilson and Roosevelt'.¹⁷ In other words, since the original republic was one which 'took shape' in evolutionary fashion its legacy may be defended; it is because the modern state is a very different entity – 'knocked together' rationalistically – that it ought to be reviled.

Nonetheless, it is worth here considering another possible difference between British and American conservatism. This is suggested by Robert Devigne, who argues that whereas American conservative theory has a long tradition of urging the devolution of power from the federal to state level, and of prioritizing the mediating structures of society, British conservative theory 'prescribes limiting the delegation of social policies to institutions outside the central state'.¹⁸ Citing Scruton's dismissal of those who argue for the devolution of power from central to local government, Devigne concludes that for British conservatives 'devolution is a sign of weakness rather than strength'.¹⁹ Moreover, he notes how the Conservative Party under Thatcher centralized authority at the level of the national state, attempted to weaken alternate

¹⁵ Interview with D. Finkelstein, 5 June 1998.

¹⁶ R. Kirk (1993) *America's British Culture* (London: Transaction Publishers).

¹⁷ T. Fleming (1997) 'Hanging with Our Friends', *Chronicles*, Vol. 21, No. 5, p. 11.

¹⁸ R. Devigne (1994) *Recasting Conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss, and the Response to Postmodernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 164.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98. Scruton is cited from Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 162-3.

sources of authority it saw as threatening (for example, trade unions) and established greater authority for itself in areas such as health and education.

There is certainly an element of truth in Devigne's distinction: for historical reasons, the American polity always has been more decentralized and American society more heterogeneous, facts which have clearly shaped conservative attitudes. However, whilst American conservatives' preference for state to federal government may well contrast with many British conservatives' hostility towards local authorities, an antipathy to local government need not imply any whole-hearted attachment to the central state. In fact, it is typically less that British conservative theory demands centralization as an end in itself than that the authority of the central state is viewed as the means by which the more 'hostile' elements of civil society (such as local authorities and trade unions) may be neutralized, in the hope that this will allow the ones conservatives prefer (such as families and voluntary associations) to flourish.²⁰

Indeed, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3, both British and American conservatives usually profess a preference for civil society's institutions to any level of state activity, whatever differences they may have regarding the latter. Further, there is also of course an important distinction to be minded between conservative governments' policies and the ambitions of conservative theory (although the Reagan administration may be as open to the charge of increasing the authority of the central state as that of Thatcher).

In fact, as will become evident, both British and American conservatism embody a number of tensions as regards the proprietary roles of the state and civil society. However, what is also apparent from the above is that there are a number of points of possible unity between different shades of conservative, almost all finding at least some role for the state whilst similarly sharing a distrust of its use to pursue utopian or rationalistic ends. Nearly all conservatives therefore accord some measure of importance to the state as custodian of law and provider of defence, whilst believing

²⁰ Which may also be believed by conservative politicians – for example, Virginia Bottomley argues that whilst local authorities' powers were rightly diminished by the Conservatives during their time in office, they also 'made enormous progress in ... devolution to the lowest level' responsibilities for management in education to schools, and in health to hospitals. Interview with V. Bottomley, 20 May 1998.

that its interference in the realm of civil society should be delimited. At the same time, the differences that do exist do not necessarily correspond to any straightforward traditionalist/libertarian split.

In particular, useful illustration of the diversity of positions amongst contemporary conservatives is provided by Paul Starobin, who identifies four camps within American conservatism divided over the role of the state.²¹ Thus, as well as the familiar category of libertarian he also distinguishes ‘radical futurists’ – such as Newt Gingrich and George Gilder – who lay particular emphasis upon the role of the global information revolution in undermining the authority of the state. Similarly, distinct from social conservatives he suggests are ‘blood-and-soil’ conservatives (identified in Chapter 1 as paleoconservatives) such as Fleming and Pat Buchanan, who promote a strongly nationalist creed nonetheless highly hostile to what is believed to be a globally-oriented federal government. The arguments of both futurists and anti-globalists will be considered in more depth in Chapter 5, yet the point valuable to note here is how the specifics of context, such as the supposed phenomenon of globalization, produce particular fissures within conservatism not easily accountable for in a conventional typology.

Moreover, they may also produce strange alliances: for example, paleoconservative M. E. Bradford argues that most mainstream conservatives have become little more than collaborators with the Left in their willingness to use the state to achieve their moral and cultural goals; as a consequence, he feels more sympathy with libertarians than with other social conservatives.²² Similarly, Fleming believes that is possible to forge ‘a tactical alliance’ with libertarians upon the basis of a common interest in rolling back government, which he argues is not shared by mainstream and neo-varieties of conservative.²³ Although not likely a very stable coalition, the hybrid ‘paleoliberalism’²⁴ some have attempted to create – including Rothbard from the

²¹ P. Starobin (1995) ‘Right Fight’, *National Journal*, 9 December.

²² M. E. Bradford (1991) ‘The Monstrosity of Big Government Conservatism’, *Policy Review*, No. 57.

²³ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

²⁴ P. Gottfried (1993) *The Conservative Movement* (2nd edn.) (New York: Twayne Publishers), pp. 146-8.

libertarian side – provides support for the ideas of disorientation amongst contemporary conservatives as well as increasing factiousness.

What needs to be examined next therefore is how the different threads of conservative argument relate, interweave and conflict in the post-Cold War period.

The Onward March of Freedom

There are a number of reasons for imagining the conditions of the post-Cold War world to be highly favourable towards anti-statist agendas. Undoubtedly most important, the collapse of Soviet communism seemed to vindicate beyond question the superiority of free market economics worldwide. At the same time, the final death-throes of socialist and working class parties and movements throughout the West itself, added but further weight to this vindication. Thus for the first time in a hundred and fifty years, capitalism was left facing no fundamental economic challenge.

As a consequence, all varieties of statist economic agendas – from nationalization programmes to Keynesian demand management – have come to appear discredited. Moreover, not only the economic follies of state interventionism may be argued by conservatives to stand refuted in light of this discrediting, but also the more general suppositions of rationalism and collectivism. Indeed, Edwin Feulner's contention that history has borne witness to the 'intellectual triumph of the philosophy of freedom over the utopias of central planning' is one with which many conservative might concur.²⁵

Also of significance following the Cold War's conclusion is the fact that much of the rationale that led even many conservatives to accept an extended role for the state has disappeared. That is, since many conservatives regarded the fight against communism to be one of the most important priorities of the post-war period, this meant accepting the political means by which it was to be waged. Thus William Buckley, key architect of the American anti-communist coalition, argued that conservatives would have to

²⁵ E. Feulner (1998) *The March of Freedom* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company), pp. ix-x.

‘accept Big Government for the duration’, including expansive military and intelligence sectors, high levels of taxation and the centralization of power in Washington; put candidly, the only way to combat the external threat of communism was ‘through the instrument of a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores’.²⁶ Although some libertarians rejected any such compromise, the argument for temporary acquiescence to big government was accepted by many shades of conservative opinion throughout the period of conflict. Yet as Gingrich argues: ‘With the end of the Cold War, the case for a strong central government has been dramatically weakened.’²⁷

Of course, conservatives’ acceptance of an extended state was in the past premised upon more than solely a desire to enlist it in the fight against their ideological enemies. Rather, throughout the twentieth century conservatives were at least in part motivated by pressure to accede to left-wing and working class demands; although concessions may the more readily have been conceded in order to cohere all-class support against the communist threat. With the defeat of socialism and the disaggregation of the working class, the consequent revision of the relationship between capital and labour may therefore have eroded conservatives’ need to make such concessions. With a less accommodating stance already initiated during the New Right era, the further unravelling of the Left and the working class during the 1990s might thus be assumed to offer the perfect opportunity for ever more radical assaults – both political and intellectual – upon the state’s size and activities.

Perhaps the clearest indicator that anti-statist and free market ideas have triumphed is their seeming acceptance by conservatives’ opponents: few left-wing intellectuals any longer write of abolishing capitalism in favour of a planned economy, whilst most ‘Left’ politicians similarly accept a market-based economic system. For this reason many conservatives take comfort in the fact that, even if conservative parties suffer electorally, their ideas appear to be accepted across the board. For example, Michael Barone argues that despite left-wing politicians such as Clinton and Blair having enjoyed electoral successes in the 1990s, it is only because they have adopted

²⁶ Quoted in Gottfried (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²⁷ N. Gingrich (1995) *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 102.

conservative programmes.²⁸ Thus even when conservatives themselves are not ‘in the saddle’ he is satisfied that, thanks to irresistible forces such as the power of the international marketplace, their ideas are: ‘the size of government is ratcheting down, not up; government agencies are being privatized and welfare programmes withering away; even middle-class entitlements are under attack’.

Indeed, in response to Clinton’s pronouncement during the 1996 election campaign that the era of big government was over, the *Weekly Standard* trumpeted on its front cover: ‘WE WIN.’²⁹ Similarly, Madsen Pirie argues that from a free market standpoint, the electoral defeat of the Conservative Party in 1997 did not matter since the victory of New Labour represented the triumph of a party equally committed to free market beliefs.³⁰

In other words – in contradiction to David Willetts’ suggestion of a collapse of intellectual neo-liberalism – market liberal ideas have continued to be espoused strongly, especially by think-tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute and the Cato Institute. Similarly, the 1990s witnessed a number of forceful articulations of libertarian programmes and principles – by American writers such as Gingrich, Charles Murray and David Boaz, and British conservatives such as Alan Duncan and John Redwood.³¹

Of note in these writings is the fact that all devote space to savouring the bankruptcy of state planning, and highlighting the confirmation communism’s collapse provides of the free market’s superiority.³² The other important contemporary argument within free marketeers’ armoury is the necessity of adapting to the realities of globalization,

²⁸ M. Barone (1997) in ‘Symposium: Is There a Worldwide Conservative Crack-Up?’, *Weekly Standard*, 1 September, p. 10.

²⁹ *Weekly Standard*, 1 October 1996.

³⁰ Interview with M. Pirie, 19 June 1998. David Howell – whilst not welcoming a Labour victory – also sees them as having embraced Conservatives’ economic beliefs. Interview with D. Howell, 14 July 1998.

³¹ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*; C. Murray (1997) *What It Means to Be a Libertarian: A Personal Interpretation* (New York: Broadway Books); D. Boaz (1997) *Libertarianism: A Primer* (New York: Free Press); A. Duncan and D. Hobson (1995) *Saturn’s Children: How the State Devours Liberty, Property and Virtue* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson); J. Redwood (1993) *The Global Marketplace: Capitalism and Its Future* (London: HarperCollins).

³² For example, Redwood (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 143-61.

with the increasing disregard of market forces for geographical borders believed to render the authority of national states ever more impotent (discussed further in Chapter 5). Yet another distinctive characteristic of these writings is the fact that, as much as they may emphasize the significance of contemporary developments, many take the form of restatements of fundamental beliefs; as Gingrich argues, the end of the Cold War means that the 'time has come for a reversion to first principles'.³³ Seemingly in agreement with this idea, Duncan (writing with Dominic Hobson) provides a chapter by chapter reiteration of the basic libertarian case, bearing titles such as 'The Importance of Property Rights to Prosperity', 'The Myth of the Collectivist Economy', and 'The Threat Taxation Poses to Liberty'.

The goal of Duncan and Hobson is thus to 'liquidate' the state that has grown so seemingly inexorably, with their initial aim being no less than a halving of the state sector's present size (from approximately forty to twenty per cent of GDP).³⁴ The means by which this downsizing is to be achieved is via such familiar prescriptions as further privatizations, reducing taxation, deregulation and the greater use of market mechanisms in the public sector. One particularly notable element of theirs and other free marketeers' agendas is the argument for devolving the responsibilities of the state on to the institutions of civil society – for example, welfare provision on to the voluntary sector – which will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

Probably the most important target of anti-statist conservatives, and not solely economic liberals, remains the welfare sector of the state, in particular since its growth proved one of the most intractable problems faced by conservative governments during the 1980s. Yet it is possible here to identify another important difference between American and British conservatives: Norman Barry argues that the former focus far more on the specifically moral consequences of state welfare provision.³⁵ One reason for this may be that since the American welfare state is much smaller, both in size and scope, purely economic arguments (such as the tax burden it represents) carry less weight. Indeed, Gertrude Himmelfarb is willing to admit that, since America is a rich

³³ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 102.

³⁴ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 395-439.

³⁵ N. Barry (1997) 'Conservative Thought and the Welfare State', *Political Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2, p.

country, 'We can afford to sustain a large population on welfare if we think it necessary and desirable.'³⁶ However, her belief that welfare dependency has many 'demoralizing' effects make this in her eyes a far from desirable proposition.

In fact, this is a key area in which a conjoining of economic and social conservative concerns may be identified. Undoubtedly the most influential writer to combine both 'rational' and moral elements in arguments concerning welfare provision is Murray. Thus, arguing along utilitarian lines, Murray believes that the mistake made by proponents of state welfare programmes is that they fail to recognize that since individuals act as utility maximizers, increasing welfare payments simply increases dependency, creating a vicious cycle that leads to the entrenchment of a welfare culture.³⁷ The main effect of over-generous welfare programmes is not the alleviation of poverty, but the underpinning of immoral lifestyles that would otherwise not be viable: in particular, welfare support for single parents fosters a culture of illegitimacy and family fragmentation. The final consequence of these processes is the growth of an intransigent 'underclass' at the bottom of society. Only by severely scaling down welfare programmes will the combination of reducing rational incentives and regenerating morality lead to the restoration of individual responsibility and family cohesion.

Although different conservatives emphasize different factors in explaining the problem of welfare dependency – for example, other writers highlight the rise of non-working households rather than the rise of single parent families³⁸ – a belief in the imperative need to roll back the welfare state is common. Moreover, whilst conservatives have frequently been scornful of left-wing analyses centring upon the notion of class, in a post-socialist context where conventional class categories have lost much of their meaning, many have enthusiastically adopted the underclass label to describe a feckless

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³⁶ G. Himmelfarb (1995) 'The Moral Crisis of Our Welfare State', *Rising Tide*, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 17. Gingrich similarly argues that reducing welfare is a 'moral imperative' – Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁷ Argued in numerous writings, from C. Murray (1984) *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books) to C. Murray (1996) 'Keeping Priorities Straight on Welfare Reform', *Society*, Vol. 33, No. 5.

³⁸ For example, L. M. Mead (1992) *The New Politics of the New Poverty* (New York: Basic Books).

layer of society typified by anti-social and criminal behaviour.³⁹ Further, it is by no means the case that British conservatives ignore the moral dimension of anti-welfare arguments; for example, Duncan and Hobson draw upon Murray's moral analysis of the underclass problem.⁴⁰

The New Leviathan

However, whilst many thinkers identify the contemporary context as one in which an anti-statist, individualist creed has decisively triumphed, contradictory trends may be highlighted. As noted in Chapter 1, conservatives' winning of the political battles of the past may not imply any straightforward victory for a liberal philosophy.

Thus Kenneth Minogue notes how railing against unrestrained individualism has become 'very much *à la mode*'.⁴¹ Equally, even resolute libertarians may perceive that their arguments are not popular ones. For example, Duncan believes his own views to be 'anti-cyclical'.⁴² Rather than seeing themselves as unambiguous victors therefore, supporters of free markets may on the contrary believe that they are going against the tide. Indeed, the very fact that despite two decades of supposedly increasing hegemony for their ideas free market writers still feel the need to write books setting out first principles is itself perhaps revealing of this sensitivity.

One American libertarian summing up what she describes as a 'backlash' against free markets highlights what appears to be the contradiction: that is, whilst 'From the

³⁹ For example, G. Himmelfarb (1996) *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books), p. 233. See also D. Willetts (1992a) 'Theories and Explanations of the Underclass', in D. J. Smith (ed.) *Understanding the Underclass* (London: Policy Studies Institute), pp. 48-54.

⁴⁰ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 383-4. Willetts also cites Murray in his account of the moral problems of welfare provision – D. Willetts (1992b) *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 149. Murray himself clearly believes his analysis to be relevant to the British context: see C. Murray (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit) and C. Murray (1994) *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

⁴¹ K. Minogue (1994/95) 'Necessary Imperfections', *National Interest*, No. 38, p. 87.

⁴² A. Duncan (1995) Interview, *New Statesman*, 19 May, p. 21.

rhetoric, you'd think we were living in a laissez-faire country', at the same time 'intellectuals of all sorts are lining up to bash libertarians in general and markets in particular'.⁴³ In other words, whilst there may be all but no question that capitalism is now the only viable economic system, there nonetheless remains little positive support for free market ideas.

Thus even if old-fashioned socialist strategies are no longer widely advocated, a range of writers contends that capitalism needs to be supplemented, restrained and regulated by mechanisms and values other than those of the market. For some this means a reinvigorated Keynesianism, for others the development of 'newer' frameworks and concepts such as 'stakeholding' or a 'Third Way' between capitalism and socialism.⁴⁴ Yet common to all is the idea that markets and individualist values are in themselves lacking, both for the creation of prosperity and for achieving such goals as social justice. Equally, it is far from the case that conservatives' political opponents unambiguously embrace anti-statist agendas. As E. J. Dionne notes, even when Clinton made his pronouncement of the end of the era of big government, this was nonetheless followed by his 'promising a rather extensive list of things that the federal government could do', such as his promise to pursue far-reaching health care reform.⁴⁵

Of course, such trends have not gone unnoticed by conservatives. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick believes that the policies of the Clinton administration reveal that 'collectivist ideas are very strong today'.⁴⁶ Similarly, Christopher DeMuth observes that, even though the intellectual underpinnings of state planning may have fallen into disrepute, the state itself continues to grow in size.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Oliver Letwin notes how although cynicism towards politicians may have become a prevalent feature of

⁴³ V. Postrel (1997) 'Laissez Fear', *Reason*, April, p. 4.

⁴⁴ See R. Kuttner (1991) *The End of Laissez-Faire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf); E. J. Dionne (1996) *They Only Look Dead* (New York: Touchstone); W. Hutton (1996) *The State We're In* (London: Vintage); A. Giddens (1998) *The Third Way* (Cambridge: Polity Press).

⁴⁵ Dionne (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 329.

⁴⁶ Interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

⁴⁷ C. DeMuth (2000) 'Why the Era of Big Government Isn't Over', *Commentary*, Vol. 109, No. 4. For the British case see M. McElwee and A. Tyrie (2000) *Leviathan at Large* (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

contemporary politics, accompanying this has nonetheless remained a strong faith in the institution of government itself as solver of problems.⁴⁸

What must be considered next therefore are conservatives' responses to newer, post-socialist arguments for extending the role of the state. It may thus be seen that at least one type of enemy remains for conservatives to combat; as Finkelstein argues, a key task for conservatives today is to 'resist the creeping return of a social democratic' philosophy.⁴⁹ Similarly, Michael Novak suggests – noting the emergence of such ideas as stakeholding and corporate governance – that although as 'an economic idea, socialism has been defeated. As a political idea, socialism lives.'⁵⁰ Indeed this formulation highlights well the way in which conservatives are torn, as will be apparent throughout the thesis, between two impulses in understanding the agendas of their contemporary enemies. The first is to argue simply that their opponents' proposals are not really new at all – with a number of variants of the 'old wine in new bottles' argument much in evidence – whilst the second is to contend that it is precisely because they are new that their implications are even more dangerous. In other words, there is often very little agreement amongst conservatives over whether their enemies are fundamentally the same as they always have been, or are instead different.

One relevant example of the former mode of argument is offered by Donald Devine, who describes Third Way ideas in colourful manner as simply 'old crock wrapped in new bunting'.⁵¹ After all, he argues, welfare state liberalism has ever since the New Deal presented itself as a middle way between the two extremes of radical socialism and unfettered capitalism. Thus politicians such as Blair and Clinton should not be trusted simply because they offer alternatives to old-fashioned socialism, since it has

⁴⁸ O. Letwin (1990) 'Three Myths of Government', in J. C. D. Clark (ed.) *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain* (London: Macmillan), p. 246.

⁴⁹ Interview with D. Finkelstein, 5 June 1998.

⁵⁰ M. Novak (1997) *The Fire of Invention* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), p. 23. For more on stakeholding and corporate governance see J. F. Johnston (1998) *No Man Can Serve Two Masters: Shareholders Versus Stakeholders in the Governance of Companies* (London: Social Affairs Unit); E. Sternberg (1998a) *Corporate Governance: Accountability in the Marketplace* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs); E. Sternberg (1998b) *Stakeholding: Betraying the Corporation's Objectives* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

⁵¹ D. Devine (1999) 'The Third Way?', "ACU"<acu@conservative.org>, 13 April. For further on the Third Way see M. Novak (1998) *Is There a Third Way?* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit); E. Abrams (1999) 'Is There a "Third Way"?' , *Commentary*, Vol. 107, No. 4.

always been the strategy of the mainstream Left to profess to charting a compromise course.

However, an obvious problem with this argument is that it fails to account for the very different context in which such ideas are today propounded, misled by the similarity of nomenclature to older notions of Third or Middle Ways. Yet in present circumstances such terms cannot but be misnomers, since any third way only makes sense when there are two others to which it relates; whereas it is precisely the exhaustion of the socialist alternative that constitutes the background against which such ideas have emerged. Thus rather than staking out some compromise middle ground, Third Way positions – whilst certainly concerned with restraining a free market ideology – display little of even a diluted variety of socialist aspiration. Upon this basis, the arguments forwarded are frequently quite different to those of past doctrines which attempted to mediate between capitalist and socialist demands.

For example, one of the most significant new arguments for state regulation derives from theories of the ‘risk society’, the belief that an ever increasing and unpredictable array of social, environmental and economic dangers has come to confront society. As seen in Chapter 1, Robert Kuttner is one who believes that the post-Cold War world is characterized by far greater uncertainty and risk, and therefore argues that this new world disorder requires the development of new regulatory mechanisms to cope with the more complex and unstable relations within the international arena.⁵²

Yet a number of conservatives may be seen to challenge such notions. For example, the Social Affairs Unit has devoted a whole series of pamphlets to contesting the idea of the risk society.⁵³ One work, by Mark Neal and Christie Davies, explores the variety of ways in which the notion of risk underpins contemporary calls for increased business regulation, such as the need to preserve the environment or protect consumer safety, on the grounds that the hazardous effects of new technologies and products are frequently unknowable in advance.⁵⁴ Yet, they argue, the consequence of accepting

⁵² Kuttner (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 3-11.

⁵³ In a series entitled ‘Risk Controversies’, edited by Digby Anderson.

⁵⁴ M. Neal and C. Davies (1998) *The Corporation Under Siege: Exposing the Devices Used by Activists and Regulators in the Non-Risk Society* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

such arguments is the legitimation of an increase in the power of the state and a diminishing of individual freedom. Thus, taking up a range of ‘techno-moral panics’ centred upon health and environmental scares – from nuclear power to genetically modified food – Neal and Davies seek to expose the irrationality of the notion that the world has become an increasingly unpredictable or hazardous place. In particular, the fact that in most parts of the world people live longer and healthier than ever before is held to demonstrate that ‘Modern society is by any standard of comparison far less risky than any in the past.’⁵⁵ Health and environmental alarmism is not only therefore irrational, but does not justify expanding the regulatory role of the state.

However, advocates of risk awareness typically found their arguments upon more than simply empirical claims. It is useful therefore to consider Anthony Giddens’ analysis, a key theorist of both risk and the Third Way. Giddens willingly concedes that, at neither an individual nor collective level, has life actually become more risky in an empirically measurable sense.⁵⁶ Rather, what has occurred in our post-traditional world is that the sources and scope of risk have changed. That is, society has experienced a rise in what he terms manufactured risk, that which ‘is a result of human intervention into the conditions of social life and into nature’. Thus it is humanity’s increased interference with both the natural and social environments that is problematic, because it is likely to produce more far-reaching and uncertain results than the risks of earlier ages.

Of course, the idea that the sources of risk somehow outweigh in significance its empirical quantity may be difficult to understand, though as will be seen with environmentalists in Chapter 7, placing an emphasis upon the human-generated character of contemporary risks is by no means restricted to Giddens amongst proponents of risk awareness. However, Neal and Davies suggest that there are in fact good reasons to suppose that the risks which do exist today are actually far less problematic than those of the past, in that whereas in earlier times risks typically took the form of the invisible and mysterious (for example, bacteria and viruses),

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁶ A. Giddens (1994) *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 4.

contemporary risks are much more visible and open to human understanding.⁵⁷ Moreover, as a result of the advances of modern science, solutions to the problems created by contemporary risks – manufactured or otherwise – are far more likely and more quickly to be found. Again therefore, risk awareness does not warrant an increase in state regulation.

Whether or not the concept of risk is explicitly highlighted, protecting society from health and environmental dangers is recognized by many conservatives to underpin their opponents' arguments for increasing the power of the state at least as much as old-fashioned economic pretexts. For example, John Patten – writing prior to the 1997 general election – describes what he imagines a New Labour Britain would be like thanks to the Left's preoccupation with safety:

This time around, 'regulationism', with which Tories have to struggle hard enough when in government would be unbounded. The New Labour world would be perfectly harmonized, hygienic, safe, every element neatly labelled and run by a new-style burgeoning salariat, political correctness made flesh. It would also be perfectly dreadful, a 'Nurseryland' Britain.⁵⁸

One of the most striking aspects of this dispute between conservatives and their opponents is the perhaps surprising fact that whereas the latter appear to advocate highly cautionary stances regarding human endeavour and individuals' self-determining capacities, the former appear much more readily to champion optimistic views of these. Indeed, as will be examined in detail in later chapters, the tension created by conservatives' attacks upon contemporary forms of irrationalism and pessimism with their own frequent disavowals of rationalism and humanism is one of the most interesting features of contemporary conservatism.

As Patten implies in his mention of political correctness, a further significant characteristic of new regulatory arguments is their specifically moral side, a strongly moralizing tone frequently noticeable in stakeholding and Third Way arguments. Yet,

⁵⁷ Neal and Davies (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁵⁸ J. Patten (1995) *Things to Come* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), p. 115.

as John O'Sullivan argues, this moral emphasis likely provides even greater justification for state intervention than socialists' economic arguments:

As the economic case for socialism evaporates moral arguments come to the fore. Intervention is urged not on grounds of greater economic efficiency, but to promote some concept of equity – race and gender quotas to remedy discrimination ... or restraints on large retail stores that undermine “community”. Unrestrained by any embarrassing test of economic success or failure, these moral interventions tend to multiply and grow vaguer.⁵⁹

Indeed, he argues, one advantage for New Labour following Conservatives' privatization programmes of the 1980s is that because the state has been liberated from many of the responsibilities of ownership, New Labour politicians are much freer to impose their agendas on industry without directly bearing the consequences.

However, perhaps the most interesting of O'Sullivan's arguments is his use of the concept of the 'New Class'. Adopted by neoconservatives in the 1960s (though not originated by them) the idea of a New Class was used to explain the anti-capitalist sentiments which they perceived to inform the reforming programmes of the era. That is, they argued, an intellectual elite had come to occupy the leading positions within society – in the media, academia, the economy and government – which sought to further agendas of economic regulation and state interventionism despite such ideas holding little authority in the rest of society.⁶⁰ What O'Sullivan argues is that today's 'new New Left' of intellectuals and regulators can similarly be characterized as constituting a New Class, with Clinton and Blair their champions. In particular, he focuses on the anti-democratic quality of this elite:

Everywhere this class seeks to extend its power through law, regulation and opinion management, and to emancipate itself from popular control by

⁵⁹ J. O'Sullivan (1997) 'Blair's New Class', *Prospect*, May.

⁶⁰ See M. Gerson (1996) *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books), pp. 233-6.

transferring powers from living democratic bodies to remote bureaucracies, the courts, quangos, new untested institutions and international bodies.⁶¹

Moreover, having power not only in public but also in private bureaucracies, this class seeks to regulate 'not merely the economy but an ever-expanding area of social life'.

Long-time advocate of New Class theory Irving Kristol also continues to employ the term, noting as well arguments founded upon environmental and health panics to justify increasing regulation. Yet it is difficult to define, and therefore defeat, its ideology because it is 'both post-capitalist and post-socialist'.⁶² Furthermore, contemporary conservatives may forward the gravest of diagnoses. For example, Robert Bork argues that the harmful influence of those occupying the 'commanding heights' of the culture is today so pervasive, and possessing such authority in relation to society's morality, that 'it is not entirely accurate to call the United States a majoritarian democracy'.⁶³

However, whilst such arguments may have some credibility in explaining contemporary regulationism, it is nonetheless highly questionable whether the disparate array of antagonistic individuals conservatives cite constitute anything so coherent as a class. That is, the notion of a New Class imputes too great a consciousness and unity to its purported members. As Kristol himself admits, the New Class 'is a vague term'.⁶⁴ Moreover, 'no useful purpose is served by trying to give it too precise a meaning'; instead, 'one recognizes its members when one sees them'. In fact, greater precision certainly would serve useful purposes, not least preventing such theories edging into the realms of conspiracy theory, with scheming liberals imagined to be controlling and manipulating virtually every sector of society.

As O'Sullivan suggests, it is not simply economic activity that is the target of contemporary demands for increasing state regulation, but the moral sphere as well. For example, calls for anti-harassment laws and the restriction of expression deemed

⁶¹ J. O'Sullivan (1997), *op. cit.* See also M. McElwee (2000) *The Great and the Good: The Rise of the New Class* (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

⁶² I. Kristol (1991) 'The Good Life and the New Class', in P. Berger and I. Kristol (eds) *Health, Life-Style and Environment: Countering the Panic* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. 151.

⁶³ R. Bork (1995) 'Culture and Kristol', in C. DeMuth and W. Kristol (eds) *The Neoconservative Imagination* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute), p. 141.

offensive to oppressed social groups may also be arguments for the state to expand its scope of activity. In regard to such demands, conservatives may therefore position themselves as defenders of liberties such as free speech. For example, George Will argues against feminists wishing to prohibit pornography – despite agreeing that its existence leads to the coarsening of social life – on the basis that ‘the First Amendment is a nullity if it protects only expression that is without consequences, or that has consequences universally considered benign’.⁶⁵

Unsurprisingly, libertarians argue strenuously that morality thrives best in spaces beyond the state’s reach. For example, Tibor Machan urges that ‘generosity is a moral virtue that cannot flourish in a welfare state or in any sort of command economy’, because it must be voluntary.⁶⁶ Similarly, Duncan and Hobson argue that the ‘expansion of the State demoralizes and poisons the life of the individual’, by narrowing the opportunities for self-help and self-improvement.⁶⁷

However, as noted at the outset, anti-statism may be founded upon a number of bases. Equally therefore, anti-rationalist conservatives may also find much to criticise in the use of the state to promote moral virtue. According to Oakeshott, government ‘is not concerned with moral right and wrong, it is not designed to make men good or even better’⁶⁸, and such a sentiment is to be found articulated by a number of contemporary conservatives. For example, Minogue inveighs fiercely against ‘hyperactive’ regulationism as a response to moral and social problems. It is, he argues, an example of rationalist zealotry to imagine it is possible ‘to deal with moral collapse by the technical device of regulation’.⁶⁹ From the promotion of healthy eating to propaganda about AIDS, the mistake of rationalist social engineers is to believe that every identifiable problem can be solved by government intervention. Moreover, since there appears to be a never-ending supply of moral and health issues the rationalist

⁶⁴ I. Kristol (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁶⁵ G. F. Will (1994) *The Leveling Wind* (New York: Viking), p. 30.

⁶⁶ T. R. Machan (1998) *Generosity: Virtue in Civil Society* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute), p. ix.

⁶⁷ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 363

⁶⁸ Oakeshott (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 189. Nisbet also agrees with Oakeshott on this point – Nisbet (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁶⁹ K. Minogue (1993) ‘The Law Is a Chatterbox’, *Spectator*, 17 July, p. 19. See also K. Minogue

believes should be tackled, the powers of government simply expand indefinitely. In reality, Minogue argues, it is only through informal social mechanisms that moral behaviour is fostered.

Moreover, history and tradition can also serve as bases for conservatives to resist the use of the law to regulate morality. For example, the *Spectator* argues against Blairite moralism that 'the invocation of the law to make people fulfil their duties to themselves and to others is merely a reminder of how far removed we are from the private lives and public spiritedness of a century ago'.⁷⁰ As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, there is certainly some amount of romanticism in conservatives' historical conception of an independent and virtuous civil society. Nonetheless, invoking the past also provides grounds for rejecting the idea that moral behaviour or good citizenship can be created by government dictat. As seen also in the case of Will, even when conservatives agree that a genuine moral problem exists, they may nonetheless reject the use of state mechanisms as the means by which it should be addressed.

As also indicated at the beginning, even the most traditionalist of conservatives can defend freedoms if these are conceived of as traditional ones. Thus even the *Salisbury Review* is able to publish an article against the introduction of identity cards, its argument premised upon a traditional understanding of a demarcated private sphere: 'Respect for privacy is a measure of a state's regard for its citizens. Families and individuals need space for authentic self-expression safe from external judgement.'⁷¹ Indeed, the conclusions drawn may well be the same as those of libertarians – for example, Duncan and Hobson also reject such schemes⁷² – even when derived from a different perspective.

A further set of issues of particular contemporary moment is that relating to constitutional questions. In Britain, recent years have witnessed a surge of agitation around constitutional issues – including 'modernization' of the monarchy and the House of Lords, regional devolution and a written Bill of Rights – provoking in

(1997) 'Id Control', *National Review*, 10 November.

⁷⁰ *Spectator* (1995) 'Editorial: De Tocqueville vs. Blair', 20 May, p. 7.

⁷¹ S. Pearce (1997) 'Corrupting Leviathan: Identity Cards and the Modern State', *Salisbury Review*, Spring, p. 24.

response a number of retorts by conservatives.⁷³ In part, conservative perspectives are again familiar ones, explicitly or implicitly drawing upon the arguments set out by Burke. For example, John Patten argues that whilst conservatives are willing to accept gradual, evolutionary change, a written constitution and a Bill of Rights are to be rejected on the basis that 'human affairs are too complex to be absolutely codified. Explicit principles are abridgements of practice.'⁷⁴ Similarly, Charles Moore argues that the danger inherent in following the prescriptions of constitutional reformers is that they are leading us into 'uncharted waters'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Minogue finds fault with constitutional reform on the grounds that it represents simply another attempt at social engineering, the immoderation of reformers denounced as representing a 'constitutional mania'.⁷⁶

However, one feature of current proposals that may be new is the extent of change considered by conservatives' opponents. Thus Digby Anderson sees the range of reforms placed on the political agenda by New Labour – from proportional representation to the break-up of the Union – as revealing an important difference from Labour programmes of the past.⁷⁷ That is, because previous Labour governments concentrated their attentions on issues such as taxation, wealth redistribution and welfare, even though they were supposedly much more radical they never seriously attempted the far-reaching constitutional changes being considered by the present Labour administration. In other words, even if the Left no longer seeks the same variety of expanded state role it once did, the changed focus of politics in the post-Cold War world may mean that it has simply found other means of expressing the same impulses.

⁷² Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.

⁷³ For example: J. Patten (1991) *Political Culture, Conservatism and Rolling Constitutional Change* (London: Conservative Political Centre); B. Mawhinney (1996) *Safeguarding Our Constitution* (London: Conservative Political Centre); A. Lansley and R. Wilson (1997) *Conservatives and the Constitution* (London: Conservative 2000 Foundation).

⁷⁴ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ Interview with C. Moore, 14 June 1998.

⁷⁶ K. Minogue (1993) *The Constitutional Mania* (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

⁷⁷ Interview with D. Anderson, 22 June 1998.

Similarly, there is also recognition of the potentially illiberal and anti-democratic character of current constitutional proposals. As John O'Sullivan argues, proposed measures such as devolution for Wales and Scotland and the ceding of powers to Europe, although advanced in the name of strengthening democracy, all have the effect of weakening the central democratic institution in Britain – parliament – and transferring power to bodies not directly answerable to the British electorate.⁷⁸ Even the issues of a written constitution and a Bill of Rights may be attacked on the grounds of liberty and democracy. For example, in the same way that conservatives may be disquieted at the attempt to legislate morality, John Patten argues similarly against the notion that it is possible to codify liberty.⁷⁹ A culture of liberty, he argues, is something that either does or does not exist within a society; governments or constitutions cannot simply create it. Perhaps most worrying, codifying rights in law means handing over the arbitration of disputes from society at large, as is the case with informally possessed liberties, to the courts.

Of course, the question of who possesses jurisdiction over the exercise and interpretation of rights and liberties raises different issues in the American context by virtue of its written constitution. This being the case, American conservatives appeal less to an informal understanding of freedom to defend against the expansion of the state than to a strict adherence to the constitution's original meaning as laid down by the republic's Founders. As Bork puts it, 'only the approach of original understanding meets the criteria that any theory of constitutional adjudication must meet in order to possess democratic legitimacy'.⁸⁰ Moreover, a belief in 'original intent' seems to unite all types of conservative, from arch-traditionalists to libertarians.⁸¹

For example, one libertarian argument which may be derived from this doctrine is that, since the powers assigned by the constitution to federal government for public expenditure are highly limited – specified purposes being those such as defence – the

⁷⁸ J. O'Sullivan (1997), *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁸⁰ R. Bork (1990) *The Tempting of America: The Political Seduction of the Law* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 143.

⁸¹ For example, M. E. Bradford (1994) *Original Intentions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press); G. Carey (1995) *In Defence of the Constitution* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press); Murray (1997), *op. cit.*, p.

majority of federal spending, including health and education programmes, may be rejected by conservatives simply upon the basis that it is unconstitutional.⁸² However, whilst there are of course numerous aspects to the interpretative debates around the American constitution, the issue of most interest here is that which conservatives identify as the problem of 'judicial activism'.⁸³ That is, the notion that rather than simply enforcing the law as a set of impartial, non-instrumental rules, the judiciary should take an active 'political' role in actually creating law, interpreting the constitution in whatever ways help further the agendas of favoured interest groups (such as women or minorities).

According to Bork, judicial activism arises as a result of the New Class's failure to achieve its goals through electoral means and its consequent turn to the courts as an alternative avenue of accomplishing them.⁸⁴ However, perhaps the most theorized positions critical of this development are those of the disciples of Leo Strauss.⁸⁵ What contemporary Straussians reject is the postmodern assumption argued to lie beneath the malady of judicial activism: that the constitution is simply a 'text', open to deconstruction and thus whatever subjective interpretation the reader wishes to impose. By contrast, what they argue for is a settled, determinate reading that would thereby rule out the subjective claims of particular interest groups. (Straussians' perspectives on postmodernism will be considered further in Chapter 6.)

Yet indicative of the sense in which many conservatives appear to perceive themselves as lone voices in a world gone morally awry, the introduction to a *First Things* symposium on judicial activism – suggesting with dismay that 'unconstitutional' rulings on issues such as abortion and euthanasia may imply a literal usurpation of politics by the judiciary – is moved to ask 'whether we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing

xi.

⁸² S. Moore (1995) 'The Unconstitutional Congress', *Policy Review*, No. 72.

⁸³ This is a key theme of Bork's writings especially, principally Bork (1990), *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

⁸⁵ H. Mansfield, Jr. (1991) *America's Constitutional Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press); T. L. Pangle (1992) *The Ennobling of Democracy: The Challenge of the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

regime'.⁸⁶ That is, if the present regime is so thoroughly bankrupt morally, have the foundations of political obligation been dissolved? A similar sentiment is expressed by Fleming, though dismissive of the lack of 'backbone' of most mainstream conservatives: 'For a real Right to develop, it would require men and women willing to be viewed as virtual criminals ... To be genuinely radical, we have to accept the fact of being enemies of the regime, of being criminals, of being outlaws.'⁸⁷

The extreme implications of such suggestions inevitably lead most conservatives to distance themselves from them; as, for example, do William Bennett and Midge Decter in a follow-up *First Things* symposium.⁸⁸ Yet it is a measure of how antagonistic many American conservatives perceive the present moral and political culture to be to their own perspectives that they are to be found debating such propositions at all.

'Big Government Conservatism'

So far it has been conservative arguments concerned with resisting the expansion of state activity and the erosion of liberty that have been considered. One question anti-statist conservatives nonetheless have to answer is that of how to account for the state's growth over recent decades. At the same time, it is also possible to identify conservatives unconcerned, or even pleased, at the state's expansion.

In terms of these issues, the records of recent conservative governments in relation to the state are clearly highly relevant, in particular their failings. Thus Simon Jenkins provides a detailed account of the Conservative Party's signal failure to diminish the role of the British state sector during its time in power, despite repeated declarations

⁸⁶ *First Things* (1996) 'Symposium: The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics', No. 67, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Fleming (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁸⁸ *First Things* (1997) 'Symposium: The End of Democracy? A Discussion Continued', No. 69, pp. 19-24.

that it intended to do so.⁸⁹ Not only did the Conservatives fail to reduce its size in terms of share of GDP taken, but also the extensive framework of regulation put in place to oversee the industries it privatized meant that changing ownership did not necessarily mean government relinquishing all control. Thus:

the scope of the state that is left behind has remained persistently above 40 per cent, forced upwards by a roughly doubled level of real spending on the welfare state. Add to this the government-regulated but privately owned monopolies and what might be termed the “state penumbra” has widened rather than contracted since 1979.⁹⁰

Similarly, the centralization of power in spheres such as education, health, housing and the police meant that regulation of the remaining public sector also increased; as John Gray documents as well, a ‘Quango State’ in which unelected and unaccountable bodies proliferated was a particular feature of the latter years of Conservative Party governance.⁹¹

A comparable story may be told about the American experience of conservative government. In the United States, the period 1979 to 1989 likewise witnessed a significant increase in the share of the national product accounted for by the state sector, rising from 31.7 to 36.1 per cent of GDP.⁹² Moreover, Reagan too was a great centralizer, also garnering to the federal government increasing control over areas such as education, health and financial regulation.⁹³ And despite a seeming reinvigoration of free market and decentralizing ideas occurring with the Gingrich-led Republican capture of Congress in 1994, the ‘radical’ agenda of the Contract with America was one which rapidly unravelled and disintegrated.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ S. Jenkins (1995) *Accountable to None: The Tory Nationalization of Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁹¹ J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 107-10.

⁹² OECD figures, quoted in T. O’Shaughnessy (1994) ‘Economic Policy’, in A. Adonis and T. Hames (eds) *A Conservative Revolution?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 94.

⁹³ D. McKay (1994) *Politics and Power in the USA* (London: Penguin), pp. 115-7, 204-5.

⁹⁴ See D. Frum (1997a) *What’s Right?* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 29-35.

Many conservatives are, of course, well aware that the state did not shrink under conservative rule. For example, Duncan and Hobson are candid in recognizing the Conservatives' failure to make significant inroads into the size of the state, whilst Murray makes a similar observation as regards the expansion of the social welfare budget during the Reagan and Bush eras.⁹⁵ Moreover, in spheres other than the economy conservative politicians may also be judged to have failed; for example, Charles Moore argues that 'the attempt to get the state out of people's lives did not succeed except in the very strictly economic sphere'.⁹⁶

A number of explanations are typically advanced for these failures. For example, David Green (Director of the Health and Welfare Unit at the Institute of Economic Affairs) argues that – despite the rhetoric and apart from the privatization programmes – the Conservative Party simply made no concerted effort to reduce the state sector.⁹⁷ In relation to the American context, DeMuth argues that although the Reagan administration made some headway in rolling back the state, not as much was achieved as conservatives might have liked because power was shared with many others who were not conservatives.⁹⁸

Interesting to note in particular is Virginia Bottomley's argument that much of the reason the Conservatives conceded the need for regulatory frameworks to oversee the privatized industries was in response to criticisms centred upon the idea of risk: that is, to satisfy the 'public appetite to check, double check and, as they see it, eliminate as much risk as possible'.⁹⁹ Like Neal and Davies, Bottomley is herself sceptical of such an appetite, rejecting the expectation that risk can ever be eliminated as a belief that 'is ludicrous and not sustainable in the long-term'. Nonetheless, conservative politicians' inability to resist such demands may at least testify to the strength such ideas possess within present-day society.

Yet whatever the explanation for conservatives' failures in rolling back the state, contemporary liberalizing agendas appear to amount to little more than calls for a

⁹⁵ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 64-7, 83-8; interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

⁹⁶ Interview with C. Moore, 14 June 1998.

⁹⁷ Interview with D. G. Green, 22 June 1998.

⁹⁸ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

redoubling of efforts, as if the question were simply one of political will. However, the flaw in conservative analyses lies in their attributing of responsibility for the growth of the state all but solely to their opponents' ideologies. For example, in Willetts' potted history of modern conservatism blame for the growth of the modern state is laid squarely at the door of liberals and socialists, with culpable conservative politicians regarded simply as too weak, or otherwise unwilling, not to give into collectivist ideas.¹⁰⁰ Conservative politicians' responsibilities for the state's expansion is seen as at best a deviation from true principles, at worst a form of collaboration with the enemy.

One problem with such arguments is that they neglect the fact that using the state need not be an aberration from 'real' conservative principles; as seen at the beginning of the chapter, not all varieties of conservative doctrine are hostile to expanding state activity. Moreover, the reasons behind even more ideologically committed conservative governments' lack of success in effecting a reduction in the state's size can hardly be accounted for entirely in terms of the strength of their opponents. Instead, account must also be taken of the market's inability to fulfil such functions as the provision of welfare for large sections of society without the state's support. Further, with the Thatcher and Reagan governments having implemented the most obvious privatizations and free market reforms, and yet still having failed to achieve a major rolling back of the state, it may be difficult to see what realistic possibility there is for the severe reduction in its size radical free marketeers envisage.

Conservatives may argue that the changes that were made during the period of conservative governance nonetheless mark an improvement over the previous era; for example, many British conservatives defend the regulation of private utilities as preferable to direct ministerial control on the grounds that it depoliticizes decision-making.¹⁰¹ Yet this argument undermines conservatives' own criticisms of left-wing varieties of regulationism: one person's depoliticization may be another's lack of accountability and democratic oversight. In other words, the difference between conservative approved forms of regulation and those of their opponents is not always

⁹⁹ Interview with V. Bottomley, 20 May 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Willetts (1992b), *op. cit.*, pp. 3-46.

readily obvious. Equally, the fact that Minogue's critique of 'hyperactive regulationism' was written at the time of, and in part directed at, the activities of the Major government is also significant: despite John O'Sullivan's characterization, a regulatory impulse inspired by moralistic concerns is not unique to the Blair administration in recent British politics.

Yet one response of conservatives to the failure of conservative governments to reduce the size of the state is instead pragmatic acceptance. For example, Fred Barnes articulates a vision of 'big government conservatism' predicated on the belief that 'big government is a fact of life'.¹⁰² In particular, since Reagan was the most ideologically conservative president for a half century, 'A good rule of thumb is that if Ronald Reagan couldn't get rid of a government program or agency, nobody can; it's here for life.' The intractability of trying to reduce the state's size is put down to the simple fact that 'people like big government'.¹⁰³ Thus whilst he does not wish the state to grow any larger, Barnes is happy for it to remain at its present size. The aim of the big government conservative, he argues, is not to waste time trying to reduce the size of the state, but instead to make sure it fulfils conservative rather than liberal ends. In similar vein, William Kristol disagrees that 'big government *per se*' is at the root of contemporary problems, but rather that it is the character of government policy that is important.¹⁰⁴

By contrast, David Frum argues that 'quite a number of influential and visible conservatives have shown a dismaying willingness to throw in the towel on the Big Government issue', citing Bennett and Irving Kristol as other representatives of this trend.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, even those formally committed to the aim of resisting over-extended government may have come to hold decidedly modest aspirations. For example, in contrast to Duncan and Hobson's radical goal of cutting the size of the state in half,

¹⁰¹ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998; interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998. Pirie also defends the record of the Thatcher years on this count – interview with M. Pirie, 19 June 1998.

¹⁰² F. Barnes (1991) 'The Politics of Less: A Debate on Big Government Conservatism', *Policy Review*, No. 55, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Bork also agrees that 'Americans like big government' – interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

¹⁰⁵ D. Frum (1997a), *op. cit.*, p. 62.

John Patten sets the far more humble target of keeping its share of GDP at no more than forty per cent.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, for conservatives who have always disdained liberal doctrines it may even be the case that the creation of new regulatory mechanisms is to be regarded as a positive development. A good example of this type of conservative is Worsthorne, who argues that a regulated form of capitalism is in fact preferable to the 'capitalist triumphalism' of the Thatcher era. He thus commends the politics of New Labour on the basis that it aims at

stopping, or at any rate, regulating change, which is why I, and so many other small 'c' conservatives, fearful of the erosions wrought by capitalism in everything we hold dear, are attracted to it. For nearly twenty years we have had a party in power that welcomed these erosions, even gloried in them ...¹⁰⁷

Of course, it may not be so surprising to find conservatives like Worsthorne reaching such conclusions. What is perhaps more so is the extent to which many conservative appear willing to criticize free market doctrines. For example, Bennett also agrees that 'Unbridled capitalism is a problem.'¹⁰⁸ Similarly, a number agree with Worsthorne that it is necessary to repudiate past conservative orthodoxies. For example, William Schambra writes scathingly of the fact that 'conservatism wasted much of this century futilely extolling the virtues of rugged individualism and the untrammelled marketplace'.¹⁰⁹

The rejection, or at least qualification, of free market liberalism is also notable amongst British conservatives. As one commentator suggests: 'One of the ironies of contemporary politics is that British Conservatives are almost as eager to denigrate the

¹⁰⁶ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁷ P. Worsthorne (1997) 'New Labour, New Tone – But New Nothing Else. I Approve', *Spectator*, 17 May, p. 34.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in P. Starobin (1997) 'Rethinking Capitalism', *National Journal*, 18 January, p. 106.

¹⁰⁹ W. Schambra (1998) 'All Community Is Local', in E. J. Dionne (ed.) *Community Works* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press), p. 46.

1980s as US Democrats.’¹¹⁰ It is particularly notable that many such Conservatives served in Thatcher-led governments. Thus, in arguing for a consensual doctrine of the social market, Chris Patten downgrades an emphasis upon assertive individualism; David Hunt expresses concern about social atomization and dismisses outright laissez-faire; Stephen Dorrell quotes approvingly Burke’s tirade against ‘solitary, unconnected, individual, selfish Liberty’; and John Patten protests against the labelling of Conservatives as individualists, when they are in truth committed to social responsibility.¹¹¹

One explanation for contemporary conservatives’ attempts to distance themselves from neo-liberalism may be found in the practical failings of free market programmes. Charles Leadbeater, for example, argued at the beginning of the 1990s, when the idea of the social market was the popular vehicle for anti-individualist thinking, that the social market’s elevation to the high ground of British politics was ‘the most important political consequence of the recession’.¹¹² However, whilst recession was certainly a feature of the early 1990s, overall such an argument has only limited explanatory power. For example, the fact that the Major government was severely routed in the 1997 general election in economic conditions more favourable than those in which it won in 1992 suggests that the problem conservatives face may be more connected to perceptions of uncertainty and instability than actual economic reality.

In fact, Barry’s interpretation of the emergence of ideas such as the social market may be most apposite, in arguing that they represent attempts ‘to soften the harsher edges of economic liberalism’.¹¹³ Of course, by no means all conservatives see the qualification of an individualist doctrine as necessarily implying a recourse to statism. For example Willetts, although seeking to supplement a free market philosophy with more social concerns, rejects the social market label on the grounds that the ‘social’ component too frequently implies a turn to the state (his own preference being for the

¹¹⁰ M. Prowse (1994) ‘What Was Right with the 1980s’, *Financial Times*, 5 April.

¹¹¹ C. Patten (1991) Interview, *Marxism Today*, February; D. Hunt (1994) *Right Ahead: Conservatism and the Social Market* (London: Conservative Political Centre); S. Dorrell (1994) *What Is a Conservative?* (London: Conservative Political Centre), p. 12; J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹¹² C. Leadbeater (1991) ‘Whose Line Is It Anyway?’, *Marxism Today*, July, p. 20.

term ‘civic conservatism’).¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, William Olson – noting ‘how tense’ relations between libertarians and traditionalists have become – is probably correct in arguing that: ‘In recent years a sizeable phalanx of traditional writers and thinkers have emerged who on principle, it seems, reject an appeal to such concepts as liberty, rights, individualism, and choice in resolving questions about the appropriate domestic scope of government.’¹¹⁵ In other words, even if not enthusiastic about an expanded state, many conservatives may not have much enthusiasm for the principles that may limit its growth either.

The Need for Authority

However, it is neither simply pragmatism nor a reaction against free market beliefs that may lead conservatives to adopt less enthusiastic stances towards liberalizing agendas. The need for authority – both political and moral – may also be grounds; indeed, this may even persuade conservatives of the need to support increasing the state’s power.

In terms of conservatives who have always believed authority to be of central importance, Worsthorne is again of interest. Worsthorne expresses dismay at the fact that the authority of Britain’s traditional ruling class has in recent decades been severely eroded, not only by the egalitarianism of post-war social democracy but also by the entrepreneurialism of the Thatcher years.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the Conservative Party itself is regrettably seen also to have lost much of the authority it once possessed. As a result, Worsthorne puts a very different interpretation to John O’Sullivan on the emergence of a New Class, seeing in the rise of a New Labour intelligentsia the welcome possibility of reconstituting at least some form of authoritative ruling elite.

¹¹³ N. Barry (1996) ‘Economic Liberalism, Ethics and the Social Market’, in J. Meadowcroft (ed.) *The Liberal Political Tradition* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), p. 71.

¹¹⁴ Willetts (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ W. Olson (1997) ‘Judge Dread’, *Reason*, April, p. 41.

¹¹⁶ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

Indeed, Blair himself is deemed worthy of comparison with no less than High Tory hero Lord Salisbury:

For just as Lord Salisbury took it for granted that a civilised society required people of a superior culture and education to do the governing and administering, so does Mr Blair, the main difference being that whereas the former entrusted the task to an old ruling class – which had been in situ for generations – the latter intends to entrust it to a new ruling class very much of its own making ... a new breed of highly educated Guardians (pun intended).¹¹⁷

Worsthorne is of course ambivalent about this development – after all, these ‘Guardians’ are not the traditional ruling class he has always known and believed in – but nonetheless, Blairite managerialism is to be preferred to the pernicious meritocratic vision of Thatcherite ideology. (Although, after only a year of New Labour in office, Worsthorne had already become less sanguine regarding the potential of ‘New Labour man’.¹¹⁸)

However, other types of conservative may also believe that a strengthening of authority is desirable. In the past, much conservative hostility towards the state was premised on the belief that, whilst the political and intellectual classes may be thoroughly suffused with antagonistic beliefs, the rest of the population – the silent majority – were essentially conservative in terms of their values and attitudes. Even if conservatives were isolated intellectually, they could at least imagine themselves to be in tune with ordinary or common sense morality. Regardless of whether such a belief was ever correct, it gave conservatives confidence in arguing for the rolling back of the state since they could believe that the individuals freed from the state’s control would independently lead ‘conservative’ lives. Yet today, a distinct worry is evident amongst many conservatives that this is no longer the case.

It is instructive here to consider the analysis presented by Frum. In the 1950s, he argues, it was possible for social conservatives to be anti-statist, and therefore make common cause with libertarians, because at the time America was ‘a very socially

¹¹⁷ Worsthorne (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹¹⁸ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

conservative country'.¹¹⁹ Even during the 1960s the majority still held to conservative positions on questions such as divorce and premarital sex. Today however:

it's not so clear that the American people, left to their own devices, will behave in ways that a conservative would consider "virtuous". In fact, a disconcerting minority of them will choose to smoke marijuana, get pregnant out of wedlock, major in basketweaving at college, wear T-Shirts with obscene messages on them, watch too much television, live on welfare, burn the flag, and play their boomboxes too loud.

