Ontological Social Policy Analysis

An investigation into the ontological assumptions underpinning the social security reforms of the UK Coalition Government 2010-2015

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis builds from a central premise: all social policy, like all social research, relies on a number of assumptions about the fundamental nature of social reality and human existence. These assumptions are 'ontological' in the sense that 'ontology' is the philosophy of being and existence. Ontological assumptions are effectively the positions we take in response to the fundamental, unavoidable, and controversial questions from which human understanding proceeds. These questions include: 'is there an objective social reality?'; 'do we have free-will?'; 'are we the product of our social context?'; and 'are institutions and cultures causally significant?'. It is increasingly accepted in the academic literature that these questions are a crucial aspect of social research, because they are the base level upon which knowledge is built. And yet, despite this acceptance, the academic literature largely ignores the role of ontological assumptions in policy making. It is the central argument of this thesis that ontological assumptions are a crucial aspect of social policy making.

As well as asserting the importance of ontological assumptions in social policy, the thesis develops a critical realist framework for their analysis. This framework is named 'ontological social policy analysis', and it is applied here to UK social security policy. The empirical research takes the form of a textual analysis and considers a number of key social policy documents. The analysis begins with the post-2005 'modernisation' projects in the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, and then goes on to consider their time in office as coalition partners (2010-2015), with a particular focus on the DWP and its flagship reform, Universal Credit. In the course of the analysis, a number of ontological contradictions are unearthed, each of which has the potential to significantly undermine the effectiveness of the policy reforms. Such findings demonstrate both the possibility and fecundity of 'ontological social policy analysis'.

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

<u>Introduction</u>

We each hold assumptions about the nature of reality ('ontological assumptions') but they are not free-floating ideas that we can pick up and abandon whenever we wish; they exist within an interrelated world and are therefore part of the causal ebbs and flows of social reality. We clearly do have some freedom in relation to our ontological beliefs, but this freedom is constrained and enabled in a number of ways. Firstly, our ideas have *logical relations* so that, for example, we cannot be both a theist and an atheist at the same time; or at least, we cannot be both without having to face the difficulties of living with such a contradiction. Therefore, although the logical relations between ideas are not cast-iron constraints, they do condition our thought to the extent that holding contradictions is relatively difficult and holding complementarities is relatively easy. Secondly, our ideas have *intertextual relations*, so that our ascription to one particular belief is often unavoidably the ascription to another. Sometimes our beliefs come in a bundle, so that we ascribe to a number of beliefs simultaneously; as a result, we often make assumptions without realising it, with one of our ideas implicating another; in other instances, our beliefs clearly indicate one another in a way that we have 'thought through'. Thirdly, our beliefs have to be conceived of *in language* if they are to be expressed or even fully understood. We may hold beliefs without realising them that therefore escape the constraints of language, but if we are to recognise them, defend them, or explore their meaning and implications, we must do so through language or some other semiotic system, and must therefore negotiate the rules of that system. Fourthly, our beliefs are constrained by their correspondence with our experience of existence, both in terms of our internal life and the external stimuli we encounter. Many challenge the very distinction between our internal life and external stimuli, but either way our experiences clearly limit what we can comfortably conceive. Therefore, our freedom to hold ontological assumptions (beliefs about the nature of reality) is not the freedom to flip switches on and off, but the freedom to navigate a complex, multi-facetted, and causal ideational terrain.

I outlined these premises in 2015 after reading Margaret Archer's *Culture and Agency* (1996) and Furlong and Marsh's 'A Skin Not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science' (2010). These two sources provided me with the initial justification and motivation for the research project because they lead directly to the *founding* claim that *ontological assumptions themselves matter*. The resultant three

and a half years of research into ontological assumptions and their implication in UK social security reform has ultimately provided a justification for the more controversial *concluding* claim that *ontological assumptions matter in social policy*. Specifically, the analysis is here concerned with how we might identify the ontological assumptions underpinning social policy documents. More specifically still, the ontological assumptions under analysis are those that implicitly underpin the social security reforms of the UK Coalition Government (2010-2015). This particular focus enables the research to contribute to four main areas of existing knowledge and open up a potential fifth.

Firstly, a contribution is made to social theory, with Chapters 1 and 2 developing a systematic approach to the ontological questions raised above. Secondly, a contribution is made to the existing literature on welfare ideologies and the political ideologies from which they derive, with Chapter 3 identifying the main ontological assumptions underlying neoliberalism, conservatism, social democracy, and Marxism. Thirdly, a contribution is made to the British politics literature, with Chapters 4-6 offering crucial insights into the ideology of the Conservative Party and the Coalition Government via a unique ontology-based analysis of a central plank of their policy agenda. Fourthly, Chapters 4-6 also contribute to the existing literature on UK welfare policy, with Chapter 6 in particular showing that a number of ontological contradictions are embedded in the Universal Credit project. Fifthly, finally, and crucially, the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, and the demonstration of its applicability, makes a major contribution to social research by opening up a new area of public policy analysis: *ontological social policy analysis* - the analysis of ontological assumptions in social policy. The full extent of the potential of this new analytical approach is difficult to gauge, but some of the most obvious lines of future research are explored in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

What are ontological assumptions?

Some readers may so far be confused by the jargonistic use of the term 'ontological assumptions', while other readers who are familiar with the term may feel uncomfortable about the way in which it has been used. The above paragraphs consider ontological assumptions as objects in a causal account of politics and society, without (a) explaining exactly what they are, or (b) acknowledging that this account *is itself* based on a series of ontological assumptions. For these reasons and for reasons that will become clear in due course, it is vitally important for this research to be open and clear about its own assumptions. Therefore, the following statements should be

made: (a) ontological assumptions are assumptions about the nature of 'being' and 'reality'; (b) this thesis ascribes to a Bhaskarian critical realist ontology. In order to clarify both statements, it is necessary to outline three of the most basic 'layers' of ontological assumptions and identify the Bhaskarian critical realist position in each.

The first layer of ontological assumptions are assumptions about ourselves. Very few people would deny their own consciousness and most people therefore ascribe to the beliefs that they are (i) *conscious* and that, because they are conscious, they must (ii) *exist* at some level or in some sense of the word. That we are all aware of our own consciousness shows that we are also (iii) *self-conscious*, and, as demonstrated by our ability to make and follow the argument through i, ii, and iii, we can assume that people (iv) have some *capacity for reason*. There are many more ontological claims that could be made about the self, but these four are perhaps the most fundamental, and certainly the most relevant for current purposes. The first three of these assumptions are purely ontological questions, but the fourth can also be epistemological; whether we have a capacity for reason is an ontological question but whether our reasoning helps us *understand* anything is an epistemological question. Critical realism is not only consistent with points i to iv, but emphasises their importance as the foundation of knowledge. Points i to iv are also consistent with positivism, constructivism, and interpretivism, three positions that, together with critical realism, underpin most current social research, even if not every individual researcher ascribes to them in the form presented here.

The second layer of ontological assumptions pertains to 'the external world', or to 'the subject-object relationship', and it is here that agreement begins to break down among the various approaches to social research. Positivists argue that our senses give us proof of the external world and allow us to access information about it. Constructivists argue that although internal experience and external reality both exist, the distinction between them does not, because if all experiences are socially constructed, we are unable to know which facets of them truly originate externally. Interpretivists argue that any understanding of existence will inherently be the subjective 'interpretation' of an individual; in other words, there is no 'objective reality'; the existence of a reality distinct from our perception of it is either an irrelevance or an impossibility. Critical realists, myself among them, argue that the external world must exist because (i) we exist, and (ii) our experience must be an experience *of* something. These characterisations, which represent four dominant positions in the specific field of *political analysis*, show that as soon as we start making assumptions about things

beyond our own conscious experience, we enter into controversial debates. One point that these four positions do seem able to share, though the importance of the assumption is rarely considered, is that *other people exist* and that they share our own characteristics of consciousness, self-consciousness and reason.

This 'second layer' of ontological assumptions requires us to consider the place of *epistemology* because many of the assumptions identified in the previous paragraph are *epistemological* as well as *ontological*. Where ontology is the study of being and existence, epistemology is the study of knowledge, which means that epistemological assumptions are assumptions about what and how it is possible for us to *know*. For example, although the positivist position (that our senses give us direct access to the external world) does rely closely on ontological assumptions about the nature of our senses and the existence of the external world, it is usually considered to be an epistemological assumption about our ability to gain *knowledge* (Furlong and Marsh 2010: 186). As Furlong and Marsh (2010) explain, ontology and epistemology are inevitably related but their relation is a contested issue, with some theorists arguing ontological assumptions are more fundamental than epistemological assumptions and others arguing the opposite. Given that this thesis has engaged with epistemology as part of the 'second layer' of ontological assumptions, it will come as little surprise that, from the critical realist perspective of this researcher, ontology is assumed to be prior. Indeed, Hay (2007) states this position most clearly by arguing that ontology is prior to epistemology on the basis of logic, because knowledge is the relation between a knower and a known and one cannot explore the relation between two things without first assuming that they exist.

So far, we have engaged with assumptions about our own existence, consciousness, self-consciousness and capacity for reason; we have highlighted disagreements about the relationship between object (external reality) and subject (internal experience), and noted the general agreement that existence is populated with others like us, i.e. other conscious, self-conscious, reasoning beings. We have also considered the relationship between ontology and epistemology, defending the logical precedence of ontology. If we are to discuss the next layer of ontological assumptions, we cannot continue to explore positivism, critical realism, constructivism, and interpretivism, given the complexity of the questions and the limitations of space. Although positivism and interpretivism are set aside for the time being, they are further explored in Chapter 1, where the critical realist critique of these approaches is outlined. It is worth briefly summarising that critique. Positivism generates its assumptions on

the basis of experiences of external stimuli, but the inherent unreliability of such experience means that it is an unsuitable ontological foundation. Interpretivism seems to assume, and rely upon, the existence of 'meaning making' and of 'other people', while simultaneously denying the possibility of drawing conclusions about whether the external world exists, which seems to lead to contradiction. Therefore, we will proceed to the third layer of ontological assumptions with a consideration of critical realism and constructivism only.

The third layer of ontological assumptions pertains to at least three interrelated areas of assumptions, which are described by Marsh (2010a) as 'meta-theoretical issues'. Marsh (2010a) outlines these three strands in the following order: we make assumptions about the relative powers of the individual and their context, we make assumptions about the relative powers of the material and the cultural, and we make assumptions about the nature of time and change.

The relative powers of the individual and their context:

These assumptions are usually addressed under the epithet "the structure-agency debate", and they relate to the constraining and enabling nature of the social context (structure) and to the individual's freedom of thought and action within it (agency). Marsh (2010a: 212), building on Hay (1995) and McAnulla (2002), identifies three main positions in the structure-agency debate, "structural, intentional, and dialectical approaches", and suggests that structuralism and intentionalism treat the structure-agency debate as an "either/or issue". Critical realism and constructivism are both dialectical approaches that seek to incorporate both structure and agency. Critical realists argue that the two are real causal forces that are interrelated and intertwined but fundamentally distinct. Constructivists argue that the words structure and agency are merely analytical concepts that we use to explain (and indeed socially construct) social life. Therefore, in constructivism, the terms are not held to refer to distinct entities or forces. Where critical realists argue that reality is itself stratified into different layers of existence, constructivists argue that it is only our thought that is stratified and that reality itself is an indivisible whole. The justification for the critical realist position on this point is made in Chapter 1.

The relative powers of the material and the cultural:

When we engage with these assumptions, less agreement exists about the framing of the debate, but, in recent years, "the institutional-ideational debate" and "the material-ideational debate" are labels that have begun to stick (Marsh 2010a; Hay and Gofas

2010). Again, Marsh (2010a) points out that there are materialist, idealist and dialectical approaches, and again it is the dialectical approaches of constructivism and critical realism that will be considered. Henceforth, this thesis will instead use the terms 'material' and 'cultural', not because they are superior concepts, but because they are the terms commonly used in the theoretical literature upon which the thesis builds. Exactly what we mean by 'material' and 'cultural' is very much part of the debate itself. Critical realists consider the cultural to be 'all the things that can be understood' (Popper 1972; Archer 1996) and the material to be relations between social positions (Bhaskar 1989; Porpora 2015). Constructivists consider the material to be the plethora of relatively durable institutions comprised by our social constructions of them, and the cultural to be the ideas that hold only as long as we believe them (Searle 1995, 2010; Hay 2016). Both critical realists and constructivists also allocate a space in their theories for the physical/natural world, though the extent to which it is identified as 'the material' is a point of ambiguity. Critical realists and constructivists not only disagree about the defining of terms and the identification of concepts, they also disagree about what the terms/concepts actually are. Critical realists argue that the concepts refer to stratified layers of reality that are interrelated and intertwined but fundamentally distinct, while constructivists argue that the concepts are analytical constructs that we use in order to understand an indivisible social reality.

The nature of time and change:

There are numerous ways of thinking about these assumptions, and so little agreement exists that there is not even a general name for the debate. Marsh (2010a; 2010b) addresses this issue in terms of "stability and change" and argues that "any attempt to conceptualize the relationship between stability and change almost inevitably invokes a position on two other meta-theoretical issues, the relationships between structure and agency and the material and the ideational" (Marsh 2010b: 86). On this basis, one way of conceiving of the nature of change is to consider the functioning of the various causal powers of the agent and their cultural, material and physical/natural contexts over time. This is the approach taken by critical realists, most notably in 'morphogenetic theory', where before-during-after models are used to explain how agents and their three contexts change over time and how they each *affect* change over time (Archer 1995). While morphogenetic theory is a major element of this thesis, it is important to note that ontological assumptions about time and change include further complications. We must also take into account the relationship between 'synchronic assumptions', which are assumptions about how things are at any moment in time, and 'diachronic assumptions' about how things are over the course of time.

Critical realists develop assumptions about both, but constructivists tend to deny the possibility of 'freezing time' for synchronic analysis. Furthermore, as Marsh goes on to argue, "any conceptualisation of the relationship between stability and change is rooted in a conceptualisation of time, and indeed time/ space" (Marsh 2010b: 87). These various distinctions, stability-change, synchronic-diachronic, and time-space unavoidably arise in the course of this research project, because it is not possible to discuss other ontological assumptions without reference to them. However, they will not be the direct focal point, and will be dealt with only insofar as they interlink with other assumptions.

Why do ontological assumptions matter?

Having explored these basic layers of ontological assumptions, and the critical realist position within them, we must now establish their relation to the overall aims of the research. Ontological assumptions play a crucial triple-role in the thesis because, firstly, the research follows the generally accepted requirement for academic social research to be open and explicit about its own ontological assumptions; secondly, the theoretical framework and the approach to analysis are explicitly and coherently built on these assumptions; and thirdly, the research is fundamentally directed towards the identification and analysis of ontological assumptions in policy documents. It is inevitable therefore that the particular ontological questions deemed important from a critical realist perspective influence the particular ontological questions asked during the analysis of social policy documents. However, it does not follow from this that the findings of the research can only be accepted by critical realists, nor does it follow that ontological policy analysis is only possible from a critical realist perspective, nor even does it follow that the particular framework for analysis offered here cannot be adapted by positivists, constructivists or interpretivists. This broader importance of the research beyond critical realist circles can be defended on the basis of four overall justifications for the undertaking of the research project. These justifications are as follows: (1) we all have ontological assumptions; (2) social policy unavoidably engages with ontological controversies; (3) ontological assumptions matter in social policy because ontological assumptions matter in social research; (4) ontological contradictions and complementarities constrain and enable the development of social policy.

(1) The suggestion that we all have ontological assumptions becomes apparent having already identified various fundamental layers of assumptions. An obvious example comes in the form of the structure-agency debate, where each of us makes decisions on the basis of certain assumptions about the relative power of our own free-

will in relation to our external environment, as well as the free-will of other individuals in their particular situations. More fundamentally, when we attempt to comprehend any given situation, we unavoidably make assumptions about the distinction (or lack of) between our internal experience and our external environment. In other words, we all hold ontological assumptions and it is therefore credible to argue that these play a role in the creation of social policy. However, this point could be made about any area of human activity or thought, so it is necessary to offer more specific justifications in relation to social policy.

(2) Makers of social policy in particular must engage with ontological questions because of the nature of the decisions they face. For example, policies that seek to solve unemployment must make assumptions about the relative causal power of the individual and the relative causal power of their environment, so that they can allocate accountability (to either a person, a group, a system, a culture etc.). A more specific example is a policy recently proposed in the UK, which entails the ordering of hospital waiting lists for operations according to an individual's weight or smoking habit, which in turn relies on assumptions about *who is to blame*. These kinds of decisions inevitably involve ontological assumptions about structure and agency, but one may argue that such decisions also rely on empirical research, which leads us to the third justification.

(3) It is generally accepted that ontological assumptions matter in social *research*, because one cannot choose an approach to social analysis without making such assumptions, a situation that holds regardless of whether or not these assumptions are acknowledged. Therefore, any empirical analysis or research will in turn rely on ontological assumptions. Indeed, empirical analysis and social research are important components of all social policy, which is nearly always proceeded by preparatory research and nearly always followed by evaluative research. Therefore, if ontological assumptions matter in social research, and if social research matters in social policy, then *ontological assumptions matter in social policy*.

(4) Contradictions, complementarities, logical implications and intertextual relations between ontological premises constrain and enable policy making. Each of these relations operates differently and now is not the time to explore them in detail (see Chapter 2). One example will suffice. If an individual believes two contradictory ontological assumptions, they will experience pressures throughout their daily lives to either solve the contradiction or move away from one of the beliefs; similarly, if an

individual is presented with a new idea that is contradictory to many of their existing ideas, they are unlikely to take on the new belief and the associated costs of holding the contradiction. In this way, contradictions constrain individual thought and action. Such constraints are notable causal influences over the formation of social policy. This fourth justification not only reinforces the notion that ontological assumptions matter, but also offers some insight into *how* they matter. This raises the following question: how *much* do ontological assumptions matter? At this point, all that needs to be said in response to this question is that the two extreme answers can be ruled out: on the basis of the argument made so far, we can rule out the suggestion that ontological assumptions have *no* significance, but we must also rule out the notion that social policy is entirely determined by the ontological assumptions of the policy makers. Therefore, this leads us to a stop-gap answer to the question: ontological assumptions have *some* influence on social policy.

Welfare and social policy

'Ontological social policy analysis' is an approach that is directed specifically towards social policy. Social policy can be understood as policy that is concerned with *welfare*, meaning that the terms 'social policy' and 'welfare policy' are used largely interchangeably in this thesis. 'Welfare' can be understood very broadly as institutional responsibility for individuals or the general well-being of a populace, but can also be understood very narrowly as a synonym for social security or for unemployment benefits. Taylor (2007: 5) argues that "ideological perspectives on welfare go far beyond discussing the arguments for and against benefit systems", which roughly reflects a British understanding in contrast to the United States, where "welfare has always meant one thing: means-tested assistance paid primarily to lone mothers and their children" (Deacon 2002: 5). As this research is assessing welfare reform in the British context, the broader understanding of welfare is far more appropriate. And yet despite this clarification, the understanding of the term remains ambiguous. O'Brien and Penna (1998: 7-8) argue that there are three possible understandings of welfare in this broader sense: (i) as the general well-being of the population (individually or collectively); (ii) as the institutional system that ensures well-being; (iii) as a discourse about well-being. Rather than choosing between these three concepts, we can maintain all three, but only use the term 'welfare' to define the second of these concepts, in the sense that 'welfare reform', 'welfare policy' and 'welfare ideology' all relate to institutional arrangements for ensuring well-being. We can maintain the use of the term 'well-being' as per the first definition and can refer to 'welfare discourse' as per the third definition.

Within this institutional understanding of welfare, it is necessary to narrow the scope of the research so that the appropriate depth of analysis can be attained in the available space and time. The first narrowing will be to centre the focus on government activity. This may involve non-governmental think tanks offering research and advice, it may involve pressure groups seeking to influence policy, and it may also involve charities and private organisations used by the state as welfare providers. However, government policy will remain at the centre of the analysis. Secondly, the scope will be narrowed by focussing on a particular government department, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This is not to suggest other departments are not involved in welfare provision, but is rather to suggest that the DWP is the most appropriate focus for the current analysis. Thirdly, within DWP activity, 'unemployment' and 'social security policy' will be the particular concern. The justification for focussing specifically on the DWP and specifically on unemployment and social security policy is that this area of welfare provision is expected to provide particular clarity on ontological assumptions. Arguments about the various causal powers in society, be they structural, agential, material or cultural, are brought to the fore in debates surrounding the 'solution' to unemployment. Therefore, this empirical focus is particularly suited to 'ontological social policy analysis'. This reasoning goes some way to justifying the choice of subject matter as a way of deploying the theoretical framework, but it is also important to justify the actual utility of the theoretical framework in the study of welfare policy.

There is a sizeable literature that is concerned with both welfare and ideas. Some authors focus on the welfare systems proposed in the abstract in relation to political ideologies, while others focus on the influence that ideologies and ideas in general have had on particular welfare regimes. A common strand among both is to raise or utilise the structure-agency question, using a range of alternative terminologies, but despite the apparent importance of this question to the delivery of welfare, there are relatively few texts that are concerned with how the structure-agency issue is addressed in actual government policy; the majority address the issue either as an abstract academic debate (e.g. Hewitt 2000) or as a strategy for organising ideologies (e.g. George and Wilding 1985). Even in these cases, the structure-agency debate is not considered in terms of ontological assumptions. A key argument running through this thesis is that to understand the structure-agency issue, one needs to situate it alongside other key ontological questions. In particularly, structure-agency must be considered alongside assumptions about the relative importance of

institutional and ideological pressures, conceived of here as the material-cultural issue. Currently, the material-cultural issue is effectively ignored in the literature on welfare and ideas, except occasionally in terms of the theoretical underpinnings of academic research (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2005). These observations lead to the question of exactly *which* ontological assumptions are to be identified in this thesis.

Which ontological assumptions?

The analysis of ontological assumptions in social policy can entail the analysis of a huge array of issues, some of which have been identified above. However, for the research to be possible, it is necessary to limit the analysis to particular types of ontological assumptions. Assumptions about our own existence, our consciousness, self-consciousness, and ability to reason, are deemed to be too abstract to have a bearing on the policy reforms under consideration, or more accurately they are deemed to lack the controversy necessary to produce interesting or notable findings. For example, it would be of little consequence if the thesis concluded with the claim that Coalition welfare reform is underpinned by the assumption that people exist, or that Universal Credit is fundamentally reliant on the assumption that people are conscious. The analysis of *epistemological* assumptions in public policy, as explored by Bevir (2005) and McAnulla (2007), would make for an interesting and potentially important piece of research, but time and space constraints have required that both epistemological and normative assumptions are put to one side. Although the analysis in Chapter 3 demonstrates that it is not possible to completely divorce ontological, epistemological, and normative assumptions, this thesis ultimate aims to analyse only the ontological, even though this occasionally involves engaging with other types of assumptions along the way. The justification for focussing on ontological assumptions is twofold: firstly, they are largely ignored in the literature, unlike epistemological and normative assumptions; secondly, as argued above, ontological assumptions are the most fundamental assumptions and can in some sense be considered the 'base level' of ideas.

Setting aside these various other assumptions, this research is focussed primarily on two ontological issues: the 'structure-agency debate' and the 'material-cultural debate'. It is clearly to the advantage of the research project (as the first example of ontological policy analysis) that these two ontological debates are widely addressed in academic writings, and explicitly underpin various key approaches to social analysis. Both debates are discussed with relatively consistent terminology and a relatively stable number of different stances, unlike the debates about time and

change more generally. Furthermore, these assumptions strike a balance between being fundamental assumptions and being areas of controversy or notable disagreement. How much freewill do people have? Are institutions anything more than 'other people'? Do people act according to material or cultural motivations? (How) are we constrained by our beliefs and power relations? Such questions are not only live, controversial and fundamental to our understanding of the social world, but they are also particularly relevant to social security policy, where the causes of individual behaviour and the level of individual responsibility are central issues.

One final clarification needs to be made about *which* ontological assumptions are analysed in this thesis. Ontological assumptions can be considered both as the beliefs of individuals and the implicit premises of particular texts. That policy makers hold ontological beliefs and that these beliefs are constraining on the policy process are important components of the abstract argument of the thesis. However, the aim of the empirical analysis is to show that ontological assumptions exist *within policy* and not to show that the ontological beliefs of policy makers correspond with the policy they produce. It is of course expected that the beliefs of policy makers *do* influence the resultant policy itself, but the purpose of the research is not to explore this expectation. Instead, the research investigates the ontological assumptions that appear *in* policy and *within* policy documents in order to show that the policies themselves imply ontological positions and that it is often the case that there are contradictions within these positions. As explained in the next sub-section, it is argued in this thesis that contradictions have a causal influence on decision making. However, there is not the space to explore the ways in which individual agents react to these causal influences. Therefore, the thesis claims that ontological assumptions exist, matter, and exert a causal influence in social policy, but it cannot make any strong claims about what individual agents believe or about how they react to ontological contradictions. The theoretical framework insists that ideas influence, are influenced by, and only have a causal force *through* agents, but the analysis in this research is focussed on the ideas themselves and the way in which they are structured.

Key contributions of the research

At the start of this introductory chapter, it was claimed that the thesis contributes to four areas of knowledge and opens up a potential fifth. The overall findings of the thesis will now be summarised in relation to these five central contributions.

The first contribution claimed by the thesis is a contribution to social theory and specifically to *morphogenetic* social theory. As a theory of social change, the morphogenetic approach aims to translate critical realist assumptions into a general model of how society is changed and reproduced over time. Through an engagement with this approach, the thesis contributes to social theory in four main ways. The first three of these (1-3) entail a three-part modification of current morphogenetic theory, and the fourth (4) entails its integration with 'critical discourse analysis'. (1) In its current formulation, morphogenetic theory combines the material-cultural and structural-agential pairings into a tripartite schema of culture-structure-agency. This thesis proposes an alternative in which the two distinctions are intersected so that social change is instead theorised as the interaction over time of material structure, cultural structure, material agency, and cultural agency. (2) In order to explain this interaction, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) concept of 'social practice' is imported as the 'during' in morphogenetic theory's 'before-during-after model' of social change. Within social practice, agents have cultural powers (to think, believe, imagine, reason etc.) and material powers (to organise, dominate, exchange, occupy roles etc.). Here, the crucial modification to morphogenetic theory is the inclusion of the concept of 'social practice' and the distinction between material agency and cultural agency. (3) In morphogenetic theory, it is claimed that the causal power of *cultural structure* arises from the logical relations between ideas. This is accepted as a crucial premise of the thesis, but it is supplemented by the claim that the cultural structure also exerts causal power through the systemic nature of language and the intertextuality of discourse. (4) By integrating Chouliaraki and Fairclough's social theory into the morphogenetic approach, it is not only possible to import the abstract concepts of 'social practice', 'language system' and 'intertextual discourse', but also to import the methodological toolbox of 'critical discourse analysis' as a whole (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Fairclough 2001; Fairclough 2003). Therefore, the contribution that this thesis makes to social theory is a three-part modification of morphogenetic theory (1-3) and the general integration of *morphogenetic theory* and *critical discourse analysis* (4).

The second contribution of this thesis is made to the existing literature on welfare ideology, where there is currently no systematic attempt to outline the *ontological assumptions* of the key welfare ideologies. In Chapter 3 of this thesis, the ontological assumptions of four ideologies are uncovered and explored: Marxism, social democracy, neoliberalism, and conservatism. Although the discussion of Marxism is little more than a summary of long-standing debates, and the discussion of social democracy is relatively brief, the ontological analyses of neoliberalism and

conservatism represent a significant contribution to the understanding of ontological contradictions in political ideologies. On the structure-agency question, neoliberalism explicitly focusses on the free-willed individual and a theory of social change based primarily on the decisions and actions of agents. However, *implicitly*, it allocates a fundamental, and perhaps even dominant, role for social structure in the form of a state-market nexus. This combined structure is held to condition, constrain, and constitute human agency. On the material-cultural question, neoliberalism contains two competing strands, one focussed on the fundamentality and causal dominance of material factors, the other focussed on the fundamentality and causal dominance of cultural factors. Where the former posits a materially-motivated rational actor, the latter posits an anti-rational individual influenced by cultural traditions. Both strands face their own internal ontological contradictions, with the former caught between inductive positivism and deductive rationalism, and the latter caught between its own epistemic certainty and its insistence on epistemic relativism. Conservatism, on the other hand, explicitly prioritises social structures, which are theorised as both the organic product of evolution and the spiritually imbued core of national identity. This normative value placed on social structure is rooted in ontology through the unavoidably structuralist assumption that society changes according to evolutionary principles. However, simultaneously, conservatism offers a vision of an unchanging human agent, who is not only seemingly unaffected by structural evolution but also holds a vast potential power to destroy social structures. In the material-cultural debate, it is clear that there are subtle differences between conservative positions, but they all seem to face a problematic contradiction. On the one hand ideas and knowledge are seen to be embedded in practical life and in material social structures, but on the other hand conservatism adheres to an idealism whereby material reality is reduced to internal experience. These various claims about the ontological assumptions of conservatism and neoliberalism, which are elaborated and justified in Chapter 3, represent the second of the thesis's five contributions.

The third contribution is to the understanding of British politics, and specifically to the understanding of how the British Conservative Party changed under the leadership of David Cameron. The contribution is unique because of its engagement with ontological assumptions as an important category of analysis. The thesis engages with the existing literature on why (because of which causes) and how (in what ways) the Conservative Party changed between 2005 and 2015. The full 'why' question is one that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis, but a contribution can be made in the identification of ontological assumptions as causal factors. The theoretical

framework makes clear that ontological assumptions are a significant but not the only causal element of cultural structure, and more importantly the framework is also clear that cultural structural factors only have a causal significance *alongside* and *through* the causal factors of material structure, cultural agency, and material agency. The specific weighting of ontological assumptions as causal factors, and the nature of their interactions with other causal factors are issues beyond the scope of the thesis, which precludes any strong answers to the 'why' question. However, a fuller answer can be given in relation to the 'how' question. The analysis of ontological assumptions in Conservative social policy allows for a significant contribution to the question of how the party's ideology changed in the ten year period under focus. The direct analysis of government policy documents (in Chapters 5 and 6) is situated within an ideational map (outlined in Chapter 3) and a review of the existing literature on the Cameron-era modernisation of the Conservative Party (in Chapter 4). It is worth briefly summarising the findings of this analysis.

The Cameron-led modernisation of the party can be seen to grapple with the structure-agency problem in its attempt to offer a middle way between the structure-centred assumptions underpinning the statism of social democracy and the agency-centred assumptions underpinning the individualism of neoliberalism. Simultaneously, the party also grappled with the material-cultural problem in an attempt to unite the material-centred assumptions of the free-market neoliberals and the cultural-centred assumptions of the conservative traditionalists. However, because both the structure-agency and material-cultural issues present real theoretical problems, they cannot be overcome by good intentions or by successful interpersonal negotiation. Therefore, over the full 2005-2015 period, and in the face of these deeply complex and deeply entrenched ontological conundrums, the Conservative Party felt the difficulties of attempting to take unsophisticated middle grounds, and found themselves sliding back towards the agency-centred and material-centred assumptions of the Thatcherite legacy. The agency-centred assumptions can be seen in the failure of 'the Big Society' to deal with the structure-agency question, where the notions of individual responsibility and anti-statism failed to explain how the community collectivism of the 'Big Society' would occur. The material-centred assumptions can be seen in the failure of 'the social justice agenda' to deal with the material-cultural question, where an explanation of poverty as the product of a deeply entrenched cultural socialisation failed to provide policy makers with levers of change, leading to a slide towards material incentivisation. This overview is unavoidably a simplification in its categorisation and its identification of causal factors, but it does demonstrate a partial answer to the question of *why*

Conservative Party ideology changed, and a more significant answer to the question of *how* Conservative Party ideology changed.