The eclecticism of Frum's list – his concerns ranging from the conceivably serious to the largely trivial – indicates well many conservatives' sense of a widespread and diffused loss of faith in accepted conservative verities. Moreover, the free market may be complicit in individuals' loss of moral bearing: that is, Frum argues, it is easy to imagine the market 'to be egging them on', responsible for gansta-rap music, the Jerry Springer show and Internet pornography. Yet if not only is there a liberal intellectual hegemony with which conservatives must contend, but also it appears that neither a non-liberal majority nor the free market can be trusted to preserve conservative values, then the state may provide the only mechanisms which can.

Frum himself, though seeing the logic of this argument, rejects the conclusion; yet others do not. The pressing urgency accorded by many conservatives to combating cultural decay will be examined in Chapter 4, but a number of examples may be cited here of how this may lead conservatives to believe that the state is necessary to underwrite moral authority. For example, Bork argues that since 'government has withdrawn from the moral sphere ... we have a state of moral chaos'.¹²⁰ Thus whilst not wishing activist judges to pass moral judgements, Bork is not above asking government to do so – with society seemingly 'slouching towards Gomorrah', state censorship of films, television and the arts may be warranted to stop the cultural rot.¹²¹ A key difference thus highlighted between libertarians and those conservatives Bork

¹¹⁹ D. Frum (1997b) 'The Libertarian Temptation', *Weekly Standard*, 21 April, p. 22.

¹²⁰ Interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

¹²¹ R. Bork (1996) *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books).

terms 'Tories' is that although libertarians may be 'willing to make moral judgments ... they're not willing to regulate. Tories are willing to regulate.'¹²²

Similarly, Himmelfarb argues that the depth of society's 'demoralization' today means that conservatives need to rethink their belief that rolling back the state and allowing markets free reign will automatically restore social and moral values.¹²³ Arguing against the claim that it is not possible to legislate morality, Himmelfarb thus prescribes just this. Leaving aside the truth or falsity of this proposition, it may be seen that far from all conservatives agree that the use of the law to enforce morality is misguided.

Writers such as Himmelfarb are at least open in confronting the issue. By contrast, Will notes the 'contradiction' of many conservatives who advocate disrespect for government whilst at the same time looking to it to preserve cultural integrity.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, as Dinesh D'Souza concludes in similar fashion to Frum, the anxieties of conservative writers on cultural malaise may be explained by the fact that they 'have lost their faith in the American people', seeing them either as foolish or depraved.¹²⁵ As will be seen in the following chapters, pessimism in regard to the current state of morality is most deeply felt by American conservatives. However, many British conservatives are far from unconcerned about a decline in moral authority. For example, Margaret Thatcher also worries about too much freedom being responsible for a rising 'licentiousness' and 'coarsening' of the culture: 'liberty decays into licence in an atmosphere where all is permitted and nothing prohibited'.¹²⁶ Order, authority and restraint, we are thus reminded, are the necessary complements to freedom. Moreover, as Duncan and Hobson's decidedly non-liberal concerns at the relaxation of divorce laws and ready availability of contraception attest, a highly qualified view of which aspects of state activity even libertarians may wish to include in any project of 'liquidation' is frequently evident.¹²⁷

¹²² Interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

¹²³ G. Himmelfarb (1996) *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Vintage Books), pp. 246-8.

¹²⁴ G. F. Will (1996) 'The Cultural Contradictions of Conservatism', *Public Interest*, No. 123, p. 44.

¹²⁵ D. D'Souza (1997) *Ronald Reagan* (New York: Free Press), p. 264.

¹²⁶ M. Thatcher (1997) 'The Value of American Studies', *Society*, Vol. 34, No. 6, p. 50.

¹²⁷ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 307-34.

Furthermore, a libertarian solution to the problem of welfare dependency is not the only one favoured by conservatives. For example Lawrence Mead, rejecting the claim of writers such as Murray that answer is to be found in the alteration of incentive structures, argues that the supposition that individuals are basically rational utility-maximizers ignores the fact that welfare recipients are so corrupted by their experience of state welfare that their competence to function as normal, rational citizens is severely impaired.¹²⁸ As a consequence, hoping to effect change by eliminating the rational basis for remaining on welfare is a mistake, since dependency is not a rational choice. Although Mead opposes state welfare provision, his proposed solution is therefore very different to that of libertarians, in that he wishes the state to adopt a more rather than less interventionist role. What he advocates specifically is 'workfare', with government obligating welfare recipients to partake in schemes designed to inculcate a work ethic. Thus, like Bork and Himmelfarb, what he urges is a reduction in liberty (at least for the unemployed) and an increase in the state's authority. Unashamed to be advocating a form of authoritarian 'paternalism' he thus readily avers that 'The solution to the work problem lies not in freedom but in governance.'¹²⁹

Similarly, as regards constitutional questions conservative arguments are frequently premised on grounds other than those of freedom or democracy. Rather, the threat posed to the authority of traditional institutions is also of major concern. Again of course, conservative arguments in this area are not entirely novel. For example, Scruton argues that proposals for constitutional reform in the name of democracy are fundamentally misguided because 'the constitution should be seen less as a device for safeguarding the rights of the subject, and more as a device for conferring legitimacy on those in power. Its essential feature is that it confers authority and dignity on the holders of office.'¹³⁰

However, again account must be taken of the depth of challenge today faced by established institutions. As John Patten observes:

¹²⁸ Mead (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 134-6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181. The need for authority is a theme running throughout Mead's book: for example, pp. 146-7, 155-7, 206-9.

¹³⁰ R. Scruton (1996) 'Editorial', *Salisbury Review*, Winter, p. 44.

The undermining of institutions in the United Kingdom seems in the mid-1990s to be endemic. Almost all the players in our constitutional arrangements are under attack, and their standing diminished, with the sole exception of the armed forces. It is an urgent task for the whole of the country, and not just a political party, to rekindle respect for our institutions.¹³¹

Yet whilst Patten suggests that rekindling respect for traditional institutions is a task for the whole country, its collapse of course has particular moment for conservatives. That is, since the constitutional arrangements he cites – including the Union and the monarchy – have always been the traditional bedrocks upon which British conservatism has grounded its appeals, any diminishing of respect for them poses a particular problem for conservatives.¹³² This being the case, whilst it may be one thing to attack the ‘state’ in the abstract, many of the actual institutions of which it is composed are nonetheless ones conservatives may need to defend.

Further issues relating to conservatives’ understandings of the role of the state will inevitably be touched upon throughout subsequent chapters. Yet a final one worth considering in this chapter is the range of arenas in which conservatives may be willing to concede a legitimate role for the state. That is, once support is given for state intervention in one sphere – such as that of morality – it becomes far less tenable to reject it in others. As Irwin Stelzer argues, if conservatives are willing to ask government to promote social values, why not accept the need for economic regulation to fulfil moral goals?¹³³ For example, conservatives like Bork argue that antitrust laws should be used solely to regulate monopolies on the basis of economic efficiency, yet Stelzer asks, why not also use these laws to promote social consensus and to ‘dull’ the harsh edge of the knife of competition? In light of the fact that Bork is evidently happy for state mechanisms to be used to promote virtue, it may indeed be difficult for conservatives like him to resist such arguments.

¹³¹ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹³² D. Cannadine (1994) ‘John Major, Just an Undertaker on Overtime’, *Spectator*, 16 April; B. Schwarz (1997) ‘The Break-Up of the Conservative Nation’, *Soundings*, No. 7.

What is clear from the above is that differences between conservatives over the role of the state and the priority that should be attached to individual liberty continue to provoke tensions. Thus whilst many conservatives wish to criticize contemporary arguments for expanding the state's role, perceived needs to qualify a purely liberal doctrine as well as to strengthen authority may contradict these critiques. One of the themes to be explored in the following chapter therefore is the hope that by focusing upon the sphere of civil society a way out may be found from the hazards of either a pure individualism or an authoritarian statism.

¹³³ I. M. Stelzer (1997) 'A Conservative Case for Regulation', *Public Interest*, No. 128, pp. 85-97.

Chapter 3

Civil Society and Community

As indicated in the previous chapter, for many conservatives it is the realms existing beyond the state that are believed to play the most important roles in the formation and maintenance of a stable society of sound moral order. Indeed, Roger Scruton claims that ‘conservatism originates in an attitude to civil society’ rather than to politics.¹ The purpose of this chapter therefore is to explore the roles played by the concepts of civil society and community in contemporary conservative thought. In particular, the aim is to highlight the ways in which these have become especially central motifs for post-Cold War conservatism.

Of course, both civil society and community are concepts that have become immensely fashionable throughout contemporary social and political discourses; moreover, interest in them has spread beyond purely academic discussions to find much wider favour. This may be seen across the political spectrum. Thus as one American commentator observes: ‘civil society is hot. It is almost impossible to read an article on foreign or domestic politics without coming across some mention of the concept ... from Hillary Rodham Clinton to Pat Buchanan, politicians of all stripes routinely sing its praises.’² A similar observation might be made regarding the concept of community.³

This being so, much of what will be examined in this chapter may not pertain uniquely to conservatism. One objective therefore is to distinguish what is distinctive in conservative usages: in particular, how the condition of the social fabric is believed to

¹ R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), p. 27.

² F. Zakaria (1995) ‘Bigger Than the Family: Smaller Than the State’, *New York Times Book Review*, 13 August, p. 1. Or, as the preface to an article by historian John Lukacs puts it: “‘Civil society’ has become the talisman of the post-Cold War era’ – J. Lukacs (1996) ‘Our Enemy, the State?’, *Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 108.

³ As does Alan Ehrenhalt: the ‘word *community* has found a place, however fuzzy and imprecise, all over the ideological spectrum of the present decade’ – A. Ehrenhalt (1995) *The Lost City* (New York: Basic Books), p. 17.

relate to all manner of issues concerning moral, cultural and economic malaise. Finally, the problems that are raised for conservatives by their specific understandings will also be considered, problems which it will be argued reveal many of the wider difficulties faced by conservatives in the post-Cold War era.

Reclaiming a Tradition

Before considering in more detail how conservatives understand the concepts of civil society and community, it will be valuable to examine some of the background to their contemporary usage. One of the most important sources for an understanding of civil society is of course the liberal tradition of Hobbes, Locke and Smith. However, writers tracing the history of the concept usually note that, despite its long lineage, since Hegel – or at least since Marx’s critique of Hegel – attention to it fell into decline, only more latterly returning to the forefront of concern.⁴

Probably the most important impetus behind this resurgence of interest has been the attempts to determine the values and institutions necessary for the transition of former Soviet societies into Western-style capitalist ones. However, most significant for this chapter is the subsequent reflection this has led to upon the condition of Western societies themselves. For example, as David Green states in the introduction to his study of British civil society:

This book began as an attempt to consider the lessons the former countries of Eastern Europe might be able to learn from Western experience of voluntary welfare provision. But, as the study proceeded, it quickly became obvious that we in the West have done almost as much harm to our own voluntary associations as the communist countries.⁵

⁴ A significant literature exists detailing the history and meaning of the concept. For example, J. Cohen and A. Arato (1992) *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press); E. Gellner (1994) *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton); A. Seligman (1995) *The Idea of Civil Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).

⁵ D. G. Green (1993) *Reinventing Civil Society: The Rediscovery of Welfare Without Politics* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit), p. viii.

At the same time communitarianism, having originated within political theory debates of the 1970s and 1980s, has also come to provide a more widely adopted paradigm for understanding the condition of society, communitarians' concerns in many respects mirroring those of writers on civil society. For example, a so-called 'Responsive Communitarian Platform' issued in 1991, and attracting over fifty notable signatories, sought to unite all those interested in revitalizing the weakened bonds of American communities.⁶

Adopting a highly cynical stance, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that calls 'for an otherwise unidentified "civil society", for "community"' represent the voices 'of lost and drifting generations'.⁷ Whether or not this is true, writers such as Robert Puttnam, Alan Wolfe, Robert Bellah and Amitai Etzioni clearly have re-introduced a vocabulary of civil society and community into political and social discourses.⁸ Most notably, discussion has been framed around a notion of decline: that is, a perceived decline of communal sentiments, civic engagement and a sense of social and moral obligations. In parallel to – and in large measure viewed as cause of – this degeneration has been the supposed rise of an aggressive and socially de-stabilizing individualism. Indeed, over many accounts hangs the spectre of a descent into Hobbesian anarchy: with the decay of the values of neighbourliness, trust and responsibility comes the ever increasing prospect of individuals pitted against each other in bitter conflict.⁹

Conservatives are certainly aware of the contemporary popularity of communitarian ideas. For example, Joshua Abramowitz believes that it 'is a good time to be a

⁶ *Responsive Community* (1991/2) 'The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities', Winter.

⁷ E. Hobsbawm (1994) *The Age of Extremes* (London: Penguin Books), p. 11.

⁸ R. Puttnam (1995a) 'Bowling Alone', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 1 and (1995b) 'Turning in, Turning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 4; A. Wolfe (1989) *Whose Keeper?* (Berkeley: University of California Press); R. Bellah *et al.* (1985) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press); A. Etzioni (1995) *The Spirit of Community* (London: Fontana Press).

⁹ For example, Michael Walzer contends that: 'Familial solidarity, mutual assistance, political like-mindedness – all these are less certain than they once were. Other people, strangers on the street, seem less trustworthy than they once did. The Hobbesian account of society is more persuasive than it once was.' M. Walzer (1991) 'The Idea of Civil Society', *Dissent*, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 293.

communitarian ... the philosophy [is] *au courant* in the press and in academia'.¹⁰ Similarly, Scruton argues that 'Communitarianism is now an orthodoxy, not only in America ... but on this side of the Atlantic.'¹¹ Even libertarians may consider it to be 'the dominant political tendency of our times'.¹²

At the same time, on a bare definition of communitarianism it is easy to suggest that 'communitarians are conservatives'.¹³ Whilst there are significant differences between conservatives and other contemporary writers on the themes of civil society and community, at this stage it is useful to recognize the areas of commonality. Certainly, a number of communitarian writers, such as Etzioni and Alasdair MacIntyre, might easily be assigned the 'conservative' label, with Etzioni owing to a highly conservative position on moral and social questions, and MacIntyre seeking to recover pre-Enlightenment traditions of philosophical discourse.¹⁴

Similarly, many conservatives – such as James Q. Wilson and David Willetts – have been highly receptive to communitarian thinking, welcoming its ascendancy and drawing upon it for support.¹⁵ Equally, Scruton defends many of the same philosophical principles as communitarians, including beliefs in: the social construction of the self; the embeddedness of ethical values within historically determined communities; and rejecting abstract conceptions of freedom and rights.¹⁶ Moreover, many conservative journals have opened their pages to communitarians such as

¹⁰ J. Abramowitz (1993) 'The Tao of Community', *Public Interest*, No. 111, p. 119.

¹¹ R. Scruton (1996) *The Conservative Idea of Community* (London: Conservative 2000 Foundation), p. 9.

¹² A. Duncan and D. Hobson (1995) *Saturn's Children: How the State Devours Liberty, Property and Virtue* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), p. xiv.

¹³ Abramowitz (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 119. Abramowitz does however go on to qualify this statement.

¹⁴ A. Etzioni (1994) 'Restoring Our Moral Voice', *Public Interest*, No. 116; A. MacIntyre (1985) *After Virtue* (2nd edn.) (London: Duckworth). MacIntyre has been labelled 'a major right-wing theorist' by C. Martindale (1992) 'Tradition and Modernity', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 105 and a 'young conservative' by R. Paden (1987) 'Post-Structuralism and Neo-Romanticism, Or Is MacIntyre a Young Conservative?', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 135-43. Amongst British communitarians, Henry Tam expresses sympathy for a conservative philosophy in the spirit of Hume and Burke – H. Tam (1998) *Communitarianism: A New Agenda for Politics and Citizenship* (London: Macmillan), pp. 34-6.

¹⁵ J. Q. Wilson (1993) *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press), p. 248; D. Willetts (1992) *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 189.

¹⁶ R. Scruton (1994) *Modern Philosophy* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), pp. 432-7, 493-5.

Etzioni.¹⁷

Yet with some justification conservatives may of course lay claim to primogeniture in terms of many of the ideas to be found in communitarian discourses; for example, conservative criticism of the atomizing effects of liberalism can be traced back to the conservative reaction to the French Revolution. Conservative writings thus frequently display a distinct annoyance at the disregard shown by other writers to conservative contributions; for example, Michael Novak takes academic communitarians to task for ignoring the long conservative tradition of upholding the idea of community.¹⁸ In attempts perhaps to reclaim – as well as gain authority from – this tradition, contemporary conservative writings thus abound with references to Burke’s ‘little platoons’ and Tocqueville’s ‘associations’, these notions’ authors lauded by conservatives for the priority they gave to the local and particular as opposed to the abstract universalism of their Enlightenment-inspired contemporaries.

Of modern interest, one of the most significant intellectual sources for contemporary conservatives is the work of Robert Nisbet, a champion of the idea of community before the emergence of communitarianism.¹⁹ Furthermore, many neoconservatives of the 1960s and 1970s also displayed degrees of unease about a purely individualist form of capitalism. Perhaps most important for the present discussion is the work of Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus, who argue that the massive expansion of the state this century has caused enormous social damage by eroding the buffers which exist between it and the individual, such as neighbourhood and voluntary organizations.²⁰ These they term ‘mediating institutions’, a conception which has proved particularly influential for subsequent conservative understandings of civil society.²¹

Whilst conservative discussion of themes relating to civil society and community

¹⁷ For example, the *Public Interest*: Etzioni (1994), *op. cit.*

¹⁸ M. Novak (1989) *Free Persons and the Common Good* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books), p. 129. Murray believes the same about civil society and the neglect of the classical liberal tradition – interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

¹⁹ R. Nisbet (1953) *The Quest for Community* (New York: Oxford University Press).

²⁰ P. Berger and R. Neuhaus (1977) *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute).

²¹ Significantly, when re-issued in a second edition in 1996 the work was given a new subtitle, *From State to Civil Society*.

should by no means therefore be seen as a wholly new development since their classical formulations, what is striking about current discourses is the prominence of the concepts amongst conservatives of all types. The widespread popularity of the notions may lead some conservatives to exercise a certain caution in their deployment – as Charles Murray argues, ‘civil society has become such a trendy phrase that I’m almost embarrassed to be caught using it’²² – yet nonetheless, they are ubiquitous within conservative writings.

Perhaps the most obvious variety of conservative to be proponents of a communitarian philosophy are those most committed to a traditionalist perspective. Good examples of this type are Scruton and Bruce Frohnen, both of whom present Burkean accounts of the nature of community.²³ One of the most interesting facets of these thinkers’ writings is their consciousness of the current popularity of community-centred philosophies, and their efforts as a consequence to distinguish specifically conservative communitarian doctrines.

Yet stressing the link between conservatism and a valuing of community is prevalent amongst conservatives much more widely. Indeed this has become all but *de rigeur* for British Conservative politicians setting out their visions; for example, David Hunt emphasizes that ‘ours is a communitarian philosophy’, whilst Willetts places a concern for community at the heart of his notion of civic conservatism.²⁴ Similarly, illustration of the centrality of civil society to modern conservatism is well shown by the case of the Heritage Foundation, one of the most important and mainstream of American conservative think-tanks. In 1996 its principal periodical, *Policy Review*, was relaunched as *Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship*, with an editorial announcing the journal’s prime objective for the future as being that of ‘articulating and advancing the conservative vision of civil society’, describing its new mission as

²² Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

²³ Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*; B. Frohnen (1996) *The New Communitarians and the Crisis of Modern Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press).

²⁴ D. Hunt (1994) *Right Ahead: Conservatism and the Social Market* (London: Conservative Political Centre), p. 7; Willetts (1992), *op. cit.* and D. Willetts (1994) *Civic Conservatism* (London: Social Market Foundation). See also K. Milne (1994) ‘Community: The Tories Fight Back’, *New Statesman*, 22 July.

‘Applied Tocqueville’.²⁵ Much space has thus been devoted to articles attending to this goal.

Many further examples may be highlighted. For instance, in 1995 William Bennett and Republican Senator Dan Coats co-crafted a ‘Project for American Renewal’, a package of legislative measures designed to re-energize the provision of welfare by private organizations; moreover, one of the key concerns of Bennett’s prolific writings is the re-establishment of the virtues necessary for the functioning of civil society.²⁶ Many other American conservatives – such as Don Eberly (director of the ‘Civil Society Project’), William Schambra and Michael Joyce (President of the Bradley Foundation, who argues for the development of a ‘New Citizenship’) – have similarly oriented their thinking around the idea of civil society.²⁷ Indeed, a whole host of think-tanks, journals and organizations – such as the Hudson Institute, *American Enterprise* magazine and Focus on the Family – have dedicated themselves to advancing the cause of civil society.²⁸ Furthermore, the role of civil society in the recovery of virtue, character and civility features as a core theme throughout contemporary conservative writings.²⁹

As will be seen, the conceptions of civil society employed by most of these writers and institutions are very much in accord with the ‘anti-liberal’ perspective of communitarian notions. Yet at the same time, other conceptions may draw upon a more liberal understanding. This of course remains important to free market writers.

²⁵ A. Meyerson (1996) ‘Welcome to *Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship*’, *Policy Review*, No. 75, p. 5. This change is further explained in J. Edwards (1997) *The Power of Ideas: The Heritage Foundation at 25 Years* (Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books), pp. 167-9.

²⁶ D. Coats (1996) ‘Can Congress Revive Civil Society?’, *Policy Review*, No. 75; D. Coats and R. Santorum (1998) ‘Civil Society and the Humble Role of Government’, in E. J. Dionne (ed.) *Community Works* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press). For Bennett, see in particular his various collections of morally edifying tales: W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1993) *The Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster); W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1995) *The Moral Compass* (New York: Simon & Schuster); W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1997) *Our Sacred Honor* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman).

²⁷ D. Eberly (ed.) (1994) *Building a Community of Citizens: Civil Society in the 21st Century* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America) and D. Eberly (ed.) (1995) *The Content of America’s Character* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books); W. Schambra (1994) ‘By the People: The Old Values of the New Citizenship’, *Policy Review*, No. 69; M. Joyce (1994) ‘Citizenship in the 21st Century’, in Eberly (ed.) (1994), *op. cit.* and M. Joyce (1998) ‘On Self-Government’, *Policy Review*, No. 90.

²⁸ Meyerson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²⁹ For example, C. L. Glenn (1995) ‘The Roots of Character in Civil Society’, in Eberly (ed.), *op. cit.* See Chapter 4 for further.

For example, the Cato Institute has its own 'Project on Civil Society' to match those of other American think-tanks, whilst writers such as Green at the Institute of Economic Affairs also make the concept central to their concerns. However, it is not necessarily the case that even contemporary free market thinkers conceive civil society in purely liberal terms. Indeed, what will be seen once more in this chapter is that the commitments of contemporary conservatives do not straightforwardly correspond to historical divisions.

Meanings and Agendas

According to John Gray, for thinkers such as Locke and Smith it is held as a universal truth that there is an inherent connection 'between individualist culture and a civil society encompassing market institutions'.³⁰ Within New Right thought, the same conflating of civil society and individualism is also in evidence, with neither 'neo-liberalism nor its conservative critics' recognizing the 'cultural foundations and historical limits of individualist civil society'. As is already apparent, many conservatives clearly never have simply equated civil society with individualism; yet what will be illustrated next is how difficult it is to sustain this argument in relation to all varieties of conservative today.

However, in attempting to determine how the terms civil society and community are understood by contemporary conservatives it is unavoidable to observe one of the most conspicuous features of all modern writings, which is the lack of both clarity and consensus as to how they should be defined. Undoubtedly, of course, this very indeterminacy is a key element in the terms' widespread attractiveness, explaining their appeal across the political continuum. Yet at the same time, there is therefore some measure of accuracy in Hobsbawm's assessment that civil society and community are today little more than 'vapid phrases'.³¹ Moreover, his suggestion that they have

³⁰ J. Gray (1993) *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (London: Routledge), p. 279.

³¹ Hobsbawm (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 11. See also pp. 139, 490.

essentially 'lost their traditional meanings' is a useful corrective to the idea that they can be understood simply in terms of their classical meanings.

Nonetheless, the basic sense in which most American conservatives understand civil society is, as suggested above, derived from the idea of mediating institutions originated by Berger and Neuhaus. Thus the usual way in which it is defined is by the presentation of lists of these institutions. For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb offers a typical contemporary example, in viewing civil society as comprising 'the institutions that mediate between the individual and the state: family, community, churches, local authorities, private enterprises, voluntary associations'.³²

An issue immediately raised by Himmelfarb's account is how the concepts of civil society and community are supposed to relate. One notable modern writer on civil society, Ernest Gellner, marks a clear distinction between the two, distinguishing the social sub-unit he terms the 'segmentary community' from civil society because it does not offer the degree of freedom he seeks from a pluralistic conception of the latter.³³ However, few contemporary conservatives draw this distinction, reflecting the fact that they are typically less concerned with civil society as a realm of plurality.

As implied by Himmelfarb's definition, one way to understand the relationship is to treat communities as themselves institutions of civil society. Yet perhaps most common is to find the two employed essentially as synonyms. For example, as a means of explaining what is meant by community, Dunn and Woodard proffer a similar list of institutions to Himmelfarb, including the family, churches and voluntary associations.³⁴ Similarly, in defining the conservative view of community, Brad Miner offers a quotation from Burke on civil society.³⁵

Yet considering community in its own right, it is often easier to understand what the

³² G. Himmelfarb (1995a) 'Introduction', in D. Anderson (ed.) *This Will Hurt: The Restoration of Virtue and Civic Order* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. vii. Eberly also agrees that what constitutes civil society are 'mediating institutions', noting particularly the Berger and Neuhaus conception – D. Eberly (1994) 'Introduction', in Eberly (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. xxxi. See also M. Novak (1994) 'The Conservative Mood', *Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, p. 22.

³³ Gellner (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.

³⁴ C. W. Dunn and J. D. Woodard (1996) *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), pp. 51-2.

³⁵ B. Miner (1996) *The Concise Conservative Encyclopaedia* (New York: Free Press), p. 58.

conservative conception is not than what it actually is. For example, Joyce argues that 'Community is not a nation ... [it] is not a class, a gender, or an occupation.'³⁶ Such a negative description does at least reveal a part of what is attractive about the concept for conservatives, in that it allows them to present social solidarities in a depoliticized form. That is, it enables conservatives to offer a philosophy of social bonds free from the entanglements of ideological conceptions of collectivities such as class or gender.

Similarly therefore, Dunn and Woodard present the conservative stress upon community – which in their view embodies the values of variety and complexity – as being in contrast to the social vision of the ideologue, who prizes uniformity.³⁷ Indeed, many conservatives articulate such liberal notions when contrasting their conceptions with those of their opponents; it is when the context is that of considering the wider condition of society that less liberal ruminations are provoked.

In many respects, the clearest accounts of community are to be found amongst traditionalist writers such as Scruton, unafraid in any context to praise the virtues of shared values and modes of behaviour. For Scruton, the community is the very source of individual identity and, most importantly, the bonds which tie individuals together are pre-political in nature.³⁸ That is, membership of society is not – as suggested by liberal theory – contractual, but based upon deep-rooted and ineliminable instincts of belonging which exist prior to political arrangements. On Scruton's organic conception, being part of a community is not therefore undertaken for any mere instrumental reason, but is an unavoidable feature of social existence. As a consequence, the community itself is not an entity that may simply be made or re-made at will. The social unit to be looked to as embodying the spirit of community is the nation.

The idea that sources more 'fundamental' than politics are what are important in the constitution of communities is also common amongst contemporary writers on civil society. For example, Eberly writes that: 'Free societies must be replenished with things that "classical" philosophers would describe as "pre-political", those things that

³⁶ Quoted in H. C. Boyte and N. N. Kari (1997) 'The Commonwealth of Freedom', *Policy Review*, No. 86, p. 41.

³⁷ Dunn and Woodard (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁸ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-45.

are more important than and prior to politics and economics.³⁹ Much of the appeal of the notion of the pre-political is not only that it fits in with an organicist conservative philosophy, but also that it ties in with the disillusionment suggested in previous chapters felt by conservatives towards conventional political and economic agendas. Thus, it is believed, the remedy for society's problems is instead to be found in other spheres.

The emphasis Scruton places upon the nation also highlights the issue of what level of social unit conservatives believe community refers to. In fact, as Willetts observes, it is often unclear within conservative writings whether it is the nation itself which is believed to embody the spirit of community, or if it is the plurality of institutions or networks which comprise the nation that is imagined to.⁴⁰ Whilst Scruton may be clear on this, in relation to many other conservatives Willetts' is an apt observation.

What may also be suggested here is another possible difference between British and American conservative theory, in that it may be argued that the national rather than local unit is a more common basis for British conservatives' understanding of community than is the case with their American counterparts. For example, it is plain from the statement cited above that Joyce believes that nation and community are not the same. Similarly, Nisbet contends that the 'spirit of nationalism' has not been as creative a force as localism.⁴¹ In other words, due to the specific nature and history of American federalism, a far greater attachment to the sub-national community is to be found amongst American conservatives.

However, whilst there is an amount of truth in this suggestion, it is also clear that British conservatives are similarly very much concerned with the sub-national social unit, even if committed to the bonds of the nation as well. Again therefore, Robert Devigne's contention that American conservative theory is distinctive in its attitude towards mediating institutions is far from justified. For example, Scruton argues that conservative social policy ought to focus upon institutions such as the family and

³⁹ Eberly (1994), *op. cit.*, p. xxiii.

⁴⁰ Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁴¹ Nisbet (1953), *op. cit.*, p. 26. See also W. Schambra (1998) 'All Community Is Local', in Dionne (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 44-9.

schools, rather than government, as the sources of individual identity and morality.⁴² Moreover, Thomas Fleming argues that – whilst himself believing the local unit to be the true source of civilized values and identity – most American conservatives possess a global outlook that militates against any true commitment to localism.⁴³ (The issues raised by the influence of global considerations upon conservatives’ understanding of community will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5.)

Nonetheless, despite differences over how civil society or community should be defined, one clear aspect upon which most conservatives seem to agree is that a marked deterioration in civility and sociability has occurred in recent times. To this may be attributed almost any and every social disorder: ‘The consequences of civil society’s decline are evident throughout our daily life, in soaring rates of crime, divorce, illegitimacy, neighbourhood deterioration, welfare dependency, chemical addiction, suicide, and virtually every other indicator of pathology.’⁴⁴ Indeed, according to William Mattox, the decline of civic virtue may even be held responsible for a veritable epidemic of clinical depression perceived to be gripping American society.⁴⁵

Similarly, it is precisely the lack of strong mediating institutions that may be to blame for the whole cultural crisis identified by many contemporary conservatives (to be discussed in Chapter 4). As Coats argues: ‘America’s cultural decay can be traced directly to the breakdown of certain institutions – families, churches, neighbourhoods, voluntary associations – that act as an immune system against cultural disease.’⁴⁶ By contrast, when civil society is strong ‘it infuses a community with its warmth, trains its people to be good citizens, and transmits values between generations’.

In particular, it is the great moral harm supposed to have been caused by civil society’s degeneration which most exercises conservatives’ minds, such as the culture of dependency created by state rather than voluntary welfare provision.⁴⁷ As seen in

⁴² Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 24-7.

⁴³ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

⁴⁴ Schambra (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ W. R. Mattox, Jr. (1998) ‘Bawling Alone’, *Policy Review*, No. 91.

⁴⁶ Coats (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ G. Himmelfarb (1996a) ‘Welfare As a Moral Problem’, *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*,

the previous chapter, as much as the growth of the welfare state may be an economic concern, for conservatives its displacing of alternative forms of welfare provision has at least as important moral consequences. For example, Himmelfarb argues that 'public relief is more demoralizing than private charity, since it is a public testimony to an individual's dependency and weakness'.⁴⁸

Values supposed especially to have disappeared with the decline of civil society are those of responsibility and duty. Importantly, the elevation of these values frequently goes hand in hand with a denigration of the value of individual rights. For example, George Will argues that:

Our political discourse is so saturated with rights talk ... that the tributaries of nonlegal rhetoric are drying up. There is excessive concentration on two polarities of social life – the individual and the state – and insufficient attention to civil society's intermediary institutions. ... Our hard-edged rights talk slights the grammar of cooperative living.⁴⁹

The Individual, the Market and the State

Whilst most of the writers so far considered conceive civil society to be an arena of moral and cultural unity, it will be useful next to examine those who instead envisage it to be a sphere of plurality and liberty. Amongst British conservatives, those influenced by Oakeshott's theory of civil association show an amount of scepticism towards the demands of communitarian prescriptions. As noted in Chapter 2, for Oakeshott it is a mistake to believe that the state should be used to pursue common goals. Underlying this denunciation is a particular understanding of the possible modes of social

Vol. 19, No. 3; D. Eberly (1998) 'Civic Renewal vs. Moral Renewal', *Policy Review*, No. 91.

⁴⁸ G. Himmelfarb (1995b) 'The Moral Crisis of Our Welfare State', *Rising Tide*, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 17. For further on the conservative view of charity see R. Whelan (1996) *The Corrosion of Charity: From Moral Renewal to Contract Culture* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

⁴⁹ G. F. Will (1992) *Restoration: Congress, Term Limits and the Recovery of Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Free Press), p. 174. See also Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 248.

organization, between which he marks a clear distinction.⁵⁰ First, there are enterprise associations, in which members are united in the pursuit of shared ends; yet whilst it may be legitimate for institutions such as companies to be modeled along these lines, it is the error of the rationalist to believe that so too should the wider social order. Second, there are associations of practice, such as universities, governed by sets of general rules but within which individuals pursue their own chosen objectives. This being Oakeshott's preferred mode, a civil association is thus characterized by a framework of non-instrumental rules in which the state does not seek to impose substantive goals or beliefs.

Thus, in a review of the New Right's attempts to articulate a civil philosophy, Noël O'Sullivan expresses suspicion towards the communitarian zeal seen to have infected parts of the conservative school.⁵¹ Similarly, he is disquieted at the notion that the bonds of community should be viewed as resting upon pre-political sources, arguing that such an idea downgrades the real essence of civil order – the impersonal, abstract bond of law – and therefore has worrying implications for individual freedom. Moreover, he suggests, were substantive bonds of pre-political commonality truly the requirement of civil association, neither Britain nor the United States could have been formed by the disparate peoples which first constituted them.

In fact, it is possible here to suggest another distinction between British and American conservatism, also highlighted by Devigne. Thus, Devigne argues, it is necessary to distinguish between the fundamental belief of modern British conservative theory that humanity 'is incapable of either generating or sustaining a substantive political unity', and the contrasting fears of American conservatives of 'an American polity that does not believe in substantive truths'.⁵² Similarly, Noël O'Sullivan suggests that Scruton, in arguing for the necessity of a shared common culture, is not only guilty of 'the greatest of political errors', but that this is 'the one to which the British conservative

⁵⁰ M. Oakeshott (1975) *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 116-29.

⁵¹ N. O'Sullivan (1989) 'The New Right: The Quest for a Civil Philosophy in Europe and America', in R. Eatwell and N. O'Sullivan (eds) *The Nature of the Right* (London: Pinter Publishers), pp. 167-91.

⁵² R. Devigne (1994) *Recasting Conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss, and the Response to Postmodernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 193.

tradition stands most deeply opposed'.⁵³ In other words, like Devigne, he believes that British conservative theory rejects the ambition to create a substantive social unity.

As with his argument discussed in the previous chapter, Devigne's understanding does possess some merit. However, as will be explored in Chapter 4, Scruton is far from alone amongst British conservatives in seeking a strong sense of moral and cultural unity. Moreover, it is not only Scruton who criticizes the tenets of liberal theory in his vision of civil society. For example, so too does Willetts, even despite being a far greater enthusiast for a free market philosophy.⁵⁴ Willetts thus denounces the liberal contractarian tradition for its failure to account adequately for the role played by society in the constitution of individual identity. Furthermore, and emphasizing his agreement with Hegel's critique of Kant on this point, Willetts also rejects prioritizing the role of autonomous individuals in moral reasoning.

Indeed, Willetts argues, one of the most important attractions of a community-centred philosophy is its provision of an answer to the 'is/ought' dilemma, by treating moral obligations as embodied in the social relations of particular communities. Thus the labels of 'father', 'son' or 'neighbour' not only describe an individual's social identity but also imply the moral duties and obligations to which he should adhere. In other words, a conservative moral vision is not, on Willetts' account, to be found in any set of mere abstract principles.

In fact, of further interest in considering the liberal content of conservatives' visions, is the clear truth that many, if not most, contemporary market liberals believe that civil society is a sphere in which much more occurs than simply market exchanges between autonomous individuals or firms. For example, Walter Block, explaining that libertarianism is not to be confused with libertinism, prescribes a greater reliance upon mediating institutions as a means of inculcating moral and spiritual values.⁵⁵ Similarly, J. A. Dorn, director of the Cato Institute's 'Project on Civil Society', believes in the necessity of a revived civil society to reinvigorate moral virtue.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Daniel

⁵³ N. O'Sullivan (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁵⁴ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998; Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 65-9.

⁵⁵ W. Block (1994) 'Libertarianism and Libertinism', *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 124.

⁵⁶ J. A. Dorn (1996) 'The Rise of Government and the Decline of Morality', *Freeman*, Vol. 46, No. 3,

Klein makes a bid for libertarianism's inclusion into the communitarian fold by arguing that only a libertarian agenda can underpin the social goals of communitarianism.⁵⁷

In other words, even for many economic liberals some distance seems to have been travelled since the time when Adam Smith could contend that society functions not because of anyone's benevolence, but as an unconscious result of individuals pursuing their own self-interest. Indeed, it is common to find suggestions that it is a mistake to view Smith simply as a champion of selfish laissez-faire; rather, it is argued, he should be recognized as being as much concerned with other-regarding moral injunctions, essential for the maintenance of a just society. We should therefore read not only *The Wealth of Nations*, but also more neglected works such as *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁵⁸ However accurate such reappraisals may be, they indicate well the problems with Gray's view of market liberals as unconcerned with the limits of an individualist conception of civil society.

Even so, American conservatives especially often argue that there is no necessary contradiction between a vigorously individualistic culture and one in which associational activity is also strong; as, for example, does Jeanne Kirkpatrick.⁵⁹ Similarly, David Frum questions why critics so often blame the market for civil society's decline, when in the past it was much 'redder in tooth and claw' than it is today.⁶⁰ However, one of the clearest examples of the attempt to reconcile free market and community-based philosophies is to be found in Willetts' notion of civic conservatism.⁶¹

On the one hand, Willetts argues, market forces should not be seen as the dire threat to the stability of traditional institutions critics claim, since history confirms that these can and have flourished during periods of rapid economic advance; for example, the experience of the nineteenth century reveals that free markets and strong communities

p. 140.

⁵⁷ D. B. Klein (1994) 'Libertarianism As Communitarianism', *Freeman*, Vol. 44, No. 12.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Green (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3; J. Q. Wilson (1991) *On Character* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute), pp. 139-48.

⁵⁹ Interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

⁶⁰ Interview with D. Frum, 4 September 1998.

⁶¹ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998; Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 65-108; Willetts (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 7-38.

can co-exist harmoniously. The present-day fragility of community institutions cannot therefore be attributed to the operation of the market since the two share a long history of peaceful congruity. Instead, the candidate much more likely culpable is a more recent development: big government.

Yet on the other hand, it is also necessary to recognize that a commitment to the free market is not itself sufficient for a truly satisfactory conservative creed: instead, the fostering of virtues such as honesty and fairness and the preservation of non-market institutions are equally vital to provide the cultural and moral environment required by a well-ordered capitalist society. Accordingly, what Willetts seeks is a balance between these two elements, the market and the community, to avoid 'the twin perils of crude neo-liberalism and a retreat into the cosy embrace of big government'.⁶² Again therefore, even amongst those who do not blame the market for communities' enervated condition, the need to supplement a free market philosophy with communitarian considerations is apparent.

Together with a widespread commitment to communitarian tenets, a further belief possessing broad agreement across the spectrum of conservatism is the independence of civil society from the state. According to many conservatives, the emergence of civil society was itself largely a spontaneous development: for example, Wilson believes that 'Civil society ... was neither foreseen nor planned by anyone.'⁶³ Thus, as with Willetts, the rise of the interventionist state is usually held responsible for civil society's decline, for 'crowding out' its institutions. This argument is of course most apparent in libertarian accounts. For example, as Newt Gingrich contends: 'De Tocqueville's description of voluntary organizations as the backbone of America would remain true today if these efforts were not completely overshadowed by a gigantic federal bureaucracy.'⁶⁴

Yet other conservatives share similar beliefs. For example, Will is also typical in arguing that there is an inverse relationship between the size of the state and the vitality of civil society: 'There is ... a zero-sum transaction in society: As the state waxes, other

⁶² Willetts (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁶³ Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 246.

⁶⁴ N. Gingrich (1995) *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 103. See also C. Murray (1997) *What It Means to Be a Libertarian* (New York: Broadway Books), pp. 57-8.

institutions wane.’⁶⁵ A similar belief, expressed in more lyrical form, is articulated by Novak: ‘When Leviathan falters, civil society stirs. When Leviathan relaxes, civil society expands.’⁶⁶ Even conservatives such as Scruton, most committed to the value of authority, may nonetheless argue that the separation of civil society and the state is desirable.⁶⁷

For this reason, devolving responsibility from the state to the institutions of civil society is a key feature of many conservative agendas. One much preferred strategy is the re-energizing of the voluntary sector. For example, Green yearns for a return to the nineteenth century heyday of the friendly societies.⁶⁸ Accordingly, his vision is one of groups of parents and teachers establishing private schools and the revival of voluntary hospitals. Similarly, Keith Joseph argues for the recovery of the role of friendly societies as a means of encouraging a sense of stakeholding in society.⁶⁹

As seen in the last chapter, for traditionalist conservatives the goal of limiting government in relation to civil society is not motivated by any concern for increasing freedom, but as a requirement for preserving common values and the heritage of a common culture. Thus Scruton argues for the privatization of schools and universities not because he shares any enthusiasm for the doctrines of economic liberalism, but because it is necessary to ‘emancipate the institutions through which our inheritance is transmitted’.⁷⁰ By the same token, Fleming argues for the desirability of rolling back government ‘not on the grounds of abstract individualism, but in defence of real human communities’ such as families and church parishes.⁷¹

However, one of the most interesting features specific to contemporary accounts is the treatment of the market in conservative conceptions. As Krishan Kumar observes

⁶⁵ Quoted in T. Skocpol (1996) ‘Unravelling from Above’, in R. Kuttner (ed.) *Ticking Time Bombs* (New York: New Press), p. 292.

⁶⁶ Novak (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Green (1993), *op. cit.* See also D. G. Green (1996) *Community Without Politics: A Market Approach to Welfare Reform* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

⁶⁹ K. Joseph (1996) ‘Why the Tories Are the Real Party of the Stakeholder’, *Economic Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 43. Not all conservatives may therefore be as sceptical of the notion of stakeholding as those noted in the previous chapter.

⁷⁰ Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

amongst all contemporary writers on civil society, there is a clear tendency to emphasize its specifically non-economic dimensions.⁷² This indeed appears the case as much in conservative writings as in others (even if less so amongst market liberals). For example, many do not mention economic bodies at all in their lists of institutions supposed to constitute civil society: Coats mentions families, churches, neighbourhoods and voluntary associations; Joyce presents the same list; as does Schambra, with the addition of schools.⁷³

Even when economic organizations are cited it is frequently not for their economic roles. For example, Adam Meyerson includes 'business enterprises' as part of civil society, yet it is their ability to generate 'creative answers to social problems' that is emphasized rather than their activities in the sphere of production.⁷⁴ Most significantly, the market may not just be ignored or marginalized by contemporary conservatives, but treated as a sphere actually separate from civil society. For example, Eberly implies just this in expressing the hope that the rediscovery of civil society marks a departure from 'a reliance on either the state or the market as mechanisms for social improvement'.⁷⁵ By the same token, Edwin Feulner, in describing what he believes to be the three pillars of present-day conservatism, distinguishes foreign policy, economic policy and those matters that are 'broadly cultural or civil society' issues.⁷⁶

The meaning of civil society for many conservatives today is evidently therefore quite different to those found in classical understandings, construed as it is in terms of their contemporary preoccupations. That is, civil society conceived as a sphere that promotes moral and cultural invigoration. However, a final feature of conservative invocations worth noting is the sense of loss and nostalgia with which they are often imbued. In other words, conservatives appear to believe that at some (frequently unspecified) time in the past society once truly was comprised of the virtuous and independent institutions they so highly prize. Their writings are thus filled with

⁷¹ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

⁷² K. Kumar (1993) 'Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 383-4.

⁷³ Coats (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 24; Joyce (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 41; Schambra (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ Meyerson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Eberly (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 47.

exhortations constituted by 're-' prefixed terms, enjoining us to 'rebuild', 're-energize' or 'revitalize' our social values and institutions. However modish the concepts of civil society and community may be therefore, for conservatives at least the issues at stake are nonetheless rooted firmly in the past.

Why Civil Society? Why Now?

In his introduction to a volume of writings on civil society, liberal commentator E. J. Dionne poses two of the most important questions relating to the issues under discussion: 'Why Civil Society? Why Now?'⁷⁷ Explaining why civil society and community have become such significant concepts is thus the next task to undertake.

Whilst conservative attachment to these notions is of course explicable in terms of familiar ambitions – such as rolling back the state – further reasons specific to the post-Cold War era may be adduced. It has already been noted how the collapse of communism was a key factor in returning civil society to the centre-stage of discussion.

Green, for example, argues that even many free marketeers 'changed their tune' from believing that free markets alone are sufficient for the functioning of capitalism in light of their experiences in attempting to rebuild the economies of the former Soviet bloc.⁷⁸

Thus the economic and social problems that remained even when the old bureaucratic structures had been dismantled reopened neo-liberals' eyes to the importance of a strong culture of civil society.

However, in itself this does not explain why re-examining civil society should also be felt necessary in relation to the West. One reason may be that the exigencies of the Cold War conflict simply precluded examining too closely the constitution of capitalist societies themselves. This idea is suggested by Eberly, who argues that 'during the cold war, the need for a well-defined identity and moral purpose was reinforced as

⁷⁶ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998.

⁷⁷ E. J. Dionne (1998) 'Introduction', in Dionne (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Interview with D. G. Green, 22 June 1998.

America led a unified democratic front against communism. Her core principles needed little further articulation.’⁷⁹ In other words, the ideological requirements of combating communism meant that inquiry into the fundamentals of Western societies was suspended for the duration. With this requirement now gone, it has become possible to examine more critically the nature of capitalist societies, without the danger of providing intellectual ammunition to capitalism’s mortal enemies.

Again however, to the extent that this may be true – belied at least in part by the fact that there were conservatives willing to examine Western societies’ core principles even during the Cold War – this still does not explain why they should be imagined in need of elaboration in the present. Even without Soviet communism to provide ready proof of capitalism’s superiority, societies confident of their own identities might be imagined to have little need for such self-reflection. Rather therefore, it is precisely because such confidence is lacking, not least amongst conservatives, that concerns over the condition of civil society have reappeared. In particular, for conservatives the problem faced is that it is frequently the free market doctrines with which they are associated that are held responsible for civil society’s enfeebled condition. Indeed, critics of free market doctrines such as Gray typically make the destruction wrought by free market policies upon community life the prime focus of their critiques.⁸⁰

One reason conservatives have sought to revive community-centred discourses therefore is to answer the charge that they are simply committed to a corrosive free market doctrine, responsible for the atomization of society and the disintegration of social bonds. It is therefore as a corollary to the distancings from an unfettered individualism discussed in the previous chapter that the search for more social doctrines has taken place, with a recognition evident amongst many conservatives that they have been damaged by losing the language of community and solidarity to their opponents.

It is significant in this connection to note the numerous efforts by British conservatives to re-interpret Margaret Thatcher’s famous dictum that ‘there is no such thing as society’. For example, Michael Howard heroically attempts to argue that ‘far

⁷⁹ Eberly (1994), *op. cit.*, p. xix.

⁸⁰ For example, J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge:

from extolling the virtues of a selfish and irresponsible individualism, she was in fact advocating the duties of neighbourliness'.⁸¹ Similarly, according to David Howell, what Thatcher meant was that 'there's no such thing as a state conception of society', that is, she was rejecting the view that the state is responsible for social welfare when instead this is best left to individuals, families and communities.⁸² Finally, Michael Portillo, seeking to develop a more compassionate brand of conservatism, argues that Thatcher simply meant that society could not excuse individual anti-social behaviour.⁸³

At the same time, conservatives of course believe that: 'We are social animals and society is what we make it ... None of us would wish to live in a grabbing and inhumane society made up of greedy and selfish people.'

Of course, one strategy open to conservatives is to argue that it is not they but their opponents who are responsible for the rising tide of anti-social individualism. For example, in arguing for the renewal of local communities Karl Zinmeister blames a liberal 'generation of American thinkers ... disdainful toward any but the most cosmopolitan and individualistic ways of living' for associating small-town life with the image of being narrowly claustrophobic.⁸⁴ Similarly, Howell argues that it was the permissive generation of the 1960s who were responsible for creating a 'selfish society' in which 'everyone did their own thing'.⁸⁵

However, for many writers it is very much a case of rejecting the sins of conservatism itself. For example, Green elaborates his vision of 'civic capitalism' – in which the need for communal solidarities alongside the operations of the market is emphasized – by contrasting it with the 'hard-boiled economic rationalism' of the Thatcher years.⁸⁶ At the very least, the focus upon economics to the neglect of social issues is frequently called into question by contemporary conservatives. For example, Eberly questions 'how sufficient is economic advancement, many are asking, if our schools do not

Polity Press), pp. 76-83, 116-9.

⁸¹ Quoted in *Observer*, 16 October 1994.

⁸² Interview with D. Howell, 14 July 1998.

⁸³ M. Portillo (1997) *The Ghost of Toryism Past; The Spirit of Conservatism Future* (London: Centre for Policy Studies), p. 12.

⁸⁴ K. Zinmeister (1996) 'Coming Home to Community Life', *American Enterprise*, November/December, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Interview with D. Howell, 14 July 1998.

function, if crime defies control, and if children have lost their innocence ...?'⁸⁷ Similarly, the post-New Right era is often presented as marking a shift in conservatism's orientation, with the social concerns supposedly disregarded in neo-liberalism's heyday instead to be placed at the top of the agenda. Thus John Patten hopes that the 1990s will be seen as the Tory social decade as much as the 1980s were the Tory economic decade.⁸⁸

Yet at least some conservatives are willing to go much further and stress the role of capitalism itself in civil society's degeneration. Thus, according to Bennett, allowing market forces unfettered operation 'may not be a problem for production, but it's a problem for human beings. It's a problem for that whole dimension of things we call the realm of values and human relationships.'⁸⁹ It may therefore be understood why the market is frequently treated as existing outside the sphere of civil society, since it is precisely the workings of the market which even conservatives may believe undermine its values and institutions.

In response to the anti-free market rhetoric of many American conservatives, one observer goes as far as to suggest that 'community-oriented conservatives ... sound a lot like, well, Karl Marx'.⁹⁰ However, as Dionne notes, it would be a mistake to view these conservatives as anti-capitalist *per se*.⁹¹ Rather, what they have come to accept along with their critics is that capitalism needs to be constrained if it is not to create untoward effects outside the sphere of economic production. Whilst this is not a new argument amongst conservatives, it has become a much more widely accepted proposition. Although conservatives may not yet have adopted the banner of classical Marxism, nor do many feel so confident in avowing an undiluted classical liberalism.

What is also attractive about communitarian notions for conservatives is that the framework a communitarian model provides fits the particular nature of their present

⁸⁶ Green (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-4.

⁸⁷ Eberly (1994), *op. cit.*, p. xix.

⁸⁸ J. Patten (1994) 'The Deepening of Conservatism', *Talking Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 73-4. See also Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 9

⁸⁹ Quoted in P. Starobin (1997) 'Rethinking Capitalism', *National Journal*, 18 January, pp. 106-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁹¹ Dionne (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

moral and cultural concerns. As seen, Willetts for one believes that communitarianism's ability to solve the is/ought dilemma is one of its most attractive features. Furthermore, it is the degenerate state of American culture which Meyerson argues makes the restoration of American citizenship 'essential' both to the nation and the conservative movement.⁹²

Yet one of the most important anxieties of contemporary conservatives is not simply that society may not share their own preferred values, but that people seem unwilling to subscribe to the very idea of moral absolutes. In other words, as will be detailed in the following chapter, it is the relativism of contemporary society that is believed to be of particular moment. What many conservatives therefore seek is to resurrect a tradition of moral language that eschews this relativism, an older tradition founded not upon the precepts of an individualistic liberal ethics, but upon the shared beliefs embodied within communities. Many thus see in the revival of the bonds of civil society a means of recreating the conditions necessary for a common, absolutist morality. For example, Eberly believes this to one of its main benefits: whilst the 'language of the latter 20th century treats personal and civic virtue as though they are purely private concerns', revitalizing civil society 'will necessitate doing away with a radical, ethical pluralism which holds that no ideal is superior to another'.⁹³

Moreover, despite economics often being presented as subordinate to social and cultural concerns, what communitarian notions also offer contemporary conservatives is a new element to their economic strategies. That is, a communitarian model of capitalism may be superior to a free market one not only morally but productively as well. Following writers such as Puttnam and Fukuyama in their development of the notion of 'social capital' – the knowledge and skills of human beings, dependent upon such virtues as loyalty and honesty – the argument of many conservatives too is that economic success comes only to those societies possessing a plentiful stock of this commodity.⁹⁴ For example, Eberly agrees with the idea that economic life depends

⁹² Meyerson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹³ Eberly (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁹⁴ Puttnam (1995a), *op. cit.* and Puttnam (1995b), *op. cit.*; F. Fukuyama (1995) *Trust* (New York: Free Press).

upon social capital, which it requires a strong civil society to generate.⁹⁵ The adding of the prefix 'social' to the term capital thus indicates the belief that solutions to problems within the economic sphere may also only be soluble by the correct attuning of social values.

A final problem for conservatives to which programmes centred upon the notion of civil society may provide an answer, is the question of what unifying goal is able to fill the vacuum left by communism's demise. Thus the search for a new shared purpose has also been a motivating force behind the conservative adoption of civil society themes. For example, Meyerson argues that 'the restoration of American citizenship ... is the most important unifying principle of conservatism in the post-Cold-War era', able to unite 'libertarian, religious, "growth-and-opportunity" and nationalist' conservatives in common cause.⁹⁶ Thus if all varieties of conservative agree that strengthening civil society is a positive ambition, rifts within the conservative camp exposed by socialism's defeat might be repaired.

Tensions and Dilemmas

However, employing the concepts of civil society and community by no means confers upon conservatives unambiguous benefits. Indeed, a number of tensions and dilemmas may be highlighted. One possible problem is that by adopting a rhetoric of communal bonds conservatives may lose the distinctiveness that a more stridently individualistic philosophy can afford them. That is, with all parts of the political spectrum using this language, conservatives may simply be surrendering the basis upon which to offer any alternative. For example, as Charles Leadbeater notes, the conclusions drawn by Willetts in formulating his idea of civic conservatism 'sound very like those of the left intellectuals he recently criticized in his pamphlet *Blair's Gurus*'.⁹⁷ Although the aim

⁹⁵ D. Eberly (1996) 'The New Demands of Citizenship: Response to Dan Coats' "Can Congress Revive Civil Society?", *Policy Review*, No. 75, p. 31.