The fourth contribution made in this thesis is made to the existing literature on UK welfare reform, and specifically to the understanding of Universal Credit. It is argued in Chapter 6 that Universal Credit is underpinned by three contradictory strands of ontological assumptions. Underpinning the full period is the notion of 'personal responsibility', whereby individuals are assumed to be causally, and therefore morally, responsible for their unemployment. This strand of assumptions emphasises agency as the most notable causal force in society, and can be seen to underpin the reforms that led to monthly (rather than weekly) benefit payments and an end to direct-to-landlord benefit payments. This 'responsibility model' also underpins the suggestion that benefit sanctions are punishments and benefit payments are rewards for morally responsible behaviour. However, simultaneously, benefits and sanctions are justified in terms of incentives that are held to *determine* individual behaviour. Underpinning incentive-based justifications is a set of assumptions closely associated with rational choice theory, and therefore the latent structuralism that is implied when one assumes that individuals always seek material gains. If every individual always chooses material gain, then they have no room for agency, and society operates according to incentive frameworks. The same assumptions are central to Universal Credit's overall aim to 'make work pay'. This material-structuralist 'rational model' and the agency-centred 'responsibility model' exist alongside a third set of assumptions in Coalition social policy. This third strand of assumptions, here labelled the 'life-course' model, allocates a dominant causal power to cultural socialisation over the life-course of an individual, focussing on the values passed through families, the culture passed through communities, and the knowledge and skills passed through the education system. The life-course model can be characterised as cultural-structuralist, in that it assumes that an individual's actions are largely the product of a life time of cultural socialisation. However, although life-course assumptions play a crucial role in the Coalition's explanations of the causes of poverty, they do not play a significant role in actual social policy *reform*. Overall, this fourth contribution of the thesis, as a contribution to the existing literature on UK welfare reform, can be summarised as an identification of ontological contradictions embedded in both the justification and legislation of Coalition social policy.

Finally, we come to the fifth 'contribution' of the thesis. It is a contribution to knowledge but not necessarily a contribution to any particular area of existing literature.

It is the overall claim that ontological assumptions matter in social policy and can be analysed using a particular approach: 'ontological social policy analysis'. This contribution therefore involves both the identification of the importance of ontological assumptions and the demonstration of the possibility of their analysis. Once a policy or policy programme has been identified for analysis, *ontological social policy analysis* can be conducted over a number of key steps: firstly, the identification of the research's own underlying assumptions (in this case, critical realism); secondly, the identification of the key ontological issues to be analysed (in this case, the structure-agency and material-cultural issues); thirdly, an analysis of the ideological context within which the policy is situated (in this case, neoliberalism, conservatism, and social democracy in the British context); fourthly, an engagement with the existing literature in order to select documents for primary analysis (in this case, an analysis of the contemporary British politics and British social policy literature); fifthly, the analysis of language, discourse, and ideas in order to identify the underlying ontological assumptions of the chosen policy documents (in this case, an analysis of 14 Coalition policy documents, and an analysis of 7 party publications from the pre-Coalition period); finally, a consideration of the contradictions, complementarities, logical implications, and intertextual references between assumptions (in this case, the focus is on the *contradictions* between assumptions, as outlined in the three preceding paragraphs). Through these six steps, the overall approach of this thesis is able to identify and analyse the underlying ontological assumptions of social policy. By outlining and demonstrating the applicability of the approach, the thesis creates a huge array of possibilities for future research. Any researcher seeking to engage with the fundamental assumptions and/or philosophical coherence of a particular social policy, or social policy programme, could turn to *ontological social policy analysis* as a guiding framework.

In summary, this thesis makes five contributions to knowledge. A contribution is made to social theory through a modification of morphogenetic theory, and its integration with critical discourse analysis. A contribution is made to the analysis of welfare ideologies, and indeed political ideologies more generally, by identifying the ontological assumptions and ontological contradictions of a number of ideological positions. Contributions are made to the existing literature on British politics, especially on the ideological change of the Conservative Party, and to the existing literature on British social policy, specifically through an identification of ontological contradictions in Universal Credit. Finally, a fifth contribution is made in the development and application

of the overall theoretical approach, 'ontological social policy analysis', which has a significant potential for future application.

Chapter summary

In order to make these five key contributions, this thesis is structured in order of abstractness, moving from the most to the least abstract over the six main chapters.

Chapter 1 lays out the ontological assumptions made by the thesis itself, proposing analytical dualisms between structure and agency, and between the material and cultural realms. After introducing the critical realist premises, the line of argument in this foundational theoretical chapter develops as a response to Colin Hay's criticisms of morphogenetic theory. By scrutinising, modifying, and ultimately defending morphogenetic theory, a strong justification is given for the main strand of social theory that underpins the research. Furthermore, crucial improvements are made, especially in relation to a four-part model of social causation, which theorises social change as the product of the interrelation and interaction of material structure, cultural structure, material agency, and cultural agency.

Chapter 2 builds this meta-theory into a model for analysis, specifically exploring cultural structure as the combination of language, discourse and ideas. The discussion in Chapter 2 is framed as an attempt to understand the nature of ontological assumptions and on this basis it is divided into three sections, the first of which seeks to explain the *causality* of ontological assumptions by fitting them into the modified morphogenetic model, the second brings together structural notions of language, discourse, and ideas in order to understand the *constitution* of ontological assumptions, and the third section sets up the analysis of ontological assumptions by discussing their *content.* All three sections rely on further modification of morphogenetic theory and, crucially, the importation of Norman Fairclough's version of 'critical discourse analysis'.

Chapter 3 identifies and explores four important welfare ideologies, outlining the ontological assumptions of each. These four welfare ideologies (neoliberalism, conservatism, social democracy, and Marxism) are selected through an engagement with the existing literature on welfare ideology and prioritised according the aims of the research. This prioritisation means that neoliberalism and conservatism are explored in much greater depth, but all four ideologies are analysed in terms of their structure-agency assumptions and their material-cultural assumptions.

Chapter 4 provides a contextual exploration of the Coalition Government using the existing British politics literature on the ideology of political parties and the existing social policy literature on the detail of policy reform. The chapter deals with these two literatures separately, dividing each into a small number of themes that reflect the main debates and analysis in the literature. The British political context is discussed in terms of five prominent discourses of the Coalition Government: modernisation, the Big Society, social justice, broken Britain, and responsibility. The social policy context is discussed in relation to four key policy areas: benefit caps, Universal Credit, workfare, and disability policy. In both sections, a number of key policy documents are identified for analysis in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of a document analysis of key pre-Coalition texts, covering the Conservative Party's 'modernisation period' and the formation of the Coalition. The main focus of Chapter 5 is on the origin of Coalition social policy, identified in the literature analysis of Chapter 4 as the Iain Duncan Smith led think tank, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ). A close analysis of two landmark reports by the CSJ is undertaken, along with an analysis of the subsequent Conservative Party green paper, which allows for an identification of a plethora of ontological assumptions, some contradictory, some complementary. The second section of Chapter 5 traces these various assumptions through the Liberal Democrat and Conservative manifestos, taking the analysis up to the formation of the Coalition in 2010.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of a second document analysis, focussed on the actual policy reforms of the DWP during the Coalition's tenure. The findings presented in Chapter 6 show a move away from the fractious and disparate policy experimentation of the opposition years, towards a clearer set of ontological assumptions. However, this set of assumptions can be seen to contain three contradictory strands, the 'rational model', the 'responsibility model', and the 'life-course model'. Chapter 6 traces these three strands and the contradictions between them through the tenure of the Coalition Government, focussing firstly on the DWP's broadly conceived 'social justice agenda' and, secondly, on the Universal Credit policy programme.

Finally, a substantial conclusion chapter draws links between the other chapters in order to (i) identify and further explain the key findings, (ii) demonstrate the importance and utility of analysing ontological assumptions in public policy, and (iii)

outline potential avenues of future research. The concluding chapter returns to the five areas of contribution made by the thesis, outlining the important features of each and explaining the importance and possibility of ontological social policy analysis.

<u>Chapter 1</u>

Critical Realism and Analytical Dualism

Introduction

This chapter provides the ontological and meta-theoretical foundations of the thesis. There is always a need for academic research to outline, or at least indicate, its foundational assumptions, but the current focus on ontological assumptions in social policy makes it especially pertinent that this thesis is clear in declaring and justifying its ontological positioning. On the basis of this requirement, Section 1 outlines and defends a critical realist perspective on the fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of existence, situating these pivotal assumptions between the interpretivist and positivist alternatives. The remainder of the chapter then engages in a closely navigated debate between the two major critical realist approaches to political analysis: the 'morphogenetic approach', associated with Margaret Archer, Douglas Porpora and Stuart McAnulla, and the 'strategic-relational approach', associated with Colin Hay and Bob Jessop. The morphogenetic approach is favoured due to the coherence of its ontological positions and for the explanatory power of its analytical dualisms. Although Hay's more recent writings have moved away from critical realism and towards social constructivism, an engagement with his critiques of morphogenetic theory is particularly valuable, given that the chapter seeks to outline, scrutinise, modify, and ultimately defend the morphogenetic approach.

Beyond the critical foundation offered in Section 1, the current chapter makes two crucial arguments that resonate throughout the rest of the thesis. Firstly, following the central claims of morphogenetic theory, it is argued that two of the most important ontological questions relate to the structure-agency and material-cultural debates respectively. The position one takes in these debates is important both because of the plethora of instances in which one's position becomes a matter of importance, and because of the controversial variety of positions it is possible, and even common, for different individuals and texts to hold. In the following chapters, where analysis of ontological assumptions is the unifying theme, the structure-agency and material-cultural questions are the central ontological issues under discussion. Therefore, this chapter has a crucial role in identifying the nature and importance of those questions.

The second crucial argument made in this chapter is that a morphogenetic approach provides a particularly sophisticated and coherent position in the structure-agency and material-cultural debates simultaneously. However, under the critique of Colin Hay, a number of weaknesses are identified in Margaret Archer's standard morphogenetic model. In response, this chapter offers important modifications that not only create more coherence in the theoretical foundations of the thesis, but also improve the explanatory power of the framework. Through this process of defending and modifying morphogenetic theory, it is argued that a critical realist approach to social change must incorporate the causal power of the structural, the agential, the material, and the cultural into a single temporal model. This model is, therefore, based on the assumption that social causality can ultimately be traced to four analytically distinguishable causal forces: material structure, cultural structure, material agency, and cultural agency (see Table 1). The remainder of the thesis relies on this model both as an underlying meta-theory and as a lens through which the analysis is conducted.

In order to make these arguments, the discussion proceeds in the following way. Section 1 introduces the basics of a critical realist ontology, contrasting it to the major alternatives of positivism and interpretivism, and outlining the three concepts that constitute the critical realist core: *intransitivity*, *transfactuality* and *stratification*. Section 2 introduces the morphogenetic approach, and its pivotal concept of 'analytical dualism', by entering the structure-agency debate and comparing Archer's and Hay's positions within it. After offering a three-part defence of Archer's position, the section concludes by setting aside Hay's position because of his problematic denial of structure and agency as *real* causal forces. In Section 3, the material-cultural question is introduced, and it is argued through a detailed engagement with Hay and Gofas's (2010) criticisms of Archer, that the structure-agency and material-cultural dualisms should be intersected as per Table 1. Therefore, the criticisms of Colin Hay are again introduced, but this time they have more problematic implications. Section 3 address these implications, offering clarity and modification in a partial acquiescence but overall defence of morphogenetic theory.

	Material	**Cultural**
Structure	Material structure	Cultural structure
Agency	Material agency	Cultural agency

Table 1: the two analytical dualisms

Section 1: A critical realist foundation

Before exploring Archer's theoretical approach, it is important to outline the critical realist perspective upon which she builds her morphogenetic model. The brief introduction to critical realism that follows is important for three main reasons. Firstly, it sets out the ontological assumptions that underpin this piece of research, presenting the critical realist perspective of the researcher and therefore of the research design. Secondly, these critical realist premises provide a common foundation for the various authors who are brought into the theoretical framework, ensuring an overall coherence. Finally, and more specifically, the basic premises of critical realism underpin specific points of the argument made in this chapter. While they are deployed in various ways, the two most prominent uses are as follows: the 'stratification premise' is used to both *distinguish* and *link* structure and agency and the material and cultural through the discussion of Archer's *analytical dualisms*; the 'intransitivity premise' underpins the latter of these analytical dualisms, because the 'the cultural' is broadly coterminous with the 'transitive' and 'the material' is a part of 'the intransitive'. In addition, using the argument of McAnulla (2005), the 'transfactuality' premise is used to critique Hay's position on the structure-agency debate and provide justification for continuing with Archer's approach.

The basis of critical realism

The most basic starting point of critical realism is to conceptualise the relationship between *ontology*, the philosophy of being, and *epistemology*, the philosophy of knowing. Critical realism was developed in opposition to two dominant approaches to the conceptualisation of this relationship: positivism and interpretivism. Crudely put, a positivist position assumes that existence (being) constitutes the content of science (knowing), so that knowledge takes the form of a series of more or less accurate discoveries about the world. In contrast, an interpretivist position assumes that existence (being) is socially constructed, and is therefore constituted by our representations of it (knowing), meaning knowledge takes the form of an ever-changing social zeitgeist. We therefore have one side arguing that knowledge is a window on reality (positivism) and the other arguing that any experience of reality is a construct of knowledge or meaning (interpretivism). It is worth briefly summarising the philosophical foundation of each tradition before describing a specifically critical realist understanding of the being-knowing relationship.

Positivism is a naturalist approach in that it seeks to import the dominant assumptions of the natural sciences into the study of the social. The most central assumption is epistemic and concerns the nature of truth: "for a naturalist, something is true when somebody has seen it to be true" (Moses and Knutsen 2007: 8). Two further assumptions are at work in this proposition, the first being the idea that existence is only acknowledged *when observed*. This does not mean that positivists deny the existence of the unknown, but it does mean that positivists will only accept observed phenomena as part of the corpus of knowledge, testing the untested and rejecting the unfalsifiable. The second major assumption is the basic correspondence theory of 'truth', which suggests an observer can identify the truth of reality through empirical observation to ensure that one's knowledge *corresponds* with reality. Therefore, to a positivist, the nature of existence is clearly accessible through observation, and observation limits the boundaries of known existence. Such ideas are imported into the study of the social sciences without any major modifications to take into account the unique reflexivity of the social subject matter. It is this manoeuvre, rather than the substantive assumptions about material existence, that is the target for most interpretivist critiques.

Interpretivism can be characterised as anthropocentric, with its conception of knowledge as inherently socially constructed and the study of human beings as fundamentally separate from the study of natural phenomena. In this tradition, any attempt to explain or describe existence is a creation of meaning rather than an exposition of reality. It is important to note that although interpretivists do not *necessarily* deny an external material reality, they consider our knowledge to be so fundamentally intertwined with human-made layers of meaning that it is impossible to identify any definitive knowledge or truths about reality. Because all knowledge is socially constructed, it makes little sense to claim that one person, theory or belief has any better access to external material reality than any other. With the study of *social phenomena* specifically, researchers are studying the socially constructed meanings of social subjects, using their own socially constructed theories, positionality and research methods. This double-level of meaning is used to deny the possibility of making 'truth-claims' about social reality, but it is also used to deny that *social* reality is in any way *external* to the intertwined meaning-making of both researchers and their subjects. Therefore, the explanation and externality of the social world are abandoned, replaced with an exclusive focus on *understanding meaning* in an unavoidably ideational social world. Therefore, epistemology is the primary philosophical base of the interpretivist approach because adherents follow the argument that we must *know* before we can

know about being, and ultimately, all that we can '*know'* about being is to form a subjective interpretation about an ideational construct.

In contrast, and regardless of the nature of our knowledge about the world, a critical realist approach holds that *the world must exist before we can know about it*. Furthermore, one must *exist as a knowing object* before one can be said to be a *social subject* and in a position to acquire knowledge or even experience the world in some way. This counterfactual approach draws on the transcendental arguments of Emanuel Kant, which originally led Bhaskar to name his theory *transcendental realism* (Collier 1994)*.* Bhaskar therefore creates a space for ontology by taking our own experience of being and retroductively theorising the necessary preconditions for that experience. In this way, critical realism allows us to distinguish 'being' from 'knowing' and therefore analytically separate the study of each, which are classified as ontology and epistemology respectively. The experience that underpins the theory is not a single empirical experience or observation of the external world, as per positivism. Rather, it consists of our entire internal conception of what it is *to be*, *to be alive* and *to be human*. Despite the strength of this philosophical base, it is also an essential part of critical realism that all theories are necessarily fallible in both the impossibility of their certainty and the instability of the objects about which they claim to explain. Critical realism, therefore, attempts to offer *the most compelling* set of assumptions, understandings and explanations, rather than claiming to offer any definitive knowledge.

Three central critical realist concepts

Developed through a critique of positivist assumptions, critical realism posits "three kinds of *ontological depth* which may be summarised by the concepts of *intransitivity*, *transfactuality* and *stratification*" (Archer et al 1998: xi, original emphasis). The concept of intransitivity is the separation of ontology and epistemology and their respective objects of study, as outlined above. Such a separation necessarily entails three sub-commitments: firstly, that there is a concrete social reality for us to know about; secondly, that knowledge of this reality is always a representation through the interpretive layers of human understanding; thirdly and consequentially, that knowledge of reality and reality itself are not one and the same. To bring in the critical realist terminology, 'reality' is coterminous with 'the *intransitive* domain', while knowledge is coterminous with 'the *transitive* domain'. Transitive objects are therefore objects of knowledge, including theories such as gravity, while intransitive objects are those objects which these theories are about, such as a falling apple. A final point to make

about this first kind of ontological depth is that the transitive domain is *encompassed by* the intransitive domain. In other words, *knowledge is part of existence*.

The second concept, transfactuality, gives us "three overlapping domains of reality: the empirical realm, which consists of experienced events; the actual realm, consisting of events and experiences (not all events are experienced); the real, which consists of mechanisms which may be unobservable" (McAnulla 2005: 31). The *realm of the real* is made up of (potentially unobservable) mechanisms that do not directly cause phenomena in the traditional Humean sense of constant conjunctions, but rather they combine in varying degrees and in varying relations to provide all the preconditions for events to occur. Bhaskar identifies the existence of this realm by discussing scientific experiments; "in an experiment the experimenter is a causal agent of a sequence of events but not of the causal law which the sequence of events enables him to identify" (Bhaskar 1975: 12). Therefore, the experimenter is identifying a real causal mechanism that exists regardless of the experiment he undertakes to identify it. The experiment itself is an *event* (actual) caused by many different *causal mechanisms* (real), of which the experimenter and the identified 'causal law' are just two. One important consequence of the transfactuality premise is that *possibilities are conceived to be real*. A useful example from Collier (1994) is of a motorbike capable of travelling at 200mph: even if the motorbike never *actually* travels more than 70mph due to its law-abiding owner, the ability, or 'causal power', of the motorbike to travel at 200mph exists in the *realm of the real*.

The third kind of ontological depth, stratification, is the notion of a *layered* ontology, where each level of reality emerges from its constituent parts and, in doing so becomes causally efficacious (Elder-Vass 2007a: 29). The most important emergent relationship to social science is the emergence of social structures from the level of individual agents, where structures are 'more' than the sum of their parts, in that they gain causal powers in their own right. However, the concept of emergence is by no means limited to this example. We can conceive of atoms emerging from sub-atomic particles, or organs emerging from tissues, which in turn emerge from cells. "The idea of emergence denotes that when particular elements combine (these can be social and/or physical), the combination can produce characteristics or properties that are distinguishable from the constituent elements themselves" (McAnulla 2005: 34).

An important qualification to the concept of emergence is that it is 'relational', by which we mean that emergent properties are nothing more than (a) their constituent

elements, (b) the way in which they are arranged, and (c) the causal powers they possess as a result (Elder-Vass 2010). The only difference between an emergent entity and its constituent elements is that it has causal powers that would not be held by the constituent elements if they were not arranged together in such a way. Elder-Vass (2010) is keen to point out that all entities are emergent from lower level entities, all the way down to sub-atomic particles, and probably beyond, giving us little indication that any particular layer is 'more real' than any other. This notion leads Bhaskar to talk of 'laminated systems', where we can arrange objects into various systems of meta-emergence, such as a scale of social being from "the sub-individual level of motives and depth psychology" through numerous other steps to "the planetary whole of world geo-history" (Bhaskar 2014). The point of relevance here is that the notion of 'emergence' challenges the idea that social research should focus on *either* 'the individual' *or* 'the structure', holding instead that social explanation necessarily requires both concepts.

Section 2: The first analytical dualism

In order to develop social analysis that is coherent with these critical realist premises, and in order to mobilise the analytical power of critical realist theory, Margaret Archer has led the development of '*the morphogenetic approach*'. This section outlines the theoretical foundations of Margaret Archer's morphogenetic approach (1995 and 1996) in relation to criticisms levelled by Colin Hay (2002). The morphogenetic approach deploys 'analytical dualism' to explain the dialectic relationship between structure and agency, a relationship that we shall label 'the first analytical dualism'. Rather than simply summarise Archer's work, this section critically engages with her philosophical foundations using the critiques of Colin Hay, who also ascribed to critical realism at the time of his critiques. This section aims to outline and defend Archer's view of the structure-agency issue and to defend her basic notions of analytical dualism, emergence and morphogenesis.

An overview of morphogenetic theory

Built from a critical realist perspective, the morphogenetic approach (Archer 1995) argues that "we are simultaneously free and constrained and we also have some awareness of it" (p. 2). In this short sentence from the introduction of Archer's seminal work, *Realist Social Theory* (1995), two foundational distinctions are captured: firstly, the distinction between the individual and the constraining/enabling/motivating social context, generally known as agency and structure respectively; secondly, the

distinction between the reality of our social situation and our awareness of that reality, known as "the material and the ideational aspects of social life" respectively (Archer, 1996, p. xi). The first of these distinctions is dealt with in the current section, while second is dealt with in the following section. The first distinction, between structure and agency, is only tenable on the basis of another of critical realism's central concepts: emergence. When we apply the notion of emergence to social phenomena, it can be argued that the social context *emerges from* individual thought and action, while avoiding the suggestion that it entails the introduction of some new substance; its unique properties derive only from its constituent parts and the way in which they are arranged. This allocates a causal role to the social context without reifying the context as some independent entity.

According to Archer (1995), the "first axiom" of morphogenetic theory's explanatory programme is that "structure necessarily predates the action(s) which transform it" (p. 138) and the second is "that structural elaboration necessarily postdates those actions" (p. 168). For example, a politician will always operate in a pre-existing political system, even if it is their raison d'être to fundamentally reform that system; the consequences of the politician's attempted reforms necessarily postdate the attempt. This 'before, during, and after' schema lies at the heart of the explanatory programme of the morphogenetic approach as a simple three-stage model of social change: conditioning (T1), interaction (T2-T3), and elaboration (T4). As Figure 1 demonstrates, structure exerts a causal influence on agents (conditioning); agents interact (interaction); and this interaction changes or maintains the structure (elaboration). This simplified outline of the morphogenetic model is enough to show how structure and agency are mobilised in a temporal sequence to form the basis of the morphogenetic cycle.
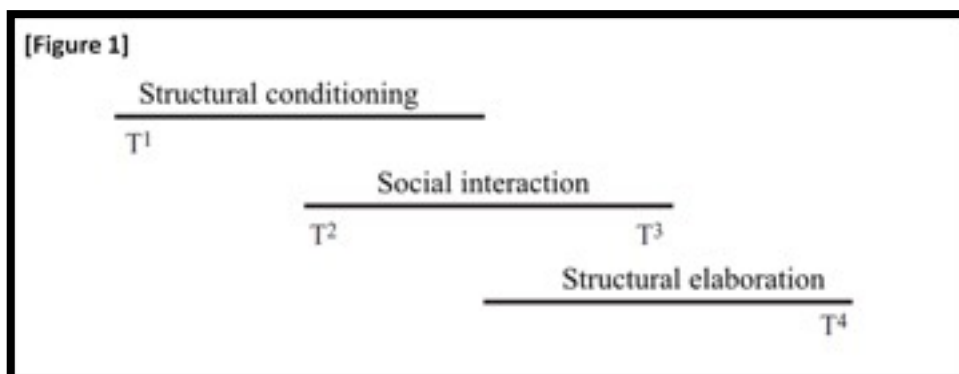

[Figure 1]

Structural conditioning

T^1

Social interaction

T^2 T^3

Structural elaboration

T^4

Figure 1: the structural morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995)

Hay's critique

In *Political Analysis*, Hay (2002) offers a critical engagement both with morphogenetic theory and with structuration theory in order to "establish a point of departure for [his] preferred strategic-relational approach" (Hay, 2002, p. 117; see also Hay, 1995). While there is no space here to address structuration theory in any detail, it is enlightening to note how Hay and Archer both use Anthony Giddens' structuration theory as a point of departure in their respective theorisations of structure and agency. This points towards the generally recognised significance of Giddens in the English language version of the structure-agency debate. Heavily influenced by the French language writing of Pierre Bourdieu, Giddens (1979, 1984) developed structuration theory as an attempt to overcome the division between objective and subjective analysis, with the former associated with positivist structuralism and the latter with intentionalist hermeneutics. However, while it is unsurprising that both Hay and Archer use structuration theory as their point of departure, they offer starkly contrasting critiques, and subsequently depart in different directions. Archer (1995) accuses Giddens of 'conflation', arguing that he elides structure and agency together, making it impossible for him to model their interaction over time. Hay (1995, 2002), on the other hand, accuses Giddens of 'dualism', arguing that, although Giddens sets out to intertwine structure and agency, he inadvertently ends up with an analytical dualism in which structure and agency can only be studied in isolation from one another.

As well drawing different conclusions from their respective critiques of Giddens, Archer (1995) and Hay (1995, 2002) also draw different conclusions from their critiques of structuralism (positions that deny the causal power of agency), and intentionalism (positions that deny the causal power, and often the *existence*, of structure). Archer identifies structuralists as 'downwards conflationists' because in their approach agency is subsumed by, and therefore conflated with, structure. She then identifies intentionalists as 'upwards conflationists' because in their approach structure is reduced to, and therefore conflated with, agency. Hay actually offers a very similar critique of these one-sided approaches, commenting that "pure structuralism effectively dispenses with agency [and] pure intentionalism disavows notions of structure" (Hay, 2002, p. 110). However, Hay then goes on to argue that "this opposition or dualism ... has tended to resolve itself into fruitless exchanges between structuralists and intentionalists" (Hay, 2002, p. 115). Therefore, one key aspect of Hay's disagreement with the morphogenetic approach relates to the justification for rejecting structuralism, intentionalism and structuration theory. From the morphogenetic perspective, this rejection is justified because such theories are built on a *conflation* of structure and

agency. To Hay, these three positions, and indeed morphogenesis itself, are instead guilty of creating a *dualism* between structure and agency.

From this broader rejection of dualism, Hay (2002) offers a more specific critique of morphogenesis, arguing that in the morphogenetic cycle "structure and agency are not only analytically separable but ontologically separate"; "in this sense, an analytical dualism hardens into an ontological dualism" (p. 123). He goes on to specify the source of this ontological dualism by highlighting the role of temporality in morphogenetic theory: "Archer insists that structure and agency reside in different temporal domains, such that the pre-existence of structure is a condition of individual action" (Hay, 2002, p. 124); "to speak of the different temporal domains of structure and agency is, then, to reify and ontologise an analytical distinction" (p. 125). In other words, Hay is arguing that if structure is held to predate agency at an ontological level, then the two exist in separate temporal domains, meaning that they form an ontological dualism. The accusation that morphogenesis adheres to 'ontological dualism' allows Hay to place it on the discard pile of theories that have failed to overcome the structure-agency dualism, along with structuralism, intentionalism, and structuration theory.

The morphogenetic response

Before exploring this difference further, it is important to point out that both Hay and Archer engage in a discussion of structure-agency over two levels. To use Bhaskar's intransitivity premise, structure and agency exist in reality (intransitive), but we also have assumptions about their existence (transitive). In addition, we have analytical models (transitive) to understand these assumptions (intransitive). As discussed in Section 1, all transitive objects are also *in*transitive. Therefore, when we make our assumptions about reality, we focus on their transitive dimension, but when we *create analytical models from these assumptions*, we focus on their *intransitive dimension*. To simplify this line of argument: both Archer and Hay have two conceptions of structure and agency and much of their disagreement is of how these two conceptions differ and relate. Table 2 displays these two conceptions of structure and agency (adapted from Al-Amoudi 2007: 548).

	Intransitive dimension	Transitive dimension
Philosophical conception	(1) Structure and agency in reality	(2) Ontological assumptions about structure and agency
Analytical conception	(3) Ontological assumptions about structure and agency	(4) Analytical models of structure and agency

Table 2: the two conceptions of structure and agency

Archer states that the analytical dualism between structure and agency is "emphatically not the same thing as philosophical dualism, for there is no suggestion that we are dealing with separate entities, only analytically *separable* ones and ones which it is theoretically useful to *treat separately*" (Archer 1996: xvi). Hay states that "while it may be useful analytically to differentiate between structural and agential factors, then, it is important that this analytical distinction is not reified and hardened into a rigid ontological dualism" (Hay 2002: 127). On the face of it, it seems the two authors are arguing the same point here but there is an important difference to be drawn between a 'distinction' and a 'separation'. On the basis of Hay's argument, a 'distinction' seems to pertain to structural and agential *factors* or *properties* rather than structure and agency as entities. Because 'a duality' distinguishes but does not separate, we can infer that duality allows for structural properties and agential properties to be interrelated and interdependent (Hay, 2002). On the basis of Archer's argument, a separation can be seen as a disentanglement of the two causal forces, and their treatment as separate entities in order to assess their individual properties (i.e. properties that one possesses but the other does not). Therefore... For Archer, structure and agency are *philosophically distinguishable* and *analytically separable*. For Hay, structure and agency are *analytically distinguishable*, but *philosophically indistinguishable* and *inseparable*. Table 3 summarises this difference.

	Archer	Hay
Philosophical conception	Structure and agency are distinguishable but inseparable	Structure and agency are indistinguishable and inseparable
Analytical conception	Structure and agency are distinguishable and separable	Structure and agency are distinguishable but inseparable

Table 3: Archer's and Hay's positions on structure and agency

This difference between distinguishability and separability brings us to the definition of dualism. If a dualism were merely a *distinction*, then according to Table 3, Archer would claim to be using a *philosophical* dualism and Hay would claim to be using an *analytical dualism*. However, both authors clearly reject such labels (Hay 2002 and Archer 2000). Therefore, dualism can be seen as a *separation*, in which two causal forces are (philosophically) *separate* or (analytically) *separated* in relation to their unique properties. A duality, on the other hand, can be understood as a *distinction*, where structure and agency are "internally related or ontologically intertwined" (Hay 2002: 118) or, in Archer's words, where they "overlap and intertwine in reality" (Archer 1996: 228). While Archer and Hay may agree on this concept (though perhaps not the terminology), they disagree about its ontological status. McAnulla (2005: 35) argues that Hay "makes the mistake of assuming that because phenomena may be ontologically intertwined, indeed (as in the case of structure and agency) existentially dependent on one another, these phenomena cannot be ontologically distinguished". It is Hay's rejection of any ontological distinction that leads Archer to label such positions as 'conflationary' (Archer 1995). Table 4 summarises the positions of Archer and Hay using this terminology. To establish the tenability of the morphogenetic position, we can make three points of clarity to demonstrate that although morphogenetic theory advocates a structure-agency dualism at the analytical level, its ontological position represents a 'duality' in which structure and agency, as distinct but not separate properties of social reality, are interrelated and interdependent.