⁹⁶ Meyerson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ C. Leadbeater (1996) 'Seven Blue Moods', *New Statesman*, 4 October, p. 30. See D. Willetts (1996)

of reviving civil society may give conservatives a new purpose in the post-Cold War world, this may thus be at the expense of abandoning any strong foundations for a distinctive ideology.

Yet civil society may not in any case provide conservatives with any easy unifying mission. The mere fact that all varieties of conservative may believe sustaining civil society to be a valuable aspiration does not of course mean that there are not serious differences over how it is conceived or its condition accounted for. For example, there remain libertarians who reject the diagnosis that individualism is responsible for civil society's parlous condition. Upon this basis, Duncan and Hobson argue that it is 'one of our principal contentions that it is the State and not the possessive individualism of the last fifteen years which has corrupted ordinary men and women'.⁹⁸ Of particular interest is their dismissal of the adoption of communitarian themes by other conservatives. Thus, presenting the matter in the starkest of terms, the invocation of community is suggested to be little more than a mask for coercion; and whether the form is that of 'High Toryism', 'One Nation Toryism' or 'Civic Conservatism', all such doctrines share the same disreputable intellectual roots as fascism and communism, in believing the interests of the individual to be subordinate to those of the community.⁹⁹

Similarly, David Boaz forcefully rejects the communitarian attack upon individual rights.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, he worries about the increasing paternalism of many conservatives: 'conservatives want to be your daddy, telling you what to do and what not to do.'¹⁰¹ Such antagonism may indeed be reciprocated, with Robert Bork concerned about the common equation of libertarianism with conservatism for precisely the reason that libertarians – whom he deems only 'quasi or semiconservatives' – do not recognize the pressing need for restraints upon individual autonomy.¹⁰² What such disagreements reveal is how a renewed concern for civil society and community may simply bring the tensions between the individualist and authority-centred elements within conservatism even further to the fore. Adopting civil society as the banner

Blair's Gurus: An Examination of Labour's Rhetoric (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

⁹⁸ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-11, 239-42, 298-302, 333-4.

¹⁰⁰ D. Boaz (1997) *Libertarianism: A Primer* (New York: Free Press), ch. 3.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in D. Frum (1997) 'The Libertarian Temptation', *Weekly Standard*, 21 April, p. 21.

under which to rally a unified conservative movement may not therefore constitute as straightforward a project as some may hope.

Consideration of the libertarian position also highlights another important issue, which is the illiberalism implicit in communitarian discourses. Thus although the renewed attendance to social questions implied by the adoption of civil society themes may seem intended to soften the harsh face of a free market-centred ideology, the actual measures necessary to recover a more civilized way of life may be far from 'soft'. For example, one collection of essays by American and British writers arguing for the restoration of civic virtue is bluntly entitled *This Will Hurt*, its writers' suggestions ranging from the stigmatizing of illegitimate children to a return to the painful and public punishment of criminals.¹⁰³ By the same token, Coats urges that it will require 'tough love' to rejuvenate civil society.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, in the hands of writers such as Lawrence Mead, ideas such as the needs of the community can be made to justify programmes such as workfare. As discussed in Chapter 2, Mead differs from libertarian critics of the welfare state in believing that the solution to the problem of welfare dependency requires a bolstering of authority. Yet his argument is also couched in the language of community and citizenship, displaying scepticism towards the liberal conceit of individual autonomy.¹⁰⁵ Thus Mead's preference for workfare is founded upon the belief that it is a means of reawakening a sense of social responsibility within the non-working poor.

However, the ambiguity as to how 'open' or free civil society should be cannot be understood in terms of a simple libertarian/authoritarian divide. In fact, civil society is often presented by many types of conservative as valued for its openness and freedom, with the tension between these avowals and claims that it must be conceived in more closed terms to be found throughout conservative writings. Indeed, it is quite possible to find the language of both conceptions side-by-side. For example, Eberly argues that: 'The realm of civil society is free and largely autonomous, but it nevertheless

¹⁰² R. Bork (1996) *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books), p. 150.

¹⁰³ Anderson (1995), *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Coats (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 26

¹⁰⁵ L. M. Mead (1992) *The New Politics of the New Poverty* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 19-23, 166-84, 237-9.

imposes constraints and obligations on the individual and limits his choices. In other words, talk of civil society implies a return to authority and order.’¹⁰⁶

How then is this co-mingling of terms such as ‘free’ and ‘autonomous’ with talk of ‘constraints’ and ‘authority’ to be understood? In fact, the overall implication of most conservative accounts is that whatever freedom is to be allowed must be within the limits prescribed by the requirements of order, since – in this demoralized age – concern for the latter must be prioritized over the needs of the former. That is, the service into which conservatives wish to press the concept of civil society, as part of their programmes of moral and cultural regeneration, very much militates against any ostensible liberalism.

Even when consideration is given to many of those who style themselves as libertarians, there is frequently little that is liberal in spirit in their recommendations. For example, Murray offers as a major reason for being opposed to the state’s displacing of civil society’s institutions, its usurpation of ‘the web of parental pressures and social stigma that kept illegitimacy rare’.¹⁰⁷ In other words, even libertarians may look to civil society not for the possibilities it offers for an expanded realm of freedom, but because it is much more effective at enforcing a strict morality than is a too ‘liberal’ state.

Important to note here as well is the frequent disregard for any public/private distinction in contemporary conceptions of civil society. That is, civil society need not refer simply to the public sphere but, as indicated in Himmelfarb’s definition, may also include institutions such as the family.¹⁰⁸ Thus the rediscovery of civil society provides not only a justification for the increased moral regulation of public spaces, but indeed countenances intrusion into almost every corner of individuals’ lives. As one critic of communitarianism warns, the blurring of the distinction between the realms of the social and the personal has many highly illiberal and authoritarian implications.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Eberly (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Murray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ See also W. J. Bennett (1994) ‘America’s Family at Risk: Politics and the Quest for a Civil Society’, *Rising Tide*, Vol. 1, No. 4.

¹⁰⁹ H. N. Hirsch (1986) ‘The Threnody of Liberalism: Constitutional Liberty and the Renewal of Community’, *Political Theory*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 425.

The conflict between the stated conception of civil society and the agenda it is intended to fulfil also creates tensions within conservative accounts in other ways, one of great significance being between civil society's supposed independence from the state and the means necessary for its regeneration. This may be seen from an examination of Coats and Bennett's 'Project for American Renewal', the declared aim of which was to turn over federal responsibility for aspects of welfare provision to private voluntary organizations. Yet as Boaz observes – even if overstating the case – the means by which this was to take place 'shows a faith in government almost as breathtaking as that of the architects of the Great Society,' requiring the passing of 19 federal laws, together with central direction from Washington as to which local programs and private institutions were to receive funding.¹¹⁰ In other words, the supposedly autonomous sphere of civil society can only be fostered via a highly dependent relationship with the state. Supporting the re-invigoration of non-state organizations may not therefore mean diminishing the state's role, simply finding it a different one.

It is in any case difficult to see how far any substantial delegation of responsibility for welfare provision to voluntary organizations is feasible, with conservatives' historical accounts of civil society – as arising spontaneously and developing autonomously – being highly romanticized depictions. In fact, as Theda Skocpol documents, the history of voluntary organizations in America has always been one of subsidy and interdependence with the state rather than of mutual exclusivity.¹¹¹ Moreover, a similar analysis may be presented of the role played by the state in fostering civil society in Britain.¹¹²

Importantly, this pattern of dependence remains true in the present. As Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier show in their study of civil society across eight nations of the developed world, the conservative idea of a zero-sum relationship between voluntary bodies and the state is simply false: for example, in terms of the funding of non-profit organizations only ten per cent of income is accounted for by private

¹¹⁰ D. Boaz (1996) 'Conservative Social Engineering: Response to Dan Coats' "Can Congress Revive Civil Society?", *Policy Review*, No. 75, p. 32.

¹¹¹ Skocpol (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 297-9; see also Mead (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1.

¹¹² See J. Gray (1998) *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books), pp.

donations, with over forty per cent coming from government.¹¹³ Even in the United States, where private giving is relatively higher than elsewhere, only 19 per cent is from private donations, with thirty per cent provided by the state (the remaining 51 per cent coming from fees and dues). Even if the state were able to disentangle itself from civil society, it is far from clear that voluntary activity would be able to fill the vacuum.

Furthermore, it may also be deemed contentious – not to mention hopeful – to suppose that the cultivation of particular social and cultural values is the key to economic success. Justifying such a proposition is clearly dependent upon being able to measure social capital with the same degree of certainty and accuracy which might be applied to capital more conventionally defined. Yet social capital is so ephemeral and elusive a concept that no clear correlation can be established with economic attainment.¹¹⁴ In particular, the notion that it is social capital that underpins economic prosperity is particularly weak in explaining changes in nations' economic fortunes. For example, although Fukuyama contends that the stock of social capital in America has fallen dramatically in recent decades – due, of course, to the rise of a destructive individualism – so too does he concede that by the mid-90s its economic prospects 'look very good indeed'.¹¹⁵

Yet a further problem for conservatives relating to the vagueness of the concepts they employ is that, whilst the ambiguities surrounding the term community may explain its widespread appeal, this may also be a weakness when consideration turns to what it means in concrete terms. Indeed, there is perhaps much in Duncan and Hobson's dismissal of the term as no more than a 'meaningless metaphysical abstraction'.¹¹⁶ Whether or not this is so, an undoubted problem for conservatives is that it is by no means certain that real-world communities fit their idealized image. Michael Kenny takes left-wing proponents of civil society discourses to task for simply assuming that the institutions they support are likely to be benign, or even progressive, in terms of the

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¹¹³ L. M. Salamon and H. K. Anheier (1997) 'The Civil Society Sector', *Society*, Vol. 34, No. 2, p. 63.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the criticisms assembled by F. Hearn (1997) *Moral Order and Social Disorder* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter), pp. 103-5.

¹¹⁵ Fukuyama (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 353.

¹¹⁶ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

values they believe them to embody¹¹⁷; yet a similar point may be put to conservatives. That is, many conservatives appear unreflectively to assume that the mediating institutions they wish to foster are bound inevitably to be homes of conservative values. In reality, however, it is likely that many of the institutions they cite are not, and may indeed even be hostile to conservatism. In particular, the almost wholly positive idea of civil society to be found in conservative accounts does not square well with the picture of seemingly dire cultural and moral malaise that is also to be found in their writings.

More thoughtful conservative writers do recognize this tension. Thus Himmelfarb urges conservatives to appreciate that civil society has been infected by a disease of moral disorder, with many of the beliefs that are responsible for society's present demoralized condition – for example, affirmative action and multiculturalism – originating from institutions such as universities and private foundations rather than the state.¹¹⁸ Similarly, 'bad' families and even some churches are also frequently culpable in the fostering of an immoral and permissive culture. Indeed, rather than regarding the whole of civil society as in a state of disrepair, many of its institutions should be recognized as being – regrettably from Himmelfarb's perspective – stronger and more influential than ever. As a consequence, conservative programmes need to engage not simply with the task of reviving civil society's institutions, but with the much harder one of their remoralization.

A similar circumspection towards the uncritical enthusiasm of many civil society revivalists is also expressed by Robert Browning who, drawing upon New Class theories, argues that non-state organizations such as consumer and public interest groups are themselves a part of the problem of today's intellectual climate, in promoting hostility towards technological progress and economic growth.¹¹⁹

Two possible conclusions may be drawn. For Browning, it is to question conservatives' assumptions that civil society is always to be seen as a protection

¹¹⁷ M. Kenny (1996) 'After the Deluge: Politics and Civil Society in the Wake of the New Right', *Soundings*, No. 4, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ G. Himmelfarb (1996b) 'Second Thoughts on Civil Society', *Weekly Standard*, 9 September.

¹¹⁹ R. Browning (1991) 'Who Are the Health Activists?' in P. Berger and I. Kristol (eds) *Health, Life-Style and Environment: Countering the Panic* (London: Social Affairs Unit), pp. 31-8.

against the evils of the state, suggesting that many of its organizations may be little more than adjuncts of an antagonistic state bureaucracy. Yet – as noted in the last chapter – the one Himmelfarb draws is that the state itself may have to be entrusted with the task of remoralizing a hostile civil society. As with Coats and Bennett, what may again be seen is how a focus upon the realm of civil society, seeming to imply an inherently anti-statist perspective, may in fact lead to even more reliance upon the state.

Notwithstanding the questioning of Devigne’s distinction between American and British conservative theory raised earlier, British conservatives typically avow more tolerance when it comes to considering the potentially adversarial nature of civil society. For example, Willetts argues that believing in freedom for the institutions of civil society implies having ‘to accept that that means not just allowing these institutions freedom to do things you approve of, but freedom to do things you disapprove of’.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, this seemingly more tolerant attitude is as much to do with the fact that, unlike many American conservatives, he is more confident that if the state is rolled back ‘the institutions and arrangements [which] will thrive and survive will be ones which display strengths which conservatives understand and appreciate’. That is, it may be less a commitment to pluralism as an end in itself that allows British conservatives to be more accepting of civil society as a realm of diversity than a less despairing view of their nation’s moral malaise. However, Willetts’ liberalism in regard to moral matters must also, of course, be highly circumscribed by his adherence to a communitarian ethics.

A different problem to that of presupposing too hopeful a view of civil society’s ‘conservative’ character is that of nonetheless deifying its institutions. This issue is well highlighted by Scruton, in criticizing those conservative politicians who continually assert the value of the family: as he argues, ‘the more it is held forth as an ideal and an example, the more it will wither and disintegrate under the strain’.¹²¹ That is, if the value of such institutions derives from their spontaneous – perhaps even ‘natural’ – properties, then ‘it is self-defeating to make the family and family values

¹²⁰ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998; as too does Stephen Dorrell – interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998.

¹²¹ Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

into an object of policy. For this merely sets the most precious of our institutions in the centre of politics, where it does not belong, and under the pressure of which it crumbles.¹²² The same might well be said of all of civil society's institutions.

Yet finally, and perhaps most seriously for conservatives, conservatism may be regarded as an ideology much less well equipped to incorporate communitarian themes than its rivals. Thus, if libertarians may be sceptical of communitarian conservatives' liberal credentials, other communitarians may be suspicious of conservatives' commitment to the value of community. That is, many contend that it is simply not possible for conservatives to answer individuals' aspirations for communal modes of life, since it is precisely the corrosive effects of capitalism's workings that is prime cause of civil society's enervated state.¹²³ For example, Gray makes the point in relation to Willetts' argument that although the belief that the free play of market forces is not disruptive of communities may have possessed some truth in the past – when the authority of cohesive forces such as religion was strong – the absence of such binding moral beliefs today means that communities are much more at the mercy of destabilizing market influences.¹²⁴

Even to the extent that conservatives may be willing to acknowledge that unbridled capitalism is a problem, these protestations frequently have little credibility outside conservative circles. Moreover, the very necessity of having to deny that theirs is a philosophy of selfish and unrestrained individualism indicates an acute awareness amongst conservatives that they are widely regarded as lacking a convincing social doctrine. The balance between markets and communities sought by those such as Willetts may thus fail to satisfy either the libertarian or communitarian critic.

Indeed, the tensions provoked by attempting to appeal to both philosophies are especially apparent in Willetts' writings, where different emphases are to be found in different contexts. For example, in an effort to present a community-minded face for conservatism Willetts argues that conservatives have a 'moral obligation' to give (albeit

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²³ Wolfe (1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 51-77; C. Lasch (1991) *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: W. W. Norton), pp. 38-9.

¹²⁴ J. Gray (1995) *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge), pp. 110-11.

limited) support to the welfare state, even if this possesses no economic justification. Thus: 'Regardless of whether people in need have been reckless and feckless or unlucky and unfortunate ... They have a claim on us simply by virtue of being compatriots. The welfare state is an expression of solidarity with our fellow citizens.'¹²⁵

This may seem an unlikely argument from someone who is also a strong critic of conservatives' historical acquiescence to the growth of the state (Macmillan's efforts to theorize a Middle Way in the 1930s taken as 'striking evidence of how far ... [the Conservative Party] was moving away from its principles'¹²⁶). Yet most significant is the fact that elsewhere – when instead wearing his free market hat – Willetts argues that it is the mistake of conservatives' opponents to believe that social solidarity may be expressed through state activity.¹²⁷ The attempt to forge a market-based communitarian philosophy may therefore generate not only critics' scepticism, but also internal contradictions.

At the root of these contradictions is the attempt to commit to two incompatible visions of the nature of individual identity. This is also well illustrated by Willetts himself: 'I want my content of what it is to be a British citizen to be deep and embedded and tied up with history and tradition, and I want my role as an economic agent to be relatively mobile and frictionless.'¹²⁸ The presumption that such a distinction is tenable is plainly highly questionable, revealing perhaps most clearly the tensions involved in the effort to marry a free market and communitarian philosophy.

Furthermore, the success garnered by communitarian ideologies today may not so easily attach itself to conservatism for other reasons. Thus whilst communitarians may appear conservative in many respects, the conceptions of community they typically proffer are very different to those usually developed by conservatives. This may be seen by considering Frohnen's attempt to distinguish the conservative doctrine of

¹²⁵ Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹²⁷ D. Willetts (1997) *Why Vote Conservative?* (London: Penguin), p. 16.

¹²⁸ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998.

community from those of writers he terms 'new' communitarians.¹²⁹ Two basic charges are levelled against modern advocates of community-based philosophies. First, in that their programmes are frequently reliant upon state action, they are no real friends of autonomous institutions. Second, they are too relativistic: whilst modern communitarians may be willing to oppose some anti-social practices, they are nonetheless far too tolerant of many vices. By contrast, the distinguishing feature of conservative critiques of individualism is that they rest upon a reverence for traditional virtues.

Both criticisms are in fact common amongst conservatives: Willetts also believes that many communitarians are too statist, whilst Scruton agrees that many are too liberal.¹³⁰

On the former point, what is considered problematic about non-conservative communitarians is that they do not accept conservatives' arguments that it is the state which is to blame for civil society's decline, nor therefore that it should not be considered an ally in its resuscitation. Of course, to the extent that this is true of other communitarians this may at least mark a more honest appreciation of the relationship between civil society and the state. Furthermore, a question of credibility may again arise for conservatives in relation to the fact that, as examined in the last chapter, recent conservative governments clearly presided over a strengthening of the state in relation to civil society in a number of respects.

As for the second distinction Frohnen suggests, Scruton makes the same point as follows: 'No communitarian has yet come to terms with the fact that the strongest communities in the modern world ... are closed communities – communities which maintain a vigilant hostility towards outsiders and unbelievers.'¹³¹ For example, he disapproves of American communitarians such as Etzioni on the grounds that they generally hold to liberal positions on issues such as multiculturalism. Such communitarians are, he argues, too 'sentimental', being unwilling to recognize that

¹²⁹ Frohnen (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 8-17. Interestingly, Frohnen does not include MacIntyre in his list of new communitarians, as MacIntyre's emphasis on virtue and tradition is believed to distinguish him.

¹³⁰ D. Willetts (1996) 'The Free Market and Civic Conservatism', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), p. 84; Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-13. Other conservatives are equally sceptical on these points. See, for example, J. Attarian (1994) 'Sham Vision and Bogus Transcendence', *Modern Age*, Vol. 36, No. 4; G. Carey (1997) 'A Good Communitarian Is Hard to Find', *Chronicles*, Vol. 21, No. 1.

¹³¹ Scruton (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

strong communal bonds cannot be forged at the same time as keeping the luxuries of an open, liberal society.

Frum also believes of communitarianism that 'the essence of it is the fuzziness of its thought and the sentimentality of its aspirations'.¹³² Indeed, Digby Anderson explains that the arguments presented in *This Will Hurt* were precisely aimed at the sort of communitarians who believe that 'we can have all the pleasantness of a community-based society without any of the nastiness'.¹³³ Similarly, William Kristol argues that 'left-wing communitarians end up not being tough-minded enough about what you really have to do' to remoralize society.¹³⁴

Equally, communitarians themselves are typically disconcerted at the moral absolutism of conservatives; for example, Etzioni decries the arguments of those on the Right who seek to uphold absolutist moral positions as dogmatic and authoritarian.¹³⁵ Whether or not Etzioni's own writings can be considered wholly innocent of such implications themselves, there remains an important truth that the nature of modern communitarian notions is different to a traditional conservative understanding of community. That is, they need not be tied to the historical values or institutions of conservative conceptions. For example, MacIntyre too is critical of conservatism on such grounds. Thus despite his appeal for the creation of non-liberal universities he rejects the proposals of educational conservatives such as Allan Bloom for the adoption of a Western canon of Great Books.¹³⁶ Similarly, he sees conservatives as having done a great disservice to the notion of tradition, criticizing Burke for using it simply to defend the status quo; ostensibly at least, critical debate within a tradition is for MacIntyre one of its essential features.¹³⁷

Indeed, the widespread appeal of communitarianism likely derives not only from its ability to offer an alternative to discredited individualistic philosophies, but at the same time to separate itself from any necessary connection with traditional values and

¹³² Interview with D. Frum, 4 September 1998.

¹³³ Interview with D. Anderson, 22 June 1998.

¹³⁴ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

¹³⁵ Etzioni (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³⁶ A. MacIntyre (1990) *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth), pp. 216-36.

¹³⁷ A. MacIntyre (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth), p. 353.

institutions that have also lost much social esteem. Thus although a traditionalist conservatism may seem to possess the resources allowing it to adapt well to an intellectual and social climate hostile to individualism, it is nonetheless dependant upon backward-looking notions of tradition and morality which have themselves fallen out of favour. Thus, even when adopting much of the same rhetoric as other communitarians, conservative forms of communitarianism may still appear outmoded whilst those of their rivals may seem highly contemporary.

From what has been discussed, it is clear that conservatives' conceptions of civil society and community are to a large extent conditioned by their attitudes towards current moral and cultural issues. Next therefore, it is necessary to examine more closely their understandings of these.

Chapter 4

Culture and Morality

In a number of respects, the concerns of this chapter are the most important for understanding contemporary conservatism: as already examined, many of what might be imagined to be essentially political or economic questions – such as those concerning the respective roles of the state and civil society – are, for many conservatives, defined as at heart moral ones. Equally common is for cultural questions to be understood in the same terms; indeed many conservatives clearly believe there to be a particularly intimate relationship between culture and morality.

Certainly, questions relating to these two arenas figure as probably the most salient – not to mention most widely discussed – aspects of contemporary conservative writings, with conservative anxieties encompassing issues ranging from abortion to multiculturalism, and from gay rights to ‘dumbing down’. One reason for this prominence is the notion that some form of ‘culture war’ is raging within society, an idea readily endorsed by many American conservatives. As will be seen, although these issues frequently possess a much lower profile in Britain, many of the same ones are nonetheless the focus of British conservative writings.

However, one obvious obstacle to understanding in this area is the sheer quantity of relevant material; another is the wide range of issues with which conservatives engage. A particular aim of this chapter therefore is to attempt to fathom what may unite the array of concerns agitating contemporary conservatives. Another objective is to examine conservatives’ proposals for defending or reinvigorating traditional values and cultural standards, to highlight again both the similarities and differences in approach of conservative perspectives.

Yet what will also be seen is that not all conservatives believe that contemporary trends should necessarily be resisted. For example, some conservatives recognize a need, on grounds either of pragmatism or principle, to accept increasing cultural and

moral diversity. However, one of the most interesting possibilities this raises – that conservatives might actually embrace currently fashionable doctrines – will be left for consideration in following chapters.

The Importance of Culture

A clear preliminary issue needing to be addressed is the meaning of the term ‘culture’. Whilst the term may possess a variety of meanings, there are perhaps two that are most important to conservatives.¹ First is the notion of culture as high culture, that is, as reflective of the greatest achievements of human learning and creativity, most commonly believed to be found in the traditional canon of Western thought and literature. Yet second, culture is also used by conservatives in a much broader sense, as referring to the shared values, traditions and modes of behaviour to be found within a particular society.

As a result of this dual meaning, the cultural conflicts with which conservatives engage appear to be fought on two major fronts: first, in the spheres of education and the arts, and second, in the wider arena of civil society, in relation to the range of institutions believed to be sources of social and moral norms. However, for many conservatives questions relating to morality and those relating to culture (in both senses of the term) cannot be separated. For example, Richard Neuhaus contends that ‘at the heart of culture is morality’, whilst Michael Novak asserts that ‘The culture wars are fought in moral wars’.² Similarly, Kenneth Minogue argues that what distinguishes morality in traditional societies from modern forms is that questions of ethical right and

¹ R. Kirk (1993) *America's British Culture* (London: Transaction Publishers), pp. 1-12 provides a valuable discussion of the meaning and significance of culture for conservatives. See also R. Scruton (1979) ‘The Significance of Common Culture’, *Philosophy*, No. 54, pp. 51-2.

² R. Neuhaus (1994) ‘Combat Ready’, *National Review*, 2 May, p. 53; M. Novak (1996) ‘Culture Wars, Moral Wars’, in T. Boxx and G. Quinlivan (eds) *Culture in Crisis and the Renewal of Civil Life* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), p. 115.

wrong are inseparable not only from religion but matters such as aesthetics.³ Thus the two sets of conflicts are inextricably linked: for example, perceived contemporary trends within education, such as the rise of political correctness, are frequently feared at least as much for the wider consequences they may have for society at large as for the pursuit of learning.

Amongst American conservatives in particular, this notion of a linkage between cultural life and morality is of course a long-established one. The most important post-war figure within this tradition is perhaps Leo Strauss, a thinker concerned especially with the pernicious influence of historicist and relativistic philosophies.⁴ What he feared is that the ascendancy of such doctrines within the academy would lead to the spread of a corrosive nihilism throughout society. By undermining belief in objective notions of morality and the political good, the consequence of these doctrines' influence might be the very dissolution of the social and political fabric. Not least of Strauss's fears was that an enervation of the foundations of America's liberal polity might pave the way for the victory of totalitarianism.

For Strauss, responsibility for the unleashing of these baleful doctrines upon the world is laid squarely at the door of the modern tradition of natural right (as initiated by Machiavelli and Hobbes). By contrast, what he believed in was the recovery of an older tradition of natural law, that of the ancient Greeks, which affirms that there are immutable principles and absolutes, vouchsafed to us by reason and possessing universal compulsion. Strauss thus strongly averred that it is possible to judge one set of values superior to another and that definite answers to social and moral questions are attainable, the best insights into which are to be found in the Great Tradition of classical philosophy.

Strauss was by no means alone amongst American conservatives of the immediate post-war decades in believing relativism to be at the root of contemporary social and

³ K. Minogue (1997) *The Silencing of Society: The True Cost of the Lust for News* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. 48.

⁴ See, for example, L. Strauss (1953) *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

political problems; for example, so too did Richard Weaver.⁵ Central to much of the American conservative writing of this era therefore was a firm belief in the proposition that, as Weaver spelt out in the title of his most important work, ‘ideas have consequences’. In other words, that explanation for the moral and political disasters of the age – especially those of totalitarianism – was to be found in society’s seduction by misguided philosophies.

A further strand of American conservatism committed to this proposition has been neoconservatism. For example, according to Daniel Bell the anti-traditionalist anomie of the modernist spirit – unleashed by the rise of industrial capitalism and championed by adversary intellectuals – is responsible for weakening the traditional Protestant ethics of discipline and order, and thus threatening the constitution of capitalist society itself.⁶ Whilst Bell rejected Straussianism (for example, preferring religion to natural law as the hope for effecting the restoration of traditional values), what may again be seen is a fear that deleterious intellectual trends are responsible for wide-ranging social, political and even economic consequences.

Both Straussians and neoconservatives are thus at the forefront of current cultural debates, with much intellectual cross-fertilization in evidence between the two groups.⁷ Yet whilst the prospect of society’s slide into moral and cultural degradation has been a perennial theme of American conservative writings, what is distinctive today is the fact that this concern has acquired an even greater sense of urgency, the over-used and frequently misleading term ‘culture war’ nonetheless conveying the strength of feeling widespread amongst many conservatives.⁸ For example, whereas Strauss was relatively guarded about many of the real-world implications of his philosophy,

⁵ R. Weaver (1948) *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

⁶ D. Bell (1978) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books).

⁷ For example, unlike Bell, Irving Kristol readily owns to an intellectual debt to Strauss. See I. Kristol (1983) *Reflections of a Neoconservative* (New York: Basic Books).

⁸ As Jeremy Rabkin notes, the term ‘culture war’ did not gain wide currency in American politics until the 1990s – J. Rabkin (1999) ‘The Culture War That Isn’t’, *Policy Review*, No. 96, p. 4. It may also be noted that Rabkin is a rare American conservative who does not believe a culture war is presently raging within American society.

particularly its 'elitist' ones, later Straussians have appeared much bolder and more open in articulating their fears.⁹

For British conservatives, a useful contrast may also be drawn between the concerns of the past and those of the present. Thus Martin Durham, in questioning the notion that the British New Right attempted to forward a clear or unified moral agenda, highlights the fact that much of the New Right took 'relatively little interest in moral issues', with bodies such as the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute concerning themselves largely with economics, and others with matters such as foreign affairs.¹⁰ By the same token, John Gray also concludes that the New Right 'concerned itself very little with the cultural or social conditions of a stable restoration of market institutions'.¹¹

Of course, it may readily be conceded that even the free market's most ardent advocates have always demonstrated at least some interest in the norms and traditions necessary to underpin the market. Gray, for example, allows Hayek to be one partial exception to his above conclusion and, as seen in the last chapter, many writers are keen to question the received view of Adam Smith as negligent towards wider moral issues. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to concur with Mark Hayes' assessment that despite the definite presence of moral and cultural concerns within the neo-liberal strand of the New Right, these were 'rarely explicit' and essentially secondary to their concerns with restoring the conditions of economic liberty.¹²

Today conversely, it is more difficult to identify many British conservatives or think-tanks even of the free market variety who are not in some way concerned with moral and cultural questions. For example, as touched upon in Chapter 1, the most significant publications put out by the Institute of Economic Affairs in the post-Thatcher era have been writings (of both British and American conservatives)

⁹ As highlighted by Richard Rorty – R. Rorty (1988) 'That Old-Time Philosophy', *New Republic*, 4 April, p. 28.

¹⁰ M. Durham (1991) *Sex and Politics: The Family and Morality in the Thatcher Years* (London: Macmillan), p. 60.

¹¹ J. Gray (1993) *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (London: Routledge), p. 275.

¹² M. Hayes (1994) *The New Right in Britain* (London: Pluto Press), p. 46.

bermoaning the state of the family and morality.¹³ Similarly, libertarians such as Duncan and Hobson are also clearly much interested in themes relating to the moral and cultural spheres.¹⁴ It may be noted as well that Durham also recognizes there to have been a shift, observing the more recent attention not only of the Institute of Economic Affairs but also the Centre for Policy Studies to debates around ‘family values’.¹⁵

Even so, the explicit according of priority to cultural questions is undoubtedly most common amongst contemporary American conservatives. For example, William Kristol argues that cultural questions are ‘more important than the tax rate or whether public housing’s been privatized’, whilst John Podhoretz avers that ‘most of us, even those with a passion for politics, experience life culturally, not politically’.¹⁶ Indeed, conservatives themselves may suggest that this represents a change from the past. For example, Terry Teachout, writing at the beginning of the 1990s, predicted that ‘the great battles of the ’90s will be fought in another arena: that of culture’, whilst William Lind argues that for American conservatism the ‘new agenda is found not in economics, but in culture’.¹⁷ Most significant is the suggestion not simply that culture ought to be recognized as requiring more attention than politics or economics but – as George Weigel argues – that the sphere of culture is in fact prior.¹⁸ Similarly, Neuhaus believes that ‘politics is chiefly a function of culture’.¹⁹

This being the case, conventional politics may be less important than in the past.

¹³ As well as those cited in previous chapters, further examples are: J. Davies (1993) *The Family: Is It Just Another Lifestyle Choice?* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit); C. Quest (ed.) (1994) *Liberating Women – From Modern Feminism* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit); M. Novak (1995a) *Awaking from Nihilism* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

¹⁴ A. Duncan and D. Hobson (1995) *Saturn’s Children: How the State Devours Liberty, Property and Virtue* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), pp. 237-391.

¹⁵ M. Durham (1993) ‘The New Right, Moral Crusades and the Politics of the Family’, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 255.

¹⁶ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998 (see also W. Kristol (1994) ‘The Future of Conservatism in the U.S.’, *American Enterprise*, July/August); J. Podhoretz (1994) ‘Our Town’, *National Review*, 27 June, p. 64. Robert Bork also avers that cultural issues are at present the most important – interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

¹⁷ T. Teachout (1990) ‘A Farewell to Politics’, in T. Teachout (ed.) *Beyond the Boom* (New York: Poseidon Press), p. 230; W. S. Lind (1991) ‘Defending Western Culture’, *Foreign Policy*, No. 84, p. 40.

¹⁸ G. Weigel (1995) ‘Capitalism for Humans’, *Commentary*, Vol. 100, No. 4.

¹⁹ Neuhaus (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Indeed, this may make it less valuable for conservatives to direct their arguments to politicians. For example, Digby Anderson argues that whereas in the 1980s most of the output of the Social Affairs Unit was essentially addressed to the government, in the 1990s a much wider audience needs to be targeted, because 'it's as important to change the way the Archbishop of Canterbury thinks or the way that the medical profession thinks as the way the government think'.²⁰

However, one consequence of believing that those who control the cultural and moral spheres possess more influence than those in political power is that this may lead conservatives to highly pessimistic conclusions. For example, Robert Bork argued at the time of the Gingrich-led Republican capture of Congress that he was less sanguine about its prospects than other conservatives, because politicians are largely impotent in the face of developments such as the spread of political correctness, which are more important worries than an unbalanced budget.²¹ In other words, even if conservative politicians do manage to win elections, this may not provide a solution to conservatives' worries.

In fact, pessimism on the part of American conservatives appears widespread. For example, Paul Weyrich – co-founder of the Moral Majority – argued in light of President Clinton's impeachment acquittal that 'If there really were a moral majority out there, Bill Clinton would have been driven out of office months ago.'²² Indeed, Weyrich's assessment is that 'we have probably lost the culture war'. His recommendation therefore is that the remaining 'moral minority' should abandon the campaigning strategies of the past and instead attempt to 'quarantine' itself from the influence of a hostile culture.

What is also especially distinctive today is the range of arenas in which cultural factors are imagined to play a decisive role. In fact, there appear to be few areas in which contemporary conservatives do not believe that these are causally significant. For example, even in foreign policy differences between competing cultures may be

²⁰ Interview with D. Anderson, 22 June 1998.

²¹ R. Bork (1995) 'Culture and Kristol', in C. DeMuth and W. Kristol (eds) *The Neoconservative Imagination* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute), p. 141.

²² Quoted in Rabkin (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

viewed as the most important source of conflict, with the threat to Western society of 'cultures' such as Islam often presented as having replaced the threat of political ideologies such as communism.²³ Similarly, Steven Forbes suggests that the absence of cultural norms such as trust ('the fundamental moral component of a free-market') is at the root of problems of the American economy.²⁴ Indeed, American free market advocates today concern themselves with cultural questions and the fostering of moral virtue as much as their British counterparts.²⁵

Nonetheless, a possible difference between British and American conservatives may still be suggested, this again being that British conservatives typically adopt less absolutist positions. For example, as David Willetts was seen to argue in the previous chapter regarding tolerance towards antagonistic elements within civil society, so does Stephen Dorrell in relation to morality. Thus, arguing that the conservative approach to politics is 'one that doesn't seek to impose a single vision', it is not therefore for conservative politicians to attempt to resolve all moral problems.²⁶ Nonetheless, as will be seen, when attention is turned to specific questions, British writers frequently echo many of the concerns expressed by American conservatives. For example, British conservative historians and writers on education also worry about such issues as the ascendancy of relativism and 'non-traditional' modes of thought and teaching in education and the arts.

The Real Cold War

One reason conservatives prioritize cultural issues may be that, as Christopher DeMuth argues, these 'are the ones that really stir the soul'; by contrast, 'it's hard to get people

²³ W. S. Lind (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 40-50.

²⁴ S. Forbes (1997) 'The Moral Basis of a Free Society', *Policy Review*, No. 86.

²⁵ For example: J. A. Dorn (1996) 'The Rise of Government and the Decline of Morality', *Freeman*, Vol. 46, No. 3; T. R. Machan (1998) *Generosity: Virtue in Civil Society* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute); N. Gingrich (1995) *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins), pp. 71-85, 141-52.

really passionately fired up and storming the barricades for the introduction of cost-benefit analysis in the Environmental Protection Agency'.²⁷ Furthermore, it may simply be that the resolution of past conflicts in spheres such as economics explains why conservatives focus more upon the moral and cultural; as Edwin Feulner argues, 'There's a greater interest today than there was say twenty years ago because ... [other issues] were more pressing and higher on the radar screen.'²⁸

Explanation may also be found in the search for new enemies, with foes such as feminists and multiculturalists figuring as substitute menaces for the socialist opponents conservatives have vanquished. Thus as Adam Meyerson argued at the time of communism's collapse: 'the greatest ideological threat to western civilization comes from within the West's own cultural institutions.'²⁹ Indeed, conservatives may themselves believe in some form of 'beyond Left and Right' thesis. For example, Norman Podhoretz argues that rather than conventional divides between Left and Right, the main battle lines in politics today are drawn through cultural issues.³⁰

At the same time, a number of conservatives draw parallels between the Cold War and current cultural conflicts, seeking perhaps a similar clarity and unity of purpose. For example, according to Pat Buchanan, America is embroiled in 'a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself'.³¹ Similarly, Irving Kristol writes:

There is no "after the Cold War" for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos ... Now that the other "Cold War" is over, the real cold war has begun.³²

²⁶ Interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998. Douglas Hurd is similarly cautious about the idea of politicians dictating morality – interview with D. Hurd, 25 June 1998.

²⁷ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

²⁸ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998.

²⁹ A. Meyerson (1990) 'The Vision Thing, Continued', *Policy Review*, No. 52.

³⁰ Interview with N. Podhoretz, 11 September 1998.

³¹ Quoted in D. Frum (1994) *Dead Right* (New York: Basic Books), p. 18.

However, such talk of the Cold War highlights one of the main problems conservatives face in making culture the new battleground, which is that whereas socialism presented a relatively clear and easily identifiable enemy – even if only as caricature – those within the sphere of culture constitute a more diverse set of opponents. As Minogue argues, current threats to society, like feminism and multiculturalism, present far more amorphous menaces than those of the past, and are therefore much harder to combat.³³

Yet more has heightened conservative anxieties in relation to these areas than solely the demise of socialism. What may again be seen is that conservatives themselves recognize that the Cold War victory has not meant the triumph of their beliefs in every sphere. As Margaret Thatcher concedes, ‘while we *have* converted our opponents to an extent on economics, we have not done so on much of anything else’.³⁴ This being so, she thus reminds us that ‘conservatism is not ultimately about economics’, but such matters as tradition, the family and education. Moreover, there may again be a self-conscious defensiveness in recognitions that conservatives’ past priorities are in need of amendment. For example, this is apparent in William Bennett’s argument that, even ‘If we have full employment and growth – if we have cities of gold and alabaster – but our children have not learned how to walk in goodness, justice, and mercy, then the American experiment, no matter how gilded, will have failed.’³⁵

Of course, conservatives are not alone in worrying about the contemporary state of morality, any more than they are unique in their concerns over the condition of civil society. Indeed, many conservatives reference Alasdair MacIntyre’s thesis that we are living in an age ‘after virtue’ – in which moral discourse is characterized by interminable and seemingly irresolvable ethical disputes – perhaps in the hope of garnering wider intellectual respectability.³⁶ Even Duncan and Hobson, despite

³² I. Kristol (1993) ‘My Cold War’, *National Interest*, No. 31, p. 144.

³³ K. Minogue (1992/3) ‘Uneasy Triumph’, *National Interest*, No. 30, p. 83.

³⁴ M. Thatcher (1997) ‘Spreading the Word’, *National Review*, 22 December.

³⁵ W. J. Bennett (1994a) ‘Revolt Against God: America’s Spiritual Despair’, *Policy Review*, No. 67, p. 22.

³⁶ For example, R. Bork (1990) *The Tempting of America: The Political Seduction of the Law* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 10, 254; E. T. Oakes (1996) ‘The Achievement of Alasdair MacIntyre’, *First Things*, No. 65; Neuhaus (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 53; D. Willetts (1992) *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 79.

regarding communitarian doctrines as kin to totalitarian ones, cite with approval the thesis of moral confusion forwarded by one of liberalism's harshest contemporary critics.³⁷

However, one striking feature of much conservative writing is the presentation of the most extreme of forebodings, suggesting society to be on the brink of moral chaos. Relatively restrained in this regard is Gertrude Himmelfarb, who nonetheless contends that society has become nothing less than 'de-moralized', a state of affairs that is reflective of a 'grievous moral disorder'.³⁸ Similarly, for Robert Bork American society is in a condition of such moral decay that it is 'slouching towards Gomorrah'.³⁹

More ominously, Neuhaus portends that 'cultural warfare may be on the edge of turning into civil war'.⁴⁰ If this is the case, Buchanan for one appears ready to fight, believing that measures little short of a military operation may be necessary to 'reclaim' American society: 'block by block, we must take back our cities and take back our culture and take back our country'.⁴¹ Whilst British conservatives are typically more temperate in their language, it is not impossible to find the direst of assessments. For example, journalist Peter Hitchens allows himself the indulgence of a thesaurus full of synonyms to describe the current prospects of moral 'disorder' and 'disintegration', arguing that a veritable tide of immorality is threatening to engulf British society, with the very real possibility of imminent social collapse.⁴²

Writers like Hitchens may, of course, be felt to represent the least reflective wing of British conservatism. A more measured opinion is offered by Willetts, who thus suggests a further basis for distinguishing Britain and American conservatives. In contrast to America, 'political correctness is largely state sponsored and state supported, and is largely to be found in public institutions ... I don't think it has much

³⁷ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 270, 372, 396.

³⁸ G. Himmelfarb (1995) 'Introduction', in D. Anderson (ed.) *This Will Hurt: The Restoration of Virtue and Civic Order* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. viii. See also G. Himmelfarb (1996) *The De-Moralization of Society* (New York: Vintage Books).

³⁹ R. Bork (1996) *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books).

⁴⁰ Neuhaus (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Quoted in Frum (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴² P. Hitchens (1999) *The Abolition of Britain* (London: Quartet Books).

of an existence or vitality outside that.’⁴³ For this reason, he argues, British conservatives do not need to be so alarmed about the possibility of wider cultural decline. However, not all British conservatives would agree that harmful cultural doctrines are restricted purely to the state sector. For example, one collection of contemporary writings on the pervasiveness of ‘sentimentality’ within modern society argues that a superficial and sentimental culture, denigrating traditional values and standards, has infected not only the realm of public policy, but also the church, the media and the arts.⁴⁴

To justify their claims that society is travelling down such ruinous paths, many conservatives rely upon rafts of quantitative data for support, frequently appearing to take an almost perverse pleasure in the cataloguing of statistics of moral disarray. One exemplar of this approach is Bennett, compiler (under the aegis of the Heritage Foundation) of an index of ‘leading cultural indicators’, drawing together every possible measure of American’s parlous moral condition.⁴⁵ For example, since 1960 violent crime is shown to have risen more than five hundred per cent; both illegitimacy and the divorce rate have increased four-fold; single-parent families three-fold; whilst high school students achieve, on average, 75 points less in their SAT scores. However, perhaps the most important conservative to exploit the use of empirical evidence for the purposes of cultural alarmism is Charles Murray, whose arguments – such as the correlation between the growth of an underclass and the expansion of the welfare state – are justified by the deployment of large quantities of statistical ‘proof’.⁴⁶

Yet despite the reliance upon hard empirical data in identifying social malaise, explanation by contrast usually turns upon normative argument. That is, rather than considering measurable factors such as poverty or poor housing as possibly responsible for ‘antisocial’ behaviour, it is typically moral causes that are cited. Indeed, suggestions that economic factors might to be blame are typically given short shrift by

⁴³ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998.

⁴⁴ D. Anderson and P. Mullen (eds) (1998) *Faking It: The Sentimentalisation of Modern Society* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

⁴⁵ W. J. Bennett (1994b) *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society* (New York: Simon & Schuster). See also Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 222-34.

conservatives, as by Himmelfarb.⁴⁷ Thus, she argues, ‘social pathology’ – illegitimacy, crime and dependency – is assuredly a function of ‘moral pathology’, and not the result of economic deprivation. Bennett espouses a similar view: ‘Most of the social problems that plague modern American society have to do with a breakdown of cultural and moral norms.’⁴⁸

Another important issue for conservatives is determining responsibility for this demoralized state of affairs. In fact, a wide range of answers may be given as to the origins of society’s moral decline: for example, for Strauss and his followers our present condition can be traced back to the breakdown of the classical worldview; for others, such as Bell and Roger Scruton, there is the more general problem of ‘modernity’, with its unravelling of custom and tradition; whilst for libertarians, it is especially the rise of socialist collectivism that is considered problematic, in denigrating the importance of individual responsibility.⁴⁹ Yet in each case a similar story is told: that in some past Golden Age – whether that of the Greek polis or the Victorian market place – the world possessed superior moral and cultural resources to its current woefully depleted stock. Rather than moral progress, the passage of time has simply brought an increase in coarseness and immorality.

Moreover, although the precise origins of the cultural debility afflicting Western societies may not be agreed upon by conservatives, a large area of common ground does exist in terms of a belief that a sharp acceleration of detrimental trends occurred in the 1960s. Thus the increased acceptance of ‘alternative lifestyles’, homosexuality, abortion and contraception – together with changes in their legal status – has been held responsible by many conservatives for every moral and social problem ever since. Similarly, the growth of the welfare state and its attendant culture of dependency are especially blamed by American conservatives on the Great Society programmes of the era.

⁴⁶ For example, C. Murray (1990) *The Emerging British Underclass* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

⁴⁷ Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 238-43.

⁴⁸ W. J. Bennett (1992) ‘How George Bush Can Win’, *National Review*, 5 October, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Strauss (1953), *op. cit.*; Bell (1978), *op. cit.*, pp. 46-54 and R. Scruton (1994) *Modern Philosophy* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), pp. 1-2, 500-4; Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 247-9.

Upon this basis, Thatcher's denunciation of the decade as one in which 'the old values of discipline and self-restraint were denigrated' is a view echoed and elaborated by numerous conservative writers.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the legacy of the 1960s may have come back to haunt conservatives with particular force in recent times since, as Feulner argues, the generation who grew up in that period is the one now controlling society.⁵¹ Of course, one of the ironies of conservatives' demonization of the 1960s is that this was also a decade that witnessed many of conservatism's own key intellectual developments, for example, the emergence of neoconservatism.⁵²

However, to understand conservatives' present concerns more fully it is necessary to provide a more detailed account of the various issues being fought over in current culture war disputes. Whilst space prohibits an examination of every relevant issue, four of the most significant may be explored: education and the arts; multiculturalism and identity; the family; and religion.

i) Education and the Arts

Many of the most heated of contemporary culture war debates take place within the realm of education, with an avalanche of conservative writings addressing concerns in

⁵⁰ Quoted in M. Durham (1994) 'The Conservative Party and the Family', *Talking Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 66. For various conservative condemnations of the sixties see: Bell (1978), *op. cit.*, pp. 120-45; A. Bloom (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 313-35; Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 243; D. Willetts (1989) 'The Family', in D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon (eds) *The Thatcher Effect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 268; C. Murray (1992a) 'The Legacy of the 60s', *Commentary*, Vol. 94, No. 1; I. Kristol (1994) 'Countercultures', *Commentary*, Vol. 98, No. 6, p. 35; M. Novak (1995b) 'Morality: How It Became a Four-Letter Word', *Rising Tide*, September/October, p. 10.

⁵¹ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998. Jeane Kirkpatrick similarly argues that the counterculture generation is now governing American politics – interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

⁵² See J. A. Andrew (1997) *The Other Side of the Sixties* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press); T. Gitlin (1996) 'Straight from the Sixties: What Conservatives Owe the Decade They Hate', *American Prospect*, No. 26.

this area.⁵³ Much of this literature takes its cue in particular from the arguments set out by Allan Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, a Straussian defence of traditional educational standards and the Western canon.⁵⁴ One reason that conservatives believe education is so important is suggested by Don Eberly, who argues that the 'cultural transmission belt of a free society is education'.⁵⁵ Similarly, the notion that education is one of the prime means by which a culture reproduces itself is also at the heart of Scruton's understanding.⁵⁶

Conservatives are troubled by two perceived developments. The first is a decline in educational standards, with many conservatives believing that traditional ideals of rigour and application have been usurped by modes of teaching that reduce ambition to the level of the lowest common denominator. For example, child-centred teaching methods, the downgrading of objective methods of assessment and the displacement of traditional academic subjects by vocational ones, are all seen to contribute to a degrading of educational standards and the eclipse of excellence.⁵⁷

Second, is the belief that schools and universities have become dominated by teachers and lecturers motivated not by conventional educational aims at all, but by a desire to instil in students politically correct notions about culture and society. In particular, ideologies such as feminism, postmodernism and multiculturalism are believed to be at the root of this shift. Thus conservatives charge that curricula are corrupted by a disproportionate attention paid to marginalized groups and non-Western cultures, an over-emphasis upon the negative of society's records on matters such as race and

⁵³ For American conservatives this constitutes a mini-industry: R. Kimball (1990) *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Higher Education* (New York: Harper and Row); D. D'Souza (1991) *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press); C. Finn (1991) *We Must Take Charge: Our Schools and Our Future* (New York: Free Press); M. E. Bradford (1992) *Against the Barbarians* (Jefferson City: University of Missouri Press).

⁵⁴ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ D. Eberly (1994) 'Introduction', in D. Eberly (ed.) *Building a Community of Citizens: Civil Society in the 21st Century* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America), p. xxxiii.

⁵⁶ R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), pp. 147-57.

⁵⁷ The Centre for Policy Studies provides many discussions of such issues. For example: S. Lawlor (1990) *Teachers Mistaught: Training in Theories Or Education in Subjects?* (London: Centre for Policy Studies); S. Lawlor (ed.) (1993) *The Dearing Debate: Assessment and the National Curriculum* (London: Centre for Policy Studies); A. O'Hear (1991) *Father of Child-Centredness: John Dewey and the Ideology of Modern Education* (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

gender, a denigration of great historical figures and their achievements, and a corrosive questioning of traditional values and institutions. Indeed, certain disciplines – such as peace studies and social history – are often all but wholly distrusted.⁵⁸ Moreover, even beyond curricula content areas such as student admissions and staff appointments have also been contaminated by ideological demands, such as quotas to satisfy multiculturalists' notions of equality.

In fact, the focus of conservative writings on education is frequently far less upon the specifics of adversary educational doctrines than upon their wider implications: for example, David Bryden argues that 'the struggle in the universities is not really about the curriculum' but about politics.⁵⁹ Similarly for Scruton, it is the 'politicization' of education, 'the attempt to recast the subjects and the aim of studying them in terms of a political agenda' that is deemed most worrying.⁶⁰ The major problem therefore with doctrines such as feminism and multiculturalism is that their adherents are believed to be fundamentally altering the very nature of what education means.

Yet even more seriously, the harmful effects of current educational theories may be felt far beyond the domain of education. For example, according to Bloom, one of the most important consequences of education's changing character is that the social contract itself is undermined, as a result of the denigration of the ideas of common goals and the public good by relativists.⁶¹ Other conservatives present similar worries. For example, Lynne Cheney argues that in encouraging students to adopt cynical attitudes towards their own societies and histories, adversary ideologies undermine the basis of patriotism.⁶² Indeed, the strong belief many conservatives have in a 'trickle down' theory of ideas means that whilst noxious beliefs such as political correctness

⁵⁸ For conservatives' especial interest in history see G. Himmelfarb (1987) *The New History and the Old* (Cambridge: Belknap Press); L. Cheney (1995) *Telling the Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster); J. C. D. Clark (1990) 'National Identity, State Formation and Patriotism: The Role of History in the Public Mind', *History Workshop*, No. 29; N. Stone (1990) 'At the Crossroads of History', *The Sunday Times*, 8 April; M. Beloff (1992) *An Historian in the 20th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press), ch. 1; J. Patten (1994) 'Why British History Matters', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 May.

⁵⁹ D. P. Bryden (1991) 'It Ain't What They Teach, It's The Way That They Teach It', *Public Interest*, No. 103, p. 52.

⁶⁰ R. Scruton (1993) 'The Harrowed Tradition', *Partisan Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2, p. 210. See also J. Casey (1991) 'Cambridge's Priggish Tendency', *Spectator*, 30 November.

⁶¹ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

may begin life within the cloisters of academia, they rapidly filter through to the rest of society. Himmelfarb for one clearly believes this: 'What starts at Harvard and Yale appears in the Midwest or in the South or in the most remote parts of the country in three months. It is really quite remarkable how that happens.'⁶³

The cross-over between concerns relating to the sphere of education and those relating to the wider culture is especially apparent in the distinction many conservatives seek to maintain between high and low culture. One of the major components of a traditional education conservatives wish to uphold is the centrality of the traditional canon, since this is believed to embody the most important achievements of Western culture. Yet concomitant to this defence of the highest of cultural attainments is a belief in the inferior status of the 'lowest'. For example, Scruton makes the relative status of different cultural artefacts a central theme of his 'intelligent person's' guide to culture – debates within his purview ranging from classical versus popular music to great literature versus genre fiction – arguing that high art is in a strong sense superior to and more valuable than popular culture, in terms both of individual and social flourishing.⁶⁴ The notion that all should be treated as of equal worth is met with derision.

Furthermore, not only may popular culture be viewed as less valuable than high culture, but it is also frequently seen by conservatives as positively harmful: for example, many argue that the violence and obscene language to be found within popular films and music is causally related to real-life criminal and antisocial behaviour.⁶⁵ In similar fashion, Minogue argues that the debased condition of the news media – demonstrated by the rise of the sound bite and the inflation of the trivial and sensational – not only reduces our understanding of the world to a superficial level, but

⁶² Cheney (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 24-30.

⁶³ Quoted in M. Gerson (1996) *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books), p. 335.

⁶⁴ R. Scruton (1998) *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (London: Duckworth). Similarly, Anthony O'Hear defends the status of classical music – A. O'Hear (1991) 'Out of Sync with Bach', *Times Educational Supplement*, 22 February.

⁶⁵ For example, M. Medved (1992) 'The New Sound of Music', *Public Interest*, No. 109; G. F. Will (1994) *The Leveling Wind* (New York: Viking), pp. 13-15; Bennett (1994a), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

also undermines respect for traditional sources of morality such as religion.⁶⁶

One typical charge levelled at conservatives in defending 'high' standards is that of elitism. Minogue, for example, confronts this indictment, arguing that 'to criticize a conclusion as elitist is merely to commit a fallacy of irrelevance, an evasion of the issue of truth'.⁶⁷ Indeed, in meeting the relativist's challenge Minogue's rebuttal is a strong one: that is, a relativistic plea against comparative judgements certainly may be argued to side-step rather than answer the question of whether or not one form of cultural experience is superior to another. However, a different accusation that may be levelled at conservative arguments is not that they are too elitist, but that they are rarely 'elitist' enough.