	Archer	Hay
Philosophical conception	Duality	Conflation
Analytical conception	Dualism	Duality

Table 4: Archer's and Hay's conceptions of structure and agency

Firstly, although the morphogenetic model places structure as temporally prior to agency, this is not to argue that structures existed before agents historically; "the issue is not about the chicken and the egg since even were ultimate regress possible, it would not prove very revealing ... after millennia of morphogenesis" (Archer, 1995, p. 75). The point is that structures "pre-date any particular cohort of occupants/ incumbents" (Archer, 1995, p. 168) but do not pre-date occupants/incumbents

generally. Therefore, structure and agency have always existed together and, ontologically, they are not treated as different entities occurring in different temporalities but as different causal forces, one of which logically precedes the other. Secondly, Archer (2000) argues, in response to a similar accusation from Anthony King (1999), that in any particular morphogenetic cycle "there is never a moment at which both structure and agency are not jointly in play" (Archer, 2000, p. 465). At the analytical level they are treated as separate entities so that we can model their interaction: (i) structures condition agents; (ii) agents interact in structured settings; (iii) agents' action leads to structural elaboration. However, even when structure and agency are analytically treated as separate entities, they are both held to exist at each stage of the cycle; it is simply the case that one of the entities is causally active while the other is being acted upon.

Thirdly, Archer (2000), McAnulla (2005) and Elder-Vass (2007) all point out that the concept of 'emergence' allows an ontological distinction (duality) to be theorised between structure and agency as causal forces, without falling into ontological dualism. As Elder-Vass explains, emergence is the idea that "a whole [e.g. structure] can have properties (or powers) ... that would not be possessed by its parts [e.g. agents] if they were not organised as a group into the form of this particular kind of whole" (Elder-Vass, 2007, p. 29). Therefore, structure emerges from agency and can only have causal influence on and through agents (Archer, 2000a), meaning that the two can never exist in an ontological dualism because they are necessarily interrelated and ontologically intertwined. Therefore, at an ontological level, critical realists such as Archer, Porpora (2015), McAnulla and Elder-Vass, adhere to a belief in (a) the reality of structure and agency as distinct causal properties of reality, and (b) their interrelated and interdependent relationship; 'interrelated' because agents and agency are constituent parts of social structure; 'interdependent' because structure and agency each only exist in the presence of the other. It is therefore possible to demonstrate the tenability of the morphogenetic view that analytical dualism can be applied without falling into the trap of ontological dualism.

The morphogenetic critique of Hay's position

We can now turn to the tenability of Hay's (2002) position, summarised above as an analytical duality and an ontological conflation of structure and agency. The logical relation between these two positions creates the following tension: if we are to deny the distinction between structure and agency at the ontological level, and therefore deny their ontological existence, it is unclear how and why they are conceptually useful at

the analytical level. This problem is visible in Hay's engagement with the fruitful, if theoretically constraining, coin analogy. In contrast to Giddens's (1984) 'bracketing' approach of seeing structure and agency as flip sides of the same coin, Hay suggests that structure and agency could instead be understood as alloys in the same coin. However, for this argument to make any sense, the coin would have to be composed of two 'alloys' in the first place, a position that would commit Hay to an ontological distinction of some kind. This in turn would seem to contradict the idea that structure and agency are abstract concepts for understanding the real "mechanisms and processes" of social change, a theoretical viewpoint from which the coin is not an alloy of structure and agency but is instead solidly constituted by social process.

This gives us two possible interpretations of Hay's position, each leading to a potential theoretical problem. *Position 1*: If social process is real but both structure and agency are merely abstract concepts for understanding social process, we are left with the following problem: why is the structure-agency issue important at the analytical level? *Position 2*: If structure and agency are held to be two constituent parts of social process, or two causal forces within it, or two features of it, we are left with the following problem: why does Hay deny the reality of structure and agency?

McAnulla (2005) interprets Hay according to Position 1, summarising Hay's ontological stance as one in which "generative mechanisms or structures are treated as mere 'theoretical entities', not as real entities" (p. 36), which leads to the position that structure and agency are nothing more than "descriptive abstractions which may (or may not) be of use in accounting for events" (p. 36). On this basis, McAnulla (2005) accuses Hay of 'actualism', the denial of unobservable social causes. When defending morphogenesis on similar grounds, Porpora (2015) critiques the position of 'nominalism' as one in which people "deny the reality of abstract objects" (p. 170) on the basis that they are merely ways of describing more tangible objects. For example, do structure and agency really exist, or are they just ways of describing social processes? A nominalist would deny structure and agency their own ontological existence on the basis of one of the following justifications: (a) that relational objects are nothing more than the entities between which the relation(s) exists, and perhaps the features of those entities, or (b) that there does not seem to be any physical space in which relational objects exist (Porpora, 2015, pp. 114–5). Position 1 can therefore be labelled 'actualist' or 'nominalist' in its denial of structure and agency as anything more than concepts for describing the functioning of 'social process'. Where Hay ascribes to this position, the following question arises: if structure and agency are not held to exist

ontologically, why are they useful or important as analytical concepts and why is the relationship between them a central ontological question?

However, in response to McAnulla (2005), Hay (2005) offers a clarification of his position that would seem to defend Position 2: "I certainly do not deny the existence of underlying mechanisms (structure-agency complexes) which may be unobservable yet causally effective" (Hay, 2005, p. 43). In this view, these 'mechanisms' are "social processes (in which structure and agency are mutually implicated)", while it is structure and agency themselves that are merely "analytical abstractions" (Hay, 2005, p. 40). Therefore, when pressed, Hay seems to advocate Position 2, accepting the reality of structure and agency as intertwined constituent properties of social processes in the form of "structure-agency complexes". This leaves us with the question: why does Hay deny the reality of structure and agency? Callinicos (2004: xxx) offers one possible answer when he claims that Hay ultimately equates "being real with the capacity to exist independently of other entities". Callinicos argues that if we erroneously assume that entities must be independent of other entities in order to be real, then we end up denying the reality of everything. On this interpretation, Hay accepts the existence of structure and agency but fails to define them as a 'real' because of his insistence on their ontological indistinguishability.

Therefore, it would seem that Hay's ontology could be interpreted either as nominalist, in its denial of the existence of structure and agency as anything more than analytical concepts, OR he could be interpreted as advocating an ontological duality in which he fundamentally accepts the existence of structure and agency but insists that their close interdependence and intertwining prevents them from being labelled 'real'. The former position is problematic because it seems to provide no basis or justification for engaging with the structure-agency debate in the first place, while simultaneously accepting that the structure-agency question is of central importance to social analysis. The latter position seems to ultimately share the morphogenetic approach of assuming structure and agency exist in an ontological duality, in that they are different causal forces but are intertwined and interdependent. Marsh (2018: 207) puts a similar critique agains Hay, arguing that "if structure (or indeed agency) has no independent causal power, then it is hard to see how the relationship between structure and agency can be dialectical". Marsh goes on to suggest that this leads to an explanatory prioritisation of agency. These three arguments would therefore imply that any analytical attempts to further delineate structure and agency lead us towards the necessity of an analytical dualism for the purposes of modelling their interplay over time.

Section 3: The second analytical dualism

In Section 1, the foundation of the morphogenetic model was secured both in terms of its ontological *distinction between,* and its analytical *separation of*, the individual and their social context. However, morphogenetic theory also relies on a second analytical dualism. Archer (1996) insists that in order to avoid "doing violence to our subject matter by eliding the material and the ideational aspects of social life" (p. xi), morphogenetic theory has "both to respect and to capture the substantive differences between structures and culture" (p. xi), where the former are understood to be the 'material' and the latter the 'ideational' aspects of social life. On this basis, morphogenetic theory combines the ontological distinction between the individual and the context with the ontological distinction between the material and the ideational to form a three-way split between structure, culture, and agency (Archer, 1996, 2013; Porpora, 1993, 2013). These three meta-theoretical causal forces are held to interact over time through two morphogenetic cycles, one between structure and agency (Figure 1) and one between culture and agency (Figure 2).
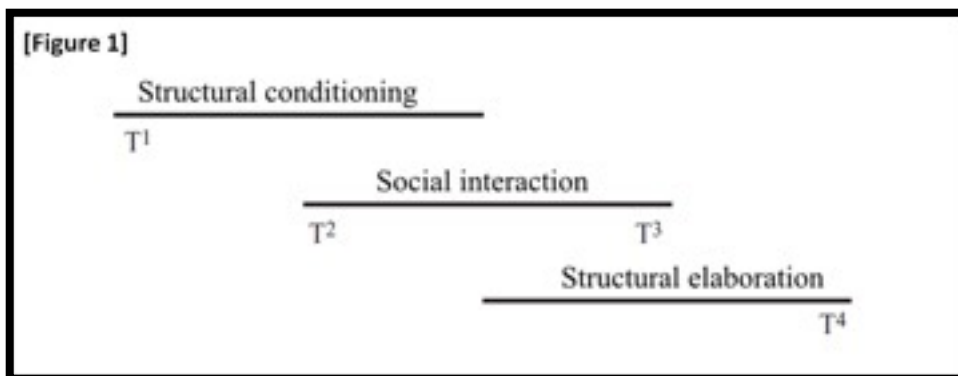

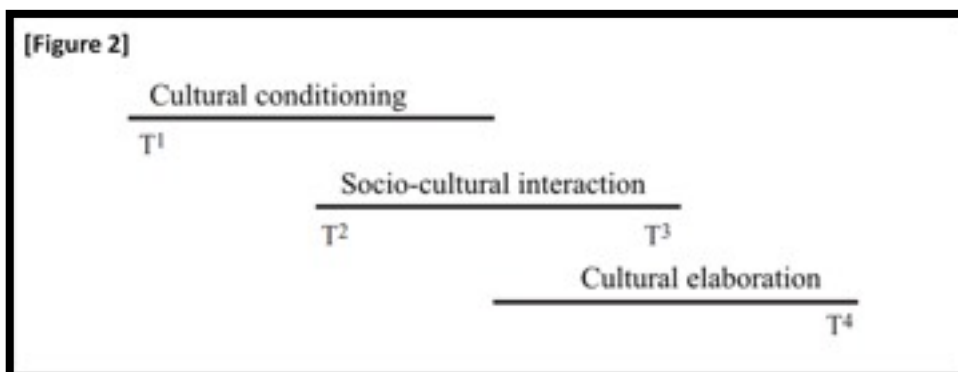**Figure 1: the structural morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995)**

Figure 2: the cultural morphogenetic cycle (Archer, 1995)

This is problematic for a number of reasons: firstly, there are ambiguities about a number of the key terms, especially 'structure' and 'material', but also 'culture' and 'ideational'; secondly, clarity is needed on the ontological status of the material-cultural distinction; thirdly, it is unclear how the material and cultural interact over time. The best way to deal with these problems is to engage with the criticisms offered by Hay and Gofas (2010), who provide one of the clearest critiques of the morphogenetic conceptualisation of the material-cultural distinction. In response to these criticisms, clarifications and modifications will be made to morphogenetic theory, so that when these three problems are returned to at the end of the section, solutions can be offered to each.

Hay and Gofas's five criticisms of morphogenetic theory

In their 2010 collaboration for the influential book *The Role of Ideas in Political Analysis*, Hay and Gofas lay five main criticisms against morphogenetic theory: (1) that there is a problematic conflation of the material and structural; (2) that there is a problematic dualism between structure and culture; (3) that there is no diachronic modelling of structural-cultural interaction; (4) that the conception of power is materialistic; and (5) that the conception of interests is materialistic. By addressing each criticism in turn, it will be possible to explain the morphogenetic approach in more detail, to subject it to sufficient critical pressure, to identify its weaknesses, and ultimately to offer a justification of its overall coherence.

Criticism 1: that there is a problematic conflation of the material and structural in morphogenetic theory

The main criticism offered by Hay and Gofas (2010) against morphogenetic theory is levelled against Archer's "unfortunate conflation of the material and the structure" (p. 45), a conflation which they argue to be the ultimate source of the other weaknesses. Before getting to the specific target of this criticism, it is necessary to be clearer about the term 'structure'. Archer (1995) uses the term 'structure' in contrast to 'culture', so that the former has a "primary dependence upon material resources" (p. 175), while the latter is composed of 'intelligibilia', a term that captures all those items that are "capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone" (Archer, 1996, p. 104). However, in a significant minority of instances, Archer (1995) uses the term 'structure' to capture "all structural influences (i.e. the generative powers of [both] structural emergent properties and cultural emergent properties)" (p. 196). Therefore, in Archer's work, 'structure' is used specifically to refer to material structures but also

generally to refer to the social context (including both its material and cultural elements). To ensure clarity, this thesis uses the term 'structure' in the more general sense to mean 'the social context', so that the terms 'material structure' and 'cultural structure' can be used for the more specific concepts (to which further clarification will be given in due course).

In order to understand the specific criticism that Hay and Gofas are making, it is necessary to turn to another of Hay's papers, in which he emphasises the importance of clearly differentiating between "material/physical structures on the one hand, and social/political structures on the other" (Hay, 2009, p. 260). Hay (2009) very effectively uses the example of King Canute and the tide in order to emphasise the difference between 'natural structures' (such as the tide) and 'socio-political structures' (such as the king's reputation). Unlike social structures, 'natural structures' neither yield to agency nor synchronically emerge from agency, but they can still provide agents with opportunities and constraints and, although the laws of physics cannot be changed, the physical and natural world certainly can. Therefore, Hay (2009) argues for a clear (presumably analytical) distinction to be made between the natural/physical context and the social/political context in which agents act. This in turn leads Hay and Gofas (2010) to criticise the morphogenetic approach for conflating the two together. While they may be right to suggest there is not enough clarity about this distinction in morphogenetic theory, they are wrong to suggest that there is a *necessary* conflation. In order to defend morphogenetic theory, we can make the distinction in morphogenetic terms, starting with the social-political element, which we will continue to label 'material structures'.

Porpora (1989) narrows the meaning of material structure, defining it "as systems of human relationships among social positions" (p. 198), which for the current debate is more usefully worded as "emergently material social relations" (Porpora, 1993, p. 212). "Although emergently material social relations are generated by cultural constitutive rules, those relations independently affect the ways in which situated actors think and act" (Porpora, 1993, p. 212). Crucially, for Porpora, the 'materialism' of material relations does not refer to their direct dependence on physical resources or their manifestation in physical reality, but instead refers to their independence from human understanding (Porpora, 2018). On this basis, material structure could relate directly to physical reality, such as a relation between the strength of two boxers or between the food rations of two castaways, but material-structural relations do not necessarily relate directly to physical reality and could be based on cultural-structural

rules, such as the relative positioning of a manager and an assistant or of a professor and undergraduate (Porpora, 2016). Therefore, if 'material structure' is taken to mean emergent social relations that are ontologically distinct from human understanding, then morphogenetic theorists would readily accept that they conflate the material and structural and would argue that this is a strength of the approach rather than a weakness. Although this clarification is essential for the use of the term 'material structure' in the thesis, it does not explain the place of 'physical reality' and the 'natural world' in morphogenetic theory.

With Archer (1995) stating that material structural emergent properties have a "primary dependence upon material resources, both physical and human" (p. 175), it seems that morphogenesis has not traditionally offered a clear enough distinction between 'material structure' and 'natural reality'. However, in *Being Human*, Archer (2000b) highlights the importance of our natural embodiment in the world and our practical relations with the world that occur "not through the manipulation of symbols but of artefacts" (p. 166). Archer therefore not only incorporates the natural world into morphogenetic theory through her theorisation of the 'natural and practical orders of reality', but she also explores the interaction over time between the natural world and human agency. As explained in the introduction, this thesis does not engage with ontological assumptions about physical/natural reality, just as it does not engage with assumptions specifically about time. However, although this strand of analysis will not be taken any further, it is important to note that morphogenetic theory needs to draw physical/natural reality into its meta-theoretical core, so that physical/natural structure is considered alongside the social context of material structure and cultural structure.

Criticism 2: that there is a problematic ontological dualism between material structure and cultural structure in morphogenetic theory

The second criticism relates to the analytical dualism between material structure and cultural structure, with Hay and Gofas (2010) repeating Hay's earlier argument that the *analytical* dualism inevitably leads to *ontological* dualism. Hay and Gofas (2010) offer a specific point of disagreement that seems to highlight their understanding of what differentiates analytical dualism from other approaches. They argue that the morphogenetic approach mistakenly assumes that *all emergent properties of material structure and cultural structure are internal to themselves separately*, rather than being emergent from the interrelation between them (Hay and Gofas, 2010). The unidentified implication of this is that any modelling of the material, cultural, structural or agential

aspects of social life must allow for the possibility that *emergent properties can arise from combinations between the concepts and not just from each one separately*.

The notion of emergence put forward by Archer is almost entirely focussed on the way in which both material structure and cultural structure synchronically emerge *from agency*. However, Porpora (1993, 2015) offers a crucial elaboration, explaining how material structures, conceptualised as "emergently material social relations", emerge from both agency *and* culture structure, which effective undermines Hay and Gofas's criticism. Material Structures emerge from cultural structures because cultural elements such as 'constitutive rules', ideas, and language are almost always central to the very existence of material structures (Porpora, 2015). Similarly, material structures emerge from agency because they are themselves relations between agents and because it is only through agents that they exert any causal force (Archer, 1995; Porpora, 2015). In order to stand by the commitment to establish a place for 'nature' in the meta-theoretical core of morphogenetic theory, it is necessary to include it in the chain of synchronic emergence. Therefore, at an ontological level, we can postulate four social forces existing in overlapping and intertwining relations of emergence... from natural structure emerges agency... from natural structure and agency emerges cultural structure... from natural structure, agency and cultural structure emerges material structure. If we put the structure-agency issue to one side, the emergence can be simplified, so that from the natural emerges the cultural, and from both emerges the material.

Criticism 3: that there is no diachronic modelling of material-cultural interaction in morphogenetic theory

Hay and Gofas criticise morphogenesis for lacking a diachronic modelling of material-cultural interaction. They refer a number of times to McAnulla's (2002) defence of morphogenetic theory and particularly his concluding remarks that morphogenetic theory "is less than clear about what the relationship between the cultural and the [material] is over time" (p. 290). Hay and Gofas (2010) suggest that "McAnulla can find no developed account of the relationship between [cultural structure] and [material structure] over time because, quite simply, there is none" (p. 46). They argue that this absence is confirmed by Archer when she restricts their interplay "to something that occurs only in the second 'socio-cultural interaction' phase of the morphogenetic cycle" (Hay and Gofas, 2010, p. 46). Therefore, what McAnulla sees as a theoretical gap waiting to be filled, Hay and Gofas see as an inevitable weakness of morphogenetic theory.

It can be flatly rejected that morphogenetic theory offers no diachronic modelling of material-cultural interaction (see Archer, 1996, pp. 284–287; Archer, 1995, pp. 305–328; Porpora, 2015, pp. 175–187), but it is not satisfactory simply to point the reader towards existing morphogenetic writings, because there are problems with both of Archer's main strands of argument on this issue: (a) the problem with Archer's claim about the intersection in the 'middle element' is that her theoretical modelling of the middle element of the basic cycle is limited in scope and theoretically problematic; (b) where Archer does present a cohesive morphogenetic model of material-cultural interaction, she does not conceptualise this interaction as occurring in the middle element of the basic cycle, which not only contradicts the earlier claim, but also limits the explanatory power of the model. Each of these problems will be dealt with in turn.

(a) Archer (1995,1996) argues that, in morphogenetic theory, "the basic mechanism by which cultural factors find their way into the [material] field" is as follows: "let any material interest group ... endorse any doctrine ... for the advancement of those interests ... and that group is immediately plunged into its situational logic" (Archer, 1995, p. 306; Archer, 1996, p. 284). Similarly, "[material] factors find their way into the cultural field by following the same path": "let the advocacy of any doctrine ... become associate with a particular material interest group and its fate becomes embroiled in the fortunes of that group" (Archer, 1995, pp. 306–7; Archer, 1996, p. 286). There is no indication that this discussion of interest groups is merely *an example* of material-cultural interaction; rather, it is made clear that this is *the* mechanism through which material-cultural interaction occurs in the middle element of the basic cycle. Aside from being a rather limited foray into the multitude of ways in which material structure and cultural structure could be considered to interact, this 'interest group explanation' is undermined by the way in which Archer conceptualises interest groups.

The middle element of the morphogenetic cycle is explored by Archer (1995) on the basis of a distinction between two types of interest group: 'primary agents', which are held to be unorganised groups of individuals who share interests (though they may not be aware of themselves as a group or aware of their shared interests), and 'corporate agents', which, in contrast, are held to be organised around the articulation and pursuit of their shared interests (so that they are necessarily aware of themselves as a group and aware of their interests). The problem with these concepts arises when we consider the distinction between primary agents and corporate agents alongside attempts to model material-cultural interaction in the middle element of the

morphogenetic cycle. 'Corporate agents' are organised interest groups, to the extent that "they are social subjects with reasons for attempting to bring about certain outcomes" (Archer, 1995, p. 260); they therefore fit into Archer's mechanism of material-cultural interaction presented in the previous paragraph because, as organised interest groups, they are capable of 'endorsing a doctrine'. However, 'primary agents' cannot be considered to be part of this mechanism because, as a group of people who "neither express interests nor organise for their pursuit" (Archer, 1995, p. 259), they are unable to 'endorse a doctrine'.

Furthermore, the distinction between primary and corporate agents creates a further problem, because it undermines the clarity of the distinction between the middle element of the material cycle ('social interaction') and the middle element of the cultural cycle ('socio-cultural interaction'). Because "the primary social context delineates collectives in the same position" (Archer, 1995, p. 259), 'primary agents' are defined by the distributions of the material structure and the cultural structure. In this case, the distinction between the material and cultural domains can be maintained as existing between the material interest groups produced by material structure and the cultural interest groups produced by cultural structure. In contrast, 'corporate agents', as "self-conscious vested interest groups, promotive interest groups, social movements and defence associations" (Archer, 1995, p. 258), are defined as *single organisational units*. Clearly, in order to become 'social subjects' and be capable of 'endorsing a doctrine', corporate agents must take the form of distinct organisations. This creates the following problem: how do we differentiate between a material corporate agent and a cultural corporate agent? All corporate agents are positioned within the cultural structure, to the extent that they use language and ideas, and all corporate agents are positioned within the material structure to the extent that they are composed of relations between individuals. Thus, at the middle element of the cycle, the distinction between 'social interaction' (material) and 'socio-cultural interaction' (cultural) can no longer be clearly maintained. Analytical dualism, central to morphogenetic models of interaction, is undermined by a conflation of the material and cultural in the middle element of the basic cycle.

Therefore, when we consider 'corporate agents', Archer's 'endorsing-a-doctrine' model of material-cultural interaction is tenable, but the distinction between material and cultural morphogenesis breaks down. When we consider 'primary agents', the distinction between material and cultural morphogenesis can be maintained, but the modelling of material-cultural interaction is untenable. These two theoretical problems

simultaneously limit the potential for morphogenetic theory to explain material-cultural interaction over time.

(b) In a more promising approach, Archer (1995, pp. 306–324) models material-cultural interaction *between the outcomes* of the two cycles, where the two possible outcomes are morphogenesis (structural change) and morphostasis (structural stability). Where both the material and cultural cycles lead to morphostasis, the stability of each reinforces the stability of the other (Figure 3). Where one leads to morphogenesis and the other to morphostasis, the change in the former disrupts the stability of the latter. When both lead to morphogenesis, the change in each enhances the change of the other (Figure 4).
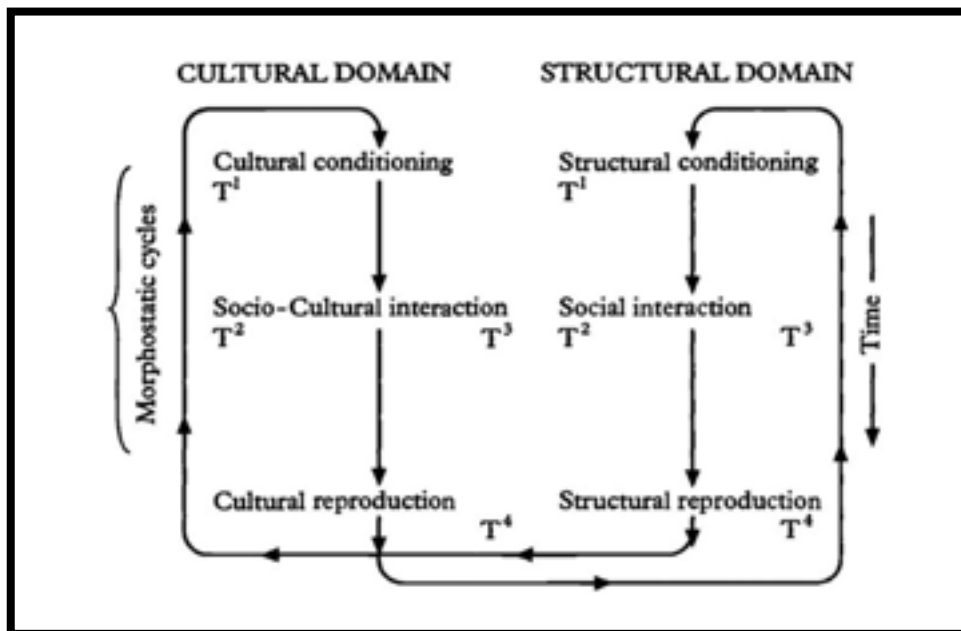

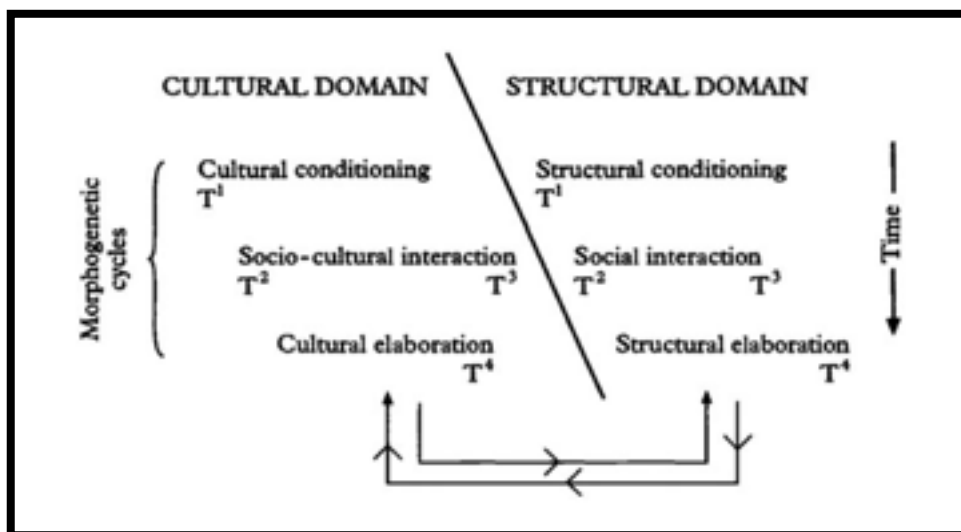**Figure 3: structural-cultural morphostasis (Archer, 1995)**

Figure 4: structural-cultural morphogenesis (Archer, 1995)

This model of interaction between the material and cultural is a much clearer, more widely-applicable, and less problematic line of argument than the one Archer presents in relation to interest groups. However, two qualifying comments have to be made about this model. Firstly, Figures 3 and 4 clearly illustrate that this interaction does not occur in the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle; it instead occurs *between* cycles, so that a material and a cultural cycle occur separately in parallel and the results of each intersect influencing future cycles. Secondly, and consequently, this approach, as depicted in Figures 3 and 4, only offers explanation of material-cultural interaction at a macro-level, which Archer (1995) describes as 'third-order' emergence, which is used to explain the "results of the results of the results of social interaction" (p. 218).

We can turn to Porpora's (2015) *Reconstructing Sociology* as a more recent attempt to provide a specific explanation of the elusive model of material-cultural interaction. Porpora seems to conceive of a closer interaction between the material and cultural by stating that "within their [materially-]structured positions arising from an initial set of [cultural] rules, agents' struggles may change the [cultural] rules and hence the [material-]structures and their future actions" (Porpora, 2015, p. 182). Porpora is clear that although "particular social structures may vary, there will always be some structure" and although "reasons will vary historically with cultural backgrounds ... in all times and in all places, people will be motivated by reasons" (pp. 180–1). Using the terminology of the current analysis, Porpora is arguing that agents always act under the simultaneous conditioning of both material structure and cultural structure. Therefore, although he seeks to explain material-cultural interaction from the morphogenetic perspective, Porpora seems to have abandoned Archer's distinction between 'social interaction' and 'socio-cultural interaction'. However, if the material cycle and cultural cycle are considered to be necessarily operating simultaneously in parallel, and if the two intersect at the middle element of the two cycles, and if the distinction between the two middle elements has been abandoned, we are still left with the question: how do the material and the cultural interact in the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle? We will come back to this question in Chapter 2.

Criticism 4: that the morphogenetic conception of power is materialistic

Hay and Gofas (2010) argue that in morphogenetic theory, "actors are seen to be empowered by their position in the social hierarchy", which is "understood in purely material terms" (pp. 45–6). Therefore, they suggest that the morphogenetic cycle fails

to acknowledge that actors may be powerful "by virtue of a widespread system of meanings that accords them status, legitimacy and/or authority" (Hay and Gofas, 2010, p. 46). It is possible to offer a rather simple response to this charge: this type of power *is* acknowledged by morphogenesis but not as a constituent of cultural structure. It is instead held to be a materially emergent social relation that belongs to the material structure (Porpora, 2015). Therefore, although 'a widespread system of meanings' would be identified as cultural structure, the resultant 'status, legitimacy and authority' are material structural elements because they are social relations.

Although this very brief response directly addresses Hay and Gofas's criticism, we can move beyond notions of 'power over' to consider the causal powers of the cultural structure and the causal powers agents have in their reaction to it. It is by delineating these types of power that we can lay the foundations for an explanation of material-cultural interaction. As Archer (1996) explains in detail in *Culture and Agency*, the cultural structure exerts a causal power upon agents, particularly as a result of the logical contradictions and complementarities that exist between ideas. As well as theorising the power of the structural level, morphogenetic theory crucially insists on "the quintessential power of human agency to react with originality whatever its circumstances" (Archer, 1996, p. 187). It therefore makes sense to assume that agents have powers relevant to the cultural and the material, so that any individual has a degree of cultural power in their negotiation of the cultural structure, including an ability to think creatively, imagine new possibilities and negotiate contradictions between ideas, but also has as a degree of material power in their negotiation of the material structure, including an ability to take up roles, change those roles, dominate others etc. Agents who hold vast amounts of knowledge and/or adhere to a set of complementary beliefs have a cultural power by virtue of their positioning within the cultural structure, while those who have been denied such knowledge and/or adhere to a set of contradictory beliefs will have relatively less cultural power. These cultural powers are not relational, as they do not entail power over other individuals. Instead they are powers that agents have to resist, adopt, change, or create ideas. In the material domain, agents do have powers over others, but they also have powers to resist, join, change, or create institutions.