That is, what is clear from most conservative accounts is that contemporary conservatives cannot genuinely be viewed as objective defenders of high intellectual standards, since they themselves typically hold highly instrumental views as to the purposes of education and cultural experience. In other words, conservatives are often guilty of aiming at, if not 'political', then at least clearly partisan ends, as opposed simply to upholding standards from a detached standpoint. For example, Bloom stresses that 'the real motive of education [is] the search for a good life', with this understood in familiar Straussian terms.⁶⁸ Similarly, Charles Glenn urges that 'the explicit curriculum of schools, and the way it is taught should also contribute powerfully to the formation of character'.⁶⁹ Further, as already seen, writers such as Cheney believe that the fostering of goods such as patriotism should be a concern of educators. Thus conservative defences of a traditional education are frequently founded less upon a belief in its intrinsic merits than its role in directing individuals towards a correct moral vision.

A further problem with conservative defences may be found in their own positions in relation to culture. Amongst paleoconservatives there is a characteristic habit of sniping at the cultural credentials of mainstream conservatives. For example, Fleming

⁶⁶ Minogue (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-65.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁸ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁶⁹ C. L. Glenn (1995) 'The Roots of Character in Civil Society', in Eberly (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 119.

argues that it is ludicrous to imagine the ‘savages and barbarians’ of neoconservatism to be capable of leading the fight in any culture war, indeed believing that ‘leftists are far more articulate, cultivated and intelligent people’.⁷⁰ In more restrained fashion, Claes Ryn argues that ‘Many supposedly intellectual conservatives seem to consider ideas and cultures from afar’, having little interest in them beyond the instrumental.⁷¹ Whilst much of this is reflective merely of sectarian rivalries – although also thereby highlighting the fact that a culture war may not provide the same unity as the Cold War – there is nonetheless a frequent disparity between the desire to preserve high cultural standards espoused by many conservatives and their own cultural preoccupations. The perceptive observations of one commentator on the popularity of Bloom’s text is here apposite:

To put the matter starkly, Bloom’s appeal reflects his denunciation of Mick Jagger, not his view on Heidegger, his aversion to equality between the sexes, not his Straussian philosophy, and his celebration of elite cultural unity, not his enshrinement of philosophers’ disinterested reason as the highest expression of humanity.⁷²

Certainly in terms of the many conservatives who have drawn upon Bloom, it is typically for the least subtle of his arguments that they look to his writings and only very rarely the more developed intellectual framework. Indeed, there is often little cultural sophistication to be found within much conservative cultural writing: for example, the crude moral frameworks imposed by Bennett upon the stories and fables contained within his various collections of inspirational readings clearly possess meagre literary virtue, even if aiming to instil the ethical variety.⁷³ Similarly, there is also something distinctly unedifying about such activities as trawling through popular song

⁷⁰ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

⁷¹ C. G. Ryn (1996) ‘How Conservatives Failed “The Culture”’, *Modern Age*, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 117. See also P. Gottfried (1993) *The Conservative Movement* (2nd edn.) (New York: Twayne Publishers), pp. 115-16.

⁷² P. Kingston (1987/88) ‘Bloom’s Appeal to the American Mind’, *Tocqueville Review*, No. 9, p. 408.

⁷³ W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1993) *The Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon and Schuster); W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1995) *The Moral Compass* (New York: Simon & Schuster); W. J. Bennett (ed.) (1997) *Our Sacred Honor* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman).

lyrics and dialogue from Hollywood films for the purposes of cataloguing obscenities. Moreover, for all that many conservatives may decry the ‘dumbing down’ of culture, the hyperbolic – even apocalyptic – tone of many of their own warnings suggests that they themselves cannot be seen as free from culpability for any intellectual decline.

What conservatives also face is a question of credibility in pronouncing upon current cultural trends. The point here is not simply that many may be ‘out of touch’ with popular culture – though, for example, Scruton’s engagement with popular music suggests a highly detached and reluctant familiarity – but more importantly, even with contemporary high culture. That is, whereas in the past ‘conservative’ cultural commentators such as Johnson, Arnold or Eliot wrote upon the bases of personal literary achievements and an intimate involvement in the cultural sphere, one noticeable feature today is the scant number of writers or artists who might be identified as conservative.⁷⁴ Ryn’s suggestion that conservatives typically look at culture largely from afar is thus a pertinent observation.

What is also revealed by conservative contributions to debates concerning education and the arts is once more a distinct sense of insecurity. As Peter Berger observes, those who seek to uphold Western cultural values:

frequently seem to have very little confidence in the capacity of the West to prevail in any kind of cultural contestation. Thus even the introduction of a modest amount of non-Western materials into the school curriculum is perceived as a serious threat to the integrity of the culture.⁷⁵

In other words, precisely the shrillness of many conservative engagements is suggestive of a clear sense of doubt about the robustness of their preferred cultural norms in the face of challenge.

⁷⁴ Although Saul Bellow might be considered an ally of cultural conservatives, in particular in light of his novelistic portrayal of Bloom – S. Bellow (2000) *Ravelstein* (London: Viking).

ii) *Multiculturalism and Identity*

With much of the debate around educational questions therefore only minimally about education itself, many of the issues with which conservatives are concerned relate rather to questions of identity. For example, Bloom perceives the difference between current and traditional conceptions of education as deriving from a ‘changed understanding of what it means to be an American’.⁷⁶ Specifically, whereas in the past American citizenship implied the acceptance of common beliefs about the norms and aims of society – although with the allowance of a certain diversity in terms of custom and religion – current theories deem such a requirement oppressive, instead conceiving difference to be central to the understanding of identity.

Such a characterization certainly possesses some truth: as Ernesto Laclau notes, the post-Cold War world has witnessed a ‘proliferation of particularist identities, none of which tries to ground its legitimacy and its action in a mission predetermined by universal history’.⁷⁷ Yet as seen in the last chapter, many conservatives conceive their ideal of community in relatively closed terms, and thus as well their notions of cultural identity. For example, the importance of common cultural experience is, according to Bennett, that a single ‘national memory’ is ‘the glue that holds our political community together’.⁷⁸ For British conservatives a similar perspective is articulated by Scruton, for whom a common culture is necessary both for the stability it provides society and for preventing individual alienation.⁷⁹

What many conservatives fear specifically about multiculturalism is that society will be hastened down a path of ‘Balkanisation’, with an explosion of disparate identities leading to hostility and conflict. This view especially informs conservative diagnoses of racial conflict. Once again therefore, the idea that explanation might be found in material causes such as poverty is typically dismissed, with blame instead attributed to

⁷⁵ P. Berger (1992) *A Far Glory* (New York: Free Press), p. 64.

⁷⁶ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁷⁷ E. Laclau (1994) *The Making of Political Identities* (London: Verso), p. 1.

⁷⁸ W. J. Bennett (1985) ‘Lost Generation’, *Policy Review*, No. 33, p. 44.

⁷⁹ Scruton (1979), *op. cit.*, pp. 51-70.

the multiculturalist's preference for maintaining distinct racial identities against integration or assimilation.⁸⁰ Moreover, the fragmentation engendered by the spread of multicultural doctrines figures prominently as a perceived cause within conservative discourses of social decline.⁸¹

Sensitive perhaps to accusations of racism, conservatives frequently stress that preserving a common culture is not simply for the benefit of a white elite. Instead, multiculturalists' encouragement of non-whites to view their identities as separate and distinct is argued to be precisely what enforces their segregation and lower status within society.⁸² Furthermore, behind the promotion of multiculturalism John O'Sullivan again perceives at work the dark hand of the New Class, having discovered that 'the way to extend its power is to divide Americans into different tribes so that it can then step forward as the mediator of their disputes'.⁸³

Beneath conflicts over the necessity of a common culture lay fundamental disagreements about the nature of identity, with major challenge to traditional conceptions coming from the perspective of 'identity politics'. Distinguishing conservative from multicultural and postmodern views of identity is an issue also addressed by John O'Sullivan.⁸⁴ For conservatives, he argues, the core characteristic of individual identity is that it is relatively fixed. In the first instance, this is largely by the accidents of birth: that is, it is the family, nation and religion into which we are born that originally determines our identity. Over time, we may reflect upon the ideas and norms we receive from these sources and thus modify our identities to an extent, but nonetheless, the influence of our origins should never be eradicated. Most importantly, individual change must be effected as gradually and cautiously as social change, whilst

⁸⁰ See, for example, conservative analyses of the 1992 LA Riots: M. Decter (1992) 'How the Rioters Won', *Commentary*, Vol. 94, No. 1; C. Murray (1992b) 'The LA Riots', *Commentary*, Vol. 94, No. 5.

⁸¹ For example, as expressed by a number of conservatives within two symposia sponsored by *Commentary* magazine: *Commentary* (1992) 'Symposium: Is America on the Way Down?', Vol. 93, No. 5 and *Commentary* (1995) 'Symposium: The National Prospect', Vol. 100, No. 5.

⁸² See M. Decter (1995) 'E Pluribus Nihil: Multiculturalism and Black Children', *Commentary*, Vol. 92, No. 3.

⁸³ J. O'Sullivan (1998) 'American Nationalism and Western Civilization', *Chronicles*, Vol. 22, No. 7, p. 23.

⁸⁴ J. O'Sullivan (1996) 'Conservatism and Cultural Identity', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), pp. 23-43.

always retaining the basic essence of our original identity.

By contrast, many contemporary views suggest that there is no such ineliminable core, and therefore open up the possibility of the wholesale reconstruction of identity.⁸⁵ This highly fluid view thus reveals a similar hubris to that of the social engineer. Moreover, whereas the conservative view highlights a wide range of sources as responsible for the formation of identity, and therefore presents a multi-faceted vision, the concentration identity politics asks individuals to place upon single aspects of their identities – such as race or sexuality – means that it offers an essentially one-dimensional conception.

Accordingly, there are for John O’Sullivan two major problems with contemporary perspectives. First, in predicating identity upon a single facet of personality they offer a highly impoverished view of individual existence; and second, in regarding identity as open to constant revision, this is also a highly fragile and precarious one. Furthermore, infinitely plastic individual identities offer a weak basis for the formation of strong and stable communities.

Of course, one question conservative critics of multiculturalism have to answer is that of what grounds a sense of common identity. A number of possibilities may be suggested. For example, for Straussians its basis obviously stems from the universality of natural rights. However, identifying a universal foundation for common bonds clearly contradicts the particularist standpoint preferred by many conservatives. At the same time, many nonetheless wish to resist the implications of a multiculturalist approach. One answer to this dilemma is to conceive these bonds as formed at the level of the nation-state – as does Scruton – which thereby avoids the extremes of either an abstract universalism or a fragmentary postmodernism.

American conservatives inevitably feel the challenge of multiculturalism to be especially acute, in light of the diverse origins of American society.⁸⁶ Appealing to the bonds of a common national culture is thus much more problematic. One possible

⁸⁵ Minogue argues along similar lines: ‘to have a fixed identity in the world of media opinion is to be mocked’ – Minogue (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁸⁶ See, for example, C. Orwin (1996) ‘All Quiet on the (Post) Western Front?’, *Public Interest*, No. 123.

strategy is, of course, that of writers such as Russell Kirk, who argue that a specifically British cultural heritage is the single most important source of American identity.⁸⁷ However, whatever truth there may be in Kirk's historical analysis, a particular problem for such conservatives today is pointed up by the difficulty even British conservatives have in defining British identity. For example, Charles Moore offers one typical example: after boldly setting out his intentions to discuss precisely 'how to be British', he is able to follow this only by delivering a highly anaemic account of the British virtues of decency, pragmatism and a spirit of enterprise.⁸⁸ If once British conservatives could offer specific achievements around which to cohere a sense of cultural pride – such as an Empire – today they are frequently left offering such shopping lists of empty banalities. Indeed, with even conservatives feeling awkward at invoking many aspects of Britain's imperial history – because of the controversies over issues such as race this will then embroil them in – they are left to fall back upon prosaic images of well-kept lawns and warm beer.⁸⁹ Whilst such conceptions may save conservatives from controversy, they provide little basis for a strong or distinctive vision of national cultural identity.

Critics of conservative efforts to uphold the ideal of a common culture typically focus on the supposed disjuncture between conservative assumptions and the realities of modern societies. For example, Gray argues that conservatives such as Scruton are engaged in a dangerous form of 'cultural fundamentalism' if they believe that it is possible to recreate traditional shared modes of life, since this overlooks the truth of 'an ethnic and a religious pluralism that is unalterable and irreversible in any foreseeable future'.⁹⁰ Thus efforts to override this pluralism may be considered not only intolerant, but also impracticable: modern societies simply are highly pluralistic ones and no amount of conservative protestation will change the fact.

The suggestion that contemporary Western societies have become more pluralized

⁸⁷ Kirk (1993), *op. cit.* Richard Brookhiser similarly emphasizes the priority of a particular cultural perspective for American identity, that of the 'WASP' – R. Brookhiser (1991) *The Way of the WASP: How It Made America, and How It Can Save It, So to Speak* (New York: Free Press).

⁸⁸ C. Moore (1995) *How to Be British* (London: Centre for Policy Studies).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁰ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 277.

and diverse may or may not be true, although casting the proposition in such terms may simply be to put a positive gloss on what in reality is the product of increased social atomization. However, the argument that it is primarily the changing reality of social diversity that is the problem for conservatives like Scruton certainly is problematic. For example, as most American conservatives willingly recognize, American society has since its origins been constituted from a diverse range of identities⁹¹; yet this did not mean that the creation of a common cultural identity was therefore impossible (even if not pre-political). That is, the idea of American citizenship as embodied in the slogan *e pluribus unum* – implying that whatever differences individuals brought with them from the old world might be pooled in the creation of a common identity in the new – is by no means entirely a myth of cultural conservatives. Thus, as Jeanne Kirkpatrick argues, one of the major values of a traditional model of public education for American conservatives is that it was once a key means of creating the common ties of identity that America's ethnic origins do not.⁹² Conservative critics of multiculturalism must therefore be judged at least partially correct, in identifying the significant change of recent times not as being increasing social diversification itself, but the diminution of belief in the idea that this diversity can or should be transcended.

iii) The Family

One of the most important sources of identity cited by conservatives is the family.⁹³ In particular, the model most commonly preferred is 'the ideal of the two-parent family'.⁹⁴ To understand the nature of the threats conservatives believe this model faces today it will be useful to consider why traditionally such importance is attached to it. For

⁹¹ For example, as does Norman Podhoretz – interview with N. Podhoretz, 11 September 1998. See also C. G. Ryn (1993) 'Cultural Diversity and Unity', *Chronicles*, Vol. 17, No. 6.

⁹² Interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

⁹³ For example, Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 149; Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 234-46; J. Q. Wilson (1993) *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press), pp. 141-63.

example, according to Murray, a Burkean understanding of the world teaches us that 'there is an accumulated human wisdom in the evolution of the family across society over the centuries'.⁹⁵

Yet once more, Scruton may be seen to present one of the clearest and most developed accounts, arguing that support for the family is wholly central to the conservative outlook.⁹⁶ This centrality derives from the fact that the family is the first institution through which the social world is perceived and is therefore crucial in the formation of identity. Moreover, its value resides in its establishment of a link between generations: 'In the commerce between parent and child, past and future are made present, and therein lies the immediate and perceivable reality of the transcendent bond which unites them.'⁹⁷ In other words, family relations bind the individual within the web of past and future history.

In cultivating this sense of belonging, the family thus acts as a natural source of the values of stability, order and continuity which the individual takes with him when relating to wider society; the family is therefore at the heart of legitimating the conservative belief in a continuing social order. Similarly, in that the individual learns in the private sphere that identity is not an artificial construction, so too will he recognize the misguidedness of treating society as open to conscious remoulding. It is thanks to these lessons of family life that 'however vociferously men may declare their attachment to other ideologies, in their most solemn and silent innervations they are naturally conservative'.⁹⁸

Yet the family may be seen as responsible not only for the inculcation of a broadly conservative disposition, but also the transmission of specific values; as James Q.

⁹⁴ D. G. Green (1992) 'Foreword', in N. Dennis and G. Erdos (1992) *Families Without Fatherhood* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit), p. viii.

⁹⁵ Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

⁹⁶ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5. A similar understanding is presented by P. Morgan (1992) 'The Family: No Possibility of Ethical Neutrality', in D. Anderson and G. Frost (eds) *Hubris: The Tempting of Modern Conservatives* (London: Centre for Policy Studies), pp. 39-40.

⁹⁷ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Wilson puts it, it is 'an unending school for moral instruction'.⁹⁹ Moreover, with the strong link many conservatives believe there to be between immorality and anti-social behaviour, a condition of social disorder may therefore be traceable back to a state of disorder within the family. Patricia Morgan, for example, argues that social problems in areas ranging from crime to health to environmental pressures are all 'related to the loosening and breaking of relationships'.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence, these problems 'are only amenable to family policy'.

It is because the traditional family is imagined to perform such key functions that many conservatives strenuously resist any threats to it, such as the liberalization of laws and attitudes towards illegitimacy, divorce or abortion.¹⁰¹ Indeed, many libertarians appear just as worried as other conservatives: as seen previously, Murray worries especially about the rise of illegitimacy, whilst Duncan and Hobson express concern at the relaxation of divorce laws and the availability of contraception.

Yet as also seen, other conservatives may well hold the free market at least partly responsible for the debased condition of civil society's institutions, and this is as true of the family as any other. For example, Morgan argues in regard to the Thatcher era as follows: 'In the very decade the traditional family needed support, government – Conservative Government – failed it.'¹⁰² In its commitment to prioritizing the individual and attacking the collective institutions of the Left, the Thatcher-led administration was thus guilty of neglecting the interests of those collective units, such as the family, depended upon by conservatives. Thus in this area as well tensions between varieties of conservative may be in evidence.

The traditional family model has, of course, been subjected to numerous intellectual

⁹⁹ Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ On abortion see R. Neuhaus (1992) *America Against Itself* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), chs 6 and 7; C. Moore (1992) 'The Womb of Time Will Bring Its Revenge', *Spectator*, 20 June; P. Johnson (1996) 'It Is Not True That There Are No Good Causes – Ending Abortion Is One', *Spectator*, 17 August. On divorce see W. R. Mattox, Jr. (1995) 'Why Aren't Conservatives Talking About Divorce?', *Policy Review*, No. 73; M. Decter (1997) 'Affluence and Divorce', *Public Interest*, No. 127; R. Deech (1994) *Divorce Dissent: Dangers in Divorce Reform* (London: Centre for Policy Studies); R. Whelan (ed.) (1995) *Just a Piece of Paper?: Divorce Reform and the Undermining of Marriage* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit).

¹⁰² Morgan (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

assaults in the past, but many conservatives believe it to face particularly potent threats from current ideologies. Two arguments in particular are worth considering. The first is forwarded by Daniel Moynihan, identifying a phenomenon he terms ‘defining deviancy down’.¹⁰³ By this, Moynihan means that modes of behaviour which once would have been considered deviant, such as childbirth out of wedlock and minority forms of sexuality, have today become accepted as normal. With the category of deviancy therefore severely contracted, non-traditional lifestyles are considered equal alternatives to traditional ones rather than existing on a continuum of moral choices. This relativism in relation to family models thus implies an erosion of the traditional variety’s unique status.

Yet perhaps even more worrying for conservative defenders of the traditional family is a complementary phenomenon, identified by Charles Krauthammer as ‘defining deviancy up’.¹⁰⁴ According to Krauthammer, it is not simply that institutions or behaviour once considered normal no longer possess a privileged status, but are today themselves frequently regarded as the ‘deviant’ forms. It is also, he observes, that the way in which the traditional family unit is discussed by many – particularly feminists – is in largely pathological terms, with the focus upon negatives such as wife beating and child abuse rather than any of the family’s positive virtues. Thus, he argues, by exaggerating statistics on rape and abuse, and subjecting to critique the values of masculinity, the nuclear family is ruthlessly demonized by its opponents.

Nonetheless, there are clear signs of defensiveness amongst conservatives in relation to the family, and the weakening of a distinctively conservative position. The most obvious indicator of the former is the attempt by some to accommodate to a world of plural family models. This may be seen particularly amongst conservative politicians. For example, Barbara Bush adopts a tone of compromise in arguing that ‘however you define family, that’s what we mean by family values’.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Michael Portillo attempts to stake out territory for a more compassionate conservatism that accepts the

¹⁰³ D. P. Moynihan (1993) ‘Defining Deviancy Down’, *American Scholar*, Winter.

¹⁰⁴ C. Krauthammer (1993) ‘Defining Deviancy Up’, *New Republic*, 22 November.

¹⁰⁵ B. Bush (1992) ‘Family Values’, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 58, No. 12, p. 718.

reality of different types of family.¹⁰⁶ If it truly is the case that the traditional family model is no longer the only acceptable variety, then conservatives might simply have to accept this and defend whatever sort of families successfully flourish.

However, the belief that conservatives can easily adapt to a world in which the traditional family has lost its privileged status is questionable, as it is far from certain that non-traditional families are capable of fulfilling the roles that conservatives expect of traditional ones. For example, John O'Sullivan suggests this in arguing that whilst the gay family model may 'mimic' the form of the conventional one, in that it cannot perform such functions as childbearing it does not possess the same merit.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, if any type of relationship is to be considered a family without requiring the same commitment as that of a traditional marriage, this inevitably weakens the family's status as an ideal to be esteemed. Yet perhaps most important, O'Sullivan argues in similar vein to Krauthammer that the way in which gay and feminist identities define themselves is precisely in opposition to the supposedly repressive nature of the traditional family. In other words, there may simply be no basis for peaceful coexistence between different family models.

Whether or not O'Sullivan's analysis is correct, it may be agreed that for the family to fulfil the roles conservatives wish it to – presenting a transcendent bond between generations and acting as a school for traditional moral instruction – then it must be constituted in at least delimited ways. However, what is also significant today is that arguments even conservative defenders of the traditional family forward are frequently not distinctively conservative ones.

In regard to this, it is useful to consider the argument of Jyl Josephson and Cynthia Burack, who characterize the model propounded in many recent attempts to defend the two-parent biological family as a 'neo-traditional' model, the neo- prefix denoting the fact that its proponents avoid explicit suggestions of male dominance and offer as

¹⁰⁶ M. Portillo (1997) *The Ghost of Toryism Past: The Spirit of Conservatism Future* (London: Centre for Policy Studies), pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁷ J. O'Sullivan (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

primary justification for its superiority the well-being of children.¹⁰⁸ Although not referring exclusively to conservative writings, there is much in this argument relevant to them. Thus whilst child welfare has, of course, always been a part of conservative arguments, it is today given an especially prominent position. For example, R. T. Gill's plaintive plea that support for the traditional nuclear family is necessary 'for the sake of the children' is one echoed by numerous conservative writers, who argue that it is the range of emotional, psychological and material needs of children that makes families comprised of two biological parents undoubtedly the best.¹⁰⁹

For Josephson and Burack, this emphasis upon child welfare is seen largely as a smokescreen, to disguise the real concern of family values advocates to preserve an oppressive, male-dominated institution. Moreover, they argue, the ostensible argument is itself unconvincing – if the well-being of children truly is the main concern, then the answer need not be the preservation of the nuclear family but the direction of greater resources, such as welfare payments and educational and child-care facilities, to support families of all types.

Whatever is thought of this position, it certainly points up the weakness for conservatives in relying upon child welfare arguments, in that the 'sake of the children' does not in itself imply the necessity of the traditional family. However, what is revealed more than any attempt to hide a concern for male dominance is a reluctance on the part of conservatives to argue their distinctive case for the two-parent family, instead laying their hands upon whatever arguments may win them ready consensus.

Thus an almost politically correct concern for the plight not only of children but also of women is much in evidence within the conservative literature. For example, Paul Johnson's professed concern about the rise in the divorce rate is that it 'is the prime cause of poverty in Britain today, especially amongst women and children'.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ J. L. Josephson and C. Burack (1998) 'The Political Ideology of the Neo-Traditional Family', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 213-31.

¹⁰⁹ R. T. Gill (1992) 'For the Sake of the Children', *Public Interest*, No. 108; R. T. Gill and T. G. Gill (1993) 'A New Plan for the Family', *Public Interest*, No. 111; K. Joseph (1991) *The Importance of Parenting* (London: Centre for Policy Studies); T. Raison (1990) 'Divorce a La Mode', *Spectator*, 10 February.

¹¹⁰ P. Johnson (1996) 'When the Honourable Estate of Marriage Is Underestimated by Dishonourable Men', *Spectator*, 29 June, p. 22.

Moreover, the feminist critique of masculinity may be given a conservative twist. For example, Duncan and Hobson argue that a key virtue of the traditional family is that it restrains the 'naturally aggressive' male; today therefore, 'the demise of the traditional family has spawned a new kind of rogue male, who is young, inadequately socialized, personally irresponsible and lacking in self-control'.¹¹¹ Murray argues similarly, suggesting that family life is necessary to civilize male aggression, since without it men will find more destructive outlets for their masculine impulses.¹¹²

In other words, there is much in such arguments that might easily find favour even with conservatives' opponents.¹¹³ Yet at least one problem for libertarians in particular in articulating the same negative view of male behaviour as many feminists – rather than the positive attitude towards assertive individualism one might expect – is that they may simply provide intellectual ammunition to their adversaries' arguments for increasing state regulation of the private sphere.

Moreover, even the most resolute of conservatives are frequently far less 'hard-line' on family issues than at first sight they may appear. For example Neuhaus, whilst seeming to view abortion as wholly and unquestionably immoral, nonetheless argues that what he seeks is 'constructive debate', adopting a far more conciliatory approach when attention is turned to what in practice he imagines can be achieved.¹¹⁴ Yet final word may be given to Murray, who defends the family in the following fashion:

I begin from the premise that the traditional monogamous marriage with children is, in reality, on average, in the long run, the most satisfying way to live a human life. Or, as a cynic might put it, marriage with children is the worst way to live a human life except for all others.¹¹⁵

In other words, even its seemingly strongest advocates may feel unable to sound any

¹¹¹ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 385.

¹¹² Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998; C. Murray (1994a) *Underclass: The Crisis Deepens* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit), p. 26. See also Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 165-90.

¹¹³ Thus the willingness of the Institute of Economic Affairs to publish a 'left-wing' take on these themes – Dennis and Erdos (1992), *op. cit.*

¹¹⁴ Neuhaus (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 121-4.

especially enthusiastic clarion calls for the traditional family's defence.

iv) Religion

A further area of notable concern for many conservatives is that of religion. Whilst there may be no necessary connection between conservatism and a religious outlook, amongst major ideologies conservatism has always placed the greatest emphasis upon the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition.¹¹⁶ Indeed, at least some conservatives believe that conservatism would be unthinkable without a religious dimension. For example, Lord Hailsham argues that 'there can be no genuine conservatism which is not founded upon a religious view of the basis of civil obligation'.¹¹⁷ In contemporary terms, William Kristol contends that 'it's hard to imagine that there'll be a conservative future that is not also a reasonably religious future'.¹¹⁸ Moreover, with civil society in so demoralized a condition, Dan Coats argues that 'Nothing short of a Great Awakening' will be sufficient to reinvigorate it.¹¹⁹

One significant role conservatives believe religion plays is that of promoting the moral life. In addition, the specific tenets of the Judeo-Christian tradition may also provide legitimation for social order and hierarchy. Furthermore, as suggested by Hailsham, a particular value of religion is that it provides an answer to the question of political obligation, justifying the duty of individuals to obey authority by sanctifying it. Similarly, Scruton argues that since the ties that bind society together are pre-political and non-contractual they are therefore transcendent; thus it is but a small step from a belief in transcendent social bonds to a belief in a transcendent Being upholding

¹¹⁵ Murray (1994a), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹¹⁶ R. Nisbet (1986) *Conservatism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), p. 68.

¹¹⁷ Lord Hailsham (1959) *The Conservative Case* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

¹¹⁹ D. Coats (1996) 'Can Congress Revive Civil Society?', *Policy Review*, No. 75, p. 25.

them.¹²⁰

However, whilst many conservatives may be genuinely religious, often a highly instrumental view of the role of religion is in evidence. For example, this is clear from Robert Nisbet: ‘some bulwark of faith, even if in a body of morality that is falsely credited with divine inspiration, is necessary to human beings’.¹²¹ Similarly, it is at least as much the institutional aspects of religion that are important to conservatives as its actual teachings. This is especially so for British conservatives, due to the historical connection between church and state. Thus Scruton argues that the role of the Church of England – whether or not ‘its fundamental doctrines [are] true or false’ – is of value to conservatives because it serves the purpose of attaching citizens to civil life.¹²² In other words, it may not simply be political obligation in the abstract which is sanctified by religion, but the authority of the British state specifically.

Of course, the clear potential problem for contemporary British conservatives is that neither the Christian religion nor the Church of England may any longer possess much social authority. As Gray argues, British conservatives neglect ‘one very large and, for them, very awkward fact ... that “traditional Christian morality” is for most people in Britain today not even an historical memory’.¹²³ This being the case, it is anachronistic to expect Christianity to bolster traditional moral values, since as much as the latter have been vitiated in recent times so too has the influence of the former. Moreover, Gray suggests, insofar as the Anglican Church continues to have an influence upon political life, it is frequently that of questioning the role of the market and its associated values. It is therefore not necessarily a friend of conservatives.

Observing the same trends, Ted Honderich concludes: ‘The Church of England may once have been, but certainly is no longer, the Tory Party at prayer. There are not enough persons at prayer to make the idea compelling.’¹²⁴ Links between the two are further strained by the emergence of ‘dissident bishops and socialist priests’.

¹²⁰ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹²¹ Nisbet (1986), *op. cit.*, p. 73.

¹²² Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 171-4.

¹²³ J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 129.

Whilst it is not the place here to analyse the Church of England's travails in adapting to a post-traditional world, it may well be the case that it offers little support to any absolutist conservatism. However, it is far from true that conservatives are entirely neglectful of this 'awkward fact'. For example, Scruton accepts that due to such factors as social and geographical mobility and the role of the media, few young people today possess much knowledge of the Christian faith; similarly, he is aware that the Church itself may not be especially amenable to a conservative perspective.¹²⁵ Yet whilst Scruton certainly believes that these developments are lamentable, he argues that it is nonetheless possible to accept the reality of transcendent bonds in the absence of a belief in a transcendent being. Even without the guidance of Christianity, individuals will still seek the bonds of community and be drawn to the upholding of tradition and a sense of history. Thus, he argues, even in a largely secularized context the conservative vision is still more compelling than the myths propounded by a contractarian liberalism.

However, even if it is granted that British conservatism does not necessarily require the support of the Christian tradition, there are still difficulties with Scruton's suggestions. For example, secular ties, even if in some sense transcendent, do not of course provide any sanctification of the political bond. Similarly, it is by no means certain that even if communities do generate transcendent bonds these will be ones grounded in values of which conservatives approve; as discussed in the previous chapter, community institutions are not inevitably homes of conservative values and nor therefore are 'transcendent bonds'.

American conservatives may appear to be in a more sanguine position, able to point to the fact that church attendance remains amongst the highest in the developed world.¹²⁶ Moreover, Irving Kristol believes that something close to a religious awakening is occurring within American society, citing as grounds for this belief the emergence and rapid rise of groups such as the 'Promise Keepers', groups of men who

¹²⁴ T. Honderich (1992) *Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 168.

¹²⁵ R. Scruton (1996) *The Conservative Idea of Community* (London: Conservative 2000 Foundation), pp. 21-3.

come together in public gatherings to avow their commitment to God and the virtues of Christianity.¹²⁷

However, the significance of religion in contemporary American life is not as straightforward as many conservatives appear to imagine (or critics frequently fear). For example, as Hanna Rosin observes of the Promise Keepers, such groups are clearly pale shadows of earlier organizations of the Christian Right, their popularity attributable to the fact that they offer a ‘watered down, gushy religion’, with meetings characterized by such sentimental indulgences as ‘hand-holding and hugging and multiracial sing-alongs’.¹²⁸ It is hard to see in such phenomena – adroitly described by Rosin as representing ‘the feminization of the American right’ – anything akin to a revival of old-time religious fervour.

Moreover, even the strength of attendance within traditional churches may not be as significant as figures suggest. For example, Bork argues in relation to the Catholic Church that – despite its number of adherents – it is ‘amazing the number who attend but don’t subscribe to what the Church teaches, in so far as the Church teaches anything these days ... most of the Catholics sitting in the pews choose what parts of the teaching they like and then reject the rest’.¹²⁹ In other words, relativism may have spread even to the traditional heartland of moral absolutism.

Furthermore, David Frum’s analysis of the failure of the Religious Right to achieve any of its major goals is also of relevance: abortion has not been made illegal, gay rights have not been reversed, church and state remain separate and the teaching of multi-faith education has been extended in schools.¹³⁰ Thus whatever the strength of religious adherence within American society, this rarely appears to translate into political success for a traditional religious outlook. Yet even more worrying for conservatives is the possibility that – as Himmelfarb’s inclusion of at least some

¹²⁶ This is a fact many American conservatives are eager to point out – interview with I. Kristol, 13 October 1998; interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998; interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

¹²⁷ Cited in C. Murray (1995) ‘The Partial Restoration of Traditional Society’, *Public Interest*, No. 121, p. 131.

¹²⁸ H. Rosin (1997) ‘Promise Weepers’, *New Republic*, 27 October.

¹²⁹ Interview with R. Bork, 10 September 1998.

churches in her list of civil society institutions held responsible for society's demoralization implies – the social and political influence organized religion does possess today, may be of precisely the opposite kind to that of which conservatives approve.

Culture War Or Culture Wars?

With discussion having shown conservatives to be concerned with a range of moral and cultural issues, one obvious question requiring answer is whether talk should be of a plural 'culture wars' or a singular 'culture war'.

Neuhaus, for example, seeks to defend the latter conception, asserting that at the root of cultural conflict is a single issue: abortion.¹³¹ Yet whilst it may be the case that the various disputes are united, it seems arbitrary to pick any single substantive issue as the unifying factor. Indeed, conservatives themselves may suggest that matters more fundamental are at stake. For example, Himmelfarb signals a dissatisfaction with the way in which 'family values' discussions focus narrowly upon single issues – whether illegitimacy, divorce or abortion – when consideration ought to be paid to the wider context of society's values.¹³²

Within a voluminous literature dealing with the culture wars, James Hunter presents one of the most useful analyses, suggesting that conflict is between what he terms 'orthodox' and 'progressive' forces.¹³³ In the past, he argues, when cultural disputes occurred within American society there was nonetheless an accepted framework regarding America's fundamental constitution within which these took place, largely derived from a biblical culture. What is distinctive about present cultural conflicts is

¹³⁰ D. Frum (1997) *What's Right?* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 79-82.

¹³¹ Interview with R. Neuhaus, 23 October 1998; Neuhaus (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹³² Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹³³ J. D. Hunter (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 31-51.

that they centre upon contested views of this fundamental constitution. Specifically, they are about the nature of moral authority. For the orthodox, this authority is imagined to be external, definable and transcendent, offering values which have an eternal validity; whereas for the progressive, authority is seen in more relative and subjective terms, with values to be interpreted in accord with changing circumstances.

Whilst conservatism cannot simply be mapped on to Hunter's notion of orthodoxy – for example, although Straussians may seem to match his characterization fairly closely, other conservatives clearly do so less – his thesis nonetheless highlights something of the underlying nature of the disagreement between conservatives and their contemporary opponents. That is, for many conservatives it is evidently relativism – the notion that there are no definite right and wrong answers, but merely different interpretations and perspectives – that is the common culprit in society's descent into moral chaos. Thus whether it is the proliferation of alternative family models or the rejection of the Western canon, what conservatives typically perceive underlies all such developments is the rejection of belief in the very idea of determinate and discriminative judgement.

The centrality of relativism to conservative concerns is well shown by Bloom, who offers as his opening statement the regretful observation that, 'There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.'¹³⁴ Similarly, relativism also raises Scruton's ire. Never one to mince his words, he thus contends that in arguments concerning moral disputes 'relativism is the first refuge of the scoundrel'; indeed, '*vulgar* relativism has no hope of surviving outside the minds of ignorant rascals'.¹³⁵ Moral relativism is perhaps the form that worries conservatives most. For example, Wilson is shocked to find amongst his students 'no general agreement that those guilty of the Holocaust itself were guilty of a moral horror'.¹³⁶ Equally, Bennett's titling of his book on the Clinton scandal *The Death of Outrage* reveals a concern not just with a President's supposed immorality, but at least as much with the relativistic lack of

¹³⁴ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹³⁵ Scruton (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 33.

¹³⁶ Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

censure with which society greeted it.¹³⁷

Scruton, for example, is well able to pinpoint the logical flaw in the relativist's case: 'in asserting that relativism is true for *him*, the relativist asserts that it is true for him absolutely. He is committed to absolute truth by the very practice of assertion.'¹³⁸ That is, even to assert relativism entails a contradiction. Yet despite this identification of relativism's defect as an intellectual notion, the bluntness of Scruton's condemnation reveals the almost palpable frustration conservatives feel at its perceived prevalence and seeming immunity to rebuttal.

One point that may be put to such conservatives is that it is flawed reasoning of their own to argue that relativism is to blame for moral malaise. For example, according to Gray it is ridiculous to believe that 'anything as recondite as moral relativism' could be responsible for the dire effects conservatives claim, since all that it implies is that values derive from culture.¹³⁹ In fact therefore, moral relativism strengthens social convention. However, regardless of whether this is true, the strength of conservatives' disdain for relativism reveals at least as much their fears regarding the threat it poses to their own ideology as to society at large. That is, even if a decline in belief in moral absolutes will not lead to the breakdown of society, a relativistic morality clearly cannot generate the type of common bonds that the philosophies of conservatives like Bloom or Scruton require.

Yet perhaps the most common accusation conservatives face in terms of their denunciations of relativism is that of authoritarianism, of seeking to impose their own interpretation of truth on others whilst denying validity to alternatives. Conservatives themselves certainly reject such suggestions, typically arguing that they support free speech and critical debate.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, many argue that it is in fact their opponents who are the real enemies of liberty: as Dinesh D'Souza suggests in relation to advocates of political correctness, 'the paradox of the relativist authoritarian' is that though decrying

¹³⁷ W. J. Bennett (1998) *The Death of Outrage* (New York: Simon and Schuster). See also R. Bland (1996) 'Against Relativism: A Cause for Conservatives', *Salisbury Review*, Autumn; Cheney (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16; D'Souza (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 157; Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 263-73.

¹³⁸ Scruton (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³⁹ Gray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁴⁰ For example, Cheney (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 192-206.

the bigotry of moral absolutism, they themselves are ruthless in their efforts to quash dissenters to politically correct doctrines.¹⁴¹ D'Souza and other conservative commentators thus document numerous purported cases of students and academics ostracized and persecuted for failing to abide by the strictures of political correctness.¹⁴²

Unsurprisingly therefore, when attention is turned to apportioning responsibility for current assaults upon traditional morality, antagonistic intellectuals are at the top of conservatives' lists. For example, according to Wilson the belief that subscribing to a definite morality lacks any rational basis is a proposition 'we have learned, either firsthand from intellectuals or secondhand from the pronouncements of people influenced by intellectuals'.¹⁴³ Similarly, Duncan and Hobson – citing Keynes' view as to the power of ideas – blame those nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers disdainful of traditional moral claims, whose views have managed to 'insinuate themselves into the private lives even of uneducated men and women'.¹⁴⁴

One difficulty with these views is the one identified with New Class analyses in Chapter 2 – that of attributing too great a coherence and unity to adversary groups. However, another is that it is very much open to question whether hostile intellectuals could ever be solely responsible for widespread changes in society's beliefs. The main problem with this notion is not so much that conservatives ascribe too much importance to the power of ideas, as that they treat them as too autonomous a force. That is, in attributing the success of antagonistic ideas largely to the activities of malignant intellectual and cultural elites, conservatives often neglect the deeper forces which may be responsible for undermining traditional values, and which therefore give these ideas resonance.

In terms of these wider forces, Gray's analysis of course offers one explanation, which is that the 'permanent revolution' unleashed by conservative free market policies

¹⁴¹ D'Souza (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹⁴² Roger Kimball is another who adopts this strategy – Kimball (1990), *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. viii.

¹⁴⁴ Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 267.

is what is truly responsible for the depletion of a common culture.¹⁴⁵ Thus, unable to recognize the responsibility of their own policies for the destruction of a common moral fabric, conservatives' blaming of a liberal-infected culture is simply a form of scapegoating.¹⁴⁶ However, although Gray's argument may highlight an important truth in emphasizing the role of the market in undermining tradition, many conservatives are evidently fully prepared to accept this. That is, many are as willing as Gray to blame free market policies for the weakening of the moral fabric.

As discussed previously, conservatives blame not only antagonistic intellectuals but also the state for society's demoralized condition. Yet at the same time, conservatives have been seen to disagree over whether the state itself or civil society alone is able to provide the mechanisms to overcome this malaise. What are to be examined in more detail next therefore are the strategies conservatives hope to use to effect a social remoralization.

The Remoralization of Society

With many conservatives committed to a belief in definite values, a particular problem faced today is that uncertainty surrounds even the meaning of the term 'value'. As Wilson argues, whilst cultural conflict is not new:

What is new, distinctive, and odd about the contemporary version of this age-old debate is the language in which it is conducted. It is about "values." But what do we mean by a "value"? A taste? A preference? A belief? A moral principle? A binding obligation? Most people flinch from answering that question, at least in public.¹⁴⁷

In attempting to obviate the confusions which seem to have infected even the language

¹⁴⁵ Gray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

of morality, one of the most salient features of contemporary conservative discourses is the resurrection of the idea of virtue.¹⁴⁸ Again, conservatives are not alone in this: within academic philosophy a dissatisfaction with liberal ethical theories, in particular their emphasis upon the role of autonomous individual reason, has led a number of writers to attempt to revive the idea of 'virtue ethics' (virtue referring to the norms formed within a community).¹⁴⁹ Moreover, as W. A. Galston notes, this disillusionment with the tenets of liberal ethics is reflective of more than simply scholarly dispute; it also reflects 'spreading fears about the fragmentation and privatization of American society'.¹⁵⁰

The notion of virtue is thus prevalent within conservative writings. For Bruce Frohnen, 'Virtue is, in fact, the very basis of conservative political philosophy.'¹⁵¹ According to Wilson, although 'Virtue has acquired a bad name' he would like to see it restored; and for Bennett, it ought to be at the centre of efforts at moral education.¹⁵² Moreover, Shirley Letwin, in her account of Thatcherism, interprets the Thatcherite project not as an essentially economic enterprise but as an attempt to rejuvenate the 'vigorous virtues'.¹⁵³ Indeed, Thatcher herself emphasizes that whilst she is usually cited as praising Victorian values, she originally stressed Victorian virtues.¹⁵⁴

Yet probably the most significant conservative writer on virtue is Himmelfarb, who explicitly contrasts the supposed determinacy of virtues with the relativism of values. Thus, she argues, a transmutation occurred in the twentieth century (though owing its

¹⁴⁷ Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. xi.

¹⁴⁸ For an interesting critical perspective on this trend see J. A. Morone (1996) 'The Corrosive Politics of Virtue', *American Prospect*, No. 26.

¹⁴⁹ See R. Crisp and M. Slote (eds) (1997) *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); J. W. Chapman and W. A. Galston (eds) (1992) *Nomos XXXIV: Virtue* (New York: New York University Press).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ B. Frohnen (1993) *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas), p. 3.

¹⁵² Wilson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. vii; Bennett (1993), *op. cit.* See also D. Anderson (ed.) (1992) *The Loss of Virtue: Moral Confusion and Social Disorder in Britain and America* (London: Social Affairs Unit); C. H. Sommers (1993) 'Teaching the Virtues', *Public Interest*, No. 111; Machan (1998), *op. cit.*; Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 237-391.

¹⁵³ S. Letwin (1992) *The Anatomy of Thatcherism* (London: Fontana).

¹⁵⁴ M. Thatcher (1993) *The Downing Street Years* (London: HarperCollins), p. 627.

origins to Nietzsche) whereby 'morality became so thoroughly relativized and subjectified that virtues ceased to be "virtues" and became "values"'.¹⁵⁵ Whereas 'values' seem to imply that moral ideas are mere custom and convention, the idea of 'virtues' lends morality a much more resolute character. Like Thatcher, Himmelfarb believes our virtues should be derived from the Victorian era.

Closely related to the desire for a restoration of virtue is the desire for a restitution of more virtuous forms of identity. Thus another prominent feature of conservative writings is a concern with individual character, with many conservatives wishing in particular to see a return of the categories of 'gentleman' and 'lady'.¹⁵⁶ Even libertarians frequently argue that it is not simply any type of individual identity they wish to see thrive once the state has been rolled back. For example, Frum argues that liberty is not in itself the goal of minimal government, but the flourishing of good character.¹⁵⁷

In terms of specifics, many conservatives present lists of virtues they believe to be the most important. For example, for Letwin the virtuous Thatcherite individual is 'upright, self-sufficient, energetic, adventurous, independent-minded, loyal to friends, and robust against enemies'; for Himmelfarb, Victorian virtues include 'hard work, thrift, cleanliness, self-reliance, self-respect, neighbourliness, patriotism'; whilst Bennett offers 'self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith'.¹⁵⁸

However, once more it may be suggested that there is a significant difference between British and American writers. Whereas American conservatives appear readily to embrace the implications of highly determinate conceptions, Letwin is much keener to stress the non-substantive character of the Thatcherite virtues. Thus: 'There is nothing substantive, that is to say, no description of the individual's profession, level of education, achievements, wealth or poverty, position in society, marital status,

¹⁵⁵ Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ For example, J. Q. Wilson (1991) *On Character* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute). Advocates of the categories of gentleman and lady include Letwin (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 336-7; Minogue (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 54; Murray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁵⁷ Frum (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁵⁸ Letwin (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 33; Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 5; Bennett (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

proficiency in particular skills, political views, aesthetic sensibilities, religion, likes or dislikes.¹⁵⁹ However, in the same way that Letwin's denial of Thatcherism as constituting an ideology was regarded sceptically in Chapter 1, so too may this contention. That is, the mere fact that an ethical theory is not prescriptive in terms of the matters Letwin highlights – as are few modern theories on those such as social position or wealth – does not mean its requirements are not substantive. Rather, it is the very notion of 'virtuous character' which constitutes the substantive demand. Moreover, as will be seen below, Letwin's specific conception is by no means an undemanding one.

Nonetheless, one difficulty faced by all conservative presentations of desirable virtues is that they may easily be seen as platitudinous. For example, as Paul Starr comments sarcastically in relation to Bennett: 'I do not know of liberals who endorse indiscipline, insensitivity, irresponsibility, hatred, sloth, cowardice, vacillation, lying, disloyalty, and despair.'¹⁶⁰ In other words, although the listing of specific virtues may appear to offer solution to the problem of moral relativism, the actual content of conservatives' lists may be so vague or uncontroversial as entirely to fail to distinguish their preferred morality from any other. Thus although Murray takes the success of Bennett's *Book of Virtues* (having proven to be a best-seller) as evidence that a 'partial restoration of traditional society' is underway, the fact that the virtues Bennett acclaims are ones that only the most determined of relativists might deny definite worth, means that its popularity proves very little.¹⁶¹

If the mere fact of desiring society to be 'virtuous' therefore hardly distinguishes conservatives from anyone else, what may do is the source of their preferred virtues. For example, whilst many proponents of virtue ethics believe that these virtues should be derived from classical sources, few but conservatives define them as specifically bourgeois ones, as do Himmelfarb, Thatcher and Letwin in drawing upon Victorian conceptions.¹⁶² However, probably the most important way in which conservatives

¹⁵⁹ Letwin (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁰ P. Starr (1996) 'Restoration Fever', *American Prospect*, No. 25, p. 6.

¹⁶¹ Murray (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁶² As also do Duncan and Hobson – Duncan and Hobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 381.

distinguish their positions is by stressing that the virtues they espouse are in some sense 'tough', typically arguing that only they are willing to recognize the need for moral norms which may be difficult, or even painful, to accept.

For example, Letwin stresses the 'vigorous' nature of the Thatcherite virtues to indicate that we are to understand them in this tough-minded way, in contrast to 'softer' virtues such as kindness, humility and gentleness.¹⁶³ Whilst the two types of virtue may not be incompatible, Letwin argues, where conflicts arise it is the former which should be prioritized. Thus, even though non-conservatives may to an extent agree that conservatives' virtues are laudable ones, what distinguishes conservatives is their willingness to privilege the 'vigorous' over the 'soft' when choices have to be made.

One issue raised by arguments seeking to resurrect the morality of a past era is whether this can be effected without the restoration of that era's social conditions: for example, whether the discipline of Victorian virtues can be revived without also an explicitly hierarchical social system and the consigning of women to the private sphere. Whilst some conservatives might be willing to countenance such a rolling back of social progress, most argue against the suggestion. For example, Himmelfarb argues that it is possible for Victorian virtues to function in a context that does not require the undesirable social features of nineteenth century England.¹⁶⁴ Of course, this belief may be considered to overestimate the extent to which values are separable from their material and social setting, a truth which community-minded conservatives at least ought to recognize.

The next question to consider is how conservatives propose to enforce a self-consciously robust morality. One of the most common demands of conservatives is a revival of the notions of shame and stigma, since one of the most pernicious consequences of relativism's sway is that those who transgress against society's norms fail even to acknowledge that they are doing so. For example, Fleming believes the following about abortion:

¹⁶³ Letwin (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

There have always been mothers who killed their babies, born as well as unborn. What is almost unique about our society is that so far from hiding their sin, so far from showing any signs of shame or embarrassment, our latter-day Medeas want not just public monies but public approbation. Instead of slinking into the back alleys where they belong, they march in parades and testify in Congress.¹⁶⁵

In other words, whilst ‘immorality’ itself is not new, at least in the past sinners had the decency to recognize their own moral turpitude, and therefore feel a due sense of guilt. Yet if sinners no longer even accept that they are wrongdoers, there is not even the possibility that they will try to avoid sinning. Indeed, the fact that today’s moral deviants may actually appear proud of their deviancy – marching in parades to draw attention to the fact – is particularly galling for many conservatives.

The use of shame as regulator of morality is urged by many writers: for example, Digby Anderson suggests that the ‘trepidation, circumspection, and anxiety’ caused by the fear of stigma is what best enforces a sense of moral probity.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, shame may also work hand-in-hand with market calculations, its advocacy therefore a source of common ground between libertarians and other conservatives. For example, John Hood (President of the John Locke Foundation) expresses approval for the campaign of boycotting and shaming organized by Bennett against Time Warner – to encourage it to stop distributing the records of controversial rap artists – on the grounds that such methods were ‘perfectly acceptable modes of discourse in a free society’.¹⁶⁷

Yet a linking of economic incentivization with stigma is most clear in the case of Murray, who hopes in particular that it will solve the problem of illegitimacy. The key difference between libertarians like Murray and other conservatives is that for the former economic imperatives are primary in the process of stigmatization. Thus, Murray argues, ‘non-economic social stigma’ must ultimately be ‘underwritten by economics’, because individuals can only be expected to recognize their moral failings

¹⁶⁴ Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 252.

¹⁶⁵ T. Fleming (1996) ‘Shame and Science’, *Chronicles*, Vol. 20, No. 10, p. 10.

¹⁶⁶ D. Anderson (1995) ‘Ridicule As a Means of Resisting Outlandish and Socially Damaging Ideas’, in Anderson (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 25. See also D. Lapin (1995) ‘Ostracism and Disgrace in the Maintenance of a Precarious Moral Order’, in Anderson (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 77-88.

¹⁶⁷ J. Hood (1996) ‘Reich and Responsibility’, *Reason*, July, p. 22.

when they feel the effects economically.¹⁶⁸ Thus moral disapprobation alone will not prevent babies being born out of wedlock – only the elimination of welfare payments will.

Once again, typical criticisms of conservatives in terms of these proposals relate to the themes of pluralism and tolerance. For Starr, for example, the problem with conservative attempts to enforce a common set of virtues is that they neglect ‘the legitimate demand of different people for equal respect in a society where diversity is not a slogan but a fact’.¹⁶⁹ However, from a conservative standpoint the most problematic issue is how exactly to recreate a society in which shame and stigma are acknowledged. The problem with such ‘hard-edged’ notions is that they demand very significant requirements to be fulfilled, not only that individuals understand the difference between right and wrong but that the majority in society is willing to enforce these standards, by censuring and ostracizing those who transgress. Yet to suppose the existence of an actively moral majority is to suppose a majority informed with precisely the virtues many conservatives believe largely to have disappeared. Whilst in traditional societies it may therefore be relatively easy to enforce a sense of shame upon a recalcitrant minority, if today the influence of relativism is as pervasive as conservatives claim then they lack a social basis for implementing their agendas.

Furthermore, as Carl Horowitz points out, whilst conservatives may see shame as a substitute for state regulation, they fail to recognize ‘the messy possibility that it leads to, and reinforces, censorship’.¹⁷⁰ That is, since shame only works as an informal moral regulator when a majority agrees with its strictures, if such social agreement does not exist then there is a good chance that conservatives will have to look to more formal means to enforce it.

Yet there are also other problems with libertarian strategies for regenerating morality, in particular relating to the issue of incentivization. For example, it is at least questionable whether incentives actually work. As seen in Chapter 2, Lawrence Mead for one is sceptical in this regard. So is Wilson: ‘Over the last two decades, this nation

¹⁶⁸ C. Murray (1994b) ‘What to Do About Welfare’, *Commentary*, Vol. 98, No. 6, p. 31.

¹⁶⁹ P. Starr (1996) ‘Restoration Fever’, *American Prospect*, No. 25, p. 6.

¹⁷⁰ C. F. Horowitz (1997) ‘The Shaming Sham’, *American Prospect*, No. 31.

has come face to face with problems that do not seem to respond, or respond enough, to changes in incentives.’¹⁷¹ That is, it is far from certain that measures such as reducing welfare payments are actually effective in remoralizing individual behaviour.

However, distinct from the question of efficacy is the question of what type of morality it is possible to create by the use of rational incentives, even if these can alter behaviour patterns. For example, whilst institutions such as the traditional family might be ‘saved’ by the elimination of economic support for single-parent families, this salvation would nonetheless be predicated not upon individuals’ recognition of the deep and abiding moral value of the institution, but on utilitarian calculation. Yet preserving institutions in a formal sense is not the same as preserving the values they embody, a distinction particularly important to traditionalist conservatives. Thus Morgan argues that asking individuals to perform cost-benefit analyses in deciding whether or not to obey moral imperatives will not safeguard the family in any sense that conservatives could applaud, since the family is of value precisely because it embodies transcendent bonds of loyalty and respect beyond mere self-interest.¹⁷² Indeed, from a traditionalist conservative standpoint, even to address moral questions from the perspective of individual choice is problematic, since they should be understood in terms of being embedded within a social and cultural matrix.

Nonetheless, the same criticism of failing to appreciate the ‘true’ value of the family may also be levelled at traditionalist conservatives’ own arguments, in terms of their frequent advocacy of the use of government policy to privilege a traditional model. Thus Morgan blames the policies of Conservative governments for the decline of the traditional family, for removing its economic protection (for example, reducing the pro-family bias of the tax system) and enacting legal changes (for example, allowing ‘no fault’ divorces) which weaken the institution of marriage.¹⁷³ Yet implying that the strength of the family is dependent upon positive government discrimination suggests as shallow a view of the bonds of marriage – that these are formed to gain tax advantages, or break down because of the lack of legal constraints – as any utilitarian

¹⁷¹ Wilson (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁷² Morgan (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

argument.

Other conservatives recognize this tension. For example, Willetts highlights the ‘paradox’ that, ‘Conservatives value the family because of its independence from the state yet they often find themselves tempted to use government policy levers so as to support it, or prop it up, or encourage it.’¹⁷⁴ Indeed, this is a key theme of Ferdinand Mount’s argument against conservative attempts to use the state to promote the family, since this undermines its ‘subversive’ character as a sphere of activity in contradiction to the state.¹⁷⁵

Previous chapters have considered various other reasons why conservatives may be drawn to the state to remoralize society. Yet here may be stressed in particular the strength and influence many conservatives believe to be possessed by their ideological opponents. For example, DeMuth argues that although he would prefer to see private rather than state sanctions used to discourage drug abuse – such as employers using their rights to dismiss drug taking employees, and the disapprobation of friends and neighbours – if drug taking were not illegal use of these mechanisms would come up against the resistance of antagonistic liberals.¹⁷⁶ Thus individuals sacked for taking drugs would likely be supported by bodies such as the American Civil Liberties Union, who would defend them on the grounds of discrimination and harassment. In other words, whilst in an ideal world conservatives would not have to use the state to enforce moral prohibitions, the realities of this imperfect one mean that they may have to do so.

Similarly, if the sphere of education is perceived to be so much under the control of adversary educationalists again it may be necessary to turn to the state. Thus Chester Finn rejects the ‘charming but antiquated devotion to “local control” of schools’ of many American conservatives, since in practice this preference ‘is indistinguishable from maintenance of the status quo under the thumb of the educational establishment’.¹⁷⁷ To take power away from hostile educationalists operating at the

¹⁷⁴ Willetts (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 265.

¹⁷⁵ F. Mount (1982) *The Subversive Family* (London: Cape).

¹⁷⁶ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

¹⁷⁷ Finn (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 233.

local level, Finn suggests that it may therefore be necessary to institute such measures as a national curriculum and a national system of examinations.

However, for conservatives willing to countenance the use of the state to protect traditional values and standards, there is of course the danger that in conceding the legitimacy of the state regulating morality and culture there is no guarantee that the agendas the state pursues will be their own. For example, arguing for a nationally imposed curriculum for schools does not automatically mean that this will be a conservative one. As Sheila Lawlor suggests in regard to the British case, despite the creation of a national curriculum – as well as the diminution of local education authority control – oppositional educational theorists continue ‘to survive, if not dominate, the post-reformed world’.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, thanks to the centralizing measures of Conservative governments, they may simply have been given more powerful means to impose their deleterious ideas upon the whole country.

The New Victorianism

Probably the most basic criticism that may be levelled at conservatives is that the picture they paint of moral and cultural malaise is simply wrong. That is, the trends they identify are either misrepresented or not as serious as suggested; nor therefore should society be seen as experiencing some form of fundamental moral crisis.¹⁷⁹ Some conservatives at least are relatively sceptical about such ideas. For example, Willetts offers a more sober assessment than do many conservatives of statistics purporting to demonstrate the decay of the traditional family, noting for instance that although fewer households may be comprised of married couples this may simply be indicative of the fact that people live longer parts of their lives alone

¹⁷⁸ S. Lawlor (1992) ‘Education: Working with the Grain’, in D. Anderson and G. Frost (eds) *Hubris: The Tempting of Modern Conservatives* (London: Centre for Policy Studies), p. 27.

¹⁷⁹ For example, on conservatives’ supposed overestimation of the strength of political correctness see J. K. Wilson (1995) *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*

– before marriage and after the death of a partner – than that individuals are less likely to enter the estate of marriage at all.¹⁸⁰

However, whilst statistics may be endlessly debated, it is often in any case not that which is quantifiable that is conservatives' main concern. For example, as Morgan argues regarding the relative strength of the traditional family, 'dimensions say nothing about importance'.¹⁸¹ That is, whether or not the traditional nuclear unit is in the majority, the real problem Morgan suggests is that it no longer possesses the status of social and political bedrock. In other words, regardless of what may be inferred about the state of traditional institutions from quantitative data, the important questions relate to their actual standing within society. In this sense, the at times hyperbolic statements of cultural declinists may be said to reflect – even if not accurately represent – the fact that clear changes have occurred in relation to social norms. For example, it evidently is the case that attitudes towards such matters as divorce, abortion and homosexuality have become increasingly less judgmental. Whether or not the pluralization of acceptable values and lifestyles is a problem for society, it is a problem for many conservatives.

One way in which this development may in fact be more problematic for conservatives than any straightforward moral degeneration is shown by Scruton's reflections upon religion. Thus whilst Scruton's argument that conservatism can manage without the support of the Christian tradition might have some plausibility in a world denuded of all religious belief – at least for conservatives who accept Scruton's conception of civil order – it faces much more difficulty in a context in which faith has instead pluralized. Whilst traditional Christianity may possess much less appeal than it once did, this is not to say that British society has become wholly secular. Rather, a multiplicity of spiritual belief-systems – including a panoply of 'New Age' philosophies – appear to abound. Even if some of these religions may individually be amenable to a conservative perspective, a multi-faith

(Durham: Duke University Press). For a questioning of the more general suggestion of cultural malaise see M. Lind (1996) *Up from Conservatism* (New York: Free Press), pp. 156-87.

¹⁸⁰ Willetts (1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 262-3.

¹⁸¹ Morgan (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 37.

society clearly does not provide the basis for the common spiritual culture conservatives like Scruton desire.

However, even if society has become more pluralistic, this may not mean that common moral values have been entirely displaced by ethical relativism. In terms of this, Gray's argument is again relevant:

it is a travesty of our condition to suggest that moral life itself is weak among us. The truth is that we have the makings of a strong and deep common moral culture in Britain today, but its content is rejected by cultural conservatives ... it departs not only from Christian values but also from humanism in its concern for the well-being of animals and the integrity of the natural environment ...¹⁸²

In other words, rather than society having experienced the loss of faith in definite moral claims many conservatives suggest, the reality may rather be that these claims have undergone a change in character.

Certainly, it is at least justifiable to argue that conservatives frequently caricature the moral positions of their opponents. In particular, in that a prominent aspect of conservative discourses is to blame the legacy of the counterculture for sexual and moral permissiveness, there is much in the argument of David Wagner that 'the Right (quite intentionally) froze its view of the Left in the late 1960s and early 70s', and therefore ignores the fact that the Left today is typically very different.¹⁸³ Whether or not this is a case of conscious disingenuousness on the part of conservatives, Wagner is right to observe that the modern Left is much more likely to advocate what he terms a 'new temperance', a stringent philosophy of restraint founded upon concerns regarding a myriad of perceived moral risks, such as AIDS and sexual harassment. Another label widely employed to describe this outlook is the 'New Victorianism'.¹⁸⁴

However, many conservatives of course do take account of these 'new' forms of

¹⁸² Gray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁸³ D. Wagner (1997) *The New Temperance* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press), p. 139.

¹⁸⁴ See Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 260.

moral argument. For example, as examined earlier, D'Souza criticizes conservatives' politically correct opponents precisely on the grounds of moral authoritarianism. Similarly, Novak clearly understands that the challenge arguments centred on notions such as stakeholding and corporate governance pose to the autonomy of corporations are reliant upon the presumption that businesses possess wider moral responsibilities to society.¹⁸⁵ Yet the disdain conservatives profess towards the moral claims of their adversaries can thus lead them to seemingly schizophrenic stances: on the one hand, we are enjoined to practice greater moral probity in the face of rising licentiousness, whilst on the other, we are told to reject the constraints demanded by politically correct moralizers. In terms of this latter face of conservatism, the author of the introduction to one collection of contemporary writings is bold enough to declare that modern conservatism is 'low on puritanism', and committed to the pursuit of hearty living: the articles which follow thus celebrate such politically incorrect pleasures as smoking, fast cars and hard drinking.¹⁸⁶ Whilst at one level these arguments may appear to be simply lowbrow exercises in liberal-baiting, in more sophisticated mode Scruton provides a philosophical outlook on the importance of pleasure (championing perhaps the most politically incorrect of all pastimes, fox-hunting) and Bloom is remembered as a defender of Eros.

Observing this contradiction, Paul Safier argues that contemporary conservatives seem to want to present themselves simultaneously as 'courageously puritanical and courageously antipuritanical'.¹⁸⁷ What this reveals, he argues, is that conservatives do not really take morality seriously, simply adopting whatever position suits a particular context. However, this argument is too simplistic, at least in the case of more thoughtful writers such as Bloom and Scruton. Indeed, conservatives do provide implicit justifications for their adoption of different attitudes towards different forms of 'puritanism', in distinguishing between the

¹⁸⁵ M. Novak (1997) *The Fire of Invention* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers). See also Norman Barry on business ethics – N. Barry (1993) 'Unsubtle Seductions of Business Ethics', *Economic Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 5.

¹⁸⁶ D. Brooks (1996) 'Introduction', in D. Brooks (ed.) *Backward and Upward: The New Conservative Writing* (New York: Vintage Books), p. xii.

specific natures of conservative and politically correct modes of moral discourse.

For example, in noting the use of the term New Victorianism, Himmelfarb is unsurprisingly concerned to distinguish the perspective of its adherents from the 'real' meaning of Victorianism.¹⁸⁸ The difference, she argues, is that whereas for the Victorians morality was 'so deeply embedded in tradition and convention that it was largely internalized', that of today's moralists is 'novel and contrived, officially legislated and coercively enforced'. Thus for the Victorians upholding moral virtue did not mean constructing a set of values afresh, but preserving those which had evolved over time. As a consequence, Himmelfarb contends, they would have rejected the formality of the regulations – such as codes governing sexual relations – demanded by New Victorians. Similarly, in that they did not believe in paternal or intrusive government, they would have derided the type of moral guardians required to enforce contemporary forms of morality.

A similar understanding is presented by Minogue, who argues that the formal and abstract character of modern forms of morality is one of their key distinctive features.¹⁸⁹ In traditional societies, he suggests, moral behaviour is part of a complete way of life – organically linked to all other spheres – meaning that individuals acquire a moral character as part of their communal identities. Yet today by contrast, since morality is largely formal, to persuade people to behave morally society must rely upon an array of technical mechanisms – such as sanctions, therapy and propaganda. Indeed, even when the same moral language is employed as in the past, the content of today's moral claims may be seen in a very different light. For example, although the virtue of thrift appears to be making a return, in relation to a recognition of the demerits of the state provision of pension rights, it is returning Minogue suggests 'not as a moral virtue, but as a governmentally-imposed obligation'.¹⁹⁰ We have thus moved 'from moral self-reliance in this area to a form of management by the state in which the moral

¹⁸⁷ P. J. Safier (1997) 'Animal House Meets Church Lady', *American Prospect*, No. 25, p. 50.

¹⁸⁸ Himmelfarb (1996), *op. cit.*, pp. 259-63.

¹⁸⁹ Minogue (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-56.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

quality has disappeared’.

Nonetheless, whilst conservatives may be right to accuse proponents of political correctness of illiberalism, many conservatives clearly lack credibility in attacking moral authoritarianism. For example, even if Himmelfarb’s idealized depiction of Victorian moralists as being neither coercive nor statist is accepted, this is clearly not true of herself; that is, of someone who writes that today’s moral disorder requires ‘strenuous moral purgatives’, that may include the legislation of moral demands.¹⁹¹

Although not all conservatives agree with Himmelfarb’s willingness to use state mechanisms, a criticism more generally applicable is that whilst conservatives are typically only too ready to condemn the social and moral ‘panics’ underpinning the authoritarianism of their opponents, many are also quite willing to propagate their own. Thus even though critical of the use their adversaries make of statistics relating to matters such as sexual harassment – for example, arguing that figures are artificially inflated – many conservatives are clearly prepared to endorse the worst possible readings of other statistics, such as crime figures and divorce rates.

For example, Krauthammer argues that whilst crime figures are evidently under-reported (by as much as two thirds) because society has become inured to living with crime, those on rape and child abuse are clearly over-reported, because therapists and feminists have raised society’s sensitivity to these issues.¹⁹² In other words, once again it is hard to escape the sense that rather than any genuine concern for the upholding of truth and objectivity, conservatives’ rejections of their enemies’ arguments are premised upon largely partisan grounds.

What the above discussion has shown is that many conservatives clearly believe that a conservative morality has become marginalized in the present social climate, in particular as a result of the rise of relativism. At the same time, their understandings of current cultural trends typically extend little beyond the blaming

¹⁹¹ Himmelfarb (1995), *op. cit.*, p. viii.

of countercultural elites. Furthermore, a lack of agreement is evident amongst conservatives as to how society might be remoralized.

¹⁹² Krauthammer, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1. See also F. Furedi (1997) *Culture of Fear* (London: Cassell), pp. 47-8 on this contradiction in conservatives' addressing of moral panics.

PART II:

Contemporary Challenges

Chapter 5

The Challenge of Globalization

The purpose of this chapter is to examine conservatives' responses to the claims of globalization theory: broadly speaking, the idea that nation-states are becoming increasingly interconnected. One reason for considering this issue is that, in a world in which capitalism appears to have defeated all rival economic visions, a celebration of globalization would seem to offer conservatives a clear basis for confirming their ideological supremacy. However, a further reason is that, as will be seen, the issue of globalization in fact brings out in especially sharp relief the differences between types of conservative. Yet more than simply exposing conflicts between strands of conservatism, it also reveals the problems faced by all conservatives in constituting their ideologies within a contemporary context.

Whilst the issue of globalization of course raises many questions, the limitations of space mean that those regarding its actual veracity are to be addressed only in so far as it is necessary to understand conservatives' perspectives. Rather, it is conservatives' own beliefs as to this reality which it will be important to explore. However, before considering these in detail, it is necessary to examine the more general role played by the nation in conservative thought.

The Nation-State and Nationalism

As illustrated in Chapter 3, British and American conservatives may readily be conceived as having very different attitudes towards the nation-state and nationalism. This being the case, it will be useful to consider each in turn.

A standard view of the British conservative tradition is that central to it 'is the idea of the nation-state with fixed boundaries, a clear identity and a particular tradition'.¹ More strongly, Bill Schwarz argues that 'every philosophical defence of British conservatism for the past century turns on the potency of the nation'.²

Confirmation of this view is provided by the defence offered by Roger Scruton, who evidently does strongly believe that the bonds tying society together are embodied at the level of the nation. At the same time, his understanding that these bonds are pre-political suggests why it is the nation element of the 'nation-state' which should be accorded priority: 'Nations have an identity through time which is distinct from that of the state, and independent of institutions, even those closest to its people. A nation can outlast the demise of its system of government, and its ancestral laws.'³ In other words, the 'nation' is distinguishable from a society's particular political arrangements, and of deeper significance. As seen in the last chapter, what constitutes the bonds of nationhood is a common culture (not necessarily a shared racial heritage).

As will be demonstrated below, most contemporary British conservatives do display at least some degree of attachment to the nation. However, what it is also important to recognize is that no necessary connection exists between conservatism and nationalism. Despite the undoubted preference of many conservatives for the particular over the universal, this need not mean that the nation is the particular in question: Burke's affinity for society's 'little platoons', or Oakeshott's preference for the familiar, may imply for conservatives an attachment to the immediate locality, but not necessarily the nation as a whole.⁴ Indeed, the idea of the nation may be as much a false abstraction of rationalists as any other collective entity.

Certainly from a historical perspective, there has been no easy congruence between nationalism and conservatism. For example, Eric Hobsbawm argues that the ideas of

¹ S. Ludlam and M. J. Smith (1996) 'Introduction', in S. Ludlam and M. J. Smith (eds) *Contemporary British Conservatism* (London: Macmillan), p. 5.

² B. Schwarz (1997) 'The Break-Up of the Conservative Nation', *Soundings*, No. 7, p. 15.

³ R. Scruton (1990) 'In Defence of the Nation', in J. C. D. Clark (ed.) *Ideas and Politics in Modern Britain* (London: Macmillan), p. 75.

⁴ A. Aughey, G. Jones and W. Riches (1992) *The Conservative Political Tradition in Britain and the United States* (London: Pinter Publishers), pp. 80-1.

both the nation-state and nationalism began life as revolutionary notions – emerging in the late eighteenth century – with the nation believed to embody the interests of a united sovereign people against the divisions of particular ones.⁵ The idea that the nation represents the embodiment of the popular will is thus clearly very different to Scruton’s pre-political cultural conception, making it of little surprise that many early conservatives were originally highly reluctant to adopt a concept of essentially liberal invention.⁶

Of course, Hobsbawm’s is not the only interpretation of the history of these notions, and it is one of the major disputes regarding the concepts of the nation and nationalism whether they are of modern or ‘primordial’ provenance.⁷ However, at least two modern conservatives may be identified who also agree with the former interpretation, Elie Kedourie and Kenneth Minogue (both, moreover, followers of Oakeshott). Indeed, as David Miller points out, both Kedourie’s and Minogue’s arguments are amongst ‘the most swingeing recent attacks on nationalism’.⁸ Kedourie, like Hobsbawm, regards nationalism as an essentially modern, revolutionary doctrine, though of course interpreting this fact in an opposite light.⁹ For Minogue, nationalism is similarly understood to be an extremist doctrine, its concern for cultural homogeneity leading to exclusiveness and a denial of diversity.¹⁰ Consequently, it should be seen as the ‘direct enemy of conservative politics’.¹¹

The case of free market thinkers is similarly ambiguous. Most obviously, anti-collectivism may also cause economic liberals to have misgivings about the nation-state, though upon different grounds to those of anti-rationalist conservatives. For example, Hayek, at least in his earlier writings, distrusts the nation-state as a

⁵ E. Hobsbawm (1990) *Nations and Nationalism Since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ch. 1.

⁶ Aughey *et. al.* (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

⁷ See A. D. Smith (1995) *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press), ch. 2 for a defence of the latter interpretation.

⁸ D. Miller (1995) *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 31.

⁹ E. Kedourie (1966) *Nationalism* (3rd edn.) (London: Hutchinson), ch. 1.

¹⁰ K. Minogue (1967a) ‘Nationalism: The Poverty of a Concept’, *European Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 53.

¹¹ K. Minogue (1967b) *Nationalism* (London: Batsford), p. 148.

collectivist social unit, since it is the focus of socialists' efforts to organize people along planned lines.¹² By contrast, an individualist viewpoint demands an international perspective, as the only means of accommodating diversity.

However, the dependence of the market itself upon wider customs and traditions – which Hayek himself came to recognize in later works – is a belief acknowledged by many free market supporters, and which thus leads to a far more positive view of the role of nationally constituted identities. For example, Arthur Seldon stresses that the promotion of free markets and the achievements of the British nation are mutually dependent.¹³ Indeed, from Powell to Thatcher, most British conservative supporters of free markets have sought to combine a commitment to free markets with support for the British nation.

Considering the case of American conservatism, an even more complicated picture appears to be presented. As previously documented, many American conservatives argue that their primary attachment is to the sub-national social unit rather than the nation. However, this is not to say that many American conservatives do not believe in the value of nationalism, even if according it a lesser priority. Indeed, even the strongest of libertarians may appreciate the value of the nation: for example, Murray Rothbard argues that, although the 'nation' is usually conceived of as attached to the 'state', classical liberals may legitimately adopt a different attitude to each. Thus, even whilst disdaining the state, libertarians recognize that the individual is 'born into a family, a language, and a culture ... He is always born into a specific historical context of time and place.'¹⁴ Intriguingly, Rothbard's understanding is not far removed from Scruton's. Moreover, it once more reveals the extent to which contemporary libertarians acknowledge the social constitution of individuality.

Yet the major problem in understanding American nationalism arises from the fact that the American nation is frequently believed to be exceptional in its origins, as an artificial, political construct. Thus it is typical for American writers – and by no means

¹² F. A. Hayek (1944) *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge), pp. 103-5, 173-4.

¹³ A. Seldon (1978) *The Coming Confrontation* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs).

¹⁴ M. Rothbard (1994) 'Nations by Consent: Decomposing the Nation-State', *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1-2.

exclusively conservatives – to draw a distinction between American and other forms of nationalism. For example, Clyde Wilson argues that what distinguishes American from European varieties is that it has always had about it ‘something of the nature of a doctrine, a set of beliefs, as opposed to the allegiances of blood, dynasty, language, history, religion, and territory that form the core of European senses of national identity’.¹⁵ In other words, allegiance to the American nation is distinctive in that it implies allegiance to a set of ideas rather than anything concrete, in particular those embodied in the American constitution.

However, with some justification John O’Sullivan argues that the ‘America-as-an-idea’ view of national identity is essentially a liberal one – and, at the present time, in his view a ‘Trojan horse’ for multiculturalism – since the notion that individuals’ allegiances should be to abstract principles is not a proposition conservatives should accept.¹⁶ In fact, he argues, American identity can be seen as predicated upon a common upbringing and culture: ‘The ideas of liberty and equality in the Declaration of Independence were the distilled essence of a much broader and richer culture including songs, stories, poems, customs, folkways, shared historical experience, and the mystic chords of memory.’

Whatever problems there may be with this view, it is not uncommon for American conservatives to argue that a common culture at least developed subsequently to the American Revolution. Thus George Will contends that ‘a common American consciousness formed in the crucible of revolutionary struggle’ led to the creation of a shared social culture and political vocabulary.¹⁷ In fact, as is obvious from the rejections of multiculturalism detailed in the last chapter, most American conservatives believe that at some point in America’s history a shared culture came into being, whether derived from a British heritage or as something distinctively American, and fostered through education and socialization.

¹⁵ C. Wilson (1990) ‘The Future of American Nationalism’, *Chronicles*, Vol. 14, No. 11, p. 17.

¹⁶ J. O’Sullivan (1998) ‘American Nationalism and Western Civilization’, *Chronicles*, Vol. 22, No. 7, p. 22.

¹⁷ G. F. Will (1994) *The Leveling Wind* (New York: Viking), p. 360.

Whilst the most vehement proponents of nationalism amongst American conservatives are undoubtedly Pat Buchanan and other paleoconservatives, as David Frum argues: 'the preservation of the existing ethnocultural character of the United States is not in itself an illegitimate goal. Shorn of Buchanan's more unhygienic rhetoric, and with the emphasis on culture rather than ethnicity, it's a goal that many conservatives share.'¹⁸ As with Scruton, most contemporary American conservatives similarly therefore define national identity in cultural rather than racial terms; the closest they typically come to the latter is to stress a WASP 'perspective'.¹⁹

Thus both endorsement of and scepticism towards nationalism may be found amongst British and American conservatives alike. In particular, the former sentiment is typically held towards the 'nation', whilst the latter is reserved for the 'state' component of the nation-state concept.

'There Is No Alternative'

Turning to the issue of globalization, an immediate difficulty – as with other contemporary concepts, such as civil society – lies in reaching a satisfactory understanding even of how it should be defined. One reason for this may be that, as Stephen Gill argues, globalization 'is not amenable to reductionist forms of explanation, because it is many-faceted and multidimensional'.²⁰ To a cynic, the problem might be a more straightforward one, which is that there appear to be as many definitions of globalization as there are writers who employ the term. Equally, as R. J. Barry Jones notes, although the terms globalization and interdependence are prevalent

¹⁸ D. Frum (1997) *What's Right?* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 64-5.

¹⁹ R. Brookhiser (1991) *The Way of the WASP: How It Made America, and How It Can Save It, So to Speak* (New York: Free Press).

²⁰ S. Gill (1995) 'Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism', *Millenium*, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 405.

within contemporary discussions, frequently little attempt is made to explain what they mean.²¹

This notwithstanding, probably the most common meaning of globalization is the idea of a fully integrated global economy. According to John Gray, this vision is nothing less than the Enlightenment utopia of a universal civilization, in which the 'manifold economic cultures and systems that the world has always contained ... will be merged into a single global market'.²² Of course, the increasing internationalization of economic activity is not in itself a new phenomenon. Yet what theorists of globalization typically suggest is that the present represents a qualitatively new phase in capitalism's history. For example, Hobsbawm argues that the distinctiveness of the contemporary situation resides in the fact that since the 1970s there has come to emerge a 'transnational' economy. That is, rather than simply an increase in trade between nation-states, what has been witnessed in recent times is the development of 'a system of economic activities for which state territories and state frontiers are not the basic framework, but merely complicating factors'.²³ On this view, the imperatives of capital, breaking down all barriers to its progress, are thus rendering the sovereign, territorially bounded nation-state obsolete.

For present purposes, the most important question of course is how conservatives may be positioned in relation to these trends. For Gray, conservatives are seen largely as responsible for promoting this vision: in particular, American conservatives are little more than 'ranting evangelists for global capitalism'.²⁴ The New Right's economic programmes should thus be understood in terms of the notion of globalization, with its imagined logic a central part of the rationale for their assaults upon the Keynesian consensus of the post-war period.²⁵ Espousing ideas of an ever-globalizing world, free marketeers could thus argue that the constraints imposed by growing interdependence in international trade and finance meant that national economies were increasingly

²¹ R. J. Barry Jones (1995) *Globalisation and Interdependence in the International Political Economy* (London: Pinter Publishers), p. 80.

²² J. Gray (1998) *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books), p. 2.

²³ E. Hobsbawm (1994) *The Age of Extremes* (London: Penguin Books), p. 277.

²⁴ Gray (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 104.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-38.

faced by realities that could not be ignored. This therefore meant not only the desirability but the necessity of free market programmes, together with an abandonment of the belief that state interventionism was an effective means of economic management.

Many critics clearly share this perspective.²⁶ One interesting version of the argument is forwarded by Leslie Sklair who, offering a distinctive twist to the study of social movements (which typically focus upon anti-capitalist ones) argues that free market thinkers and think-tanks constitute a social movement operating ideologically on behalf of 'transnational capitalism'.²⁷ A further variant worth noting is that of Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, who argue that the rhetoric of globalization is of value to free marketeers in the 1990s precisely because of the failure of their economic programmes of the 1980s.²⁸ Theories of globalization are thus a 'godsend' to economic liberals because they gave a new lease of life to a free market ideology when its bankruptcy might otherwise have been exposed by its practical failings. The merit of this understanding is that it thus locates the espousal of globalizing ideas within the context of their contemporary theorizations.

The role of global forces in the rejection of Keynesianism may also be understood in other terms. For example, according to Anthony Giddens it is as much sociological as economic factors that lie behind this abandonment:

Globalizing influences ... have helped set in play pervasive processes of detraditionalization in everyday social activity. Detraditionalization in turn means an acceleration of the reflexivity of lay populations. Keynesianism worked tolerably well in a world of *simple modernization*; but it could not survive in a world of *reflexive modernization* – a world of social reflexivity.²⁹

²⁶ For example, W. Hutton (1996) *The State We're In* (London: Vintage), pp. 28, 56-8.

²⁷ L. Sklair (1997) 'Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3.

²⁸ P. Hirst and G. Thompson (1996) *Globalization in Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 176.

²⁹ A. Giddens (1994) *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 42.

That is, following from the disintegration of the traditional social fabric caused by globalization, individuals become increasingly aware of the economic incentives that are supposed to determine their actions, and as a result, consciously subvert expectations. Keynesianism, presupposing a citizenry exhibiting relatively stable patterns of behaviour, is thus rendered ineffectual in an age of 'reflexive' modernity. Although for Giddens the New Right's free market response to these transformations is the wrong one, it nonetheless reflects the changing realities of a globalized world.

Considering the arguments of contemporary conservatives themselves, one point of clear agreement between many and their critics is that globalization does represent a qualitatively new phase of development. For example, John Patten argues that the challenges of globalization

are not the international or imperial challenges which a Peel or Disraeli had to deal with. In their day there was of course a sort of globalisation (our accidental empire, and the trade which came with it) and technological change (steam; telegraph cables under the ocean); but it was chalk to what is the twentieth-century's new economic cheese. There was then no globalisation of and by big companies, and certainly there were not any totally free global money markets
...³⁰

Moreover, not only may present-day trends be considered largely novel, but for many writers they do indeed undermine the traditional authority of the nation-state. For example, Newt Gingrich argues that: 'All current economic textbooks are based on the national economy as though that were still the keystone of an understanding of how the world works. Yet the fact is that the world economy is now, in large part, an interconnected system of electronic signals.'³¹ Similarly, Patten believes that governments are largely 'at the mercy of events in the larger economic world over which they can have little control ... The world markets have to a large extent become the judge and jury not only of worldwide enterprise but also of national economies.'³²

³⁰ J. Patten (1995) *Things to Come* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), pp. 177-8.

³¹ N. Gingrich (1995) *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 64.

³² J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 176.

Furthermore, the inevitability of these processes is also frequently emphasized. For example, David Howell argues that 'we are already far too globalized and interwoven' for it to be possible for Britain to isolate itself from global trends.³³ Or, as Stephen Dorrell argues, there simply 'isn't an alternative to global trade'.³⁴ This then has important implications for policy. That is, when confronted by an increasingly open world market, developing a deregulated, low-cost environment for investors becomes imperative. For example, John Redwood argues that recognizing the needs of global business means that the aims of 'Taxation, industrial relations and social policies ... [must] concentrate on ensuring a skilled and flexible work-force'.³⁵ Similarly, Patten believes that conservatives must continue to argue for low inflation and low public expenditure to meet the requirements of a globalized world.³⁶

However, whilst it is possible to see a global free market vision as tied to an entirely positive and optimistic view of the onward march of market forces – for example, Christopher DeMuth argues that amongst the many benefits of global competition, it forces companies to become efficient and therefore benefits consumers³⁷ – there is much about such arguments which implies a far less sanguine stance. Thus the 'no alternative' perspective suggests a fairly defensive attitude towards the beneficence of markets: not that free market capitalism represents the best of all possible worlds, merely the only option that is viable. Indeed, Howell's formulation of this thesis, that there are 'no alternative escape routes' to adapting to the pressures of a global marketplace, is likely to inspire as much dismay amongst readers as any confidence.³⁸ In other words, it is not necessarily Enlightenment utopianism that motivates supporters of globalization, but perhaps simply pragmatic 'realism'.

Thus, although adapting to the realities of globalization may be believed necessary, this is different to believing that there will always be rewards. Consequently, as much

³³ D. Howell (1995) *Easternisation: Asian Power and Its Impact on the West* (London: Demos), p. 21.

³⁴ Interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998.

³⁵ J. Redwood (1993) *The Global Marketplace: Capitalism and Its Future* (London: HarperCollins), p. 15.

³⁶ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 179-81.

³⁷ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

³⁸ Howell (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

as an unregulated global economy may be applauded when it delivers economic benefits, it is no less possible for conservatives themselves to blame it for creating problems. For example, as former British Chancellor Kenneth Clarke pleads:

It is not the changes made by the Conservative Party that have created uncertainty and economic insecurity in Britain ... The need for change has been driven by the unprecedented changes in the nature of world markets – by globalisation of funds, by information technology ...³⁹

Similarly, the seemingly arcane workings of international currency speculators fit them especially well for the role of scapegoat. For example, Patten reminds us of ‘the devastating effects that gimlet-eyed serial currency-killers at work in front of their screens can bring, as we found on Black Wednesday’.⁴⁰ In other words, globalization may provide conservatives replacement scapegoats for denying responsibility for economic malaise – in the absence of socialists and militant trade unionists – as much as it may offer grounds for any positive free market vision.

Another way in which globalization may be useful for conservatives in deflecting criticism is suggested by Ghita Ionescu. According to Ionescu, the Major government elected in 1992 was the first ‘post-globalization’ Western government, that is, the first to be elected in a period liberated from the tensions of the Cold War, and in a new era of developing global institutions, trade and cultural relations.⁴¹ Yet rather than seeing the Major government’s dearth of significant ideas as revealing a lack of vision, Ionescu argues that it simply reflects the fact that what nation-states can achieve is heavily circumscribed by global realities. Thus it is an example of what Ionescu terms the ‘pragmatization of politics’: in a world in which conciliation and coalition-building are more suitable than old-style ideological politics, and humble rather than ‘millenary’

³⁹ Speech delivered at the LSE [12 July], quoted in K. Milne (1994) ‘Community: The Tories Fight Back’, *New Statesman*, 22 July, p. 30.

⁴⁰ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁴¹ G. Ionescu (1992) ‘The Deeper Meanings of Mr Major’s Victory’, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 27, No. 3; G. Ionescu (1994) ‘Turbulence in British Politics: The First Two Years of the Major Government’, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 29, No. 2. The term ‘post-globalization’ is used because it is argued to be more comprehensive than post-Cold War.

promises should be made to electorates, it is no surprise that post-globalization governments may appear less dramatic in their ambitions and policies. If conservatives appear to lack 'big ideas' in the post-Cold War era, this may simply be the appropriate response to the political circumstances of a globalized world.

One of the most important aspects of contemporary championings of global liberalization is the emphasis placed upon the role of information technology. Indeed, for many libertarians the realm of 'cyberspace' is perceived to be a model for wider society, a space which is decentralized, unregulated and predicated upon the freedom of the individual. Thanks to the particular affinity of these features to a libertarian perspective, David Shenk argues that 'Cyberspace is Republican.'⁴²

What one critic has labelled 'high-tech libertarianism'⁴³ is to be found particularly in the works of conservatives such as Gingrich (together with his Progress and Freedom Foundation) and George Gilder, both key proselytizers for the information revolution. Of course, as much as their arguments are concerned with upholding the virtues of technological progress, underlying this are political and social concerns. Thus Gingrich, drawing heavily upon the work of Alvin Toffler and his heralding of the Third Wave, believes that the expanding role of computer technology will revolutionize politics. One of the consequences he envisages is that:

While the Industrial Revolution herded people into gigantic social institutions – big corporations, big unions, big government – the Information Revolution is breaking up these giants and leading us back to something that is – strangely enough – much more like Tocqueville's 1830s America.⁴⁴

In other words, the information revolution, in devolving power from collective institutions to individuals, is 'recreating' the conditions of perfect competition supposed to have existed in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the spread of information technology may thus provide a further means for reinvigorating civil society.

⁴² D. Shenk (1997) *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 174.

⁴³ P. Starr (1997) 'Cyberpower and Freedom', *American Prospect*, No. 33, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 57. See also N. Gingrich (1994) 'Introduction', in A. Toffler and H. Toffler *Creating a New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing).

In similar vein, Gilder argues that the global information revolution has turned the world into a 'microcosm', in which it is at the micro-level – both technologically and socially – that the most important advances are occurring.⁴⁵ Whereas in the past economic success came to those nations possessing superior stocks of natural resources and heavy industry, today it comes to those at the cutting edge of information technology. Some of Gilder's arguments are certainly quixotic, blurring as they do into mysticism: for example, his belief that the information revolution is sweeping aside the old 'superstitions' of materialism and rationalism seems, as one reviewer puts it, to offer conservatives their own version of New Age spiritualism.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the same political conclusions are drawn as by Gingrich. That is, government regulation and taxation are seen not simply as undesirable, but unworkable in the information age: whereas mills and factories cannot easily be moved, technology, information and ideas are extremely mobile, with an overly-regulated economic environment simply causing these latter to move elsewhere. Thus, in the world of the microcosm, it is the small, readily adaptable firm that benefits much more than the large.

Charles Murray is also impressed by the mobility and flexibility the computer revolution affords people: 'as the technology continues to turn a revolution every five years ... the de facto freedom within a society will increase'.⁴⁷ However, although these arguments are strongest amongst American conservatives, there are British writers who share a similar belief in the liberating role of communications technology. For example, William Rees-Mogg argues that the cyber-economy empowers the individual and is likely soon to displace the 'monolithic' nation-state.⁴⁸ Similarly, Ferdinand Mount believes that: 'The newest technologies fragment and disperse knowledge and power far beyond the capacities of lumbering national bureaucracies reliably to track their activities, let alone to control them.'⁴⁹

⁴⁵ G. Gilder (1990) *Microcosm* (New York: Simon and Schuster).

⁴⁶ R. Wright (1989) 'Review of George Gilder's *Microcosm*', *New Republic*, 6 June.

⁴⁷ Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

⁴⁸ W. Rees-Mogg (1995) 'The End of Nations', *Times*, 31 August.

⁴⁹ F. Mount (1992) *The British Constitution Now: Recovery Or Decline?* (London: Heinemann), p. 239. See also Redwood (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 11-14.

A further recurrent theme of conservative writings on globalization is the threat posed by the high-growth, low-cost economies of the East.⁵⁰ Yet, Howell argues, this confrontation between East and West is as much about values and culture as it is about economics.⁵¹ Interestingly therefore, Howell disagrees with those who look to Western writers (such as Etzioni) for inspiration as to how to rejuvenate the moral fabric of civil society, instead urging us to consider the Asian model of values: of order, respect and discipline. Conservatives worried about demoralization might therefore be better minded to abandon their Anglo-centrism (and such efforts as attempting to resurrect Victorian virtues), and instead embrace the opportunities opened up by globalization for importing the values of a culture that is a living example of how society should be ordered.⁵²

Other writers also emphasize the cultural side of globalization. For example, Stephen Dorrell believes that ‘a healthy culture is something that is developing all the time in response to external influences. The idea that you can have a healthy culture that is insulated seems to me to defy all of history ... and the moment it stops changing it’s dead.’⁵³ Moreover, Madsen Pirie argues that because youth culture is today universal, emphasizing the advantages of globalization may offer the Conservative Party one means of outflanking New Labour – and, especially, reinvigorating support amongst the young – by allowing them to escape from the image of ‘Little Englanders’.⁵⁴

A further dimension to the universalizing potential of globalization of benefit to conservatives relates to its religious aspect. Clearly, Christianity possesses strongly universalistic elements, viewing the world as the creation of a single God and constituted by a single community of people regardless of territorial boundaries.⁵⁵ Moreover, many American religious conservatives adopt evangelical and ecumenical principles. Richard Neuhaus thus notes a growing trend of religious statements

⁵⁰ For example, Redwood (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁵¹ Interview with D. Howell, 14 July 1998; Howell (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-3.

⁵² Though a fierce critic of globalization, Gray also believes that East Asian cultures may be the best place to look to recover traditional values – J. Gray (1995) *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge), p. 111.

⁵³ Interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998.

⁵⁴ Interview with M. Pirie, 19 June 1998.

presaging a world-wide 'coming together' and a new age of religious renewal.⁵⁶ Neuhaus himself counsels circumspection towards millennial utopianism; nonetheless, even in his relatively cautious assessment the point is clear:

In communications, economics, and interreligious relations, there are hints of an emerging something that might be called a global society, perhaps – stretching the point somewhat – a global community ... [utopian expectations] should not blind us to the fact that world-historical change does happen, and that such change may be part of God's unfolding purposes in time.

Challenges to Civil Society and Sovereignty

If there are thus reasons for conservatives to embrace the idea of globalization, it is also the case that the challenges globalization presents to civil society and sovereignty create tensions for conservatives. For example, as Fukuyama argues, the biggest problem with the information age's enthusiasts is that in breaking down hierarchies and authority, the information revolution may well destroy the trust and shared norms that underlie a market society, and upon which communities depend.⁵⁷ Similarly, Gray holds supporters of untrammelled global market forces not to consider the effects this will have upon the stability of families and communities, as well as upon culture and established institutions.⁵⁸ In reviewing Redwood's *The Global Marketplace* he thus laments that it is the rhetoric of globalization which prevents Britain from following the protectionist examples of other countries in defending their national cultures, such as France in protecting its film industry.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ M. Waters (1995) *Globalization* (London: Routledge), p. 127.

⁵⁶ R. Neuhaus (1996a) 'The Public Square: The Coming Age of the Spirit', *First Things*, No. 62, p. 66.

⁵⁷ F. Fukuyama (1995) *Trust* (New York: Free Press), p. 24. It may be seen here how Fukuyama has more latterly developed a far more circumspect view of globalizing market forces.

⁵⁸ J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 26-9; Gray (1998), *op. cit.*, pp. 24-38, *passim*.

⁵⁹ J. Gray (1994) 'Review of John Redwood's *The Global Marketplace*', *Guardian*, 3 January.

For Gray, there is thus a 'core neoliberal contradiction between economic globalization and national sovereignty'.⁶⁰ Indeed, the issue of globalization makes especially apparent the tension between market liberal and traditionalist elements of conservatism. For example, this can be seen in the testament given by John Patten to globalization's virtues:

When I walked the streets of Oxford in the run-up to the 1979 election contest, the burning issue was how to manage the decline of the local motor industry ... who would have predicted then that the Cowley plant, a by-word for corporate awfulness and industrial anarchy in 1979, would be called 'Rover' in 1995, owned by a German company, and be completely riddled with Japanese working practices, turning out world-beating cars? ... globalisation has worked and beneficially.⁶¹

It is tempting to wonder how many conservatives feel far less enthusiastic about the 'saving' of British industries by German firms.

Moreover, a particular contradiction seems to exist for British conservatives between enthusiasm for a free global economy and opposition to European Union. As Gray sarcastically puts it, for the anti-European conservative, 'national sovereignty must be defended from the encroachments of European institutions, in order that it might more comprehensively be abandoned through a complete surrender to global market forces.'⁶² Similarly, Andrew Marr argues that in their preoccupation with Europe, the Right of the Conservative Party has failed to understand that the true cause of loss of sovereignty is the power of international markets: 'its steely-eyed enthusiasm for global markets and the rising power of transnational companies over national trade unions' has blinded it to the truth that the British Parliament has been more weakened by economic deregulation than by over-regulation by Brussels.⁶³

⁶⁰ Gray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶¹ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 177. Although Patten is largely enthusiastic about the economic benefits of globalisation, as seen earlier he is not beyond blaming international forces for economic problems as well.

⁶² Gray (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶³ A. Marr (1995) 'The Real Enemy Is the Money Market', *Spectator*, 9 September, p. 22.

Yet why have nationalist conservatives ‘trained their guns’ in the wrong direction (Europe) whilst having ‘cheerfully presided over the death of British national autonomy’?⁶⁴ Marr himself offers two reasons. First, in part it is a displacement activity: since it is impossible to restore the Empire or reverse globalization, the only feasible target for conservative international dissatisfaction is Brussels. Second, it may be ascribed to genealogy. Since the nineteenth century, Marr argues, conservative defences of Parliamentary sovereignty have been combined with a staunch commitment to free trade and small statism, which were not perceived to pose any threat to national autonomy. In the past this belief may indeed have been justified, since Britain’s position as dominant world power – unleashing economic forces to demolish others’ national sovereignty – meant that there was little danger posed to Britain’s own autonomy. Although Britain’s changed position in the world means that this is no longer the case, conservatives have remained wedded to the old doctrines, even though it might better suit their nationalist inclinations to abandon them.

A further reason is suggested by Colin Crouch. His argument is that, on its own, pure free-marketism is a ‘rather forbidding doctrine’, because it has to tell people that very little can be done to protect them from global competition, and nor does it provide much in the way of a focus for cohering loyalty.⁶⁵ By using the European Union as a target, British conservatism is able to ‘square its circle’ of proclaiming national sovereignty – and thereby offering people some measure of reassurance of security – whilst exposing ‘the country to completely unregulated capital movements and as much globalization as possible’.

Ferdinand Mount argues that there need be no difficulty in viewing each development – globalization and closer European unity – separately: ‘It does not directly follow that, because the volume of international trade is so vastly increased, we must therefore yield to European institutions the regulatory powers over trade and industry hitherto exercised by national governments and parliaments.’⁶⁶ Yet the problem of course remains for British conservatives concerned with sovereignty that, if globalization is

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁵ C. Crouch (1997) ‘The Terms of the Neo-Liberal Consensus’, *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 4, p. 359.

real, losing the authority exercised by national governments to global forces is little better than losing it to European institutions.

However, William Waldegrave suggests a reason why nationalism is to be preferred to regionalism:

we should be very careful about the withdrawal of authority from relatively local institutions – national governments for example – in favour of passing that authority up to larger structures. It may well be that the nation is too small to control all it wants to control, but it is very doubtful that, since the real forces we are dealing with are often global, regional ones will do much better. In fact, they may find it very difficult to build any sense of allegiance at all.⁶⁷

Alternatively, according to Howell, the issue might be resolved if we recognize that the British political establishment's concern for European Union is simply misplaced, in that it is Asian capitalism which is going to dominate global markets.⁶⁸ In these terms, if the fate of Britain simply does not reside with Europe but with wider international forces, then it may well make sense for British conservatives not to wish Britain to entangle itself in the European project. Implicitly however, there remains a need for Britain to surrender autonomy, both economically and culturally, to the dictates of an other, even if this other is Asia rather than Europe. Howell's own embracing of Asian values may not sit so easily with conservatives more concerned with defending British values and traditions.

Moreover, it certainly is the case that even conservatives broadly sympathetic to the impact of global forces wish to square the circle and emphasize their commitment to retaining a nationalist focus. Thus Patten argues that, 'the Tory stance toward all these rapid changes in the future must always be shaped by the national interest'.⁶⁹ Indeed, Howell argues that responding to globalization provides conservatives with a new 'big

⁶⁶ Mount (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁶⁷ W. Waldegrave (1995) 'The Future of Parliamentary Government', *Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 176.

⁶⁸ Howell (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ J. Patten (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 178.

idea', in terms of defending the nation. That is, because people are frightened of the destruction of local cultures and economic insecurity:

the Conservatives have got a whole new agenda to carve out as to how to cope with this, how to conserve the best things in this turbulent new world ... nation-states take on new and very important roles which are not so economic, it's a question of providing people with a national identity, securing them against crime, instability of all kinds and so on.⁷⁰

Of course, such a position is unlikely to satisfy critics such as Gray, since conservatives are themselves held responsible for this turmoil.

Yet not all conservatives are so keen to square circles, a number agreeing with Gray that global liberalism is a threat to national sovereignty and identity. One argument is a paternalist one: for example, Peregrine Worsthorne argues that the erosion of national sovereignty is especially 'bad news ... for people who need protection from the state'.⁷¹ However, particularly vehement critics of globalization are Pat Buchanan and other paleoconservatives, who campaign for protectionism and withdrawal from global institutions – together with restricting immigration – to defend America's cultural identity and economic security from external threats.⁷² Indeed, Thomas Fleming argues that mainstream conservative enthusiasm for free trade, the exporting of American notions of democracy and open borders for immigrants 'is a leftist position ... it's the position of Robespierre'.⁷³ By contrast, conservatism 'is not a globalist movement, it's not a universal movement'. In this respect, his criticisms are thus very much in accord with Gray's.

However, most fundamentally it is the constitutive role played by the nation for identity that troubles traditionalist conservatives. Fleming again articulates the point

⁷⁰ Interview with D. Howell, 14 July 1998. See also D. Howell (2000) *The Edge of Now* (London: Macmillan).

⁷¹ Interview with P. Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

⁷² P. Buchanan (1998) *The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice Are Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy* (Boston: Little, Brown); S. Francis (1993) *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), pp. 5-8, 170-5.

well. Thus: 'Man is a tribal creature, not a global angel that takes in whole continents at a single glance.'⁷⁴ Similarly, whilst other conservatives may perceive globalization to have positive economic benefits, for writers such as Scruton the fact that the bonds of national identity transcend 'mere' politics and economics means that the influence of global forces must be seen as more problematic. That is, if community is premised upon the deeply rooted bonds of a common culture, no amount of economic benefits can substitute for a loss of cultural integrity.

Indeed, Scruton also expresses concern about the role of international bodies. For example, in examining the efforts of the World Health Organization to regulate the global tobacco industry, he is concerned about the implications this has for democracy and liberty within nation-states. He thus worries that legislative powers are being 'granted to transnational bodies answerable to no national electorate', with this transnational legislation 'curtailing the freedom of law-abiding people'.⁷⁵

However, whilst a widespread assumption is that economic globalization goes hand-in-hand with the values of free market liberalism, an argument may also be made that it is the values of a traditionalist conservatism which are particularly suited to the requirements of the global age.⁷⁶ That is, if the economic verities of a free market philosophy are no longer in question, yet the world has become increasingly risky and insecure, then to maintain social cohesion the values of authority, individual responsibility and self-discipline may require even greater articulation. In other words, the necessary complement to an increasing internationalization of economic activity may be increasing illiberalism in the social and cultural spheres – in which case, the arguments of writers such as Scruton may be deemed even more relevant. In terms of this, it is perhaps understandable why libertarians like Rothbard should believe there is a need to 'reconsider' the importance of the nation within the post-Cold War context.⁷⁷

⁷³ Interview with T. Fleming, 2 October 1998.

⁷⁴ T. Fleming (1990) 'Short Views on Earth Day', *Chronicles*, Vol. 14, No. 8, p. 13.

⁷⁵ R. Scruton (2000) *Who, What and Why?: Trans-National Government, Legitimacy and the World Health Organisation* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs), pp. 9, 62.

⁷⁶ This is suggested by Paddy Ireland – P. Ireland (1997) 'Endarkening the Mind: Roger Scruton and the Power of Law', *Social and Legal Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Rothbard (1995), *op. cit.*

Nonetheless, further tensions for conservatives arise from the idea of their presenting themselves as disciples of the communications revolution. In fact, such conservatives may seem to be espousing a form of ‘technological determinism’⁷⁸, a perhaps odd philosophy for a conservative to adopt. In other words, they see technology as leading politics and economics, rather than the other way round. Yet however appealing the optimism vested in the development of new technologies may be, it is likely misplaced, in that such a belief simply abstracts the role of technology from its wider social context. That is, however much power may be dispersed or equality established in the virtual sphere, is unlikely to affect the relations in which people stand in the real world.⁷⁹ Moreover, as Fukuyama points out, information age ‘futurologists’ tend to over-generalize from the computer industry, which may reward smaller, flexible firms; yet in other industries, the benefits of scale are still likely to obtain.⁸⁰

Conservatives themselves may also see the downsides. For example, Murray observes that one consequence of the increasing fragmentation brought about by the information revolution is that it ‘defuses all of the political energy to make legislative changes’.⁸¹ Similarly, Neuhaus adopts a perspective of ‘healthy scepticism about a digital revolution’.⁸² Indeed: ‘Divorced from the cognitive structure that is knowledge and the reflectively internalized knowledge that is wisdom, information makes us dumb.’ This being the case, the type of person who gains his knowledge purely from electronic sources is ‘crippled’ by a dependency comparable to that of the underclass on welfare.

Moreover, a definite tension exists for conservatives between their contemporary expectations of information technology and more traditional conservative perspectives. An interesting illustration of this may be gained from a consideration of a pamphlet penned by William Rees-Mogg in the mid-1960s – at the time when the Wilson-led

⁷⁸ M. Lind (1996) *Up from Conservatism* (New York: Free Press), p. 38.

⁷⁹ M. Dawson and J. Bellamy Foster (1996) ‘Virtual Capitalism: The Political Economy of the Information Highway’, *Monthly Review*, Vol. 48, No. 3, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Fukuyama (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4.

⁸¹ Interview with C. Murray, 22 September 1998.

⁸² R. Neuhaus (1996b) ‘The Internet Produces a Global Village of Village Idiots’, *Forbes*, 2 December, p. 100.

Labour government was placing its own hopes in the white heat of technology – articulating a very different perspective to the enthusiastic one cited above. His argument is therefore imbued more with Orwellian fears – the pamphlet tellingly entitled *Liberty in 1984* – than with any sense of optimism:

The combination of electronic systems of communication with modern computers does however make possible control of a much more complex system in a much more complete way from a smaller number of centres ... At first sight the implications are extremely gloomy. What is obvious is that we have moved from a period of diffusion of power to a period of concentration of power.⁸³

Rather than being returned to Tocqueville's America, we are therefore more likely to find ourselves in Stalin's Russia.

Of course, such Orwellian fears about the development of new technologies were as much conditioned by the ideological struggle with socialism as by any genuine attempt to divine their true implications. Yet in the same way, today's conservative champions of the information revolution similarly perceive the question through an ideological rather than a scientific prism: that is, in terms of their political ambitions.

Even so, for a writer to change his opinion on a subject does not in itself necessarily warrant criticism. Yet in this case, for conservatives to have converted themselves from sceptics into enthusiasts for science, progress and technology clearly is problematic, since throughout conservatism's history conservatives have more frequently been concerned to articulate a highly tempered, if not outrightly hostile, attitude to such notions. Indeed, for traditionalist conservatives science has more often been seen as implicated in man's corrupted state than as instrument of his enlightenment, fuelling man's hubris and providing false expectations as to man's salvation through reason. For example, according to Russell Kirk, 'innovation is a devouring conflagration more often than it is a torch of progress'.⁸⁴ Thus the issue of the global information revolution reveals in particularly pronounced form the tension

⁸³ W. Rees-Mogg (1965) *Liberty in 1984* (London: Conservative Political Centre).

⁸⁴ R. Kirk (1953) *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co.), p. 8.

that exists between the standpoints of an optimistic liberalism and a traditional scepticism within conservatism.

Equally, there is good reason for believing globalization to be problematic for a religious perspective: that is, in attempting to come to terms with the realities of a globalizing world, religious systems of belief are frequently obliged to relativize themselves.⁸⁵ Indeed, efforts at universalization through ecumenism contain within them the potential seeds not of any transcending unity, but rather the dissolution of each religion involved. That is, in the effort to discover common principles and possibly unite denominations, inevitably requires an abstraction of beliefs and the likely loss of whatever is specific to any one. Utopian or not, the efforts of religious conservatives to embrace the idea of a global community may thus entail the destruction of the very beliefs they wish to globalize.

Globalization in Question

So far, the consideration of conservatives' responses to globalization – whether as something to be welcomed or feared – has proceeded largely upon the basis that globalization is indeed a real phenomenon. Finally however, it is worth considering the criticisms of conservatives who are themselves sceptical about the notion.

First, following from what has been discussed as to the misgivings of conservative nationalists towards globalization, it may readily be imagined why many wish to reject the idea of its reality altogether. For example, in rejecting a description by the *Times* of a G7 summit meeting as a meeting of the board of directors of 'World Inc', Noel Malcolm dismisses such talk by stressing that it was in fact 'a meeting of the heads of separate national governments: not directors of the same global company'.⁸⁶ Such a style of reporting, it is argued, is simply symptomatic of a growing disdain within

⁸⁵ R. Robertson (1991) 'Globalization, Modernization, and Postmodernization', in R. Robertson and W. Garrett (eds) *Religion and Global Order* (New York: Paragon), pp. 288-90.

⁸⁶ N. Malcolm (1991) 'In Defence of Nationalism', *Spectator*, 20 July, p. 8.

international affairs towards pursuing the purely national interest, akin to a 'new prudery'. Talk of globalization is thus more about rhetoric than about presenting any substantive reflection of reality.

In fact, most conservatives typically question the idea of globalization to some extent. Thus even though most American conservatives reject Buchanan's analysis of the wholly negative effects of globalization (as well his isolationist conclusions)⁸⁷, this does not mean that they wholeheartedly accept a global vision. Thus, even if the benefits of international trade are not queried, the idea that any 'transnational' world order has come into existence frequently is questioned. For example, William Kristol is typical in seeking to emphasize that whilst the nation-state may be losing some of its authority, this does mean that it has been superseded:

There are big forces out there that can't be wished away and in some respects they're healthy forces, they discipline national governments ... [but] I don't believe in a globalized future, the nation-state is still very, very strong and important ... I don't believe there are these inevitable forces sweeping over the world making nation-states irrelevant.⁸⁸

Similarly, Edwin Feulner argues that whilst in international economics globalization is a very real phenomenon, the more fundamental suggestion of trans-national interconnectedness is 'a form of globaloney'.⁸⁹ Amongst British conservatives as well, few argue that the nation-state has become obsolete. Thus Douglas Hurd avers that, although globalization is a reality, the world is still composed of nation-states.⁹⁰

In fact, it is possible to argue that free markets actually require the division of the world into nation-states. For example, Charles Moore argues that this is precisely what Adam Smith believed. The existence of independent nation-states is therefore necessary, partly 'because for free markets to work they have to have competition and

⁸⁷ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998; interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998. See also R. Ponnuru (1998) 'The Holes in Buchananomics', *American Enterprise*, July/August.