Therefore, morphogenetic theory *does* allow for the possibility that agents can hold relational power (e.g. "status, legitimacy and/or authority") "by virtue of a widespread system of meanings", but these powers are part of the material structure. That such powers are partly constituted by cultural meanings is accounted for in the

morphogenetic assumption that the material synchronically emerges from the cultural. However, this consideration of power has, more importantly, led to a possible distinction between the cultural power of agents and the material power of agents. As will become apparent towards the end of the chapter, it is this distinction that is key to understanding material-cultural interaction.

Criticism 5: that the morphogenetic conception of interests is materialistic

Hay and Gofas (2010) argue that morphogenetic theory conceives of "interests as materially determined" and "conceives of actors in the process of socio-cultural integration as animated ultimately by their material interests" (p. 45). The supposed source of these two strands of materialism is the dualism between the material and culture, because such a separation denies the complex interpenetration of material and cultural effects (Hay and Gofas, 2010). It is for this reason that Hay and Gofas (2010) "prefer to talk of a social structure with interrelated, if nonetheless analytically separable, ideational and material elements" (p. 46). However a central part of Hay's (2011a) position is the explicit rejection of material interests because their acknowledgement is supposedly a denial of social construction and a denial of the reflexivity of the agent (Hay, 2011a). Therefore, rather than Hay and Gofas (2010) having identified a materialist bias in the morphogenetic conception of interests, they have instead offered a wholesale rejection of material interests.

It would therefore make more sense to say that while morphogenesis includes both material and cultural conceptions of interests, Hay's position offers a purely ideational understanding of interests. Marsh (2018: 210) takes a broader view of this problem, arguing that in Hay's theory as a whole "what is missing ... is any idea that there are material, as well as ideational, constraints on the actions of agents". In contrast, not only does morphogenesis claim to balance cultural and material interests, it also claims that it is possible, and indeed necessary, to acknowledge the reflexivity of the agent within any conception of interests. Furthermore, although the morphogenetic model strongly opposes Hay's (2016) view that social forces are comprised entirely of social constructions, it is underpinned by a critical realist position that accepts that agents always perceive of themselves, their ideas, and their external environments through socially constructed understandings. Therefore, in order to respond to Hay and Gofas's accusation of materialism in the theorisation of interests, it is necessary to show how morphogenesis (a) allows for both material and cultural interests, (b) maintains the reflexive power of agency, and (c) acknowledges the role of social construction.

(a) The uniqueness of the morphogenetic position on interests is that it applies analytical dualisms in order to distinguish different types of interest, whereas Hay and Gofas (2010) conflate these various types together as the socially constructed perspectives of individuals. By applying an analytical dualism between the agent and the social context, Archer (1995) posits 'vested interests', which are interests loaded into positions within the structural context. This includes interests that are inherent constituents of the roles that agents occupy in material structure and inherent constituents of the beliefs that they hold in the cultural structure (Archer, 1995). Because both the material and cultural contexts are held to provide agents with 'vested interests', it is possible to argue that morphogenesis allows for both material and cultural interests.

(b) These interests condition agents through the costs associated with flouting them and the benefits associated with adherence. However, this does not mean that they *determine* behaviour, because agents are always pursuing projects, be they "the satisfaction of biologically grounded needs [or] the utopian reconstruction of society" or anything in between (Archer, 1995, p. 198). The conditioning effects of the social structure (material or cultural) only ever operates *through* the projects that agents undertake, because constraints and enablements only exist in relation to "the particular projects of particular agents in particular positions" (Archer, 1995, p. 198). This allows for a third type of interest beyond the vested interests of the material and cultural context: the 'real' interests of agents (Archer, 1995, p. 203). Agents may well define their own 'real interests' completely differently to the vested interests inherent in their material role(s) and/or cultural belief(s). When they do act against their vested interests, a common cost that an agent pays is the loss of the associated material role or cultural belief, though other additional/alternative costs could also arise. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the morphogenetic model defends material and cultural interests while *maintaining the reflexive power of the agent.*

(c) A key tenet of Hay's (2016) position is that all individual perspectives are social constructions. Therefore, when agents form their interests, they have social constructions about what they attach value to, social constructions about their strategically selective context and social constructions about their own abilities (Hay, 2016). There is no reason why a morphogenetic perspective cannot incorporate these different layers of social construction. Indeed, the critical realist position on which morphogenesis builds insists that all knowledge is socially constructed. However, while

the inclusion of social construction leads Hay (2016) to argue that "there is no material bottom line to be found" (p. 531) and consequently no material interests (Hay, 2011a), it would instead lead morphogenetic theorists to reassert the importance of analytical dualism. Marsh (2009) uses the label 'thick constructivism' to capture Hay's position where the theorisation of social construction leads to a denial of the material-cultural distinction, and he uses the label 'thin constructivism' to capture an approach where social construction is theorised on the basis of an ontological distinction between the material and cultural. From the position of 'thin constructivism', the analytical dualisms of morphogenetic theory allow for the consideration of the inherently socially constructed perspective of the agent, while simultaneously accepting that an agent's perspective is necessarily *of* something. This something exists independently of the individual's knowledge and exerts a causal force through the consequences of action; these consequences "cannot simply be dissolved into subjective constructions" (Archer, 1995, p. 203).

Returning to the 'three problems'

In the introduction to this section, three problems were identified with the morphogenetic conception of the material-cultural distinction (aka 'the second analytical dualism'), and it was proposed that by dealing with Hay and Gofas's (2010) five criticisms, it would be possible to defend morphogenetic theory and clear up the three problems. We must now return to those problems to assess the result. Firstly, there was a problem with regards to the ambiguous use of terminology; clarifications have now been made so that: 'structure' is held to be the 'structured social context'; 'material structure' is held to be the 'emergently material social relations' between agents; and 'cultural structure' incorporates both 'constitutive rules' and the 'logical relations between ideas'. Secondly, it was argued that clarity was needed on the ontological status of the material-cultural distinction. Again, progress has been made here with the identification of an emergent chain whereby from natural structure emerges agency, and from natural structure and agency emerges cultural structure, and from all three emerges material structure. Furthermore, the arguments made in Section 2 about emergence, ontological duality, and analytical dualism, can all be applied to the material-cultural distinction.

Thirdly, and finally, it was suggested that there is a problem with the morphogenetic model of material-cultural interaction. Through an engagement with Hay and Gofas's (2010) criticisms, it was acknowledged that Archer offers two models of material-cultural interaction. However, the model that explains material-cultural

interaction in the middle element of the basic cycle is theoretically flawed, and the model that explains material-cultural interaction between the material cycle and the cultural cycle is only able to explain interaction at the macro-level and ultimately fails to consider the two cycles simultaneously. Therefore, this problem is still requiring a solution. This solution can ultimately derive from the responses to Hay and Gofas's fourth and fifth criticisms about interests and power. Simply put, the solution to material-cultural interaction in the morphogenetic approach is to challenge the notion that the material-cultural distinction only applies at the *structural level*, and therefore to acknowledge a distinction between *material agency* and *cultural agency*.

Material agency and cultural agency

Archer only explicitly applies the material-cultural dualism at the structural level, which implies either that agency is a conflation of the material and cultural, or that it is neither and can therefore be considered a separate causal force entirely. The latter seems to be Archer's own view, as demonstrated in her more recent work, where she discusses structure (material structure), culture (cultural structure), and agency as a trinity of concepts that form a tripartite view of society (Archer 2013). However, her original theory also implies that a material-cultural distinction can be applicable to the agential level, through an analytical separation of '*social* interaction' and '*socio-cultural* interaction' (Archer 1995) (see Figures 1 and 2 on page 44). Although Archer's distinction between 'social interaction' and 'socio-cultural interaction' has been shown to be problematic above (in response to Hay and Gofas's third criticism), this does not mean that the only other option is to advocate the tripartite model. Instead, an alternative will be proposed using a distinction between material agency and cultural agency. While the full utility of this distinction only becomes clear in Chapter 2, the theoretical work must be done in the current chapter so as to make the most of the engagement with Hay and Gofas.

Up to this point, we have followed Archer's example of initially simplifying agency to refer broadly to 'people' and we will follow Archer further in unpacking the concept of agency at the point of requirement. Here, it is required to deal with the question of the material-cultural separation. Archer splits agency into three emergent strata: (i) agents, (ii) actors and (iii) persons (Archer 1995: 254). To avoid confusion, we will refer here to (i) *'interest-groups'* instead of (i) 'agents' because this is effectively what Archer means by it and because doing so ensures that the terms 'agent', 'agency' and 'agential' are reserved for their more general uses. Therefore, agency consists of three strata: (i) interest-groups, (ii) actors and (iii) persons.

(i) Interest-groups are "groups or collectivities in the same position or situation" within the structural context (Archer 1995: 257). Each interest group shares the same interests and is structurally conditioned through these interests. Archer argues that *interests* can be both material and cultural, so it makes sense to assume that interest *groups* can be material and cultural also. As discussed above, Archer (1995) distinguishes between 'primary interest groups' in which individuals within the group are unaware of themselves as a group and therefore exert no conscious influence on structural change, and 'corporate interest groups' where individuals are consciously and actively formed as a group directed towards a particular influence on structural change. Such distinctions must be abandoned if we are to model material-cultural interaction; or at least such distinctions must not be considered as an essential component of morphogenetic theory. Instead, we must consider all interest groups to be the product of the structural level, so that individuals who share (cultural) beliefs and/or (material) positioning, share interests. Individuals may be more or less aware of their interests, and more or less aware of themselves as an interest group, but ultimately all interest groups are rooted in the material and cultural structure. This allows the analytical dualism between the material and the cultural to be maintained.

(ii) Social actors are individuals rather than groups, and "are defined as role incumbents" (Archer 1995: 276). A person becomes a material actor by taking on a particular role or particular roles in society. To some extent a person chooses a role but people are "always born into a system of social stratification" and therefore the "privileges and underprivileges" that come with being part of an interest-group "are regarded as properties that people acquire involuntaristically" (Archer 1995: 277). These properties present people with constraints and enablements, making the attainment of some roles easy and of others almost impossible. Those privileged by their involuntaristic placement may have many roles available to them, as well as the ability to create and shape roles, while those less privileged may find significant barriers to the attainment of any role at all. The power that an agent has within a role, the power that they have to shape and change their role, and the power that they have to leave a role or occupy a new one are all *material* powers of social action. Similarly, a person becomes a cultural actor by taking on a particular belief or idea. To some extent a person chooses a belief or idea but people are always born into, *and grow up in,* certain cultural contexts, which act as constraints and enablements so that taking on certain new ideas may be made easy by complementarities with existing beliefs, while taking on other ideas may be made almost impossible by contradictions with existing

beliefs (Archer 1995). The power that an agent has within a set of complementary beliefs, the power that they have to change their beliefs by overcoming contradictions or exploiting complementarities, and the power to abandon a whole belief system or occupy a new one are all *cultural* powers of social action.

(iii) We must finally turn to '*persons*', who belong to interest-groups, occupy roles, and undertake social action. Here, an analytical separation will *not* be made between cultural and material constituents. We could consider a distinction between individual action and individual thought to be a material-cultural distinction applicable to 'persons'. However, this would lead to a problematic suggestion that material agency does not include thought and cultural agency does not include action, which can be seen to be problematic in light of the discussion so far, and would be even more problematic once considered within the theoretical developments outlined in Chapter 2. More directly, Archer argues that the defining feature of personhood is a "continuous sense of self" (Archer 1995: 282), meaning that an analytical dualism of this final strata of agency would be to create a separation *within* individual persons rather than within their agential (inter)action. In addition, Archer discusses morphogenetic cycles for both (i) interest-groups and (ii) actors, but excludes the possibility of a morphogenetic cycle for (iii) persons. By maintaining a single notion of personhood, individual persons can be theorised as the base unit from which interest-groups, roles, social actors, social action and, as we shall see in Chapter 2, 'social practices' all *emerge*.

Therefore, an analytical dualism between material agency and cultural agency can be based on the distinctions between material and cultural *interests*, and between material and cultural *power*, which are distinctions that already exist within Archer's theorisation of the morphogenetic approach. The notion of personhood ensures that a distinction between material agency and cultural agency is not a distinction between two parts of a human being. Instead material agency and cultural agency are the powers that agents have *within* and *in reaction to* the conditioning effects of material structure and cultural structure. Using Porpora's (2015) argument that an agent always thinks and acts within both a materially structured context, and a culturally structured context, it is possible to argue that a morphogenetic theory ultimately entails a model of interaction over time between 'material structure', 'cultural structure', 'material agency' and 'cultural agency'. These four social concepts are derived from two analytical dualisms, one between the individual and the social context (structure-agency), and another between the relational and ideational aspects of social life (material-cultural). See Table 1 below.

	Material	Cultural
Structure	Material structure	Cultural structure
Agency	Material agency	Cultural agency

Table 1: the two analytical dualisms

Conclusion

"It should be appreciated that all philosophies, cognitive discourses and practical activities presuppose a realism – in the sense of some ontology or general account of the world – of one kind or another" (Bhaskar 1989: 2). In order for this research project to analyse the 'ontology or general account of the world' underpinning the Coalition Government's welfare reform, it has been essential to lay out the ontological assumptions that underpin the research project itself. This chapter has fulfilled this role extensively by building a framework for analysis using Margaret Archer's morphogenetic model and the Bhaskarian critical realist tradition. The necessity of such a detailed exploration of ontology can be explained by its triple-purpose in the analysis that follows: firstly, this chapter has explicated the founding assumptions of the researcher, offering a degree of transparency to the reader regarding the positionality of the research; secondly, the assumptions and models laid out in this chapter, especially the most abstract discussion of Section 1, provide the foundation for the research design, which is explored in more detail in Chapter 2; finally, the meta-theory proposed in this chapter offers a detailed exploration of a particular ontological position that can be situated alongside the ontological positions identified in the empirical analysis to come.

In Section 1 of this chapter, the foundations of a critical realist position were laid, focussing on the three concepts that were considered most important to the remainder of the chapter and to the thesis as a whole. The concepts of intransitivity, transfactuality and stratification underpin a number of important arguments made in this chapter. The concept of intransitivity was used to explore the notion of analytical dualism, and can be considered as the philosophical underpinning of the material-cultural distinction. The concept of transfactuality was used to question the approach taken by Colin Hay and therefore provide justification for continuing with a morphogenetic approach to political analysis. The concept of stratification was used

both to explain the distinction between structure and agency and to maintain the connection between them; this use of the stratification premise was then replicated with regards to the material-cultural distinction. Therefore, the basic critical realist concepts laid out in Section 1 were not merely an introduction to the theoretical tradition, but were intertwined with, and provided essential justifications for, the arguments made in Sections 2 and 3.

Sections 2 and 3 formed the centrepiece of this chapter's original theoretical contribution, and saw the development of an analytical model based on the structure-agency and material-cultural distinctions. Section 2 entered into the structure-agency debate, bringing clarity to the disagreements between Hay and Archer, two authors that seek to lead the analytical application of critical realism in different directions. By defending the morphogenetic approach against accusations of ontological dualism, and through a critique of Hay's ontological conflation, it was possible to justify the notion of analytical dualism as an approach to the structure-agency question. Rather than continuing the clarification and defence of Archer's position, Section 3 saw a number of clarifications and modifications of the morphogenetic position. The terminology was clarified so that structure and culture became material structure and cultural structure. The theoretical foundations were clarified using a chain of *synchronic emergence*, so that from natural/physical structures emerges agency, from natural/physical structures and agency emerges cultural structure, and from all three emerges material structure. Finally, Section 3 went beyond clarifications and offered a significant modification to morphogenetic theory, in which a distinction was applied between material agency and cultural agency. As a result, morphogenetic theory can be seen to build from the intersection of two central analytical dualisms, structure-agency and material-cultural, which leads to the identification of four analytical subdivisions of society: material structure, cultural structure, material agency and cultural agency. 'Morphogenesis' (as social change) is the product of the interaction over time of these four causal forces.