⁸⁸ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

⁸⁹ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998.

⁹⁰ Interview with D. Hurd, 25 June 1998.

nations represent competition as well as individual companies', and partly because free markets are a cultural development as much as an economic one, and therefore need the historical framework of 'appropriate habits of mind and the rule of law' which only nation-states can provide.⁹¹

Moreover, rather than seeing the nation-state as passively at the mercy of irresistible forces, it is possible to see it as able to change to meet the challenges of globalization. For example, DeMuth – though not seeing this development in a wholly positive light – argues that the nation-state 'is proving to be pretty resourceful today in responding to globalization', for example, accruing to itself greater regulatory powers.⁹²

Furthermore, few conservatives believe in the idea of a global community. As Stephen Dorrell argues:

I like the IBM version of this: you trade globally, you live locally ... people don't live in a global community ... they live in much more local communities than that. The nation-state is important in that global market place because it is the focus of political accountability, because it's the focus of people's sense of self
...⁹³

By the same token, Jeanne Kirkpatrick argues that 'I don't think we're about to live in a global village'.⁹⁴ In fact, she argues, our fundamental view of identity remains unchanged in this supposedly global age.

Yet not only may the idea of the emergence of a global community be a myth, at the same time a contradictory trend may be identified, which is the growth of devolutionary politics.⁹⁵ Thus Feulner contends that: 'If you look around the world the trend is clearly towards smaller.'⁹⁶ In other words, even to the extent that the nation-

⁹¹ Interview with C. Moore, 14 June 1998.

⁹² Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

⁹³ Interview with S. Dorrell, 23 June 1998. Waldegrave makes a similar suggestion – Waldegrave (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 176-7.

⁹⁴ Interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

⁹⁵ On this, see Hobsbawm (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 424-30.

⁹⁶ Interview with E. Feulner, 22 October 1998.

state is being undermined, this need not mean the emergence of a transnational order, but rather an increasingly fragmented and localized one.

Moreover, regardless of what paleoconservative critics may argue, mainstream American conservatives are highly ambivalent about crusading for the export of the American democratic model to create a single liberal world order, themselves worried about the uncertain contours of the post-Cold War international landscape. Kirkpatrick therefore argues that, whilst it may be desirable to see the spread of liberal democracy around the world, 'there is no mystical American "mission"' to do so.⁹⁷

Furthermore, conservatives may also wish to reject the idea of globalization because they have a clear interest in presenting the world as essentially unchanging. This can be seen in particular in the area of international relations. Thus for conservative 'realists', to uphold the validity of realism itself requires a rejection of the notion of globalization.

For this reason, Owen Harries cautions readers of the *National Interest* to 'View with extreme scepticism the current outpourings of claims that what has been true about relationships between states from the time of Thucydides until yesterday no longer holds.'⁹⁸ These claims include those being made about increasing interdependence and the rise of transnational institutions, which are supposed to have revolutionized international politics. The problem with claims that these developments are revolutionary is that, 'They invariably underestimate the durability and tenacity of the past.'

In other words, to sustain the basic assumptions of realism – that international relations are to be understood through a timeless 'balance of power' prism – the claims of globalization theorists must be resisted. As Harries presents it, for the realist the world is divided up 'vertically' into sovereign states, with clear boundaries to control and defend.⁹⁹ Yet for the globalization theorist, this vertical version of the world is being replaced by a 'horizontally' ordered one, with the decisive forces in this

⁹⁷ J. Kirkpatrick (1990) 'A Normal Country in a Normal Time', *National Interest*, No. 21, p. 42. See also J. Ehrman (1994) *The Rise of Neoconservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 180-4; A. Tonelson (1993/4) 'Beyond Left and Right', *National Interest*, No. 34, pp. 9-13.

⁹⁸ O. Harries (1992/93) 'Fourteen Points for Realists', *National Interest*, No. 30, p. 109.

⁹⁹ O. Harries (1996) 'Does Realism Have a Future?', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), p. 142.

transformation being capital, technology and information. Increasingly, these spread horizontally across the globe without recognizing national limits. With sovereignty a myth and the state a fiction, state rivalries and military force make little sense – the realist’s viewpoint is thus an anachronism.

Harries offers four specific arguments against the claims of globalization theorists. First, that there is nothing new in the claims being made; after all, he argues, a century and a half ago Marx and Engels were predicting the end of the nation-state. Second, that the assumption that propinquity automatically produces greater harmony is simply false. Third, that the degree of interdependence in the world today is in fact no greater than it was at the beginning of the century, when trade as a proportion of global production was higher than it is now. And fourth, that the perspective of globalization theorists is a largely ‘Western-centric’ one. Even if the borders of Western nations have become more porous, this is not true of much of the rest of the world, for example, China, Korea and Japan. In other words, nothing fundamental about the world has really changed in the contemporary era.

However, one of the most important bases for conservatives’ cynicism towards globalization theories is that they are perceived to be theories of conservatives’ opponents. For example, Maurice Cowling believes that the term globalization is ‘just an intelligentsia catchphrase’.¹⁰⁰ Thus if many critics perceive globalization theories to be legitimating ideologies of the free market, many conservatives conversely perceive them to be legitimating ideologies of the Left (suggesting perhaps most clearly the fundamentally ambiguous nature of the concept).

In particular, many conservatives’ suspicions of theoretical concepts arise from the fact that they are seen as ‘excuse-making’ devices. For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb lambasts those who wish to excuse the failings of individual morality on factors such as class or race. Yet: in ‘the post-cold war era, “globalization” has replaced “capitalism” as the epithet of choice’ for those who wish to shift personal responsibilities onto

¹⁰⁰ Interview with M. Cowling, 18 May 1998.

impersonal forces.¹⁰¹ In other words, globalization is simply another fashionable theory employed to excuse anti-social behaviour.

Also considering globalization theories from an ideological standpoint is Kenneth Minogue, who dismisses the theory of globalization as representing 'a new ideology for an emerging class of internationalists'.¹⁰² Emphasizing the significance of global problems such as global warming is thus how international regulatory bodies extend their power and leverage over nation-states. What this new class of internationalists argue is that sovereign states cannot deal with many contemporary problems – such as pollution – because they do not stop at state borders; moreover, Minogue argues, they perceive nation-states to be too blind and too selfish to be trusted even to attempt to do so. Even if the global problems used to legitimate the idea of globalization are themselves often myths (which Minogue himself certainly believes), the project of internationalization unleashed is real, and dangerous, enough. As Minogue puts it pejoratively, the international world is the natural habitat of instrumental rationality in its extreme form.

Of course, for a writer who believes nationalism to be inimical to conservative politics, it may be wondered why Minogue finds the prospect of the erosion of national sovereignty so worrying. However, if once again there seems a circle needing to be squared, Minogue does so as follows. Despite his dislike of international bodies stripping individual nations of their sovereignty, he nonetheless emphasizes that he is by no means sentimentalizing the nation-state: 'It is in many ways a vile old brute'.¹⁰³ The point, however, is that even if 'The state is a monster ... it is *our* monster', in that it is open to some sort of accountability. Whilst this may not mean that conservatives should abandon their hostility towards the state, in a world of increasingly powerful international bodies anti-statism may have to be qualified by the need to combat these even more problematic foes.

¹⁰¹ G. Himmelfarb (1995) 'Introduction', in D. Anderson (ed.) *This Will Hurt: The Restoration of Virtue and Civic Order* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. vii.

¹⁰² K. Minogue (1996) 'Does National Sovereignty Have a Future?', *National Review*, 23 December, p. 38.

It may thus be seen that globalization is an issue which frequently reveals in sharp form the differences between types of conservative, between enthusiasts for its economic and political benefits and those more concerned at the threat it poses to national sovereignty and cultural integrity. However, what has also been seen is that there are a number of obstacles even to conservatives accepting the idea that the contemporary world has been significantly transformed.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Chapter 6

The Challenge of Postmodernism

From what has been discussed in the preceding chapters, it is clear that for many conservatives the defeat of Marxism has not meant the end of ideological conflict. Instead, an array of enemies is perceived to have replaced the older socialist menace, from New Class regulators to politically correct feminists. However, one important quality of many of these new antagonists is that they themselves define their identities in terms of a rejection of Enlightenment-inspired ideologies such as Marxism – which thus highlights a seeming paradox. Whereas conservatives were in the past principal critics of the Enlightenment and its associated principles, with their upholders by contrast radicals and revolutionaries, today it is typically supposed ‘radicals’ who are at the forefront of challenging the doctrines first formulated by the eighteenth century *philosophes*, with many conservatives in turn attacking these critics. Indeed, as has been documented in previous chapters, many contemporary conservatives evidently regard themselves as upholders of the values of reason, objectivity and universality.

What will be valuable to consider next therefore is the extent to which conservatives might rather accept and adapt to current ideological developments; in other words, draw upon their own heritage of anti-Enlightenment thinking to create an *au courant* sceptical philosophy of their own. In terms of this, it is interesting to note that the only contemporary ideology to receive widespread approbation from conservatives is communitarianism, as discussed in Chapter 3. Yet in fact, many of the ideologies of conservatives’ culture war opponents may be found to share much more with conservatism than most conservatives appear to recognize. Whilst it would be highly illuminating to consider any number of these – for example, examination of the shared intellectual ground between conservatives and feminists would likely generate many revealing insights (as well no doubt as vehement revulsion from both parties) – one in particular will be focused upon: postmodernism.

The particular value in considering postmodernism is that first, postmodern theories are perceived by many conservatives to underpin the whole range of woeful contemporary cultural and political trends and second, especially interesting possibilities exist in terms of a correspondence with a sceptical conservatism. Indeed, consideration will be given below to whether some form of 'postmodern conservatism' may not be the oxymoronic notion it may at first sight appear.

The (Anti-Essentialist) Essence of Postmodernism

One major difficulty for this chapter is the fact that, as Joe Doherty observes, 'the link between postmodernism and the political right is largely one of implication rather than demonstrable celebration and adoption'.¹ As will be seen, there are conservatives more ready to recognize this link than others, yet Doherty's point is nonetheless largely correct. This being the case, the aim of this chapter will be as much to draw out implications as to identify explicit avowals.

To begin however, it is obviously necessary to offer some account of what is to be understood by a postmodern perspective. Postmodernism is of course a notoriously difficult perspective to characterize, with a particular obstacle presented by the fact that little consensus exists even as to which thinkers ought to be identified with a postmodern viewpoint. Certainly, those most frequently deemed its key exponents – such as Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard possess many evident differences. To add but further complication, the existence of a wide variety of related and/or competing terms, from poststructuralism to postmaterialism, makes any easy identification of a single doctrine even more problematic. Indeed, with the proliferation of terms littering the 'post-' conceptual landscape having come to include post-postmodernism, mapping a certain path across this terrain is clearly a far from straightforward task.

¹ J. Doherty (1992) 'Postmodern Politics', in J. Doherty, E. Graham and M. Malek (eds) *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (London: Macmillan), p. 204.

Nonetheless, whilst bearing these caveats in mind it is possible to identify a cluster of broad notions embraced by writers whose thought is typically considered postmodern. Upon this basis, one of the most useful encapsulations of the postmodern position remains that provided by Lyotard, in conceiving of it as signifying an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'.² In other words, a postmodern stance is one of scepticism towards those perspectives, which attempt a total understanding of society, derived from the aspirations of the Enlightenment and founded upon beliefs in objectivity, rationality and universality. Rejecting the ambitions of such hubristic ideologies, the postmodern concern is instead with the 'little narrative', emphasizing rather relativity, indeterminacy and contingency.³ The very idea that phenomena possess determinate essences must therefore be abandoned, with conventional epistemological assumptions (principally that an objective vantage point for determining truth regarding the real world is attainable) also to be discarded. Thus, with no objective reality to be grasped, attention must instead focus upon the 'flexible networks of language games' which embody individuals' subjective representations of the world.⁴

As a consequence, postmodernists' intellectual programmes are characterized by projects of anti-foundationalism, deconstruction and decentring subjectivity. Whilst not all thinkers commonly assigned the postmodern label agree with every idea or practice that may shelter beneath a postmodern umbrella, the themes briefly outlined above are recurring ones throughout postmodernist writings, relating to a core rejection of the precepts of Enlightenment rationalism. Moreover, although there are obviously many other facets to postmodern writings, in terms of a basic orientation much is evidently shared with the long-standing repudiations of rationalism articulated by conservatives.

Nonetheless, what is also very clear is that few conservatives willingly recognize this. Thus before considering the potential that exists for conservative congeniality towards a postmodern perspective, it will be helpful first to examine in greater detail conservatism's more well-known 'anti-anti-rationalist' face.

² J. Lyotard (1984) *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. xxiv.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

It is in fact possible to discern a long history of conservative engagement with what have become known as specifically postmodern conceits. Indeed, Robert Devigne suggests that modern conservatism may be understood precisely in terms of responding to the challenge of postmodernism. Thus the two figures he identifies as providing the most important intellectual inspiration for modern British and American conservative thinking – Michael Oakeshott and Leo Strauss – were, he argues, led ‘to anticipate and fear postmodernism long before it became a fashionable concept in the academy’.⁵

Unfortunately, Devigne offers little in the way of either extended or in-depth discussion of postmodernism – beyond the idea of a disintegration of shared norms and practices – and nor is any consideration given to the thought of specific postmodern writers. Nonetheless, although much of his argument in regard to this issue thus remains merely implicit, his basic thesis has much in it to provoke fruitful thought. In particular, Strauss’s writings clearly represent the obvious starting point for understanding American conservatives’ attitudes towards postmodernism.

Strauss’s position may thus readily be taken to represent an implicit rejoinder to postmodern contentions, one of his prime interests being to counter the arguments of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, key intellectual antecedents for many postmodernists. This rejoinder centres upon a number of commitments: to objectivity and universality; to reason as the source of knowledge; to the possibility of trans-historical knowledge; to moral and political determinacy; and to the superiority of a particular (Western) intellectual tradition.⁶ Equally, whereas philosophy itself is frequently subjected to a form of decentring by postmodernists, for Strauss the philosopher is deemed to possess a highly privileged status in relation to knowledge. As seen in Chapter 4, Strauss’s preference is for a return to a pre-modern understanding of the nature of political philosophy, specifically the classical conception of natural law.

Yet a further important analysis to consider here is that presented by Daniel Bell, of significance especially because he attends to postmodernism itself as a phenomenon.

⁵ R. Devigne (1994) *Recasting Conservatism: Oakeshott, Strauss, and the Response to Postmodernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. xi.

⁶ L. Strauss (1953) *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

According to Bell, postmodernism should be viewed as a product of the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s.⁷ At the same time however, it also represents a continuation of the basic thrust of modernism. Modernism, on Bell's account, is a particular cultural sensibility, a refusal to accept limits coupled with a continuous thirsting for change. Reaching its apogee in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, the spirit of modernism is what is held responsible for subverting the traditional bourgeois moral and social values underpinning capitalism. Whilst seeing no radical disjuncture between modernity and postmodernity, the distinctiveness of postmodernism for Bell lies in the fact that it carries the anti-traditionalist project of modernism to much further extremes. Whereas the modernist temper was confined largely to the spheres of art and imagination, the postmodern seeks to challenge order and morality in every arena of social life. Similarly, whereas modernism was largely the preserve of a cultured elite, postmodernism – in disdaining all boundaries – is implicated in the development of a widespread cultural (or rather countercultural) movement.

Considering these two perspectives it is possible to distinguish two different basic attitudes amongst conservatives. In particular, this is a distinction suggested by Jurgen Habermas, who distinguishes between the position of 'old conservatives' such as Strauss and that of neoconservatives such as Bell. Whereas the former demand a wholehearted rejection of the modern world, recommending 'a withdrawal to a position *anterior* to modernity', the latter by contrast accept many of its features (such as the developments of modern science) and instead recommend 'a politics of defusing the explosive content of cultural modernity'.⁸ In other words, whilst old conservatives may prefer some form of rolling back of modernity, neoconservatives seek rather to excise the cancerous elements within it.

However, whilst Habermas's argument indicates a clear truth about the different attitudes held by conservatives towards the modern world – and not just the two groups he discusses – it is necessary to signal a note of caution in terms of what these

⁷ D. Bell (1978) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 46-54.

⁸ J. Habermas (1985) 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', in H. Foster (ed.) *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press), p. 14.

differences actually amount to in practice. That is, as discussed in Chapter 4, despite Bell's rejection of Straussianism a great deal of common ground is apparent between neoconservatives and Straussians, as they frequently advocate very similar agendas on educational and moral matters. Indeed, as Thomas Fleming observes, Habermas displays an evident over-reliance on Bell in his characterization of neoconservatism, Bell being in a number of respects atypical (not least in his anti-Straussianism).⁹ Equally, later Straussians clearly do not urge the same style of anti-modernism as may be attributed to Strauss, commonly invoking the idea of a modern Republican tradition – believed of course to be of key inspiration to the founders of the American Republic – as offering the basis for a similar binding social philosophy that Strauss perceived in classical thought.¹⁰

A further issue nonetheless usefully raised by Habermas's analysis is the difficulty in separating out the notions of modernity and postmodernity. As will be discussed more fully below, for Habermas conservatives are believed to share the same basic orientation towards modernity as postmodernists. One obvious problem with this contention is that it does not take seriously conservatives own rejections of postmodernism: for example, Bell for one clearly believes that postmodernists are guilty of similar sins as modernists, a view with which Strauss would likely concur. Whilst it is not possible here to resolve the various debates surrounding the meanings of either modernism or postmodernism, it is at this stage possible to highlight the fact that how these are understood is often largely to suit the agendas of those who define them. In particular, to suggest guilt by association: of postmodernists with modernists for Bell, and postmodernists with conservatives for Habermas.

As also examined in Chapter 4, a particular salience has been acquired by the arguments of both Straussians and neoconservatives in the context of culture war conflict. Indeed, both Strauss's and Bell's contributions to debates around relativism and postmodernism may be said to have been relatively ignored, at least by non-

⁹ T. Fleming (1991) 'Review of Jurgen Habermas's *The New Conservatism*', *Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3. Bell's differences with other neoconservatives are evidenced by his self-proclaimed break with neoconservatism in resigning as co-editor of neoconservative journal the *Public Interest*. See D. Bell (1985) 'The Revolt Against Modernity', *Public Interest*, No. 81.

¹⁰ For example, T. L. Pangle (1988) *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: Chicago

conservatives, until the outbreak of these more recent cultural hostilities.¹¹ It is worth therefore considering some of these more specifically in terms of their arguments regarding postmodernism.

As a preliminary, it is necessary to point out two general problems with conservative accounts. First is the fact that, as with Bell, postmodernism is typically presented as inextricably linked to the counterculture of the 1960s. For example, Irving Kristol equates the two thus: 'The counterculture is "postmodernist".'¹² (Although in the following sentence, Kristol also employs the contradictory simile of postmodernism as the counterculture's 'younger twin'.) Whilst this suggestion clearly suits conservatives' purposes in demonizing postmodernism, it also forecloses more interesting debate over the question of its origins.

Second, and most problematic, is the tendency even in book-length treatments to effect a largely uncritical lumping together of different thinkers, as all equally guilty of exactly the same offences. That is, postmodernism frequently figures as a single undifferentiated bogeyman. For example, Dinesh D'Souza lists the various 'esoteric' names today's 'fashionable scholars' adopt – 'deconstructionists, postmodernists, structuralists, poststructuralists, reader-response theorists' – with not a word as to what may distinguish them.¹³ His claim that they are all embarked upon a shared intellectual enterprise may have some validity, but in the absence of any more nuanced discussion or evident close reading of these fashionable scholars' writings, such conservatives' pretensions to being defenders of high intellectual standards may again seem open to question.

With these problems noted, a number of common themes are apparent in contemporary conservatives' engagements with postmodernism. Many of these are

University Press). See also Devigne (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 49-53.

¹¹ As one disciple of Strauss suggests, a 1988 article by Richard Rorty (R. Rorty (1988) 'That Old-Time Philosophy', *New Republic*, 4 April) may well represent 'the first extended notice that a prominent American philosophy professor has taken of Strauss', H. Mansfield, Jr., (1988) 'Democracy and the Great Books', *New Republic*, 4 April, p. 34. On the relative neglect of Bell see B. Turner (1990) 'Introduction', in B. Turner (ed.) *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (London: Sage), p. 2.

¹² I. Kristol (1994) 'Countercultures', *Commentary*, Vol. 98, No. 6, p. 35.

¹³ D. D'Souza (1991) *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press), p. 157.

once more suggested by Bloom. For example, 'deconstructionism' is held by Bloom to represent:

the last, predictable, stage in the suppression of reason and the denial of the possibility of truth in the name of philosophy. The interpreter's creative activity is more important than the text; there is no text, only interpretation. Thus the one thing most necessary for us, the knowledge of what these texts have to tell us, is turned over to the subjective, creative selves of these interpreters, who say that there is both no text and no reality to which the texts refers. A cheapened interpretation of Nietzsche liberates us from the objective imperatives of the texts that might have liberated us from our increasingly low and narrow horizon.¹⁴

Postmodernism therefore undermines the very basis of determinate textual analysis, and is suppressive of both truth and reason. Similarly, as George Will argues, the ascendance of postmodern theories may be held to imply 'the displacement of books and all they embody – a culture of reason and persuasion – by politics'.¹⁵ Indeed, postmodern ideas:

subvert our civilization by denying that truth is found by conscientious attempts accurately to portray a reality that exists independently of our perceptions or attitudes ... Once that foundation of realism is denied, the foundation of a society based on persuasion crumbles. It crumbles because all arguments ... become arguments about the characteristics of the person presenting a thought, not about the thought.¹⁶

Will's suggestion that postmodernism poses a threat to the very foundations of civilization indicates well how many conservatives view it as of danger not only to standards within the sphere of education, but as a threat to order and cohesion throughout society. Thus postmodernism is believed to have spread far beyond the walls of the academy. For example, Lynne Cheney believes that the 'progress of postmodernism can be seen in a range of institutions, from museums, to cinema, and

¹⁴ A. Bloom (1987) *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 379.

¹⁵ G. F. Will (1994) *The Leveling Wind* (New York: Viking), p. 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

even including the practice of therapy'.¹⁷ As seen in Chapter 2, one particular concern of American conservatives in the spread of the idea that texts should be interpreted subjectively is in the area of judicial interpretation of the constitution.

Indeed, most of the concerns identified in previous chapters, from relativism to identity politics, are believed by many conservatives to be undergirded by postmodern ideas.¹⁸ What is also once more apparent is that it is more than simply the intellectual merits of postmodernists' arguments that inspire conservative odium. D' Souza therefore probably speaks for many conservatives in arguing that it is in fact possible to 'overstate the intrinsic importance of the new scholarship'; after all, 'strange and abstruse' theories have always been popular with intellectuals.¹⁹ What is distinctive, and thus most worrying, about the theories of today's fashionable scholars is 'rather ... the extent to which they serve the ends of a political movement'.

Again it is worth noting the parallel arguments to be found amongst British writers. For example, one article entitled 'The Virus of Evil in Culture' (bearing a sub-heading 'David Holbrook examines the horrors of post-modernism', employing language more usually reserved for the reporting of wars and dictatorships) informs us that thanks to postmodernism our culture has been infected with 'the virus of schizoid moral inversion, and it threatens to erode our civilisation'; that today's literature students are introduced to 'works that offer only depravity and corruption'; and that indeed our whole culture is one in which 'we are powerfully under the influence of those who have made a pact with the devil'.²⁰

Unsurprisingly, Roger Scruton shares a similar perspective. Like Bell, Scruton sees a definite continuity between postmodernism and modernism: 'I suspect that the postmodernizers are really only modernizers in another guise.'²¹ For Scruton as well, it

¹⁷ L. Cheney (1995) *Telling the Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 143.

¹⁸ See K. Windschuttle (1997) 'Absolutely Relative', *National Review*, 15 September; E. Christian Kopff (1996) 'Postmodernism, Theory, and the End of the Humanities', *Chronicles*, Vol. 20, No. 1; J. O'Sullivan (1996) 'Conservatism and Cultural Identity', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), pp. 23-43.

¹⁹ D'Souza (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 182.

²⁰ D. Holbrook (1994) 'The Virus of Evil in Culture', *Salisbury Review*, September, pp. 11, 13.

²¹ R. Scruton (1992) 'In Inverted Commas', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 December, p. 3.

is the threat to order and tradition which is the menace posed by both: the very 'ruin of meaning ... lies on the agenda of those modernists and post-modernists, from Sartre to Rorty, whose world is bereft of all authority.'²² Indeed, Scruton too appears to believe that postmodernists have entered into a Faustian pact, a discussion of deconstruction being placed at the end of a chapter entitled 'The Devil'.²³

Whose Enlightenment Is It?

In light of these frequently scathing attacks, it seems appropriate to raise the question of just where such conservatives ought to be placed in any ideological schema. In particular, it is pertinent to ask whether conservative critics of postmodernism should thus be seen as defenders of Enlightenment principles.

Of course, one way in which conservatives may obviate the paradox of seeming to be upholding Enlightenment ideals in attacking postmodernism is implied in the suggestion – by those such as Bell and Scruton – of a clear kinship between modernism and postmodernism. Thus by calling down a plague on both the modernist's and postmodernist's houses, the latter may be dismissed as party to precisely the same faulty mode of thinking conservatives have always sought to expose.

One problem with this move is that it may easily lead to confused, if not outright contradictory, stances being adopted. For example, Bell criticizes the modernist sensibility on the basis that 'it draws from the French Revolution and the idea that men, by their own efforts, should – and can – tear up society by the roots and remake it by design', and therefore for its commitment to the 'utopia of the Enlightenment'.²⁴ However, at the same time he seeks to denounce both modernists and postmodernists for their surrender to nihilism and the dictates of immediate impulses, together with the

²² R. Scruton (1994) *Modern Philosophy* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), p. 477.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 458-79.

²⁴ Bell (1985), *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4.

placing of a premium upon 'pre-rational spontaneity'.²⁵ Yet it is hard to see how conservatives can credibly criticize their enemies for being, seemingly simultaneously, Enlightenment-inspired utopians and nihilists swayed by non-rational imperatives.

Similarly, an over-emphasis on the continuity between modernism and postmodernism may offer a wholly limited basis for understanding what is distinctive about postmodern doctrines, a problem for conservatives themselves in that this thereby blunts the force of their attacks upon contemporary adversaries. However, other conservatives do argue that postmodernists are not the same as their older enemies of the Left. Thus as Joel Schwartz pointedly writes:

The irrationalist thinking that appeals to today's academic left ... treats the ideas of universality, truth, and human excellence as so many bad jokes. Remarkably, the irrationalist left takes pride in denying to all mankind what an earlier left had criticized society for denying only to the poor.²⁶

Yet in that this assessment is offered by way of criticism, it is apparent that many conservatives today view themselves as defenders of principles and ideals which would once have been most frequently articulated by their opponents. Indeed, as one commentator noting the general decline of universalist thinking bluntly observes: 'only a few cranky groups of the right are trying to make us remember the Enlightenment and Hegel.'²⁷

Bloom, for example, attempts to do just this, lamenting the fact that: 'As Hegel was said to have died in Germany in 1933, Enlightenment in America came close to breathing its last during the sixties.'²⁸ Similarly, Cheney wishes to resist the attack upon those principles 'associated with the United States and its Western heritage, including, in the last instance, the Enlightenment legacy of scientific thought'.²⁹ In the

²⁵ Bell (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 143.

²⁶ J. Schwartz (1990) 'Antihumanism in the Humanities', *Public Interest*, No. 99, p. 30.

²⁷ A. Lingis (1994) 'Some Questions About Lyotard's Postmodern Legitimation Narrative', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1/2, p. 10.

²⁸ Bloom (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 314.

²⁹ Cheney (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

same vein, Will proudly asserts that ‘Our nation is, I passionately believe, the finest organized expression of the Western rationalist tradition.’³⁰

Moreover, invocations of objectivity and rationality can be found throughout contemporary conservative writings, beyond discussions directly relating to postmodernism. Most obvious perhaps, libertarians’ commitment to the free market is of course predicated upon notions of progress, universality and rational behaviour. There is at least some truth therefore in John Gray’s judgement that ‘market fundamentalism, is, like Marxism, a variation on the Enlightenment project’.³¹ Indeed, as seen especially in the last chapter, it is Gray’s identification of free market conservatism as one of the most redoubtable remaining strongholds of Enlightenment principles which accounts for its earning so much of his wrath. Equally, the contention of paleoconservatives like Fleming that the globalist outlook of mainstream American conservatives places them outside the true conservative tradition – although clearly a highly partisan representation – is nonetheless accurate in identifying a strongly universalistic quality to many American conservatives’ perspectives.

However, similar commitments are to be found amongst a wide variety of conservatives, and in relation to a whole range of concerns. This may be illustrated by considering one British collection of articles, which seeks to highlight the sentimental and irrational nature of all manner of contemporary social, medical and moral panics, from health scares to environmental alarms.³² Typical in tone is an article by Anthony O’Hear in which, reacting to the outpourings of grief prompted by the death of Princess Diana, he expresses disdain for the fact that she stood for ‘the elevation of feeling, image and spontaneity over reason, reality and restraint’.³³

Yet one of the most revealing of contemporary writings is a book review by Roger Kimball, who is moved to ask in its title, ‘Whose Enlightenment Is It?’ According to Kimball, although the book’s author avows a left-wing standpoint, in attempting to

³⁰ Will (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 139.

³¹ J. Gray (1995) *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge), p. 100.

³² D. Anderson and P. Mullen (eds) (1998) *Faking It: The Sentimentalisation of Modern Society* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

³³ A. O’Hear (1998) ‘Diana, Queen of Hearts’, in *ibid.*, p. 184.

uphold the ideal of a universal common humanity and attacking identity politics and multiculturalism he sounds as if he has 'turned over a new, conservative leaf'.³⁴ It is, Kimball suggests, simply not possible both to claim left-wing credentials and disassociate oneself from such postmodern ideas. In other words, defending Enlightenment ideals can today seem readily presentable as all but wholly the prerogative of conservatives.

Towards a Postmodern Conservatism?

With many conservatives appearing to have cast themselves as last guardians of the rationalist tradition, it seems appropriate to return to the alternative suggestion mooted at the outset and consider what potential there might be for conservatives to treat postmodernists not as mortal enemies but valuable allies.

Certainly, a number of clear structural parallels between postmodernist and conservative thought may be discerned. Probably the most well known critic to note these is of course Habermas, who highlights the point that in blaming an adversary culture for the ills of the economy and polity, neoconservatives such as Bell reveal a number of shared assumptions with postmodernists as regards the nature of social causation.³⁵ That is, by identifying factors such as moral laxity as responsible for undermining economic and political stability, many conservatives implicitly agree with a postmodern idealism that believes explanation for economic and political developments is to be found in the domain of culture. Upon this basis many conservative contributions to the present culture wars might well be suggested to represent simply the flip sides of those of their postmodern opponents. For example, fearful conservative presentiments of apocalyptic nihilism might be argued to represent

³⁴ R. Kimball (1996) 'Whose Enlightenment Is It?: Review of Todd Gitlin's *The Twilight of Common Dreams*', *New Criterion*, April, p. 6.

³⁵ Habermas (1985), *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8, 13-15.

merely the converse of those postmodernist accounts that rather revel in its possibilities.³⁶

Furthermore, many conservatives often regard themselves as engaged in a largely 'deconstructive' mission: thus Maurice Cowling believes it to be 'an unavoidable fact that a Conservative intellectuality ought to be negative, sceptical and intolerant'.³⁷ Perhaps few postmodernists would agree with the last of these three aspirations, but both may be recognized as frequently motivated more by a desire to gainsay opponents' ideas and programmes than to offer 'constructive' prescriptions of their own.

Of course however, structural congruities do not in themselves point to any necessary similarity in terms of outlook. Yet beyond these formal parallels the conservative tradition may be argued to share more substantive philosophical ground with postmodernism. As noted earlier, for Habermas this shared perspective is derived from a common spirit of anti-modernism: thus thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida are given the label 'young conservatives' to indicate their adoption of a similar scepticism towards modernity as that of old and neo-conservatives.

To assess whether this attribution is justified, it is necessary to attempt to identify the more concrete ways in which a conservative perspective may be in accord with that of postmodernists. The obvious place to begin is of course with Burke, whose fulminations against the rationalistic modes of thought of Enlightenment thinkers have informed the arguments of generations of subsequent conservatives. It would undoubtedly be a misguided exercise simply to measure Burke against some yardstick of postmodern criteria – and worse to attempt to pin upon him any postmodern label – thus the aim here must be purely to draw out possible points of contact between a Burkean and postmodern perspective.

Most clearly, Burke offered a similarly modest assessment as that of postmodernists of the faith that should be placed in individuals' reasoning capacities. In contrast to the perceived reliance of Enlightenment thinkers upon abstract modes of thought – their

³⁶ Compare M. Novak (1995) *Awaking from Nihilism* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit) with J. Baudrillard (1984) 'On Nihilism', *On the Beach*, No. 6 (Spring).

³⁷ M. Cowling (1997) *A Conservative Future* (London: Politeia), p. 14.

folly compounded by imagining that the fruits of reason might allow the radical reshaping of society – Burke therefore acclaimed that:

in this enlightened age I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings; that instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree ... and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them.³⁸

The prejudices Burke cherishes are thus those generated by man's non-rational faculties, of common sense and intuition, with the historical accumulation of experientially-derived wisdom (believed to be embodied in traditions and established institutions) argued to provide a far surer guide to action than any presumptuous belief in the powers of reason. Similarly, rather than looking to any supposedly universal principles, men should look to the particular – the community – as shaping their values and identities.

Whilst the language employed may therefore be very different – for example, few postmodernists would offer explicit affirmation of prejudice – a number of areas of agreement may nonetheless be recognized between a Burkean and postmodernist stance: a scepticism towards rationalistic modes of thought; a distaste for the ambitions of hubristic ideologies; an emphasis upon the particular and the contingent; and the prizing of discrete traditions and communities.

Yet potentially as well, Burke's position may be found to possess similar (though far more rarely championed) relativistic implications. Thus as one commentator aptly observes: 'One of the ironies of history is that the growth of relativism, to which the right so vehemently objects, has as its intellectual origins the conservative reaction to the Enlightenment.'³⁹ That is, if beliefs and identity are to be derived not from any universal grounding, but formed in the particular of specific communities, a relativistically historicized view of these might be a logically irresistible conclusion. Indeed, with the 'prejudices' to be found within one society possessing no

³⁸ E. Burke (1968) *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin Books), p. 183.

³⁹ F. Furedi (1992) *Mythical Past, Elusive Future* (London: Pluto Press), p. 120.

foundationally justifiable compulsion for any other, the Burkean conservative might be felt to possess little basis for passing judgement upon cultural differences. Moreover, even reality itself might slip through a tradition-oriented conservative's fingers as much as those of postmodernists: with no standpoint of universal reason outside of embedded traditions available, objective reality may be as inaccessible to the conservative as to the postmodernist trapped within the subjectivity of discourse.

These implications of course apply as much to many contemporary conservatives' arguments as to Burke's, especially in light of conservatives' revived interest in communitarian themes. For example, David Willetts is aware of this possibility, noting that a potential danger of a community-centred perspective is that 'We lose all ability to judge anything.'⁴⁰ Whilst few conservatives (and certainly not Burke) ever argue to the extremes of either ethical or epistemological relativism, it is nonetheless not surprising to find Burke treated by a resolute defender of universal grounding and judgement like Strauss as at least implicated – for his downgrading of the role of reason and for supposedly equating the good with the existing – in the descent of modern thought into relativistic ruin.⁴¹

Yet further substantive commonalities can be found with many other elements of conservative thinking, and by no means solely with Burkean varieties. Probably the clearest expression of a sharing of perspectives is the similar attitude of both postmodernists and all varieties of conservative towards what are decried as totalizing or totalitarian ideologies. In terms of this, an individualistic libertarianism may come very close to a postmodern preference for a dispersed and fragmented social philosophy. Moreover, Eric Hobsbawm's suggestion that both free market liberalism and postmodernism represent attempts to 'sidestep the problem of judgment and values altogether' by emphasizing the subjective perspective of the individual, highlights the possibility that the former may equally be unable to avoid the descent into relativism.⁴²

Whilst this argument has obvious weaknesses – to note again, few free market thinkers have ever advocated a purely individualist philosophy – nonetheless, there is at least a

⁴⁰ D. Willetts (1992) *Modern Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 74.

⁴¹ Strauss (1953), *op. cit.*, pp. 312-23.

⁴² E. Hobsbawm (1994) *The Age of Extremes* (London: Penguin Books), p. 339.

tension for economic liberals in ascribing to either values or identity any straightforward objective status.

Similarly, despite the widespread rejection of identity politics by conservatives, the notion of difference has of course long played a part in their own discourses of identity, not least in terms of race. Indeed, the very term difference was once far more a part of the vocabulary of the Right than of the Left. Thus Michael Lind's speculation as to the possibility of a 'multiculturalism of the right', based upon the ready acknowledgement of racial differences, draws attention to an important truth regarding conservatives' intellectual heritage.⁴³ Of course – as Lind recognizes – conservatives today are typically highly circumspect about forwarding arguments centred upon ideas of racial difference, especially biological ones. Even so, they do remain a thread of conservative argument, undoubtedly best exemplified by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's efforts to provide a scientific rationale for the differentiation of racial groups, based upon purported differences in intelligence.⁴⁴ Interestingly therefore, although Murray and Herrnstein reject multiculturalism, sympathy is expressed for the idea of 'ethnocentrism', implying similar assumptions regarding both the significance and ineradicability of differences between ethnic groups.⁴⁵

Indeed, even amongst postmodernism's strongest critics similarities may be identified. For example, Scruton – like many traditionalist conservatives – shares with postmodernists a distrust of science and ideas of progress, disdains rationalistic ideologies and values the particular over the universal.⁴⁶ Yet what makes Scruton a particularly worthwhile writer to consider is that he shares many of the fundamental assumptions underpinning these beliefs. For instance, Scruton urges his own form of decentring, arguing that the first person perspective of liberalism, with its presumptions of an autonomous rational self, is deficient; rather, it must be supplemented with the

⁴³ M. Lind (1995) *The Next American Nation* (New York: Free Press), p. 2.

⁴⁴ C. Murray and R. J. Herrnstein (1994a) *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press).

⁴⁵ C. Murray and R. J. Herrnstein (1994b) 'Race, Genes and IQ: An Apologia', *New Republic*, 31 October, p. 37.

⁴⁶ R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), *passim*.

standpoint of the other, the third person perspective.⁴⁷ Moreover, he also believes in the priority of appearance – that the ‘*reality* of politics is not to be found outside the motives of those who engage in it’ – in contrast to the claims of ideologies like Marxism about underlying essences.⁴⁸ The focus for understanding should therefore be the ‘surface’ of society, the realm of the cultural, rather than its supposed material foundations. Like the postmodernist, he is thus drawn to the insights offered by the philosophy of language. Finally, he also affirms a belief in social constructionism: ‘The human world is a social world, and socially constructed.’⁴⁹

Upon this basis, it is indeed quite possible to assess Scruton’s own philosophy as open to the charge of relativism.⁵⁰ Most significant however, Scruton’s own comments on postmodernism indicate an awareness that at least aspects of a postmodern standpoint may be more agreeable to a conservative than he would likely wish to allow. For example, he confesses agreement with Lyotard’s contention that Enlightenment-inspired metanarratives are defunct.⁵¹ Furthermore, despite his general equation of modernism and postmodernism, he is by no means unaware of the similarities between the postmodernist and conservative rejection of the former. Thus, he argues, the voices of the ‘few noble spirits’ – such as Burke, de Maistre and Eliot – that over the centuries have resisted modernity, have tended to be drowned out by those urging that the processes of modernisation are universal and inexorable. However:

If the announcement of a postmodern condition signals that this view has at last proved to be wrong, and that the world is slowing down or stopping – maybe even going into reverse – then the little wisdom that has been uttered over the last four hundred years will not have been in vain.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-203.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ Scruton (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 495.

⁵⁰ See P. Ireland (1995) ‘Reflections on a Rampage Through the Barriers of Shame: Law, Community and the New Conservatism’, *Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 192.

⁵¹ Scruton (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Of course, such an allowance represents only the faintest and most begrudging of endorsements. Moreover, Scruton makes certain that there be no confusion between his own and a postmodern position – for example, Lyotard is still chastised, for failing to acknowledge Burke and for displaying a ‘sneaking attachment’ to the old metanarratives.

With even such reluctant recognitions of any kinship with postmodernism few and far between amongst conservatives, it is unsurprising to find the actual endorsement of postmodern doctrines all but non-existent. Yet two writers to present relatively sympathetic treatments of postmodernism worth examining are John Gray and Noël O’Sullivan. In doing so, both draw upon an Oakeshottian understanding of the nature of politics and philosophy. It is useful therefore to return to the argument forwarded by Devigne. Thus whilst his attribution of a sense of fearful anticipation of postmodernism may be relatively straightforward in relation to Strauss, in Oakeshott’s case this is a much more difficult argument to sustain, since major target of Oakeshott’s disfavour was precisely the follies of rationalism.⁵²

Of particular significance is the fact that Oakeshott is one of the few conservatives to be given by postmodernists either attention or respect. For example, Richard Rorty, whilst suspicious of the elitist implications of Strauss’s thought, writes favourably on Oakeshott’s anti-rationalism.⁵³ Moreover, he draws upon Oakeshott’s understanding of a conversation in developing his own understanding of philosophy; that is, Oakeshott’s suggestion that in a conversation ‘there is no “truth” to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought’.⁵⁴ What Rorty thus argues is that philosophy should be regarded as simply one form of ‘conversation’ amongst many, possessing no privileged status as guarantor of the foundations of knowledge.

Whilst it may be as erroneous directly to impute postmodern inclinations to Oakeshott as to Burke, nonetheless a number of facets of Oakeshott’s writings may readily be

⁵² Which is not to suggest that Devigne is not well aware of the relevant differences between Strauss and Oakeshott – Devigne (1994), *op. cit.*, pp. 190-3.

⁵³ On Strauss see Rorty (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 28; on Oakeshott see R. Rorty (1980) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), pp. 389-94 and R. Rorty (1989) *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 57-60.

⁵⁴ M. Oakeshott (1962) *Rationalism in Politics* (London: Methuen), p. 198.

conceived as providing resources for the fashioning of a postmodern doctrine. For example, an idealist rejection of a correspondence theory of truth may be found in his earliest writings.⁵⁵ Similarly, as with Burke, a preference for knowledge of a practical nature is contrasted with the technical knowledge lamentably favoured by rationalists.⁵⁶ Practical knowledge is thus that which is acquired through experience rather than abstract reflection, from the concrete traditions of belief and behaviour in which people exist.

Politics therefore, 'is not the science of setting up a permanently impregnable society, it is the art of knowing where to go next in the explanation of an already existing traditional kind of society'.⁵⁷ Moreover, unlike Strauss, Oakeshott does not hold Hobbes responsible for the degradation of modern thought, instead approving of the fact that 'His scepticism about the power of reasoning ... separates him from the rationalist dictators of his or any age.'⁵⁸ It is in part indeed by drawing upon Hobbes that Oakeshott develops his preference for a model of civil association constituted by a framework of non-instrumental rules.

Turning to Gray, whilst he has of course adopted a number of intellectual stances over the years, for a time he sought to develop a 'post-modern liberal conservatism' consciously modelled on Rorty's historicist conception of a postmodern bourgeois liberalism, as a philosophy appropriate to the needs of an increasingly fragmented society.⁵⁹ Having come to regard the possibility of a universally valid, rationally grounded liberalism to be a chimera – the hubris of such ambitions having been exposed by the failures both of communism and the New Right – Gray nonetheless urges that as a historical practice liberalism may still be defended, if understood as a time-bound, specifically Western cultural artefact. By viewing it in this way, we thus

⁵⁵ M. Oakeshott (1978) *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁵⁶ Oakeshott (1962), *op. cit.*, pp. 7-13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁸ M. Oakeshott (1975) *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 63.

⁵⁹ J. Gray (1993) *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (London: Routledge), p. viii.

'initiate a form of post-modern individualism that is fully conscious of its own historical particularity'.⁶⁰

The place of conservatism in this postmodern philosophy derives from its particular awareness of the local character of our experience of individualism, and operates to rein in liberalism's overweening tendencies. Its value therefore, is in 'correcting the illusion that we are, or can ever be, dispossessed or unencumbered selves, free-floating sovereign subjects, distanced from all social convention and heirs to no tradition'. Whilst the possibility of a traditionalist conservatism by itself being relevant to our postmodern world is discounted – Gray criticizing conservatives such as Scruton for demanding too substantive a notion of what a common culture ought to be like in today's pluralistic times – if conjoined with a duly restrained liberalism it may therefore be conceived of as a necessary element in the constitution of a postmodern philosophy.⁶¹ Moreover, the set of political arrangements Gray believes most appropriate to this circumscribed liberalism are those of the conception of civil society outlined by Oakeshott (and derived from Hobbes). Thus, 'the task of the state is to keep in good repair what Oakeshott calls civil association – that structure of law in which, having no purpose in common, practitioners of different traditions may coexist in peace'.⁶²

O'Sullivan presents a similar understanding to Gray's. However, the amenability of a conservative perspective to postmodernism may be traced back much earlier. Thus O'Sullivan's very definition of conservatism, as a philosophy of imperfection committed to the defence of 'a limited style of politics', clearly suggests this possibility.⁶³ Moreover, in his analysis of the New Right, an Oakeshottian understanding of 'the role of government as the maker and custodian of non-instrumental law' is that which he finds to be the most valuable of its theoretical components.⁶⁴ When attention is paid to postmodernism itself therefore, it is not so

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262. Even so, Gray's notion of a historicized individualism does share an intriguing amount with Scruton's conception of socialized individuality – cf. Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 192-203.

⁶² Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 265. See also pp. 3-17, 40-6.

⁶³ N. O'Sullivan (1976), *Conservatism* (London: J. M. Dent), pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴ N. O'Sullivan (1986) 'Conservatism, the New Right and the Limited State', in J. Hayward and P.

surprising that O'Sullivan should argue that its expression of a 'comprehensive dissatisfaction with the western humanist tradition' makes it a perspective anyone interested in the defence of a limited style of politics ought to consider drawing upon.⁶⁵

In particular, O'Sullivan identifies three features within postmodernism's deconstructed notion of the self of value in the development of a 'philosophy of modesty'.⁶⁶ The modest nature of the postmodern self lies first, in its acceptance of a de-centred cosmic existence in which contingency is acknowledged as part of the natural order of life; second, in its rejection of the idea of absolute knowledge; and third, in its repudiation of Eurocentrism, disavowing the notion that Western values must possess a universal significance. Like Gray (and Rorty), O'Sullivan does not take any of this to mean a necessary abandonment of Western liberalism's values and institutions, but similarly wishes us to recognize their non-universal, foundation-less character.⁶⁷ A historicized view of the self is thus one, which 'acknowledges that the self in question is a specifically *Western* self, rather than man as such'. Explicitly following Gray, he too argues for a Hobbesian view of civil association, seeing in this model the best hope for peaceful coexistence in a world of postmodern pluralism.

However, following from the definition of conservatism O'Sullivan forwards, his argument implies (more than Gray's) that such a model is *the* conservative one. As noted in Chapter 3, for O'Sullivan the demands of conservatives such as Scruton for a common culture are believed not only to be misguided, but as going against the fundamental traditions of British conservatism. If this is the case, then perhaps all conservatives – or at least British ones – ought to find some virtue in a modest postmodern philosophy, not only for its own merits, but if they are not to stand in contradiction to the basic orientation of their own intellectual tradition.

Norton (eds) *The Political Science of British Politics* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books), p. 33.

⁶⁵ N. O'Sullivan (1993) 'Political Integration, the Limited State and the Philosophy of Postmodernism', *Political Studies*, Vol. 41, Special Issue, p. 22.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

The Conservative Condition

It is thus possible to see how conservatism may be construed both as antagonistic to and in propinquity with a postmodern creed. What remains therefore is to attempt to resolve this seeming contradiction.

First, it will be valuable to consider more closely Habermas's classification of postmodernists as conservatives. It is certainly not difficult to suggest ways in which postmodernism's claims may be argued to possess 'conservative' implications. For example, Bloom's suggestion that the outlook deconstruction consigns us to is of an 'increasingly low and narrow horizon', might well serve as a diagnosis of the potentially conservative consequences of a postmodern perspective as a whole, in its engendering of social and political fragmentation and its disallowance of any grounding for large-scale social change. Similarly, accepting postmodern contentions may also be 'conservative' in terms of a foreclosing of genuine intellectual debate, since with the abandonment of such notions as truth and objectivity it may be impossible to challenge beliefs – from whatever perspective – at any fundamental level, with all simply sheltered from critique within protective shells of relativistic indeterminacy.

Moreover, it is by no means impossible for postmodernists to draw similar political conclusions to conservatives. For example, Rorty expresses agreement with neoconservatives on a number of issues. Thus – writing in 1987 – he agrees with Bell that Soviet expansionism poses a serious threat to freedom and democracy and needs to be combated.⁶⁸ Without intending to score easy retrospective points against Rorty, his exaggerated assessment of this threat – 'it seems likely that the next century will see a steady expansion of Moscow's empire throughout the Southern Hemisphere' – can be traced to the sharing of a similar intellectual understanding. That is, the same inflated apprehension regarding 'totalitarian' ideologies.

Nonetheless, it probably remains inaccurate to describe postmodernists as being, in the sense Habermas intends, conservatives as such. It is not without value to note that few subscribers to postmodern ideas would self-apply a conservative label, even if

⁶⁸ R. Rorty (1987) 'Thugs and Theorists', *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 566-7.

rejecting conventional left-wing appellations. For example, Rorty – despite his agreements with Bell – professes to being ‘astonished, and alarmed’ at being associated with neoconservatives by critics such as Habermas.⁶⁹ Lyotard too reacts with great disdain to Habermas’s suggestion, subjecting it to a highly caustic rebuttal.⁷⁰ To its proponents at least, the postmodern turn is typically conceived of as a ‘progressive’ rather than a conservative one, in representing a challenge to established ideologies and politics.

Yet it is not necessary simply to accept postmodernists’ self-image to understand why assigning them a conservative label may be a mistake. One obvious issue concerns the question of lineage. That is, whilst conservatives may typically take too narrow a view of postmodernism’s origins, it is nonetheless correct to suggest that the adoption of postmodernism as a widely employed paradigm is traceable to issues which emerged from within the Left. Specifically, it may be attributed to a loss of faith in traditional left-wing ideas and programmes: from a sense of disillusionment following the failure of the 1968 student revolts, the later retreat of socialist movements and parties throughout the West, and the decline of Third World liberation movements. Most recently, the collapse of Soviet communism has further accelerated interest in postmodern themes, as part of the Left’s search for alternative agendas. One problem therefore in labelling postmodernists conservatives is that it mystifies postmodernists’ own genealogy.

Furthermore, most postmodernists do not, at least in theory, construe their ambitions in purely ‘conservative’ terms: that is, any task of deconstruction is frequently presented as simply the necessary prelude to some form of later reconstruction. That such claims may themselves be regarded with scepticism should not in itself detract from the fact that no simple equation can be made between postmodernists’ and conservatives’ goals. Indeed, as István Mészáros suggests, insofar as the practical implications of postmodernist thought are conservative, they are likely no more so than Habermas’s own.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

⁷⁰ Lyotard (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3.

⁷¹ I. Mészáros (1989) *Power and Ideology* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), pp. 42-3.

Yet perhaps most important, assigning the conservative label to postmodernists is highly problematic for then understanding why many conservatives are so hostile towards postmodernism. The following observation of Rorty's is to the point:

Habermas has said (in an interview) that he knows himself to be on the right track in his ethical universalism because that is the doctrine that brings the loudest squeals from the German political right ... I had taken for granted, on the basis of my (admittedly limited) experience with the American political right, that what made the right squeal was any *doubt* about ethical universalism, any suggestion of historicism ...⁷²

In other words, whilst 'anti-modernism' may be a shared theme of both postmodernist and conservative writings, emphasizing this commonality obscures the fact that many conservatives – including, to take those Habermas himself cites, Strauss and Bell – conceive the problem of modernity as representing precisely the *opposite* disorder to that typically suggested by postmodernists; that is, as entailing a disastrous collapse of belief in absolute, universal values, rather than any over-commitment to them.

There is thus good cause for circumspection in applying the conservative label too widely. Nonetheless, the above arguments do not of course explain why different conservatives may be read differently in terms of their relationships to a postmodern perspective. One way of explaining this may again be in terms of a split between British and American traditions; to return to Devigne's argument cited in Chapter 3, it may be argued that whereas American conservatives strongly believe in the maintenance of a substantive social and political unity – and for this reason reject postmodernists' assumptions – British conservatives are much more sceptical towards this aspiration, and thus in postmodernism much greater affinities may be seen. Indeed therefore, Habermas's likening of postmodernism to conservatism might be more convincing if he had cited British rather than American representatives of the latter.

In relation to the concerns of this chapter specifically, support for Devigne's distinction may once more be found. In particular, an Oakeshottian perspective may readily be conceived of as the preserve of British conservatives. For example, this is

evident from one bold expression of parochialism by Gordon Graham, who argues that Oakeshott's philosophy 'is a decidedly English doctrine with little appeal and no following in other countries ... [since] only English and hence British political institutions have ever been decent enough to allow a decent man to be conservative'.⁷³

Certainly at least, whilst Oakeshottian arguments have influenced a large number of British conservatives – including, as well as Gray and O'Sullivan, writers such as Cowling, Shirley Letwin and Kenneth Minogue – far fewer of their American counterparts have so embraced them. In fact, Gertrude Himmelfarb expresses a disquiet typical amongst American conservatives at what she perceives to be Oakeshott's failure to provide a sure grounding for determinate value judgements:

Oakeshott is right to criticize the Rationalists for subverting all habits, the good together with the bad. But so long as he provides us with no means for distinguishing between good and bad, let alone for cultivating a disposition to do good rather than bad, we are obliged to look elsewhere for guidance – to invoke mind, principle, belief, religion, or whatever else may be required to sustain civilization.⁷⁴

In similar vein, William Kristol argues that it is a mistake to believe that 'true conservatism is an Oakeshottian acceptance of whatever's going on and you can't actually appeal to principles'.⁷⁵ Indeed, Irving Kristol offers a converse argument to Graham's, in arguing that he finds little in Oakeshott's arguments of relevance to America's 'exceptional' conservatism (his concern especially being for the religious dimension of American life).⁷⁶ Leaving aside for the moment how fair any of these appraisals of Oakeshott may be, they at least highlight the general suspicion amongst

⁷² Rorty (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 573-4.

⁷³ G. Graham (1986) *Politics in Its Place: A Study of Six Ideologies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 188.

⁷⁴ G. Himmelfarb (1989) *Marriage and Morals Amongst the Victorians and Other Essays* (London: I. B. Taurus and Co. Ltd.), p. 228.

⁷⁵ Interview with W. Kristol, 20 October 1998.

⁷⁶ I. Kristol (1996) 'America's "Exceptional Conservatism"', in K. Minogue (ed.) *Conservative Realism* (London: HarperCollins), pp. 9-22.

many American writers towards varieties of conservative doctrine that are believed to offer insufficient security to a shared morality.

However, attractive as the solution Devigne's dichotomy provides may be, the distinction it depends upon must again be regarded as too simplistic, the result primarily of an over-emphasis on the respective significance of Oakeshott and Strauss in determining British and American conservative thought. For example, many British conservatives clearly do work with highly determinate conceptions of truth and political practices; Scruton is one obvious example. Similarly, by no means all American conservatives are enamoured of a Straussian perspective. Thus whilst Strauss saw Burke as implicated in the degradation of modern thought, the identification of writers such as Russell Kirk with a Burkean philosophy places them too in a particularist, anti-rationalist tradition. Bruce Frohnen, one contemporary American upholder of Burkean principles, is thus highly critical of the emphasis Straussians place upon the role of reason.⁷⁷ Nor is he as sanguine regarding the possibility of objective judgement: 'There is no true external, Archimedean point possible from which society may be judged.'⁷⁸ In fact, Frohnen expresses far more sympathy for Oakeshott's attacks upon the fallacies of rationalism than with Strauss's writings.

Moreover, Rorty's – admittedly limited – use of Oakeshott may suggest at least something of what is problematic about regarding Oakeshott's philosophy as relevant only to the British context, as well as with Kristol's notion of an exceptional American one. Similarly, Rorty's historicist defence of liberalism, drawn upon by Gray and O'Sullivan, may have even greater relevance for American conservatives, at least for those who accept that the American tradition is to a large extent premised upon liberal foundations.

In other words therefore, whilst there clearly are differing attitudes towards the demands of substantive authority – both political and moral – amongst conservatives, these differences again do not provide the basis for easy typologizing. Rather, to

⁷⁷ B. Frohnen (1993) *Virtue and the Promise of Conservatism* (Lawrence, K.S.: University of Kansas Press), pp. 149-52.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

understand better how these attitudes relate to conservative engagements with postmodernism it will be useful to consider in more detail conservatives' understandings of the notions of reason and tradition. Indeed, although these two concepts are frequently understood as in opposition, in terms of conservatives' conceptions there may not in fact be as great a divergence as may initially appear. That is, the staunchest upholders of tradition and particularism do not typically reject reason *per se*, whilst conservative defenders of reason (and even Enlightenment) are rarely advocates of any straightforward rationalist optimism.

As already seen in the cases of both Burke and Oakeshott, few conservatives see a commitment to tradition as implying the negation of reason, but rather as suggesting the superiority of a practical, experientially grounded variety. Thus, by viewing reason in terms of a deference to the accumulated wisdom of the ages, rather than promoting utopian hubris what it counsels is precisely the preservation of tradition. At the same time, nor have many conservatives ever been purely defenders of whatever happens to exist, or believers that circumstance alone is all. Thus even many traditionalist conservatives believe in sources of principles that exist beyond the movement of history, such as religion or natural law. Indeed, one strategy employed by conservatives to rescue Burke (popular particularly amongst his American followers) from suspicions of being simply a defender of the status quo – and thus from the charge of relativism – is to see him as a natural law thinker, committed therefore to at least certain universal and eternal verities.⁷⁹ Similarly Frohnen, even though arguing that reason is a highly limited capacity, believes it has a role in uncovering non-historical truths: 'God gave reason to man – to be used to discover and follow His will.'⁸⁰

Scruton as well attests that there are beliefs that gain their justification from outside the traditions of particular communities, the very idea that there are forms of allegiance which exist prior to political bonds of course being one.⁸¹ Moreover, he argues, a further bond that transcends the vicissitudes of history is that of the family. In other words, almost all conservatives espouse beliefs and principles which cannot be reduced

⁷⁹ Most notably, P. Stanlis (1958) *Edmund Burke and the Natural Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

⁸⁰ Frohnen (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

to any purely historicist foundations. Upon this basis, Willetts feels he is able to refute the accusation of relativism that may be levelled at communitarian conservatives, because it is possible for conservatives to appeal to definite criteria in judging institutions, such as their durability or how far they embody the 'deeper traditions' of a society.⁸² Like most conservatives Willetts studiously avoids adjectives such as 'abstract' or 'objective' in describing these criteria, but nonetheless, traditions he argues are most definitely not 'irrational'.

More generally, no form of conservative anti-rationalism typically goes as far as a postmodern variety in denying the validity of evaluative judgement. This may be illustrated, for example, by comparing Rorty's use of Oakeshott's notion of a conversation to Oakeshott's own. Thus although Rorty uses it to conclude that philosophy possesses no especial claims in comparison to other modes of knowledge, Oakeshott draws no such conclusion. Rather, for him philosophy is a distinctive discipline, which moreover should be privileged as a higher mode of understanding.⁸³ Similarly, critics such as Himmelfarb cannot be judged wholly correct in suggesting that Oakeshott offers no basis for making judgements: for example, his belief that it is through 'intimations' flowing from a deep practical knowledge of a tradition that allows us to discriminate between the authentic and inauthentic clearly does provide a basis of sorts, however unsatisfactory this may be.⁸⁴

In other words, even the most avowedly anti-rationalist forms of conservatism typically contain core substantive commitments. Yet equally important to understand is that the role reason is intended to fulfil for writers such as Strauss is not entirely dissimilar to that of these anti-rationalist conservatives: that is, to maintain a continuity with the wisdom of the past. Thus although Straussians clearly have far more confidence that the principles reason divines possess a universal and eternal validity, this is very different from regarding reason to be a creative force, a la 'rationalism'. Again therefore, reason is not antagonistic to tradition – indeed for Straussians belief in

⁸¹ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁸² Willetts (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁸³ Oakeshott (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

the importance of tradition is of course crucial – and nor therefore is it intended to underpin any utopian hubris. Thus when such conservatives invoke reason as a means of combating relativism, whilst it evidently is an attempt to re-establish a belief in determinate and absolute standards, since these are imagined to possess a non-historical existence it is not undertaken in the spirit Burke condemned of presuming it possible for a single generation to determine objective truth.

It is quite common therefore to find contemporary conservatives defending both tradition and reason simultaneously. For example O’Hear, although articulating a preference for reason and reality to feeling and spontaneity, also invokes Burke and the value of tradition as a means of restraining these latter sentiments.⁸⁵ Whilst it may be speculated as to what Burke himself, as one who cherishes untaught feelings, would have made of the expressions of spontaneous emotion O’Hear condemns, for such conservatives reason is viewed as a force buttressing order and authority rather than challenging them.

Nonetheless, this still leaves the question as to what conservatives mean when they profess to be defenders of the Enlightenment. However, here again efforts are typically made to avoid being mistaken for rationalists (even if some, like Will, appear happy to affirm a commitment to the rationalist tradition). American conservatives are undoubtedly more comfortable employing a philosophical vocabulary inherited from the Enlightenment, thanks to the fact that this informs the language of their own society’s founding documents. Even so, in the same way that they typically distinguish between the characters of the American and French Revolutions, American conservatives also often distinguish between the intellectual groundings of these two events. For example, Irving Kristol condemns the utopianism of the ‘Continental Enlightenment’ – the tradition of Voltaire and Diderot – whilst acclaiming the meliorism and respect for tradition to be found within the ‘Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment’, the tradition of Locke, Hume and Smith.⁸⁶ Burke’s admiration for

⁸⁵ O’Hear (1998), *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.

⁸⁶ I. Kristol (1983) *Reflections of a Neoconservative* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 141-52. Jeanne Kirkpatrick also cites the importance of the ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ for understanding America’s intellectual foundations – interview with J. Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

Smith may indeed be taken as a sign of the affinity between a traditional conservatism and this sceptical Enlightenment liberalism.

In fact, rather than being either straightforward anti-modernists or Enlightenment enthusiasts, most contemporary conservatives probably share Digby Anderson's view that the legacy of the Enlightenment represents a 'mixed inheritance'.⁸⁷ Thus, he argues, whilst we have benefited from the advances of science and the wealth generated by a market economy, we have also suffered from the damaging questioning of authority that has accompanied these developments. This then explains many of the tensions apparent within contemporary conservative writings noted at the end of Chapter 4: whilst panics around health and environmental risks appear to undermine the positive achievements of the Enlightenment, and thus should be challenged, the perceived threat posed by modernist ideas to authority is what leads conservatives to over-dramatize their own anxieties in relation to moral and cultural malaise.

A similar assessment to Anderson's is made by James Q. Wilson, who argues that the Enlightenment has left us an 'ambiguous legacy'.⁸⁸ Moreover, Wilson's attempt to identify an inherent moral sense is worth considering here as it reveals with particular clarity how conservatives' ambivalence may be apparent even within an individual writer's arguments. Thus on the one hand Wilson espouses agreement with the belief of Enlightenment thinkers that there is a universal human nature, since this allows us to counter moral relativism by affirming that there is a universal moral sense. Yet on the other, he also urges us to recognize that such thinkers took a far too optimistic view of how far human nature could be understood, wary that a too sanguine view of human beings' capacity for self-knowledge might imply conceding ground to utopian schemes of social engineering. In other words, it is necessary to perform a careful balancing act, to uphold a positive view of humanity's ability to perceive universal absolutes whilst at the same time gainsaying human beings' ability to understand society in totality.

Indeed, it is conservatives' efforts to mediate between these two requirements which underlies the difficulty in understanding the relationship of conservatism to postmodernism, incorporating as conservatism therefore does two conflicting impulses:

⁸⁷ Interview with D. Anderson, 22 June 1998.

one, a desire to defend the values of reason and universality against postmodernists, because of the threat their debasement poses to absolute standards of morality and authority; and two, a desire alongside postmodernists to remind us of humanity's more fallible side, to counter the equal danger presented to traditional values and order by an overweening belief in reason. Moreover, it is not possible simply to identify either impulse with a particular 'type' of conservative since many evidently feel some measure of affinity for both.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the overall question cannot be resolved, as it is possible to argue that that one of these impulses is typically given priority by contemporary conservatives: specifically, the first. What determines this choosing is context, and may be understood by considering further Himmelfarb's analysis of Oakeshott:

Skepticism is innocent enough, even attractive, in an age suffering from a surfeit of principles and enjoying a plenitude of good habits ... But when those habits become insecure or fall into disuse, the conservative must look elsewhere for the civilized values he has come to enjoy.⁸⁹

In other words, in the past – when the major threat to order came from rationalist liberals and socialists – the need to emphasize the dangers of a hubristic rationalism may indeed have been paramount; however, since at the present time the main ideological enemies are foes such as postmodernists, appealing to definite principles is the more urgent need. Moreover, in the absence of a 'plenitude of good habits' – i.e. a common fabric of shared values and institutions – upon which critics of rationalism such as Burke could depend (able to preserve stability without the need for principled justification), emphasizing too strongly a sceptical attitude is likely to compound the problem of de-moralization. The keen awareness many conservatives have of the changed realities of the contemporary world thus explains why their major concerns are with the wider social and political significance of postmodernism rather than its theoretical insights.

⁸⁸ J. Q. Wilson (1993) *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press), p. 215.

Furthermore, even conservatives with whom it is possible to identify some amount of shared theoretical ground with postmodernism may believe that the need to combat its real-world implications constitutes a more important priority than acknowledging this possible truth. As Paddy Ireland notes, Scruton – despite subscribing to a social constructionist thesis and thus implicitly recognizing that aspects of identity such as sexuality are not naturally given – resists drawing the social and legal conclusions that disdaining practices such as homosexuality as immoral may have fairly weak justification from conservative principles.⁹⁰ Put more bluntly, such conservatives may be willing to sacrifice theoretical integrity for what they perceive to be social utility. This is perhaps most apparent in relation to the issue of relativism; as Scruton writes:

Of course, no conservative will be happy to see the spread of relativism, since people need values and have them only to the extent that they believe in their authority. It is a philosophical question whether relativism is *true*. Politically speaking, however, it is better that few men believe it. Like Plato, a conservative may have to advocate the ‘Noble Lie’. He might in all conscience seek to propagate the ideology which sustains the social order, whether or not there is a reality that corresponds to it.⁹¹

Of course, if it requires the advocacy of a Noble Lie to disavow relativism, then perhaps it may not be – philosophically speaking – simply the refuge of scoundrels Scruton contends (or at least, not solely non-conservative ones). Not many conservatives would own so boldly to such a position, although Straussians of course similarly believe that philosophers should refrain from revealing too widely the ambiguities and uncertainties that may arise from reflection upon moral questions, for the dangers this poses to social stability.

The conclusion to be drawn therefore is that whilst there may be clear theoretical affinities between conservatism and postmodernism, scope for any alliance or

⁸⁹ Himmelfarb (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁹⁰ Ireland (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 193.

⁹¹ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 139-40.

conjoining of perspectives is highly limited, principally because it is not possible for conservatives to accept the practical implications of postmodern agendas. In particular, in a contemporary context in which traditional values and institutions no longer possess either widespread or unquestioned acceptance, the need to articulate sets of definite principles becomes especially pressing.

Chapter 7

The Challenge of the Environment

As detailed in previous chapters, many conservatives clearly perceive that – despite conservatism’s victory over its traditional ideological rivals – the contemporary social, cultural and intellectual environments remain surprisingly unsympathetic to a conservative perspective. If many therefore feel less than enthusiastic about conserving much within these spheres, a realm that might be imagined to command far greater respect amongst conservatives is the natural. Within conservative ideology, the role played by ideas of nature and the natural has of course always been a strong one, not least in legitimating conservative conceptions of morality and social order. Yet today specifically, with concern for the natural environment having become widespread throughout contemporary social and political discourses, the affinity the conservative tradition possesses for a nature-centred perspective might well provide conservatives one of their best avenues for adapting to the present ideological climate. Indeed, environmentalism itself is probably the only contemporary ideology apart from communitarianism for which it is possible to identify any significant (if still limited) support amongst conservative writers.

The major question to be addressed by this chapter therefore is how fruitful an endeavour it may be for conservatives to develop a ‘green conservatism’; a further being what implications this entails. Once more of course, what needs to be taken into particular account are the differences of perspective amongst varieties of conservative, as well as the specific context of the post-Cold War era.

The Nature of Environmentalism

Before proceeding with the main discussion, it is necessary to consider a number of preliminary points. First, it is important to note that as much as there are different styles of conservatism there are equally different shades of environmentalism, ranging from authoritarian to anarchistic varieties; for example, Dryzek and Lester propose a six-fold typology of environmentalists.¹ This being the case, establishing the precise nature of the relationship between the two ideologies is obviously not a straightforward task. Indeed, as will become apparent, identifying affinities between conservatism and environmentalism may only be possible at the level of particular strands rather than between the ideologies as a whole. However, it is also clearly beyond this thesis's remit to attempt to provide any detailed examination of environmentalism, or to address in any depth issues concerning its definition. Rather, it will be sufficient to consider environmentalism in a fairly broad and general sense, as referring to such doctrines as adopt as central to their orientation concern for the natural environment.

A second issue worth highlighting at the outset is the fact that most conservatives, regardless of their attitudes towards environmentally concerned philosophies, clearly feel little but disdain for their contemporary proponents: as one writer argues, 'the biggest problem with environmentalism is environmentalists'.² Even those conservatives relatively sympathetic to environmentalism frequently employ derogatory epithets – 'tree huggers', 'hippies' and 'eco-nuts' – to describe environmentalists themselves.³ The purpose of this observation is to make clear that, whilst the scope for the development of personal bonds between conservatives and environmentalists may readily be agreed to be highly limited, acknowledging the existence of this enmity need not foreclose the possibility of ideological congruence between the two perspectives.

¹ Specifically: Hobbesians and structural reformers; guardians; free market conservatives; reform ecologists; social ecologists; and deep ecologists. J. Dryzek and J. P. Lester (1989) 'Alternative Views of the Environmental Problematic', in J. P. Lester (ed.) *Environmental Politics and Policy* (London: Duke University Press), pp. 316-24.

² C. Williamson, Jr. (1993) 'Chicken Little Is a Christian', *Chronicles*, Vol. 17, No. 6, p. 28.

³ For example, J. R. E. Bliese (1996) 'Richard M. Weaver, Russell Kirk and the Environment', *Modern Age*, Vol. 38, No. 2, p. 158; T. L. Anderson and D. R. Leal (1991) *Free Market Environmentalism* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy), p. 52.

However, whilst it is thus not unreasonable to suggest that most conservatives are generally hostile towards environmentalists, it is also typical amongst commentators to consider them largely antagonistic towards environmentalism itself. For example, John Gray articulates this standard view thus:

It is fair to say that, on the whole, conservative thought has been hostile to environmental concerns over the past decade or so in Britain, Europe and the United States. Especially in America, environmental concerns have been represented as anti-capitalist propaganda under another flag.⁴

Similarly, in regard to conservative politics, Robin Wright observes that 'A derisive hostility toward environmentalism is common among congressional Republicans', whilst Mike Robinson argues that 'the basic tenets of Conservative Party ideology are well removed from the radicalism at the centre of "green" politics'.⁵

Even so, although conservatives are believed in fact to be opposed to environmentalism, Gray also highlights the theoretical affinity between conservative and environmentalist philosophies. As he continues:

Far from having a natural home on the Left, concern for the integrity of the common environment, human as well as ecological, is most in harmony with the outlook of the traditional conservatism of the British and European varieties.⁶

Gray himself indeed offers one of the most considered attempts to elaborate a green conservatism (though as with his considerations on postmodernism, of course at a time when he still believed conservatism to be a viable and relevant perspective). Yet unlike postmodernism, the common ground conservatism may share with environmentalism is more widely observed. For example, Robinson asks in regard to the free market

⁴ J. Gray (1993) *Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment* (London: Routledge), p. 124.

⁵ R. Wright (1995) 'Some Like It Hot', *New Republic*, 9 October; M. Robinson (1992) *The Greening of British Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 220.

⁶ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 124.

perspective of 'Thatcherite' ideology: 'Where in this rationality is the Burkean idea of continuity and responsibility to future generations, potentially so close to a Green Party perspective?'⁷

In fact, amongst greens and conservatives alike there is relatively widespread recognition of the possible harmony between environmentalism and specifically traditionalist forms of conservatism. For example, Jonathan Porritt, whilst also sceptical towards 'Thatcherite' economics, similarly recognizes that 'there is much about green politics that is instantly and deeply appealing to a certain kind of Tory', that kind being a traditionalist one.⁸ Moreover – and to give hint of the problem with Gray's view of American conservatism in particular – American conservative John Bliese argues that 'a traditionalist conservative today should be an environmentalist'.⁹

To underscore the importance of distinguishing between neo-liberalism and traditional conservatism, Gray thus argues that the points at which the latter and a green perspective converge are 'the very points at which they most diverge from fundamentalist liberalism'.¹⁰ Indeed, the issue of the environment (as with that of community) is one that provokes much venting of antagonisms towards economic liberalism amongst traditionalist conservatives themselves. For example, another American writer, John Vinson, happily endorses the views of environmentalists who 'despise' free market conservatives – arguing, like Gray, that they are not real conservatives at all – and thus urges traditionalist conservatives to seek unity with the former rather than the latter.¹¹ Less strongly but in similar vein, Chris Patten, opening a chapter entreating conservatives to take greater heed of environmental concerns, argues that the attitude of American conservatives who seek simply to protect the right to make money regardless of wider consequences, is an example of 'rapacious

⁷ Robinson (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁸ J. Porritt (1984) *Seeing Green* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), p. 231.

⁹ Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁰ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹¹ J. C. Vinson, Jr. (1996) 'Conservatives and Environmentalists', *Chronicles*, Vol. 20, No. 6, p. 30.

irresponsibility'.¹² In other words, concern for the environment may represent another contemporary issue likely to exacerbate fault lines within conservative alliances.

Widespread amongst both conservatives and greens therefore, is a belief that traditionalist forms of conservatism share much intellectual ground with environmentalism (at least in theory), whereas free market doctrines are fundamentally hostile.¹³ At the same time, it is generally supposed that the latter are today dominant within conservatism, and thus the potential for convergence is in fact restricted. However, in that this thesis has already questioned the tenability of distinguishing free market liberalism as a wholly distinct ideology from 'real' conservatism, as well as the assumption that free market concerns are hegemonic contemporarily, these viewpoints must be subjected to critique. In fact, it is by no means impossible for free marketeers to incorporate a number of aspects of green ideology within their own. Similarly, whilst it will be argued below that there are significant barriers to convergence between environmentalism and conservatism, this is not primarily due to the current weakness of traditionalist conservative perspectives; rather, despite the affinities that exist, there nonetheless remain important variances of principle between green and traditionalist conservative philosophies.

However, if problems in understanding the relationship of conservatism to environmentalism arise from knowing which of the former's faces to consider, traditionalist or neo-liberal, so do they from determining which of the latter's represents its 'true' visage. As is widely noted, environmentalists themselves frequently disavow conventional Left/Right labels, regarding both poles of the standard ideological spectrum as problematic.¹⁴ For example, Porritt argues that since both capitalism and socialism are committed to the 'super-ideology' of industrialism environmentalists should be critical of both.¹⁵ The notion that environmentalism may constitute some form of Third Way is therefore common. Nonetheless, it may still

¹² C. Patten (1983) *The Tory Case* (London: Longman), p. 137.

¹³ See also J. Young (1990) *Post Environmentalism* (London: Belhaven Press), pp. 156-7; N. Everett (1994) *The Tory View of Landscape* (London: Yale University Press), pp. 211-22.

¹⁴ A. Dobson (1995) *Green Political Thought* (2nd edn.) (London: Routledge), pp. 29-33.

¹⁵ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 43-4.

legitimately be asked whether green thought should be regarded as fundamentally 'conservative' or 'radical'.

Whilst there may be no Habermas to label greens young conservatives, a number of commentators argue that environmentalism indeed belongs on the same part of the ideological spectrum as conservatism. For example, Joe Weston, noting green writers' Romantic views of nature and the emphasis they place upon such notions as natural limits, considers green thought to fit 'within the broad framework of right-wing ideology'.¹⁶ However, a number of the problems in attributing the conservative label to postmodernists are equally relevant here, specifically those of lineage and self-understanding. Thus – Third Way-isms aside – it is clearly the case that environmentalists operate on intellectual and political territory at least once occupied by the Left, not the Right. Moreover, whilst attempts to forge hybrid eco-socialist or eco-feminist perspectives abound, the idea of 'eco-conservatism' is most noticeable by its absence within green writings.

A more substantial objection to the labelling of greens as conservatives is that there are obvious respects in which environmentalists appear to be decidedly radical, in arguing for profound transformations in society's patterns of production and consumption. A more nuanced argument therefore is one forwarded by David Wells, who attempts to account for the Janus-like appearance of green ideology by describing environmentalists as 'ideational conservatives pushed into situational radicalism'.¹⁷ That is, whilst greens may essentially be committed to conserving, the rampant productivism of modern consumer societies is so antithetical to their preferred visions that they are forced to become advocates of fundamental change.

Of course, Wells' formulation might be felt to constitute an appropriate description of many (conventionally understood) conservatives' perspectives as well, in similarly possessing basically 'conservative' impulses whilst countenancing substantial degrees of change if necessary to redirect society from travelling down misguided – for example, socialist – paths. In other words, *restorative* change, to return society to some previous (if only imaginary) natural or social order, is certainly acceptable to both

¹⁶ J. Weston (1986) 'Introduction', in J. Weston (ed.) *Red and Green* (London: Pluto Press), p. 24.

greens and conservatives; similarly, a complementary scepticism towards *experimental* forms of change may also be shared. However, although Wells' argument certainly provides useful insight into the relationship between conservatism and environmentalism, defining conservatism in terms of an attitude towards change was of course found wanting in Chapter 1.

A final writer who notes the similarities between conservatism and environmentalism worth examining is Anthony Giddens. Considering Giddens is useful because not only does he suggest what particular style of conservatism may have most in common with environmentalism – drawing a similar distinction between traditionalist and free market varieties as other writers already mentioned – but also what type of environmentalism this may be. Thus he observes that there are 'rather obvious affinities between ecological thinking, including particularly "deep ecology", and philosophic conservatism'.¹⁸ In fact, Giddens' suggestion that it is deep ecology, a perspective which demands the most radical re-evaluation of man's relationship to nature, with which conservatism shares most intellectual affinity is problematic (arising perhaps from his desire to counsel 'conservatism' to radicals). Nonetheless, understanding why this is so will prove important. What is also useful in Giddens' argument is his employment of a notion of 'philosophic' conservatism – a worldview broadly concerned with the melioration of change – as distinct from a specifically conservative ideology. This distinction will also prove useful, though in light of what has been argued about attitudes towards change, ultimately in distinguishing the 'conservatism' of conservatives from that of environmentalists.

¹⁷ D. Wells (1978) 'Radicalism, Conservatism, and Environmentalism', *Politics*, No. 13, p. 305.

¹⁸ A. Giddens (1994) *Beyond Left and Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 11. Gray also cites deep ecology as having the most affinities with a traditionalist conservatism – Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 128.

Towards a Green Conservatism?

Although this chapter is to argue that there are crucial problems with the idea of a convergence between environmentalism and conservatism, it is nonetheless logical to consider first the areas of shared understanding that undoubtedly do exist between the two ideologies. The possibility that greens and conservatives possess a fundamentally similar orientation is perhaps most obviously suggested by the shared etymological roots of the terms 'conservative' and 'conservation'. Furthermore, unlike other potentially conservative doctrines – such as postmodernism – it is, pace Gray, relatively easy to find approbation amongst conservatives for some form of environmentally aware philosophy. Indeed it is also far less true that, as Bliese suggests, 'conservatives have largely ignored environmental issues', than it may be of other *au courant* topics.¹⁹ Even so, what is true is that engagements with these issues tend to feature sporadically within conservative writings, with often little attempt made to explore points of principle in depth.

However, a number of more extended discussions may be identified. As suggested above, the most important effort to conjoin the two doctrines is Gray's. Yet he is far from alone. For example, the Bow Group within the Conservative Party has published a number of pamphlets setting out an environmentally concerned vision, centred upon conservative notions of order, patriotism and tradition.²⁰ Others on the 'wet' wing of the Conservative Party have also shown interest in environmental questions.²¹ Moreover, the image of American conservatives in particular as fundamentally hostile to environmental concerns is also misleading, being addressed not only by traditionalist writers such as Vinson and Bliese, but more mainstream conservatives as well.²²

¹⁹ Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁰ T. Paterson (1984) *Conservation and the Conservatives* (London: Bow Group); T. Paterson (1989) *The Green Conservative* (London: Bow Group).

²¹ C. Patten (1983), *op. cit.*; C. Patten (1990) *The Conservative Party and the Environment* (London: Conservative Political Centre).

²² See, for example, G. K. Durnil (1995) *The Making of a Conservative Environmentalist* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press); J. R. Dunn and J. E. Kinney (1996) *Conservative Environmentalism* (Westport, Connecticut: Quorum Books); M. Shere (1997) 'Building Trust: Conservatives and the Environment', *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 3.

However, especially valuable to highlight here is the attitude of the free market's proponents. In fact, rather than simply dismissing or ignoring environmental concerns, a notion of 'free market environmentalism' has been articulated by a number of economists.²³ For example, one writer contributing to a symposium on what should constitute the key components of conservatism in the 1990s argues strongly for the inclusion of free market environmentalism.²⁴ Similarly, at the end of the 1980s Margaret Thatcher delivered a number of speeches appearing to indicate a new-found interest in the environment, arguing that 'The core of Tory philosophy and the case for protecting the environment are the same.'²⁵ Furthermore, Newt Gingrich avers that he has been a life-long advocate of environmental protection.²⁶

Many commentators regard such avowals with cynicism, questioning the depth of free marketers' commitments and the extent to which they are motivated simply by electoral expediency. For example, John McCormick finds Thatcher's conversion to environmentalism 'surprising' and asks how well 'pro-environmental statements sit against a background of ardently anti-regulation Thatcherism'.²⁷ By the same token, Robert Garner describes Thatcher's changed attitude as representing nothing less than an 'about turn'.²⁸ The most obvious observation to make in regard to 'Thatcherism' specifically is of course that it is in any case a mistake to perceive it as simply an ideology of free market laissez-faire. However, two points of more general relevance may be made. First, to the extent that the concern of economic liberals for the environment does represent an 'about turn', or at least a tempering of a pure free market philosophy, this may be revelatory once more of the same defensiveness already illustrated in relation to other contemporary concerns. Yet second, when attention is

²³ For example, Anderson and Leal (1991), *op. cit.* R. Taylor (1992) 'Economics, Ecology, and Exchange: Free Market Environmentalism', *Humane Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1 and R. Eckersley (1993) 'Free Market Environmentalism: Friend Or Foe?', *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1 both provide useful overviews.

²⁴ J. K. Andrews, Jr. (1990) in 'The Vision Thing', *Policy Review*, No. 52, p. 5.

²⁵ M. Thatcher (1990) *Our Threatened Environment* (London: Conservative Political Centre), p. 10. See also S. Brittan (1989) 'The Green Power of Market Forces', *Financial Times*, 4 May.

²⁶ N. Gingrich (1995) *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 193.

²⁷ J. McCormick (1991) *British Politics and the Environment* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd.), p. 2.

²⁸ R. Garner (1996) *Environmental Politics* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf), p. 142.

turned to the specific details of conservative and environmentalist affinity, it is in fact not the case that it is solely with traditionalist varieties of conservatism that parallels may be drawn.

It is thus necessary next to consider these in some depth. To do so, it will be useful to examine twelve bases for potential harmony between conservatism and environmentalism:

- 1) A sharing of intellectual sources.
- 2) A preference for the rural over the urban.
- 3) A desire to conserve; to respect limits.
- 4) A scepticism towards the claims of science and the idea of progress.
- 5) A scepticism towards market liberalism and economic growth.
- 6) A belief that the natural world possesses moral value.
- 7) A belief in fundamental holism and harmony.
- 8) A belief that the natural world should serve as a model for the social.
- 9) A belief in maintaining a continuity between past, present and future.
- 10) A preference for the decentralized and local.
- 11) A belief in the need for authority and regulation.
- 12) A rejection of humanism.

1) A sharing of intellectual sources.

One of the most obvious similarities between green and traditionalist conservative writings is the use of a number of the same intellectual sources as inspiration. Both reference a variety of the same thinkers, as well as writers and artists: for example, Burke and Carlyle, together with any number of Romantics. William Ophuls represents one of the clearest examples of an environmentalist influenced by Burke, yet Burke is

also quoted approvingly throughout the green literature.²⁹ For example, John Young's assessment that Burke represents 'the source of many of the more attractive aspects of modern conservatism' is a view with which many environmentalists probably concur.³⁰ In that most of the shared principles that may be identified between greens and conservatives are to be found in Burke, he is therefore worth quoting at length:

A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. 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 ... By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges ... Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, moulding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but in a condition of unchangeable constancy ...³¹

Since much of the sentiment of passages such as these is to be found throughout green as well as conservative thought, there is something to be said for seeing the frequent citing of Burke by green writers as indicating more than simply a case of one or two incidentally shared insights. In terms of intellectual traditions, it is not difficult to see why Andrew Dobson suggests that adhering to a green perspective may be read as implying 'siding with Edmund Burke against Tom Paine'.³²

2) A preference for the rural over the urban.

As to the actual elements of a common worldview, the simplest respect in which greens and conservatives may be in agreement is in a valuing of rural over urban existence. This basic disposition is evident, for example, from the following childhood

²⁹ For example, W. Ophuls (1977) *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity* (San Francisco: Freeman).

³⁰ Young (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 155.

³¹ E. Burke (1968) *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin), pp. 119-20.

³² Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 78.

recollection of Thomas Fleming: 'Until we moved near Charleston, I had never seen a city that did not deface the landscape, and to this day I prefer, when I am traveling, to spend my time in the countryside.'³³

Of greater intellectual significance, the countryside is also often seen as the very wellspring of conservative values, as much as it may be the focus for green philosophy. Thus, as Vinson observes, throughout the ages 'a prominent strand of conservative thought has been love of the land and attachment to the soil'.³⁴ Indeed, he argues, in both Europe and the United States the small farmer and the landed country gentleman are the archetypal conservative figures, 'able to sense the changeless cycles of the seasons'. Moreover, the virtues of country life stand in stark contrast to 'the arrogant sophistries and passing sensations of modern urban living'. Leaving aside the similarities that may be evoked with a fascist 'blood and soil' ideology by these sentiments, it is easy to see how a mythical and romanticized conception of rural existence is of appeal to both traditionalist conservatives and environmentalists.³⁵

An awareness of the dependence of conservatism upon the countryside is apparent amongst many modern conservatives, whether or not they share quite the same views as Vinson. Thus John Patten argues: 'The countryside should, above all else, be the repository of truly Conservative values.'³⁶ Moreover, as a politician he notes another important aspect of this relationship: 'The countryside also has always been the place to go in order to collect Tory voters by the trailer load, from country village and market town alike.' Indeed, other conservative politicians demonstrate a similar consciousness of the electoral considerations involved in attending to environmental concerns. For example, Chris Patten also argues that 'The Conservative Party has

³³ T. Fleming (1996) 'Man, Man, and Again Man', *Chronicles*, Vol. 20, No. 6, p. 10.

³⁴ Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 29. Porritt also notes the long history of conservative concern for the land – Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 231.

³⁵ P. Hay (1988) 'Ecological Values and Western Political Traditions: From Anarchism to Fascism', *Politics*, No. 8 provides an interesting discussion of the possible blurring of environmental romanticism into fascism.

³⁶ J. Patten (1995) *Things to Come* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson), p. 241.

always depended for much of its political support on those who live in the countryside, and for this reason among others, it has a special regard for the face of Britain.³⁷

Opportunistic as these statements may make conservatives' appeals seem, there nonetheless remain important points of principle at stake. The particular values cherished by conservatives in country life are well identified by Nigel Everett, in describing what he terms the eighteenth and nineteenth century 'Tory' view of landscape.³⁸ Thus, he argues, a traditional landscape is favoured in the Tory conception not simply for its aesthetic qualities, but for its cultivation of such values as personal responsibility, humility, a spiritual sensibility and the acceptance of social hierarchy. By contrast, the newly industrializing towns were regarded as ugly and coarse, and responsible for nurturing immorality, individualism and commercialism. Whilst greens may possess less enthusiasm for such ideas as the preservation of social hierarchy, a similar belief that non-urban living represents a more valuable way of life may also be shared.

3) A desire to conserve; to respect limits.

As already discussed, defining conservatism merely in terms of a desire to conserve is flawed. Nonetheless, this is not to say that a basic inclination to preserve that which exists, rather than gamble on the results of experimentation, is not common amongst conservatives, with Burke's scepticism towards a 'spirit of innovation' felt by many, as well as environmentalists. For example, Douglas Hurd argues of an environmentally aware philosophy that it 'fits in with the conserving side of conservatism'.³⁹ Moreover, this extends not only to the conservation of the natural world but the man-made as well, including historic buildings and monuments.

Nonetheless, this style of conserving impulse, which may be described as a straightforward preservationism, is most likely to manifest itself in relation to specific cases, that is, in terms of threats to particular areas of wildlife or buildings. At a more

³⁷ C. Patten (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

³⁸ Everett (1994), *op. cit.*

general level, neither many greens nor conservatives typically suggest the arresting of change altogether. Rather, what both tend to invoke is some notion of limits as to what change is acceptable, that which does not overstep 'sensible' boundaries; indeed, as seen, it is possible to argue that conservatism should be defined precisely in terms of a respect for limits. Thus words such as 'caution' and 'prudence' recur time and again in conservative writings on the environment. For example, Bliese urges us to remember that 'the most important virtue in politics is prudence'.⁴⁰ This prudence, he argues, should thus impress upon us the crucial need to halt uncontrolled meddling with the world's climate and to cease endangering biodiversity.

Environmentalists offer similar, though typically more theorized, formulations of these ideas, in terms of such notions as risk-avoidance and the 'precautionary principle'.⁴¹ That is, as the world's eco-system is highly complex and ever-changing, when considering new technological or social developments it is better to err on the side of caution because the full consequences of their impact upon the natural world are unforeseeable; and if unforeseeable, dangerous. Yet long before any sociological embroidery of these notions, the belief that the natural world defies human comprehension was commonplace within the conservative tradition. For example, Richard Weaver, half a century ago, warned that because 'nature reflects some kind of order which was here before our time and which ... defies our effort at total comprehension ... to meddle with small parts of a machine whose total design and purpose we are ignorant produces evil consequences'.⁴²

The affinity of conservatism and environmentalism in regard to the idea of limits is perhaps best shown by Gray, who mixes together the two styles of discourse:

both Greens and conservatives consider risk-aversion the path of prudence when new technologies, or new social practices, have consequences that are large and

³⁹ Interview with D. Hurd, 25 June 1998. See also R. Eckersley (1992) *Environmentalism and Political Theory* (London: UCL Press Limited), p. 21.

⁴⁰ Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁴¹ T. O'Riordan and J. Cameron (1994) *Interpreting the Precautionary Principle* (London: Earthscan).

⁴² R. Weaver (1948) *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 172.

unpredictable, and, most especially, when there are unquantifiable but potentially catastrophic risks associated with innovation.⁴³

It is more therefore than simply a belief in a bare notion of limits which greens and traditionalist conservatives share, but the view that what defines these limits are deficiencies in human understanding. Yet this being the case, it is possible to see how a free market perspective may also be in tune with an environmentalist one. Thus Anderson and Leal cite a basically Hayekian view of the limits of the human capacity for knowledge in favour of their free market environmental strategy.⁴⁴ Thus, since our knowledge of nature is diffused rather than concentrated, and because ecosystems depend upon a complex number of interacting elements which cannot be grasped in totality, it requires the unconscious workings of the market rather than the centralized power of the state to manage the environment. Indeed Gray, at this stage still possessing some regard for the positive functions of the market, also regards its ability to overcome the Hayekian epistemological dilemma which besets attempts at conscious planning as suggesting it to have a valuable role in managing resource scarcity.⁴⁵

In fact, many free market writers argue that the existence of private property rights and the operation of market forces provide the best hope for conserving the natural environment. This is because, they argue, the market spontaneously utilizes resources in the most efficient – i. e. ‘conservationist’ – way possible (providing it is free of distortions). Furthermore, market discipline rather than state intervention is also frequently argued to be a better means of regulating those companies which harm the environment, via the mechanisms of consumer choice. Thus Gingrich argues that: ‘To get the best ecosystem for our buck, we should use decentralized and entrepreneurial strategies rather than command-and-control bureaucratic efforts.’⁴⁶ Similarly, David Willetts argues that the privatized water industry is much better able to achieve ambitious environmental standards than when it was nationalized, since government Ministers are constrained by a range of considerations that may conflict with these

⁴³ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴⁴ Anderson and Leal (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 129-30.

ambitions.⁴⁷ In other words, market forces need not be seen as destructive of the natural environment, but as operating in harmony with a conservationist spirit.

4) *A scepticism towards the claims of science and the idea of progress.*

A further way of describing the accord between environmentalists and conservatives might be in terms of a shared antagonism towards 'modernity'. However, the reflections of the last chapter indicated some of the problems with using this category. Instead therefore, it will be useful to consider the attitudes of conservatives and environmentalists towards a number of the specific features of the modern world. Amongst the most important of course are the developments of science and technology, with a clear scepticism towards these evident within both conservative and green thinking, for their roles in despoiling the natural and human environments. For example, Porritt is dismissive of 'unimpeded technological development', the 'viewpoint of narrow scientific rationalism' and, as already mentioned, 'industrialism'.⁴⁸ Yet whilst he believes a rejection of these doctrines separates green thought from both capitalist and socialist ideologies, many traditionalist conservatives are equally sceptical towards the viewpoint of scientific rationalism, as detailed in previous chapters. Moreover, Scruton has much to say about the alienating and dehumanizing effects of industrialization.⁴⁹

At the same time, neither most traditionalist conservatives nor environmentalists are typically anti-science or anti-technology *per se*. As Dobson points out, it is wrong to see environmentalism as simply a reincarnation of old-style Romanticism; and nor should even the most traditionalist forms of modern conservatism.⁵⁰ Rather, what both share is a distinct ambivalence towards the virtues of scientific and technological advances, and the belief that it is necessary to emphasize their negative as much as the

⁴⁶ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 196. See also Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Interview with D. Willetts, 22 June 1998.

⁴⁸ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ R. Scruton (1984) *The Meaning of Conservatism* (2nd edn.) (London: Macmillan), pp. 116-7, 123-4, 132-3.

⁵⁰ Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

positive sides. In this vein therefore, Gray argues that whilst we should not be anti-technology as such, we should nonetheless reject 'scientific fundamentalism' and temper our enthusiasm for modernity's technological and industrial fruits.⁵¹ In other words, we should not seek to halt or reverse the advances of science, but to diminish its presumptive status.

Whilst conservatives and environmentalists are not alone in attacking the negative and alienating effects of industrialization, what both also typically share is a belief that what is problematic about science and technology is so inherently, rather than because of any specific social context. As David Pepper points out, environmentalist critiques of technology are therefore largely ahistorical, rarely relating it to its place within specific production arrangements or social relations.⁵² For example, this is clear from Porritt's regard for industrialism as some form of 'super-ideology'. Yet Scruton similarly rejects the belief that the evils of the industrial process are related to its capitalist context and would therefore disappear outside of it.⁵³ In other words, both conservatives and environmentalists frequently agree that science and industry are to be regarded with suspicion whatever the social system they exist in.

Equally, both frequently question the idea of progress as an intrinsic good. Again, it is not necessarily the case that progress is wholly rejected, but rather that its costs and disadvantages are emphasized as much as any benefits. For example, Gray argues that whatever improvements occur in one sphere are invariably accompanied by evils in others.⁵⁴ Thus whilst science and technology may make us healthier and longer-lived, this cannot unambiguously be called progress because accompanying these developments may be alienation and dehumanization. Therefore, any view of history as one of a continual progressive movement from past to present is regarded as at best naïve and at worst dangerous, neglectful of the many downsides that have arisen along the way. This also suggests why both traditionalist conservatives and environmentalists often possess highly pessimistic historical outlooks.

⁵¹ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁵² D. Pepper (1993) *Eco-Socialism* (London: Routledge), pp. 143-5.

⁵³ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 139.

By contrast, the free market's proponents typically possess more positive attitudes towards the idea of progress. For example, Thatcher is keen to stress that it would not be sensible to attempt to 'turn the clock back to a pre-industrial world where Adam delved and Eve span'.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, as with the market, it is possible to emphasize the positive role science and technology may play in solving environmental problems, such as the development of recycling technologies. This is emphasized by both Thatcher and Gingrich.⁵⁶ Moreover, environmentalists themselves also often rely upon science evidence to support their arguments as to the parlous state of the environment. In any case, Thatcher does not find it impossible to admit that progress may not be an unalloyed good.⁵⁷

5) A scepticism towards market liberalism and economic growth.

However, environmentalists are also frequently critical of the market itself, together with its associated values. For example, Robyn Eckersley writes that it 'is undoubtedly the case that the expansionary dynamics of capital accumulation have led to widespread ecological degradation and social hardship'.⁵⁸ Similarly, Porritt blames increasing GNP for a multitude of ills, including not only pollution but rising crime and expanding bureaucracy.⁵⁹ Yet as already seen, traditionalist conservatives are by no means necessarily friends of free markets, an antagonism also possessing a long history within conservatism. For example, Russell Kirk criticizes businessmen for being 'intent upon getting and spending to the exclusion of almost every cultural and social interest'.⁶⁰ Thus: 'Conservatism is something more than mere solicitude for tidy incomes.'

Together with a scepticism towards the market, it is also the case that both greens and traditionalist conservatives frequently reject, as Gray suggests, 'the shibboleth of

⁵⁵ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10; Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 198-200.

⁵⁷ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁵⁹ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

liberal individualism', the idea that only the individual has value.⁶¹ Both therefore frequently question the basic tenets of the liberal tradition – this questioning ranging from mild circumspection to outright hostility – for its supposed failure to understand individual identity as embedded within a fabric of social (and perhaps natural) relationships. Unsurprisingly, both greens and traditionalist conservatives criticize in particular the individualism of contemporary neo-liberalism.

One of the most distinctive features of green economic concerns is a preoccupation with the idea of resource finitude, which Dobson describes as 'an article of faith' for all green thinkers.⁶² That is, all share a belief that the depletion of raw materials makes current levels of production and consumption untenable, since without change humanity will simply exhaust the earth's resources. Suggestions thus range from restraining economic growth, freezing it at zero, or even attempting to put the economy into reverse. Whichever solution is advocated, all regard economic growth as in some sense problematic.

In contrast to traditional economic models therefore, environmentalists typically prefer ones centred upon a notion of 'sustainable development', that is, development concerned not simply with achieving the highest possible rate of growth but with environmental protection and resource conservation. Yet this idea is also very much in accord with a traditionalist conservative perspective, which may similarly prefer moderation in economic policy. Thus, for example, Bliese agrees with the idea of sustainable development.⁶³

However, what is perhaps most interesting to note is that there are a number of points of contact between environmentalism and a free market ideology even on economic questions. As discussed in previous chapters, free market thinkers themselves often avow an awareness that individuals do not exist in isolation. Moreover, it has also already been seen how many argue that markets in fact provide the best means of conserving resources. Yet furthermore, economic growth itself may be argued to be of

⁶¹ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁶² Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁶³ Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 152.

benefit to the environment, by generating the wealth necessary to support scientific research into solving environmental problems.⁶⁴

As a consequence, Thatcher also argues that her 'Government espouses the concept of *sustainable* economic development'.⁶⁵ Most importantly, this claim may not be as questionable as it initially appears, at least in relation to government spending. Indeed, Thatcher's own famous paralleling of the management of the nation's accounts with careful household budgeting appears to strike a chord with many greens. For example, Young believes it to be a useful contribution to green thought 'to think of national finance in pre-Keynesian terms analogous to good housekeeping'.⁶⁶ Similarly, Porritt also emphasizes that 'Managing the household budget *is* important' (though believing that a 'heartless' monetarism distorts this sentiment).⁶⁷ Thus although Thatcher's administration was beset by numerous critics demanding that government spending be increased, it may have been able to take comfort from the fact that environmentalists represented one group who endorsed its commitment to reining in unsustainable 'profligacy'.

Even so, what lies at the heart of many environmentalists' concerns about economic growth is not merely the question of imprudence, but the idea that there is a basic immorality about 'consumer capitalism'. That is, even were consumerism and materialism 'sustainable' they would still be unethical. For example, Porritt disdains a 'materialist ethic' and suggests that we do not really need all the frivolous extravagances of modern capitalist societies; rather than indulging in ever increasing levels of consumerism, we should adopt a life of 'voluntary simplicity'.⁶⁸ Yet again of course, many conservatives share this attitude. For example, Fleming argues that, 'Materialism and consumism retard the development of the human person.'⁶⁹ Indeed, we are reminded, the latter 'was the religion of Sodom'. Moreover, as seen in earlier

⁶⁴ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Young (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 204.

⁶⁹ Fleming (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 12. See also Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 149.

chapters, one of the major apprehensions of neoconservatives regarding capitalism is the deleterious effect a consumer culture has upon traditional moral values.

Within this point may be considered the question of elitism. Thus Young describes as one of the elements of a conservative viewpoint the belief that 'Consumerism of the popular kind is distasteful, indeed conspicuous consumption by those unused to it is what conservatives call "vulgarity".'⁷⁰ However, whilst an explicit elitism may be most apparent within conservative discourses, a basic contempt for the material aspirations of ordinary people may be felt as much to permeate green rejections of the 'extravagances' of consumer societies.

6) A belief that the natural world possesses moral value.

What is also apparent is that many environmentalists perceive the natural world actually to possess moral claims, possibly even rights. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 4, for Gray a concern for the natural environment may be a key component in developing a common post-Christian morality.

The highly moral dimension of green thought is clear in the very tone of much writing, as when Porritt writes indignantly that nature does not exist simply to be dominated by man.⁷¹ However, conservatives express similar sentiments. For example, for Weaver man's misuse of nature is a sin. Indeed: '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.'⁷² By the same token, Gingrich suggests that 'human beings have a moral obligation to take care of the ecosystem'.⁷³

Yet even more strongly, the claim may be made not only that nature should be accorded moral respect but that, again according to Weaver, 'creation or nature is

⁷⁰ Young (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁷¹ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁷² Quoted in Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁷³ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 196.

fundamentally good'.⁷⁴ Similarly, and often by way of contrast with the supposed immorality of human society, nature frequently figures within green writings as possessing morally positive virtue. For example, Robert Goodin suggests utilizing a 'green theory of value': the more 'natural' are a thing's properties the more valuable it should be deemed.⁷⁵ In other words, both greens and conservatives frequently share not only a benign moral attitude towards the natural world, but a belief that what is natural is in some sense morally superior.

If both traditionalist conservatives and environmentalists frequently disparage the moral values of consumer capitalism, what they typically avow instead is a preference for non-material, spiritual values.⁷⁶ For conservatives these are likely to be those of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whilst for greens a much wider range of spiritual beliefs may be endorsed, including New Age doctrines. Even so, both thus typically emphasize the importance of a 'transcendent' ethics. Moreover, the perspective of conservative-minded environmentalist Edward Goldsmith represents an obvious bridge between a conservative and environmentalist spiritualism, in terms of his belief that strong religious commitments are valuable in the maintenance of stable and well-ordered green communities.⁷⁷

7) A belief in fundamental holism and harmony.

A further presumption often shared by greens and conservatives is a belief that the 'natural' condition of the world is one of stability and interconnectedness. Where this is perhaps clearest in environmental thought is in the Gaia hypothesis, which promotes the notion that the whole planet is in some form of holistic harmony. James Lovelock expresses the idea thus:

The entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity capable of

⁷⁴ Weaver (1948), *op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁷⁵ R. Goodin (1992) *Green Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press), pp. 19-83.

⁷⁶ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 231.

⁷⁷ For example, E. Goldsmith (1988) *The Great U-Turn* (Hartland: Green Books).

manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts.⁷⁸

Two major points are thus contended: first, that the constituents elements of the earth's ecosystem exist in a condition of mutual balance; and second, that the whole constitutes an entity in its own right. Whilst by no means all environmentalists support the Gaia hypothesis, a belief that nature possesses (or ought to possess) some balanced or equilibrium state is common. In other words, a Darwinian understanding of the natural world as a domain of struggle and conflict – 'red in tooth and claw' – is typically rejected in favour of a vision which emphasizes its inter-relations and stability.⁷⁹

Goldsmith too is a devotee of the Gaia hypothesis, expending a deal of energy to refuting the idea that nature is about rivalry and competition.⁸⁰ Instead, he prefers to talk of equilibrium, balance and harmony; indeed nature is even suggested to be teleological. Yet such conceptions are of course paralleled in many conservative understandings of society: for example, Burke's suggestion that human society is characterized over time by an unchanging constancy similarly presupposes notions of holism and harmony. Moreover, most traditionalist conservative accounts typically emphasize order and stability, whilst downplaying the roles of change and conflict in history. Thus, Gray argues that both green and conservative writers should embrace the Gaia hypothesis.⁸¹ At the least, Thatcher believes that the world's environmental systems possess a 'fundamental equilibrium'.⁸²

Again indeed, it is possible to regard a free market perspective as also mirroring that of an environmentalist one. Thus Robert Nisbet, arguing that contemporary ecological notions that systems possess holistic purposes in fact have a centuries-old pedigree (as in 'web of life' conceptions), counts Adam Smith as an 'ecological' thinker because of his belief that the overall result of individuals pursuing their own self-interest is

⁷⁸ Quoted in E. Goldsmith (1992) *The Way* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press), p. 115.

⁷⁹ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Goldsmith (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 19-32, 125-40.

⁸¹ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 138.

equilibrium.⁸³ It is perhaps necessary to stress therefore that whilst free market writers may disdain consciously created order they do not typically believe in 'disorder'. As Hayek argues, the operation of market forces is 'the only way in which so many activities depending on dispersed knowledge can be effectively integrated into a single order'.⁸⁴ In other words, pluralism and diversity at one level nonetheless become integrated into a whole at another. Indeed, free marketeers' conceptions of spontaneous order may thus parallel more closely an environmentalist's model of nature than do those of an authority-centred conservatism.

8) *A belief that the natural world should serve as a model for the social.*

However, not only may a conservative view of society mirror that of an environmentalist view of nature, but conservatives may similarly treat the natural world as a model for human society (bolstered by the presumption that nature and the natural are essentially good).⁸⁵ For example, as seen, Burke suggests viewing our constitution as 'working after the pattern of nature'.

One of the most notable ways in which this is apparent is in the frequent employment of organic metaphors.⁸⁶ Not only are such references multiple within Burke's writings, but amongst traditionalist conservatives in general conceptions of society as an organism are rife, most specifically in rejecting the notion that it is an artificial (that is political) contrivance. For example, Anthony Quinton believes organicism to be one of the key principles of conservatism, arguing that we should view society as 'a unitary natural growth, an organized, living whole, not a mechanical aggregate'.⁸⁷ Similarly, Clinton Rossiter avers that 'Society is a living organism with roots deep in the past.'⁸⁸

⁸² Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸³ R. Nisbet (1976) *The Social Philosophers* (London: Heinemann), pp. 323-85.

⁸⁴ F. Hayek (1982) *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* Vol. 1 (London: Routledge), p. 42.

⁸⁵ Pepper (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

⁸⁶ Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ A. Quinton (1978) *The Politics of Imperfection* (London: Faber and Faber), p. 16.

⁸⁸ C. Rossiter (1982) *Conservatism in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), p. 27.

Indeed, traditionalist conservatives are as likely to attribute some type of emergent existence to society as a whole as proponents of the Gaia hypothesis are to the planet. For example, Scruton argues that 'society is more than a speechless organism. It has personality, and will. Its history, institutions and culture are the repositories of human values – in short, it has the character of end as well as means.'⁸⁹ By imputing society with a 'personality' and set of interests of its own, in the same way that environmentalists may warn against treating nature in any purely instrumental fashion, so too may conservatives justify their warnings against so treating society. If society is indeed akin to a living organism, then change too must of course be slow and organic, evolutionary rather than revolutionary. As Rossiter continues, 'men must forbear to think of [society] as a mechanical contrivance that can be dismantled and reassembled in one generation'.⁹⁰

Moreover, having seen how free market thinkers' beliefs in a notion of spontaneous order may also be in accord with environmentalists' conceptions of nature, it is not surprising to find economic liberals using natural metaphors to serve their purposes as well. For example, Anderson and Leal seek to legitimate their belief that entrepreneurialism is natural in precisely this way.⁹¹ Stretching their analogy to its limits, they thus argue that when a 'niche' in an ecosystem appears, a new species benefits by taking advantage of the 'profit' opportunity opened up, with the activity of these 'self-interested' plants or animals therefore benefiting the system as a whole. In other words, looking to nature as a model may thus be as useful for free market writers as traditionalist conservatives in validating their visions of social organization.

9) A belief in maintaining a continuity between past, present and future.

Another aspect of conservative thought frequently lauded by both greens and conservatives is the fact that conservatism takes a 'multi-generational' perspective.⁹²

⁸⁹ Scruton (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Rossiter (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁹¹ Anderson and Leal (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

⁹² Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 136. See also Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 21; Young (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 155-6; Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 151; Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

As quoted above, Burke's contention that looking back to our ancestors is necessary for looking forward to posterity obviously implies this, though most often cited is his description of society as 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born'.⁹³

A heedless attitude towards the natural world and its resources may therefore be iniquitous because it abuses our inheritance from past generations, and despoils and depletes what is available to future ones. This being the case we must be aware that, as Thatcher argues: 'No generation has a freehold on this earth. All we have is a life tenancy – with a full repairing lease.'⁹⁴ Similarly, Scruton warns that 'We are not to plunder our inheritance, as though it were our exclusive property'; instead, we must recognize that 'We, the living members of society, are its trustees, bound by the duties of our tenancy.'⁹⁵ Indeed, Scruton appreciates that whereas a concern for future generations was once most commonly to be found within a traditional religious perspective, today it is within the environmental movement that it is most likely to be in evidence.⁹⁶

Gray however, also brings out the deeper philosophical implications of this belief, suggesting that – unlike liberals – what conservatives and greens appreciate is that 'individuals can never achieve their full humanity as islands in time'.⁹⁷ That is, that identity is embedded not only within a wider social context than liberals allow, but in a broader temporal one as well. Thus is drawn the conservative conclusion, that this understanding of identity necessarily forswears any 'project of making the world over anew ... the gnostic delusion that beset Paine, Robespierre and Lenin'. In other words, invoking the imputed interests of past and future generations is another means of forestalling change in the present, again clearly suggesting the affinity of environmentalism with a conservative tradition of anti-radicalism.

⁹³ Burke (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁹⁴ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ R. Scruton (1996) *The Conservative Idea of Community* (London: Conservative 2000 Foundation), p. 17.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

10) *A preference for the decentralized and local.*

Also common within green writings is a rejection of the belief, as Porritt puts it, 'that big is self-evidently beautiful'.⁹⁸ Thus both greens and conservatives frequently commend the life of the small-scale community. Conservatives' preferences for local communities and the decentralizing of authority have already been discussed in earlier chapters, yet here their specifically environmental aspects may be considered. For example, as seen above, libertarians like Gingrich may believe that decentralization is as beneficial for the environment as it is for economics and politics. Yet probably the clearest place to find a conjoining of community and environmental concerns is in traditionalist conservative writings. For instance, Nisbet argues that an important strand of historical communitarian thinking is of those conceptions centred upon the idea of the 'ecological community', which take as their regulative ideal the natural world's supposed harmony, balance and simplicity.⁹⁹ Nisbet himself, of course, is a key conservative advocate of community for whom these are a source of inspiration. Moreover, Vinson also urges 'a revival of rural community' to act as a counterweight to the sterility of city life.¹⁰⁰

In terms of green thought, Eckersley suggests the term 'ecocommunalism' to describe those strands of anarchist and utopian writings which seek the development of small-scale co-operative communities as the preferred mode of human existence, existing in a harmonious relationship with nature.¹⁰¹ As Eckersley notes, a common theme of these writings is the desire for a disengagement or withdrawal from corrupted political and social life, which also therefore mirrors the anti-political sentiments of many conservative communitarians. Yet what may also be found in common are similarly illiberal implications, arising – as in the case of conservative conceptions – from the question of how the boundaries of community are to be drawn.

⁹⁷ Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁹⁸ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁹⁹ Nisbet (1976), *op. cit.*, pp. 320-4.

¹⁰⁰ Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 160-70.

For example, Gray considers under the rubric of an environmentalist opposition to laissez-faire the necessity of restricting immigration, since unfettered it may lead to 'undoing settled communities, mixing inassimilable cultures and thereby triggering dormant racism'.¹⁰² In other words, the problematization of immigration may be justified by the need to preserve the environmental integrity of communities as much as any conservative desire to preserve a traditional notion of national identity. However, undoubtedly the most explicit exemplar of the illiberal approach to ecological communitarian thinking is Goldsmith, who especially admires the stability and cohesion of primitive tribal communities. Yet this then requires accepting – in similar manner to Scruton – that 'a community must be relatively closed', with the admission of outsiders to take place only in a climate of scepticism and suspicion.¹⁰³ Identifying preferred social models, Goldsmith is very much taken with the Indian caste system.

Many – indeed probably most – green writers typically reject such a perspective, yet in the same way that Scruton may be appreciated at least for displaying a willingness to take the cultural conservative position to its logical conclusions, so too may writers like Goldsmith for that of greens: if the desire is for communities united by highly demanding substantive commitments, then they probably must maintain significant barriers to alien influence. In fact, more mainstream green writers often do draw similar conclusions to Goldsmith (following as well from their commitments to resource conservation and the need to curb economic growth), even if supplementing their arguments with more liberal qualifications. For example, Porritt, although counselling sensitivity and of course opposing discrimination, nonetheless affirms that 'The strictly logical position, as far as ecologists are concerned, is to keep immigration at the lowest possible level.'¹⁰⁴

11) A belief in the need for authority and regulation.

If decentralization represents one strategy favoured by many conservatives and greens alike, at the same time others may see the pressing urgency of the environment's

¹⁰² Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁰³ Goldsmith (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

condition – magnified by a pessimistic view of history’s trajectory – as requiring increased authority and regulation. Thus in similar fashion to many conservatives’ prognoses of cultural and moral malaise, at least some greens share the view that the only solution to environmental degradation is to bolster the centralized authority of the state. For example, Ophuls argues that ‘the politics of the sustainable society seem likely to move us along the spectrum from libertarianism toward authoritarianism’.¹⁰⁵ Others, such as Robert Heilbroner, also suggest that there is little alternative to using a strong state to achieve environmental – and human – salvation.¹⁰⁶ Suggested strategies range from the relatively mild, such as the increased regulation of industry and agriculture, to the more demanding, such as the enforced rationing of the world’s resources and population control.

However, even libertarians – regardless of any belief in the efficacy of free market solutions – may not be entirely averse to the state playing a strong role in environmental protection. Indeed, as Irwin Stelzer notes, although libertarians typically reject the use of economic regulation to fulfil wider social goals, preserving the environment appears to represent an exception.¹⁰⁷ For example, although Murray argues a principled case against regulation in general, arguing that government actions typically cause more harm than good, in the case of enforcing air and water standards he accepts that these do constitute an area where the state has an important role to play.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Christopher DeMuth argues – despite being a strong advocate of decentralization – that private communitarian efforts have limitations in areas such as environmental protection.¹⁰⁹

Of course, few free market thinkers have ever argued that markets provide spontaneous solution to every problem. Thus conceding that examples of ‘market failure’ such as pollution may warrant regulation need not take them outside the

¹⁰⁴ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 191.

¹⁰⁵ Ophuls (1977), *op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁶ R. Heilbroner (1974) *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: Norton).

¹⁰⁷ I. M. Stelzer (1997) ‘A Conservative Case for Regulation’, *Public Interest*, No. 128, pp. 94-5.

¹⁰⁸ C. Murray (1997) *What It Means to Be a Libertarian: A Personal Interpretation* (New York: Broadway Books), pp. 114-23.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with C. DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

boundaries of their ideology: that is, pollution being an externality – its costs not borne solely by those consuming the goods that produce it – means that regulatory mechanisms may be justified to account for the additional social cost. Nonetheless, this does therefore provide economic liberals important common ground with even the less liberal wing of environmentalism, despite the fact that they are unlikely to concur with many of the prescriptions of writers such as Ophuls or Heilbroner.

12) A rejection of humanism.

Finally, concomitant to the elevated status of the natural world within much green and conservative thought, is a belief in the necessity of downgrading the status of human beings. That is, both many greens and many conservatives regard it as little more than arrogance to believe that humanity occupies a unique position within the natural world, perceiving it to be one of their most important tasks to disabuse humanity of this overweening pretension. Indeed, the rejection of anthropocentrism is what Gray praises as the fundamental characteristic of deep ecological thought.¹¹⁰

Yet in fact, most greens share such a perspective, with the very term anthropocentric – and in places the very word human – rarely figuring as anything other than a pejorative within green writings. For example, Porritt argues that we should replace an ‘anthropocentric’ view of man as existing separate from nature with a ‘biocentric’ philosophy that views humanity simply as one part of nature as a whole.¹¹¹ Moreover, as seen in Chapter 1, a different way of characterizing a conservative philosophy of the need to recognize limits is as anti-humanism.¹¹² Similarly, Eckersley notes the commonalities between conservative and environmentalist critiques of totalitarianism.¹¹³ A scepticism towards rationalism and political hubris are therefore equally to be found in common.

¹¹⁰ J. Gray (1997) *Endgames: Questions in Late Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 195.

¹¹¹ Porritt (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 206.

¹¹² L. Allison (1984) *Right Principles* (London: Basil Blackwell), p. 20.

¹¹³ Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

Furthermore, many environmentalists are also drawn to the postmodern alternative. For example, Eckersley argues that what is distinctive about 'eocentric theory' is that 'it represents a new constellation of post-Enlightenment political thought', whilst Dobson suggests that there are obvious grounds for greens to take on board 'post-modern celebrations of difference, diversity, foundationlessness and humility'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, broader philosophical questions may be argued to be at least as central to green thought as a concern for the natural environment itself. For example, Porritt contends that he is as interested in 'explaining why the old mechanistic world view of Bacon, Descartes and Newton is now wholly redundant ... [as] arguing the merits of flue gas desulphurization'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Dobson believes that 'the historical significance of radical green politics' precisely lies in its constituting a challenge to the Enlightenment project.¹¹⁶

With a rejection of humanism therefore the most fundamental commonality between green and conservative thinking, this also makes it the strongest basis for envisaging a convergence. As Vinson argues, 'it is hard to see why some environmentalists lean towards varieties of leftist thinking which strain and mold life into tight ideological dogmas. Nothing could be so foreign to the rich, organic vitality of nature.'¹¹⁷ In other words, to be true to their own philosophical perspective, environmentalists ought rather to lean to the Right.

Against Environmental Alarmism

From the above, two main conclusions may be drawn: first, that the common ground between environmentalism and conservatism encompasses a good many points of principle, perhaps more than is typically appreciated; and secondly, whilst these

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129; Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in F. Dodds (ed.) (1988) *Into the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Green Print), p. 201.

¹¹⁶ Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

commonalities mainly are with traditionalist varieties of conservatism, even with a free market philosophy a number of shared principles may be identified.

Yet despite this, there are a number of grounds for caution in imagining any unproblematic convergence between conservatism and environmentalism. To understand these it is necessary to consider two further aspects: the nature of many conservatives' own rejections of environmentalism, and the differences between conservative and green forms of environmentally concerned philosophies.

One obvious basis for conservative suspicion towards environmentalism is that, regardless of either theoretical affinities or environmentalists' claims to the contrary, it is nonetheless an ideology of the Left. For example, Gingrich testifies that: 'After I was elected to Congress, I found that national environmental organizations were all too often simply an extension of the left wing of the Democratic Party.'¹¹⁸ Indeed, conservatives frequently present it as a form of 'unmasking' to expose environmentalists as socialists simply in disguise. For example, George Will argues that (some) 'environmentalism is a "green tree with red roots." It is the socialist dream – ascetic lives closely regulated by a vanguard of bossy visionaries – dressed up as compassion for the planet.'¹¹⁹

However, other conservatives see environmentalism more as an ideology that has taken the place of socialism following the Cold War's conclusion. This is particularly clear amongst neoconservatives. For example, Michael Novak believes that 'environmentalism is likely to replace Marxism as the main carrier of gnosticism (and anti-capitalism) in the near future'. Similarly, Richard Neuhaus perceives that: 'After the demise of Marxism as an ideological force ... the banner of choice is currently THE ENVIRONMENT.'¹²⁰ In the same vein, James Dunn and John Kinney suggest that for the Left: 'with the failure of communism and socialism, their socialistic utopian ideal no longer made sense. The intellectual idealists then substituted the concept of ecological

¹¹⁸ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹¹⁹ G. F. Will (1994) *The Leveling Wind* (New York: Viking), p. 192.

¹²⁰ Both quoted in M. Gerson (1996) *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books), p. 236.

utopia.’¹²¹ Again the dilemma faced by conservatives in understanding their post-Cold War enemies is highlighted: are environmentalists simply old-fashioned socialists in another guise, or does their ideology represent something new?

Dunn and Kinney argue that conservatives’ dispute with left-wing environmentalists should be located within the paradigm of the culture wars, believing that greens consciously distort the facts about the environment to fit their political agendas. Indeed, they go so far as to suggest the possibility that a core group of environmentalists – green organizations, spokesmen and academics – may be operating conspiratorially, working to achieve the goal of undermining civilization that the communist parties of the past failed to accomplish.¹²² At the very least, this suggestion indicates once more the difficulty conservatives have engaging with contemporary enemies, the patent absurdity of comparing networks of environmentalists with those of Soviet agents indicative of a mind-set still fighting old battles. More fundamentally, such a conspiratorial view also clearly underestimates the extent to which environmentalism represents a pervasive ideology within contemporary society, not merely that of nefarious environmentalist cadres. Even so, it is unsurprising to find writers such as Irving Kristol seeking to link the promotion of environmental panics with a New Class analysis.¹²³

Many writers also recognize that there is more to environmentalists’ beliefs than simply reconstituted socialism. For example, this is evident from one of the most virulent assaults upon environmentalism’s intellectual pedigree, posited by George Reisman. According to Reisman, environmentalism embodies the pernicious ideas of a veritable cocktail of ideologies: as well as Marxism, it draws upon ‘racism, nationalism, and feminism; and cultural relativism, determinism, logical positivism, existentialism, linguistic analysis, behaviorism, Freudianism, Keynesianism, and more’.¹²⁴ Of course, this scattergun approach to criticism is perhaps more revealing of the author’s feelings of frustration with an intellectual climate perceived to be largely hostile than it is of a

¹²¹ Dunn and Kinney (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 217-23.

¹²³ I. Kristol (1991) ‘The Good Life and the New Class’, in P. Berger and I. Kristol (eds) *Health, Life-Style and Environment: Countering the Panic* (London: Social Affairs Unit), pp. 146-52.

concern with rational analysis. Nonetheless, the germ of a rational point may be divined from Riesman's tirade, which is that the intellectual roots of environmentalism are not solely socialist ones.

More coherently, Peter Berger places environmentalism within the general tradition of utopianism within Western thought, presumptuously committed to 'the utopia of a rationally planned life, both individually and collectively, in which the pursuit of happiness is ever more fully guaranteed'.¹²⁵ Whether socialist in character or not, environmentalism is nonetheless therefore regarded by many conservatives as animated by hubristic aspirations. In this sense, environmentalism may be understood somewhat differently to postmodernism, if regarded as no less troubling.

Turning to the question of specific principles, the most obvious place to begin is the rejection of green arguments by free market thinkers, many of whom clearly have little sympathy even for a free market environmentalist vision. Perhaps the most important such critic – or at least the most cited by greens themselves – is Julian Simon, who vigorously contests in particular the empirical claims of environmentalists. Thus, marshalling a wealth of quantitative data, he argues that fears about impending resource depletion and population growth are simply mistaken.¹²⁶ Similarly, many conservative journals question the factual validity of a range of environmental contentions (at least by opening their pages to critical scientists) from the scale of pollution to global warming. One of the most significant of these is the *Public Interest* which, with its long-time commitment to empirical analysis, has presented a host of articles challenging suggestions of environmental malaise.¹²⁷ Such questionings are also to be found within the output of many conservative think-tanks, with both the

¹²⁴ G. Reisman (1992) 'The Toxicity of Environmentalism', *Freeman*, Vol. 42, No. 9, p. 349.

¹²⁵ P. Berger (1991) 'Towards a Religion of Health Activism', in P. Berger and I. Kristol (eds) *Health, Life-Style and Environment: Countering the Panic* (London: Social Affairs Unit), p. 30.

¹²⁶ J. Simon (1990) *Population Matters* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers).

¹²⁷ For example: S. Moore (1992) 'So Much for "Scarce Resources"', *Public Interest*, No. 106; J. H. Adler (1992) 'Clean Fuels, Dirty Air: How a (Bad) Bill Became Law', *Public Interest*, No. 108; K. Zinmeister (1993) 'The Environmentalist Assault on Agriculture', *Public Interest*, No. 112; T. G. Moore (1995) 'Why Global Warming Would Be Good for You', *Public Interest*, No. 118. In Britain, conservative publications such as the *Spectator* publish similar articles: for example, J. Bowman (1990) 'Happy Earth Day to You', *Spectator*, 28 April; A. Kenny (1994) 'The Earth Is Fine; The Problem Is the Greens', *Spectator*, 12 March.

Institute of Economic Affairs and the Social Affairs Unit at the forefront in this area.¹²⁸ For example, James Le Fanu notes the paradox that whilst concern for the environment has never been greater, the realities of environmental pollution – our air, water and food being safer and healthier than ever before – are diminishing.¹²⁹

Naturally, it is not possible here to adjudicate on these empirical disputes; in any case, most important to understand are the differences of principle underlying them. For example, in contrast to the perspective of many environmentalists, Simon's is a self-consciously optimistic vision: the real facts about trends in resource availability and life expectancy are, he suggests, 'irrefutably happy'.¹³⁰ Moreover, underpinning his position is a very different view of humanity to that typically found in green accounts, one that believes human beings 'create more than they destroy'.¹³¹ From this standpoint, population growth should be regarded as a 'triumph rather than a problem', creating increased economic opportunities and – the more minds humanity possesses – potentially accelerating the rate at which knowledge is discovered.¹³² Indeed, one of his books' titles, describing humanity as *The Ultimate Resource*, thus reveals a resolutely humanistic position, equally implying a rejection of any supposed green theory of value.¹³³

Simon's questioning of eco-pessimism is also to be found throughout conservative writings. For example Will, observing how many predicted environmental catastrophes have failed to materialize, mockingly observes that although 'Various reasons for

¹²⁸ In 1993 the IEA established an 'Environment Unit' with the avowed aim of applying market-based analysis to environmental questions. For example: R. Bate (1994) *Global Warming: Apocalypse Or Hot Air?* (London: IEA Environment Unit); M. Pennington (1996) *Conservation and the Countryside: By Quango Or Market?* (London: IEA Environment Unit); J. Morris (ed.) (1997) *Climate Change: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (London: IEA Environment Unit). Of the Social Affairs Unit's output see Berger and Kristol (1991), *op. cit.*; J. Le Fanu (1994) *Environmental Alarums* (London: Social Affairs Unit); A. O'Hear (1997) *Nonsense About Nature* (London: Social Affairs Unit); M. Neal and C. Davies (1998) *The Corporation Under Siege: Exposing the Devices Used by Activists and Regulators in the Non-Risk Society* (London: Social Affairs Unit).

¹²⁹ Le Fanu (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹³⁰ Simon (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹³³ J. Simon (1981) *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).

gloominess come and go ... the supply of gloominess is remarkably constant.¹³⁴ Similarly, Dunn and Kinney also believe that 'the facts are largely "good news"'.¹³⁵ Moreover, a rejection of the basic worldview of environmentalism informs many conservative perspectives. For example, Geoffrey Howe cites writers such as William Blake and romantic notions of the countryside – denouncing dark satanic mills in favour of a green and pleasant land – as one of the major obstacles to the creation of a dynamic, modern economy.¹³⁶ Equally, the postmodernist affinities of environmentalists may also produce conservative antagonism. Thus Lynne Cheney is critical of environmentalism because it 'is about more than ecology, it is about how the great thinkers of the Enlightenment have led us astray'.¹³⁷

Furthermore, it is possible to turn a Burkean prudentialism on its head, as does Robert Whelan: 'The best way to provide for future generations is to exploit resources, not conserve them. Market forces and human ingenuity will take care of shortages by providing solutions which leave us better off than we were before.'¹³⁸ Similarly, Richard Ehrman argues that sustainable development is 'inimical to Conservative values'.¹³⁹ In particular, adopting this notion is a problem for conservative politics – presumably despite what Thatcher may think – in that the aspirations of the typical Conservative voter are to acquire a 'big house, big garden and second car'. Thus it is simply not possible 'to have a successful Conservative government without growth'; the 'inescapable concomitant' of which includes such implications as 'an increase in building and traffic'.

This being the case, Ehrman argues that it is reprehensible that people should have to suffer 'interference from a lot of bureaucratic nannies in the Department of the Environment'. This point of course highlights one of the most important concerns of many conservatives, that promoting environmental protection means strengthening the power of the state. As Le Fanu also argues, environmentalists' efforts to advance the

¹³⁴ Will (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹³⁵ Dunn and Kinney (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹³⁶ G. Howe (1991) Interview, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 January.

¹³⁷ L. Cheney (1995) *Telling the Truth* (New York: Simon and Schuster), p. 97.

¹³⁸ R. Whelan (1989) *Mounting Greenery* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs), p. 16.

'greater good' provide powerful legitimation to bureaucrats in allowing them to set themselves up as legislators of this good.¹⁴⁰ However, whilst the wider setting of conservative concerns regarding the relationship between contemporary doctrines such as environmentalism and an expanding state has already been explored in earlier chapters, one aspect discussed in Chapter 2 meriting further consideration is the role of the notion of risk. Thus not only may a focus upon risk be problematic in encouraging a growth in state regulation, it may for conservatives have other worrying implications.

Whilst for Giddens a greater sensitivity to risk implies that societies have become more reflexive, Mark Neal and Christie Davies argue that the dominance of risk-centred ideologies such as environmentalism means that modern societies are in fact far less reflexive than they once were, since assumptions about risks – from scepticism towards food additives to fears about nuclear energy – exist within the public consciousness as rigid and unquestioned dogmas.¹⁴¹ Thanks to a fixed presumption which always presupposes the very worst about human activity, there is, for example, an unwillingness to consider the reinstatement of banned chemicals even if further testing reveals them to be safe. The real consequence of the success of ideologies like environmentalism therefore is that they have displaced any genuinely critical or 'reflexive' outlook.

Furthermore, a Hobbesian understanding of the state of nature may also suggest why modern civilization ought to be preferred to living close to nature. Thus Charles Moore writes in regard to the romanticization of primitive tribes, that it is nonsense to

revere their superior understanding of their environment and contrast it with our own rapacity. In fact, these tribes are pathetic. Their lives are solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. They have no freedom, no law, no architecture, no literature, no universities, no churches ... not to mention all the rather more

¹³⁹ R. Ehrman (1994) 'Falling for the Green Fraud', *Spectator*, 30 July, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰ Le Fanu (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ Neal and Davies (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 44.

mundane things which make life more pleasant, like public transport and lavatories that flush and electric kettles ...¹⁴²

In other words, living in a natural state is not to live in the basically harmonious or pacific world envisaged by many greens.

Finally, Anthony O'Hear takes perhaps furthest the charges of romanticism and sentimentality, presenting one of the most in-depth attacks upon the fundamental principles of environmentalism. Thus, whilst many in the West preach a creed of a simple, unadulterated nature, 'people in the underdeveloped world can think of no fate more desirable than to enjoy the fruits of scientific, technological and economic development'.¹⁴³ Yet further, he deconstructs the whole set of ideas about nature deployed by green thinkers. For example, the distinction typically drawn between natural and artificial is, he argues, incoherent and untenable: indeed conservation itself is 'highly intrusive and anything but natural'.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the notion that the former equates to pure and moral, whilst the latter to impure and corrupted is also simplistic: shown, for example, by the fact that naturally occurring radiation overshadows that produced by power stations, and that many of the most toxic poisons are produced by nature rather than man.

Believing nature to provide the model to which human society should aspire is therefore highly questionable, since nature is frequently more man's enemy than friend. Moreover, it is simply arbitrary to presume that the present set of balances in nature is either ideal or permanent. In fact, it is more correct to see nature as in a state of imbalance, with everything subject to continual change; indeed without it – for example, the extinction of moribund species – evolution could not occur. Perhaps most serious, the sentimentality of environmentalism entails a degrading of the notions of autonomy and reason, as implied in the suggestion that animals may possess rights. O'Hear thus also stands his ground on a determinedly anthropocentric position.

¹⁴² C. Moore (1992) 'What Has the Earth Done to Deserve a Summit?', *Spectator*, 23 May, p. 8. See also R. Whelan (1999) *Wild in Woods: The Myth of the Noble Eco-Savage* (London: IEA Environment Unit).

¹⁴³ O'Hear (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

To understand the perspective of the above arguments it is necessary to return to the conclusions of the previous chapter. As suggested there, many conservatives clearly fear contemporary forms of irrationalism at least as much as rationalistic ideologies; at the same time, it was recognized that this does not mean any wholehearted embracing of Enlightenment aspirations. The same points are again pertinent. For example O’Hear, although criticizing the ‘idolatry’ of environmentalist earth worship – especially as personified in the Gaia hypothesis – nonetheless expresses a belief that man should be concerned for nature, as long as this concern is set within a traditional religious context. He thus concludes by quoting from Ruskin that the earth represents an entail to man from God.¹⁴⁵ Similarly Irving Kristol, although also disgusted by the ‘new paganism’ of environmentalism, and critical of its anti-science sentiments, is himself of course very much committed to a traditional religious worldview.¹⁴⁶ In other words, it is again less the case that contemporary conservatives have become unalloyed devotees of ‘enlightened’ thinking, but that they recognize the dangers presented to their own traditional beliefs by contemporary anti-rationalist doctrines.

The Problems of a Green Conservatism

Thus one obstacle to the convergence of conservatism and environmentalism is that many conservatives reject environmentalist tenets. However, there are also problems with the attempts of those conservatives who seek to embrace environmental concerns.

Eckersley suggests that there are a number of fundamental differences between green and conservative ideologies which make the two incompatible.¹⁴⁷ The first is that the green tradition is much more radical in its vision, arguing for a fundamental transformation of the political and economic status quo. By contrast, conservatism is resistant to both cultural innovation and social and political experimentation.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁶ I. Kristol (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁴⁷ Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 21-3, 30.

Moreover, green thought is imbued with an egalitarian ethos that seeks to transform existing power relations, which is contrary to a conservative commitment to established order and hierarchy. Yet the clearest difference, Eckersley argues, is that greens have been some of the most vociferous critics of Reaganism and Thatcherism. Thus Eckersley recommends rejecting the perspective of free market liberalism, as culpable for unleashing the very forces responsible for many environmental problems.

Beginning with the last of these points, there certainly is a question of credibility to be addressed by proponents of a free market environmentalism. The argument of writers such as Eckersley that allowing markets free rein and preserving the environment cannot exist in harmony implies that unfettered economic activity is inextricably linked to environmental exploitation. Yet whether or not the typical normative perspective of this belief is accepted – that unchecked economic growth is iniquitous – the point itself is substantially correct. That is, it is difficult to deny that the operation of market forces is responsible for significantly altering the natural environment, regardless of whether this is seen in destructive or creative terms. Moreover, whilst market discipline may encourage firms individually to be efficient in their use and management of raw materials, in terms of a capitalist system as a whole it cannot but be accepted that the imperatives of capitalism impel it towards the ever greater mastery and exploitation of the natural world. Whatever affinity there may be between free marketeers and environmentalists as regards a belief in the careful husbanding of the state's finances, the former clearly cannot believe the same about economic activity in the market sphere.

Similarly, whilst it may not be impossible for free market thinkers to concede the need for some regulation to meet environmental concerns, such concessions are always limited and begrudging, and unlikely to suggest any sincere belief in the natural world having a primary priority. In other words, there is always going to be a conflict for economic liberals with their anti-statist impulses. For example Thatcher, aiming to distinguish between her philosophy and that of a statist 'green socialism', rejects a reliance upon the state by invoking 'the scarred landscape, dying forests, poisoned rivers and sick children of the former communist states' to bear testimony to which

approach works best.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, few conservatives writing on the environment neglect the opportunity to draw contrasts with the legacy of pollution and environmental degradation borne by East European societies.¹⁴⁹ Yet this being the case, they fall back on precisely those mechanisms that most greens regard as themselves problematic, including not only those of the market but also scientific and technological solutions.¹⁵⁰ What this neglects is the extent to which environmentalists' arguments are bound up with a more general rejection of the values of both liberalism and modern science.

Moreover, although the parallels that may be drawn between the natural world and a model of the market conceived in spontaneous, self-equilibrating terms may have some validity, they clearly have so in only limited respects. That is, the type of equilibrium that is produced by the competitive pursuit of self-interest in a capitalist economy is hardly equivalent to the harmony typically envisaged by environmentalists. Indeed, scepticism towards such paralleling leads Lincoln Allison to describe Nisbet's classification of Adam Smith as an ecological thinker as 'wilfully perverse'.¹⁵¹

Furthermore, it is also difficult for economic liberals to escape the humanistic foundations of their ideology. Eckersley is largely correct in arguing that the classical liberalism of Locke and Smith treats the nonhuman world in purely instrumental terms, that a labour theory of value implies natural resources to be worthless until human labour valorizes them, and that it treats human happiness and freedom as inextricably linked to material progress.¹⁵² Yet again therefore, there must be seen a profound contradiction at the heart of free market environmentalists' doctrines, in that they are attempting to marry humanist and anti-humanist imperatives. Whilst this contradiction may not imply the complete non-viability of a free market environmentalist approach, it certainly points up the great difficulties there are in satisfying simultaneously both sets of requirements. Furthermore, the perceived hegemony of free market thinking within

¹⁴⁸ M. Thatcher (1993) *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins), p. 641.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 196; C. Moore (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also Gray (1993), *op. cit.*, pp. 130-3.

¹⁵⁰ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 20. See also Dunn and Kinney (1996), *op. cit.*, chs 2-6.

¹⁵¹ L. Allison (1991) *Ecology and Utility* (Leicester: Leicester University Press), p. 15.

¹⁵² Eckersley (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

conservative ideology is what led Gray to abandoning his belief in the feasibility of a green conservatism.¹⁵³

Finally on this point, in terms of political advantage it is at least open to question whether contemporary conservatives' rural support is more important than its urban one; in other words, whether it truly is electorally expedient for free market conservatives to temper a growth-centred vision with an environment-centred one. As Ehrman colourfully writes, 'when it comes to counting Tory supporters there must, by any reckoning, be fewer shire Nimbies than there are upwardly mobile Essex men and women'.¹⁵⁴ Certainly this is a fairly impressionistic assessment, but it is nonetheless the case that contemporary conservative political support is by no means as obviously rooted in the country villages and market towns suggested by John Patten as perhaps it once was.

However, with the tensions between free market and green doctrines in any case the most obvious, this leaves to be addressed the question of other modes of conservatism. As seen, a further argument of Eckersley's in distinguishing between environmentalism and conservatism is that the former is far more 'radical', seeking much more fundamental social, political and economic change. Leaving aside Eckersley's particular suggestion of egalitarianism – it being difficult to see why an egalitarian rather than hierarchical doctrine possesses any greater legitimacy from a nature-centred perspective – this point is still worth considering.

Thus a common criticism levelled by greens against conservatives is that their environmentalism is restricted merely to the conservation of a traditional landscape. For example, Robinson argues that "greenness" for the Conservatives appears as little more than a cosy, nostalgic feeling about countryside past-times and thatched cottages'.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Young suggests that: 'Conservative environmental concern therefore has to remain for the most part parochial. Conservatives campaign in favour

¹⁵³ J. Gray (1995) *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge), p. 191 note 32.

¹⁵⁴ Ehrman (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁵ Robinson (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 220.

of favourite causes, rare species, special bits of countryside, hedgerows or old buildings.¹⁵⁶

As discussed in Chapter 3, it is certainly legitimate to label conservative visions cosy and nostalgic. Yet equally, so may those of greens: for example, Berger's description of the green utopia as one of 'happy peasants, jumping through the grass' is hardly any less fair to greens than Young or Robinson are to conservatives.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, it has also been shown to be untrue that a conservative environmentalism extends to no more than a simple preservationism: conservatives may be as committed to a more fundamental philosophy of limits as any green thinker. In other words, what Giddens terms 'philosophic' conservatism may rightly be said to inform the perspectives of both. Yet what this highlights is the fact that factors other than an attitude towards change need to be considered to distinguish between conservative and green doctrines.

Two points of interest are raised by the charge of parochialism. First, is the fact that – despite their rejections of humanism or affinities with postmodernism – greens are typically committed to a universalist perspective. That is, although not predicated upon the universally possessed capacities of human beings, a belief in the interconnectedness of the global environment does lead most greens to adopt a universal outlook. Yet this therefore creates tensions with the particularism of traditionalist conservative standpoints. For example, Fleming is thus suspicious of the internationalism of environmentalists. Indeed, in this respect the normative viewpoint of environmentalism may be even more deluded than those of earlier hubristic ideologies:

Previous ethical systems, including those that claimed to be universal, acknowledged the importance of private, familial, local and national loyalties, but a global ethic would be more concerned with the interrelationship between an Illinois landfill site and the greenhouse effect.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Young (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁷ Berger (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Fleming (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

Moreover, Fleming finds distasteful environmentalists' demands for international regulatory mechanisms, implying as they do an erosion of national sovereignty. As noted in Chapter 5, Kenneth Minogue similarly worries about the legitimisation phenomena such as global warming provide to internationalist ideologues.¹⁵⁹

Secondly, what is also indicated by both Young's and Robinson's condemnations is the fact that whilst a traditionalist conservative environmentalism is essentially a rural ideology – its roots traceable to a fundamentally aristocratic Toryism – by contrast, modern environmentalism is basically an urban, middle class philosophy. This then is further reason why Fleming finds the latter unpalatable. Commenting on the celebrations of Earth Day, he writes dismissively: 'In New York, Chicago, and most large cities, hundreds of thousands of urbanites gather to celebrate their oneness with nature by listening to electrically produced music blasted through massive electronic sound systems.'¹⁶⁰

More seriously, although conservatives like Vinson may believe that society 'desperately needs the perspective of a self-reliant rural class', this is typically the last social group greens desire to represent an environmentalist perspective.¹⁶¹ Thus although within green debates there is much argument over who should be the bearers of an environmental ethic – suggestions ranging from salaried professionals to the members of new social movements – it is rarely imagined that it might be the countryside inhabitants of conservative visions.¹⁶² Indeed, members of this group (those who actually live closest to nature) are more commonly cast within green writings as part of the problem of environmental degradation rather than of its solution. For example, hunters and farmers are typically prime targets of environmentalists' wrath – for failing to share their sentimental views of animals and for employing modern agricultural methods – and certainly not seen as potential allies.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ See also J. Rabkin (1997) 'Globalist Heart-Warming', *National Review*, 8 December; J. Rabkin and J. Sheehan (1999) *Global Greens, Global Governance* (London: IEA Environment Unit).

¹⁶⁰ T. Fleming (1990) 'Short Views on Earth Day', *Chronicles*, Vol. 14, No. 8, p. 12.

¹⁶¹ Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁶² Dobson (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 148-64.

¹⁶³ McCormick (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 69-87.

By the same token, conservatives usually have little sympathy for those whom greens imagine might be able to accomplish their goals. For example, Vinson observes that: ‘Unfortunately, some environmentalists have made common political cause with radical feminists, gay activists, and other groups which have, at the very least, a bias against the family.’¹⁶⁴ This comment indeed thereby indicates a whole range of differences, regarding notions of morality and the family, which likely separate conservatives from greens.

Conservatives are also frequently sceptical of the very language of environmentalism. Thus as Moore observes: ‘It was never called the “environment” by anyone who celebrated it in verse or simply went for a walk and looked at it.’¹⁶⁵ That is, he understands that the term itself clearly has a normative character; with conservatives often preferring more neutral terms such as ‘countryside’ or ‘nature’. However, it may also be that conservatives deploy a normative vocabulary of their own. For example, as Chilton Williamson points out, the environment is ‘what Christians used to call Creation’.¹⁶⁶ In other words, if employing the term environment is a means by which environmentalists attempt to lay ideological claim to concern for the natural world, so may conservatives’ use of terms such as Creation imply a similar effort at ideological ownership.

Moreover, deeper differences in terms of how greens and conservatives conceive the natural world are also revealed. For example, use of the word Creation reveals how the spiritual values espoused by each are also frequently very different. This has already been seen in relation to those, such as O’Hear and Kristol, who are explicitly hostile to environmentalism, but it is also true of most conservative accounts. For example, Thatcher suggests a specifically Christian perspective, in arguing that ‘we must not try to be, the Lords of all we survey. We are not the Lords; we are the Lord’s creatures.’¹⁶⁷ Similarly, Gingrich also takes his cue from Biblical authority: ‘As the book of Genesis says, we have an obligation to cultivate that which God has given

¹⁶⁴ Vinson (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁵ C. Moore (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ Williamson (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁶⁷ Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 21.

us.¹⁶⁸ Thus, whilst a general commitment to 'spiritual' values may be shared by both greens and conservatives, this need not mean that these values are the same; and as suggested by O'Hear's rejection of the 'idolatry' of earth worship, there may indeed be antagonism.

Of most significance, a specifically Judeo-Christian perspective has a number of important implications as to how man's relationship to nature should be conceived. Almost all conservatives understand this in terms of a custodial or guardianship model: for example, Bliese writes that 'we are always to act as trustees, as faithful stewards of all that we have inherited'; Chris Patten that 'the notion of custodianship has a central part in the Conservative approach ... We are trustees, obliged to pass on what we inherited from the last generation to the next'; whilst Thatcher believes that Conservatives 'are not merely friends of the Earth – we are its guardians and trustees for generations to come'.¹⁶⁹

However, this suggests a very different view of man's position vis-à-vis the natural world than that held by many environmentalists, in particular deep ecologists. That is, conservative forms of environmentalism in fact remain human-centred ones: as Goodin points out, the theological notion of custodianship implicitly presupposes man to possess a higher status than the rest of nature, since man is believed to have been by given God a unique role in its protection.¹⁷⁰ Whilst being a 'friend of the earth' may suggest some form of equality between man and the natural world, to be its guardian implies a fundamentally unequal relationship. That is, a traditional religious perspective is in fact more 'humanistic' in its outlook than is typically the case with greens'.

Indeed, a belief that concern for the environment should be understood largely in terms of human interests is widespread amongst conservative environmentalists. For example, Gingrich readily accepts that 'man dominates the planet', whilst Dunn and Kinney avow that 'our effort is primarily anthropocentric: we regard the world first in

¹⁶⁸ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁶⁹ Bliese (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 151; C. Patten (1983), *op. cit.*, p. 137; Thatcher (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 10. See also Anderson and Leal (1991), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ Goodin (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 6.

terms of human needs'.¹⁷¹ Equally, Fleming believes that 'Man is ultimately the proper subject of any discussion of the environment.'¹⁷²

Nor do many conservatives have much sympathy with the anti-humanism implicit in the belief that the moral status of animals should be elevated. According to Scruton, the efforts of animal rights activists represent pernicious examples of how 'humans feed their dislike of other humans by sentimentalizing other species'.¹⁷³ Indeed, the issue of animal rights is a significant obstacle for such conservatives to embracing Gray's idea of a post-Christian morality centred upon environmental concerns. Thus Scruton perceives the successes of anti-fur trade campaigners to reveal that 'at a time when Parliament has become ostentatiously permissive in all matters pertaining to traditional morality ... morality has become a matter of fashionable posturing rather than a submission to conscience'.

Moreover, it is necessary to be sceptical towards many of the parallels that may be drawn between traditionalist conservative principles and those of environmentalists. For example, conservatives' concerns for absent generations is essentially a concern for absent human beings, the notion that it is up to individuals in the present to be mindful of our descendants' inheritance also betraying a basically human-centred view of the earth's ownership. Similarly, conservatives' use of organicist imagery may well serve metaphorical purposes, but this is different to believing that social reality in fact corresponds to the order of nature.

In other words, the character of conservative 'anti-humanism' is typically of a different order to that of environmentalists. That is, conservatives' anti-humanism is fundamentally oriented to a rejection of the hubris of rationalist ideologies' social visions, which may not imply that man does not possess a privileged position in relation to the natural world. For example, Scruton's avowal of a social constructionist philosophy (noted in Chapter 3) clearly reveals a commitment to a belief in the essential humanness of the world.

¹⁷¹ Gingrich (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 195; Dunn and Kinney (1996), *op. cit.*, p. xiii.

¹⁷² Fleming (1996), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁷³ R. Scruton (2000) 'Introduction', in R. D. North *Fur and Freedom: In Defence of the Fur Trade* (London: IEA Environment Unit), p. 7.

What has been demonstrated in this chapter is that clear affinities exist between conservatism and environmentalism. Moreover, it is not solely traditionalist conservatives who embrace environmental concerns. Nonetheless, there are also barriers to the convergence of conservatism and environmentalism. Most fundamentally, despite their anti-humanist commitments conservatives' views of society and morality are essentially those of a human-oriented ideology.

Conclusion

It is now possible to reconsider the issues raised in Chapter 1. However, before turning to the specific hypotheses that were set out, a number of other issues may be re-examined. First, from what has been discussed it is apparent that important differences exist between contemporary British and American conservatives – for example, the latter clearly believe that developments such as the rise of political correctness are more pressing threats. Nonetheless, what is also evident is that British and American conservatives address similar issues and experience similar dilemmas.

Further, the circumspection expressed towards abstract typologies of conservatism has been vindicated by the documenting of a range of issues in which conservative commitments do not correspond to straightforward or predictable divisions. For example, although the expectation that environmentalists' arguments are most in accord with a traditionalist conservative perspective is broadly confirmed in Chapter 7, as was also shown several free market writers appear more ready than some traditionalist conservatives to embrace environmental concerns.

Equally, good reasons have been seen for agreeing with the idea that Left and Right are inadequate as labels for describing contemporary ideological positions. For example, the number of conservatives ready to defend the Enlightenment and objectivity, reject the 'irrationality' of postmodernists, and attack the illiberalism of political correctness – together with the hostility of many of conservatives' critics towards notions such as progress – reveals that contemporary ideological divides do not necessarily correspond to traditional Left and Right splits.

It is next necessary to address the hypotheses set out in the introduction. As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of the thesis has not been straightforwardly to prove or disprove these hypotheses, but rather to use them as a means of exploring the arguments and perspectives of contemporary conservatives. It is in this light that they are to be reconsidered.

1) Conservatives no longer possess any significant defining purpose, either enemies to fight or 'big ideas' to promote.

From what has been examined, it is clear that conservatives are able to find ideas to promote even after the resolution of the conflicts of the Cold War era. A number of these have been identified in the preceding chapters: for example, revitalizing civil society, responding to the challenges of globalization and fighting a culture war. Similarly, there are no shortage of foes lined up by conservatives as replacements for the socialist menace, including feminists, politically correct moralists, 'New Class' regulators and utopian internationalists.

However, a number of clear problems for conservatives relating to their contemporary enemies and agendas have also been highlighted:

First, the threats conservatives identify are far more diverse and disparate than that of socialism. Whereas the latter represented a relatively easy to identify target, the array of -isms contemporary conservatives seek to tackle – from multiculturalism to postmodernism – does not constitute a single, unified threat. Although conservatives themselves often appear to pay scant regard to the differences between their ideological enemies, it is even less credible to group all elements of an 'adversary culture' within a single category than it is to place together all varieties of traditional left-wing ideologies. Similarly, as seen in Chapter 2 with Irving Kristol's attempts at definition, identifying who precisely constitutes a New Class or countercultural elite without resorting to vague 'knowing them when one sees them' characterizations is far from easy.

Second, understanding the ideological character of contemporary enemies appears much harder. For example, many conservatives perceive enemies such as environmentalists and proponents of the Third Way simply to be socialists operating in different guises. Yet this can cause problems in understanding what is distinctive in these enemies' perspectives, in terms of the fact that many reject traditional left-wing orthodoxies. Indeed, as seen in Chapter 4, many conservatives clearly have not altered their view of the Left from how it existed in the 1960s. They may not therefore recognize that their modern adversaries often advocate diametrically opposite views on

issues such as sexual permissiveness to those of past antagonists. Conservatives may thus be left fighting caricatures rather than real opponents.

Three, contemporary enemies may not constitute as convincing threats as those of the past, and are thus less able to provide conservatives either with wider resonance for their ideology or internal cohesion. Thus, although some conservatives may attempt to draw parallels between the Cold War and current cultural conflicts, it is difficult to present the politically correct academic as a threat comparable to the red menace. Similarly, comparing environmentalists to Soviet agents, or presenting postmodernists as in league with demonic forces, merely demonstrates a lack of perspective.

Fourth, in attributing the influence of antagonistic ideas largely to the activities of degenerate intellectuals, many conservatives neglect the deeper forces which may be responsible for undermining traditional institutions and values. That is, conservatives frequently ignore the more difficult possibilities that the acceptance of green ideas or 'alternative lifestyles' are not merely the result of the influence of malignant ideologies, but reflective of wider social changes.

Fifth, the tenets of those whom many conservatives wish to treat as enemies are not as easily distinguishable as socialist ones from the principles conservatives themselves espouse. For example, it is quite possible to see a strong affinity between conservative doctrines and ideologies such as environmentalism and postmodernism. Although there may also be significant differences, there is nonetheless far less clear water between conservatism and these ideologies than many culture war protagonists acknowledge.

Sixth, the ideas contemporary conservatives are enthusiastic to promote may not be distinctively conservative ones. Although it has been questioned whether the beliefs of free market writers have been as unambiguously embraced by their opponents as some appear to believe, it is nonetheless the case that market liberals are far from any longer alone in believing that there is no alternative to a market-based system. Yet more definitely, a lack of distinctiveness is apparent in relation to traditionalist conservative concerns: for example, valuing communal bonds, tradition or moral virtue is hardly unique to conservatives within contemporary politics. Thus conservatives may possess far fewer distinctive ideas to champion.

Finally, in relation to those standpoints which are largely distinctive to conservatives – such as the rejection of political correctness and the upholding of traditional educational and cultural standards – their efforts to present themselves as disinterested and objective defenders are often compromised by the fact that they themselves typically hold highly instrumental and partisan views of the purposes of education and cultural experience. That is, it is difficult for conservatives to claim to be standing upon any higher moral or intellectual ground than their opponents.

2) Despite the absence of viable alternatives to capitalism, free market liberalism appears bankrupt.

One of the strongest reasons for believing a market liberal ideology to have been in the ascendant since the Cold War's conclusion is not only that it no longer faces ideological challenge from socialists, but that its erstwhile opponents even appear to accept many free market beliefs. Moreover, contemporary trends such as globalization and the advance of the information revolution may be taken to provide clear support for the belief that an ideology of unfettered capitalism must be embraced.

Thus, as seen, a number of strongly free market perspectives may be identified, of conservatives such as Newt Gingrich and John Redwood, and think-tanks such as the Cato Institute and the Adam Smith Institute. Similarly, at least some are prepared to forward bold agendas, such as Duncan and Hobson's idea of 'liquidating' the British state. For these reasons, David Willetts' contention that intellectual neo-liberalism has collapsed is clearly far from accurate.

However, what has also been seen is that free market beliefs are not free from challenge in the post-socialist context. Thus if arguments to reject capitalism have declined, ones demanding its constraint and regulation are commonplace. For example: to promote social justice; to manage risk; to preserve the environment and communities; and to protect national cultures. Whilst free market writers do offer arguments to meet these challenges – such as arguing that markets can provide

solutions to environmental problems – they are compromised in a number ways.

For example, the credibility of conservatives' anti-statist agendas is clearly undermined by the records of conservative governments, not only in failing to roll back the state, but also in further expanding its domain. Moreover, whilst market liberal agendas may not be dead, it is nonetheless the case that free market writers frequently appear less confident and more defensive, in tempering their commitments to any 'pure' free market philosophy. Thus many readily accept concerns about the integrity of communities and the state of morality. As noted in Chapter 5, even radical libertarian Murray Rothbard feels the need to acknowledge that individuals are born into a specific context. Yet qualifying an individualist perspective, even if not with the intention of accepting that markets are responsible for the problems critics claim, undoubtedly weakens free marketeers' grounds for rejecting these criticisms.

Moreover, writers who attempt to combine free market and communitarian commitments open themselves to the charge of contradiction. As seen with Willetts in Chapter 3, whatever intellectual legitimacy there may be in siding with Hegel against Kant in rejecting the idea of individual autonomy, this inevitably raises the question of how well this rejection sits with the liberalism of a free market perspective.

3) The main focus of conservatives' concerns has shifted away from economics and politics to more pessimistic ones around culture and morality.

If a free market philosophy is not dead, at the same time neither can Gray's contention that neo-liberalism is hegemonic within conservatism be considered correct. For example, many conservatives clearly demonstrate very little interest in following market liberals' prescriptions, such as their ambitions to roll back the state. Moreover, the antagonism of many traditionalist conservatives towards free market beliefs appears to have been heightened by contemporary issues: many are evidently more than the willing to hold free market doctrines responsible for damage done to both the natural and social environments.

Similarly, there is undoubtedly strong evidence to support Andrew Sullivan's suggestion of a 'cultural turn', with numerous conservatives explicitly avowing the importance of focusing upon cultural questions. What is particularly notable is the range of arenas in which cultural factors are imagined by conservatives to play a decisive role, from economics to foreign affairs. Moreover, conservatives' perspectives frequently are highly pessimistic, with institutions from the family to the university perceived to be in a state of grievous moral disorder. Indeed, some conservatives believe society to be so demoralized that they are no longer confident that even a 'silent majority' shares conservative values, let alone any countercultural elite. Clear signs of insecurity are also evident in conservatives' efforts to defend traditional cultural standards and morality. Thus, the very shrillness of many conservatives' contributions to culture war debates reveals a patent lack of confidence in the ability of traditional beliefs and institutions to resist challenge.

One consequence of conservatives' pessimism is a greater willingness to countenance the use of state mechanisms, such as censorship, to remoralize society. Yet at the same time, it is also often recognized that in dealing with cultural malaise, politics is largely impotent. For many, it is therefore hoped that civil society will be able to provide solutions; although, for the reasons discussed in Chapter 3, it is far from certain that this hope is well founded. Amongst the more radical elements of American conservatism, some appear willing to question the very legitimacy of the present regime, this standpoint – though undoubtedly marginal – indicating the depth of disquiet felt by American conservatives in particular regarding the current state of morality.

Nonetheless, not all conservatives are pessimistic. For example, at least some are evidently satisfied that the end of communism has secured their ideology a decisive victory. Moreover, many appear highly optimistic in championing the benefits of science, technology and modern medicine; and as shown in Chapter 7, the rejections of environmentalism by conservatives such as Irving Kristol and Anthony O'Hear reveal that it is not solely market liberals who defend the achievements of the modern age. Indeed, conservatives are often critical of the 'gloominess' of adversaries such as environmentalists. However, this frequently hostile attitude towards contemporary exponents of 'anti-modern' philosophies – even more apparent in the case of

postmodernism – may seem at variance with conservatives’ historical scepticism towards ‘modernist’ beliefs.

4) Despite a social and intellectual climate hostile to ‘radicalism’, traditionalist conservative doctrines lack purchase.

If an aversion to individualist and free market beliefs characterizes many of the ideologies which seem to enjoy the greatest resonance in the post-Cold War era, there are clearly grounds for believing that a traditionalist conservatism possesses the resources to gain much wider intellectual sympathy and credibility than a market liberal philosophy. For example, the sceptical perspective of a traditionalist conservatism may be in accord with a communitarian critique of liberalism, a postmodernist rejection of metanarratives, and an environmentalist hostility towards progress.

These affinities have been shown to be recognized by many conservatives, with a number supporting communitarian and environmentalist doctrines (though far fewer feeling the same regard for postmodernist ones). Nonetheless, also highlighted have been reasons why the scope for stable alliances may be limited.

In the case of postmodernism, despite a number of suggestive parallels between conservative and postmodernist arguments being identified, conservatives’ concerns to resist challenges to traditional values ultimately precludes widespread acceptance of a perspective that does not provide solid grounding for moral absolutes. In relation to environmentalism, what has been seen is that although both conservatives and environmentalists may share broadly ‘anti-humanist’ perspectives, these are nonetheless of different orders. Thus much of conservative thought remains largely human-centred, with few conservatives sympathetic to notions such as animal rights. Furthermore, regarding the wider appeal of postmodernist and environmentalist beliefs, whilst widespread social scepticism towards the values of rationalism and progress may be of benefit to conservatives in undermining the authority of progressive ideologies, conservatives are also evidently concerned that too much cynicism may produce a lack

of faith in any definite beliefs, including their own.

Moreover, as demonstrated by conservative rejections of the sentimentality of communitarians, and the specific way in which they conceive notions such as virtue, conservative prescriptions are typically much more demanding than those of their opponents, such as their calls for the stigmatization of illegitimacy. Yet not only may conservatives face the charge of intolerance, but also the problem that much more challenging requirements therefore need to be fulfilled for the creation of conservative communities than is the case with other communitarians' conceptions. For example, that communities be willing to shame and ostracize transgressors against the strictures of conservatives' moral codes.

Furthermore, conservatives frequently do not recognize that social changes may not imply that morality is in decline but instead that it has changed in character, as with the acceptance of non-traditional identities. The problem this poses for conservative moralists is that rather than simply facing the task of re-moralizing a society denuded of all values – difficult as such an undertaking might be – they face the even harder one of combating widely subscribed to alternative moralities. It is therefore not surprising that many appear to fit Giddens' characterization of a 'fundamentalist', failing to engage with the changed nature of a 'post-traditional' world. Moreover, as much as the institutions of the market may command little faith, so too do many of the ones defended by traditionalist conservatives, from the nuclear family to Christian churches.

5) Contemporary conservatism is characterized by an increasing factiousness and disunity.

Of course, there are a number of areas of agreement between contemporary conservatives. Thus, although many conservatives have become more hostile towards market liberalism, a shared perspective is nonetheless evident in conservatives' antagonism towards such aspects of state activity as the provision of welfare, with a conjoining of economic and moral concerns apparent in attacks upon the dependency culture. Similarly, a preference for civil society and the voluntary sector is displayed by

most varieties of conservative. Indeed, an agenda of regenerating civil society may be believed to provide a unifying glue similar to that of the Cold War. Furthermore, the willingness of many libertarians to recognize the importance of the moral and cultural supports of the market may also provide a potential basis for unity.

Nonetheless, there are at least as many bases for disharmony. Thus contemporary issues, such as the implications of globalization for national sovereignty, often exacerbate the conflict between market liberals and traditionalist conservatives. Moreover, the issue of globalization accentuates the contrast between traditionalist conservatives' preference for the local and the particular and the universalizing imperatives of free marketeers' visions. Yet other splits are also apparent: for example, the antagonism felt by paleoconservatives towards neoconservatives. Furthermore, even when conservatives may agree on shared ambitions, such as the reinvigoration of civil society, conflict nonetheless arises as to how goals are to be achieved; the increased willingness of some conservatives to use the state to achieve their ends thus opening the gap with libertarians even further.

The final conclusion to be drawn therefore is that, whilst it would be premature to describe conservative ideology as exhausted, it is nonetheless the case that the ending of the Cold War era has generated many problems for conservatives. Conservatives have clearly not achieved any straightforward intellectual dominance, with many indeed perceiving the present ideological climate to be a highly hostile one. Moreover, despite this climate being one seemingly amenable to 'conservative' ideas in a number of respects (as with the widespread rejection of radical change) it is nonetheless frequently antagonistic to the specific ideology of conservatism. In other words, although neither dead nor bankrupt, it is correct to conclude that conservatism has been disoriented by the circumstances of the post-Cold War world, with conservatives left struggling to develop an ideology of contemporary relevance.

List of Interviewees

Digby Anderson, 22 June 1998.

Robert Bork, 10 September 1998.

Virginia Bottomley, 20 May 1998.

Maurice Cowling, 18 May 1998.

Christopher DeMuth, 16 October 1998.

Stephen Dorrell, 23 June 1998.

Edwin Feulner, 22 October 1998.

Daniel Finkelstein, 5 June 1998.

Thomas Fleming, 2 October 1998.

David Frum, 4 September 1998.

David G. Green, 22 June 1998.

Owen Harries, 9 September 1998.

David Howell, 14 July 1998.

Douglas Hurd, 25 June 1998.

Jeane Kirkpatrick, 16 September 1998.

Irving Kristol, 13 October 1998.

William Kristol, 20 October 1998.

Charles Moore, 14 July 1998.

Charles Murray 22 September 1998.

Richard Neuhaus, 23 October 1998.

Madsen Pirie, 19 June 1998.

Norman Podhoretz, 11 September 1998.

David Willetts, 22 June 1998.

Peregrine Worsthorne, 8 May 1998.

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