The main priority of this chapter has been to provide the foundational social theory upon which the methodology and analysis rests. Just as Section 1 of this chapter provided a base of ontological assumptions to justify and position the remainder of the chapter, so the chapter as a whole provides a base of social theory for the remainder of the thesis. Following the approach taken in this chapter, this theoretical foundation will not only be an implicit undercurrent in the analysis that is to follow, but will be regularly referenced and deployed to further the overall argument of the thesis. This theoretical framework underpins the chapterisation of the thesis, the

methodological approach, and the research's central concern with the structure-agency and material-cultural questions. In Chapters 3-6, analysis of welfare ideologies, political parties, and welfare policy is undertaken with a primary focus on ontological assumptions about the structure-agency and material-cultural issues. However, although the current chapter has identified what *kinds* of assumptions the research project hopes to identify, it has so far not addressed the causal role that ontological assumptions actually play in social change. Therefore, one of the main aims in Chapter 2 is to explain how ontological assumptions, *as social objects*, causally affect social change. If ontological assumptions do have a causal role in welfare policy creation, it is only by virtue of their nature as part of the *cultural structure,* and it is therefore important to also analyse their intrinsic relation with cultural agency, material agency and material structure.

<u>Chapter 2</u>

The Causality, Constitution and Analysis of Ontological Assumptions

Introduction

Begun in Chapter 1 and completed in the current chapter, the theoretical framework of this thesis brings together the work of Roy Bhaskar (1975 and 1979), Margaret Archer (1995 and 1996), and Lillian Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough (1999), creating an overall framework that coherently unifies three levels of abstraction: (1) a Bhaskarian critical realist ontology, (2) a modified morphogenetic theory of social causality, and (3) a theoretically integrated approach to critical discourse analysis. Where Chapter 1 outlined the Bhaskarian critical realist foundation and offered the basics of the modified morphogenetic theory of social causality, the current chapter will integrate this with Fairclough's 'critical discourse analysis' (henceforth CDA), and in doing so, will further develop the morphogenetic approach. The complexity of this theoretical framework has meant that up until this point, it has been discussed in abstraction from the research question. Section 3 of this chapter offers an overview of how the theoretical framework is to be *applied* in the current research, but by way of introducing and justifying the content of the current chapter, it is worth briefly outlining the nature of this application. Rather than simply *identify* the ontological assumptions underpinning Coalition social policy, this thesis seeks to understand ideas as causal forces in society. To this end, ontological assumptions are considered in three respects. Firstly, the *causality* of ontological assumptions is considered, making it necessary to identify their place within a broader vision of social reality and social change. Secondly, the *constitution* of ontological assumptions is considered, which raises the question of what ontological assumptions *actually are* as objects of social reality. Thirdly, the *content* of ontological assumptions is considered, leading us to consider what kinds of ideas we are looking for when we seek to identify the ontological assumptions of policy documents.

With regards to the *'causality'* of ontological assumptions, Chapter 1 introduced and critically evaluated 'the morphogenetic approach', an approach that builds an

explanatory model of social change from a critical realist foundation. It does so by introducing analytical dualisms and explaining the interaction over time between the structural, agential, material, and cultural dimensions of social reality. It was argued in Chapter 1 that the morphogenetic approach allows us to model social change as the product of four social causes: material structure, cultural structure, material agency, and cultural agency. Section 1 of the current chapter will situate ontological assumptions within this model of social change and thereby theorise those assumptions *as causal social entities*. To this end, Section 1 engages in detail with Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) central concept of 'social practice'. Although this concept is explicitly rejected by Archer, it is shown that the particular way in which Chouliaraki and Fairclough conceive of social practice allows it to fit neatly into the morphogenetic approach. By incorporating social practice as the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle and by exploring the implications of this incorporation, it is possible to enhance the morphogenetic cycle's capability to explain the interaction between the material and cultural dimensions of social reality. These modifications allow Section 1 to achieve its aim of locating ontological assumptions (as causal entities) within the morphogenetic cycle, and explaining how they interact with other social causes.

With regards to the *constitution* of ontological assumptions, we must again utilise Archer's theoretical tools of 'analytical dualism'. In this case, we are considering the dualism between the *use of ideas* and *ideas themselves*. The former relates the cultural agency of individuals to create, modify, believe, reject, spread, and critique ontological assumptions, while the latter relates to the causal power that ontological assumptions exert through their contradictions, complementarities, intertextuality, and linguistic formation. The welfare policy documents under analysis in this thesis do of course relate to the cultural agency of the authors and the audience, they relate to the *material* agency of politicians and benefit-recipients, and they relate to the *material structures* of politics and economics at various levels. But, it is the cultural structure of these documents that is the specific focus of the research and, on this basis, Section 2 explores the conceptualisation of cultural structure in more detail. Like all entities of cultural structure, ontological assumptions are composed of three main constituents: ideas, language, and discourse. To put this another way, ontological assumptions exist over three levels: they exist *as ideas* that have the capacity to be understood and the capacity to logically contradict; they exist *in language* that can be communicated to others or stored within texts; they exist *within discourse* because their interpretation relies on complex systems of intertextuality.

With regards to the *content* of ontological assumptions, Chapter 1 emphasised the importance of the structure-agency and material-cultural questions as pivotal ontological issues, both in their pervasiveness and in their contentiousness. Therefore, when we seek to identify the ontological assumptions of welfare policy documents, the two most important questions to ask are (a) what position is being taken on the structure-agency issue, and (b) what position is being taken on the material-cultural issue. Because Chapter 1 only focussed on the ontological assumptions of the current research project, it only thoroughly explored *one* possible stance on these issues. It is therefore necessary to consider the various other kinds of positions it is possible to take; this consideration is the remit of the following chapter, where a variety of political ideologies are considered. Section 3 of this chapter addresses issues of content in more detail, exploring the means by which we can identify the ontological assumptions underpinning policy documents. Fairclough's CDA offers a number of potential tools for analysing texts, and specifically their underlying assumptions. Although a limited range of these tools are deployed in the current research, the theoretically coherent integration of CDA into the overall framework opens the potential of using a greater range of discourse analysis methods in future research.

In summary, this chapter completes the theoretical framework begun in Chapter 1 and in the process, it situates ontological assumptions within that framework, with regard to their causality, constitution, and content. The *causality* is explored in Section 1 by introducing Chouliaraki and Fairclough's conceptualisation of 'social practices' into Archer's morphogenetic cycle. The *constitution* is explored in Section 2 through Archer's notion of the 'cultural system' and through Chouliaraki and Fairclough's particular observations about discourse and language. Finally, the *content* of ontological assumptions, and the specific questions of how we go about analysing them, are considered in Section 3 with reference to Fairclough's 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA).

Section 1: Social practice and the causality of ontological assumptions

The first task of this section is to demonstrate that CDA is theoretically compatible with the framework developed in Chapter 1. In the first place, this entails the identification of critical realist assumptions in the social theory of CDA, a task that is much simplified by

Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) explicit adherence to Bhaskarian critical realism in their collaborative exposition of CDA's social theory. Ensuring the overall coherence of the current theoretical framework also demands that we demonstrate the complementarities between morphogenetic theory and CDA, specifically in relation to the two analytical dualisms introduced in Chapter 1. Although Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) do not engage with morphogenetic theory, Fairclough's (2003) guide to CDA specifically directs readers towards Archer's approach to the structure-agency issue. Perhaps more importantly for the integration of these approaches, it is possible to demonstrate the compatibility of CDA and morphogenesis in relation to the four fundamental social causes. The differing terminology, and the slight differing in conceptualisation, ultimately does not stand in the way of theoretical integration. Once this shared foundation is established, the remainder of this section seeks to exploit the complementarities between CDA and morphogenetic theory, especially with the introduction of 'social practice' into the morphogenetic model. It is by introducing 'social practice' into the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle, that this section is able to conclude with an outline of material-cultural interaction and the identification of the place of ontological assumptions as causal entities.

Fairclough's critical realism

Fairclough's social theory is developed in many of his works on CDA, including *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) and *Analysing Discourse* (2003). However, it is most thoroughly and systematically laid out in his collaboration with Lillie Chouliaraki entitled *Discourse in Late Modernity* (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). Their book anchors CDA in Bhaskarian critical realism, explicitly advocating and mobilising the key critical realist concepts discussed in the first section of Chapter 1. Upon this foundation they outline a web of post-structuralist and Foucauldian concepts that offer some contradiction and ambiguity as well as some significant insight and theoretical sophistication. An important reason for incorporating Chouliaraki and Fairclough's work is to allow for an inclusion of particular concepts from constructivist theoretical traditions, many of which have been dismissed by critical realist authors without thorough engagement (Day 2007). For example, Archer is dismissive of concepts and theories that derive from a conflationary position, even though they could assist in the development and application of morphogenetic theory. While we should not simply import whole theories based on differing ontological assumptions, it is important to engage in conceptual cross-fertilisation between differing approaches.

However, first we must assess the compatibility between CDA and the core critical realist concepts identified in Chapter 1, Section 1. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) identify the critical realist notion of 'open systems' as being the starting point for CDA. They argue that "because the effect of individual mechanisms on events is always mediated by others, there are no straight forward ways for science to establish the nature of individual mechanisms by analysing events" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 20); this is the same line of argument that originally led Bhaskar to oppose a Humean concept of cause and consider the social world to be an 'open system' (Bhaskar 1975). A crucial part of this critical realist concept of open systems is the idea that *reasons can be causes*. Because of the complexity of critical realist causation, "it would be better to think of [reasons] as emergent elements in more extensive networks of concepts, beliefs, symbols and texts" (Fairclough, Jessop and Sayer 2004: 26). In the following section, these networks (theorised as 'the discursive order') will be proposed as a missing link in Archer's notion of the cultural system.

In order to understand the role of reasons in these cultural networks, it is necessary to maintain the material-cultural distinction discussed in Chapter 1. In light of that discussion, it is therefore also necessary to maintain Bhaskar's intransitivity premise. Chouliaraki and Fairclough state that they "see critical social science as having a 'transitive' as well as an 'intransitive' object" (1999: 32), demonstrating an explicit commitment to this essential realist assumption. The intransitivity premise is primarily used in Chouliaraki and Fairclough's work to explore the concept of 'social practices', a concept that is the focal point for much of the current section (see below). In addition Fairclough explicitly endorses the transfactuality premise: "the position I take is a realist one, based on a realist ontology: both concrete social events and abstract social structures [...] are part of reality"; "we can make a distinction between the 'potential' and the 'actual' [and] both need to be distinguished from the 'empirical'" (Fairclough 2003: 14). These examples demonstrate that not only is CDA based on critical realism, it subscribes specifically to *Bhaskarian* critical realism. Furthermore, this subscription is not an implicit undertone in the work of Chouliaraki and Fairclough, nor is it a token gesture of affiliation; it is an active and integrated part of their underlying social theory.

Fairclough and the two analytical dualisms

Moving from critical realist ontology towards morphogenetic meta-theory, we can see how Fairclough supports the view that agents' actions are "socially constrained [but not] totally socially determined" (Fairclough 2003: 22). Furthermore, Chouliaraki and

Fairclough argue that "social systems are both the precondition of social action and the products of social action" (1999: 32), with the former tantamount to Archer's structural conditioning and the latter to her structural elaboration. By using the terms 'precondition' and 'products', Chouliaraki and Fairclough are setting up the same before-during-after sequence that epitomises Archer's morphogenetic model. Indeed, it is possible to quote Fairclough explicitly supporting Archer's specific approach: "agents have their own 'causal powers' which are not reducible to the causal powers of social structures and practices (on this view of the relationship between structure and agency, see Archer 1995, 2000)" (Fairclough 2003: 22).

When discussing Archer's model in the previous chapter, we laid out four basic social causes (cultural structure, material structure, cultural agency and material agency), as derived from two analytical dualisms built one on top of the other. The structure-agency distinction and the material-cultural distinction were theorised as analytical dualisms for exploring the interaction that drives social change. Chouliaraki and Fairclough do less than Archer to justify and explain their meta-theoretical position, but they imply the same two analytical dualisms, as demonstrated in their commitment to develop "a theory of language incorporating both the dialectic between the semiotic (including linguistics) and non-semiotic social, and the dialectic between structure and action" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 49). The first dialectic corresponds to the material-cultural analytical dualism, where "the semiotic social" is closely aligned with cultural structure (an alignment explored further in Section 2 of this chapter), while the "non-semiotic social" is closely aligned with material structure. The second dialectic, "between structure and action", is fairly obviously the same conceptual pairing that is discussed in this thesis as "the structure-agency analytical dualism".

When they come to theorise the active role of discourse, Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) talk of a social practice being made up of four '*moments*': 'material activity', 'social relations', 'mental phenomena' and 'discourse'. Each of these 'moments' corresponds roughly, though by no means exactly, with the four social dimensions advocated in chapter one: material activity roughly corresponds with material agency; social relations with material structure; mental phenomena with cultural agency; discourse with cultural structure. The correspondence between these concepts is loose and indistinct, but there are clearly underlying similarities that demonstrate compatibility and the potential for a fruitful complementarity. Rather than pursuing this quadripartite approach to social theory as four 'moments' of *social practice*, we will continue to theorise the four social dimensions as four basic social

causal forces. However, the concept of 'social practice', which is so central to Chouliaraki and Fairclough's social theory, is one that requires further attention. There is justification enough to explore social practice as a result of the identification of these four 'moments' and their close relation with the four causal forces outlined in Chapter 1. More importantly, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's particular conceptualisation of social practice opens up the potential for a more integrated morphogenetic model that can begin to explain material-cultural interaction. Of particular relevance to the current research, this entails an ability to pinpoint ontological assumptions (as causal entities) within the morphogenetic cycle. Therefore, the remainder of this section will introduce 'social practices' into morphogenetic theory, and ultimately work towards a theoretical modelling of how ontological assumptions affect social change.

Social practices

There are three main points to address with regards to social practices. Firstly, it is important to establish the position of social practices in relation to structure and agency, partially rejecting Fairclough's claim that social practices are an intermediary level between the structural and agential (Fairclough 2003). Secondly, the discussion must consider the ways in which this concept of social practices strengthens the morphogenetic model outlined in Chapter 1. In particular, this second point of discussion will utilise and justify the analytical separation of material agency and cultural agency, in order to develop a model of material-cultural interaction. The third and final point to be addressed is the place of ontological assumptions as causal entities within the morphogenetic model, and this is the destination at which the current section eventually arrives.

Structure, agency and social practice

Chouliaraki and Fairclough envisage social practices as an intermediary between structure and agency, insisting that the specific advantage "of focussing upon practices is that they constitute a point of connection between [...] 'society' and people living their lives" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 21). This raises a problem of compatibility because Archer has previously argued that such conceptualisations of social practices operate "by considerably flattening out the ontological depth of the social world by denying the existence of emergent properties" and therefore offering insufficient explanatory power (Archer 1995: 94). Archer's attack is directed at 'conflationist' approaches, which deny the separability of structure and agency and consequentially fail to elucidate their interaction over time. However, Chouliaraki and Fairclough's approach differs from conflationary approaches in two ways: firstly, they propose social

practices as a *third* stratum, *alongside* structure and agency, rather than an amalgam of the two; secondly, they are explicitly committed to the existence of *emergent properties* and the specific emergence of structure from agency.

There remains the problem that Archer's morphogenetic model, even with the modifications made to it in Chapter 1, does not accommodate a third 'intermediary' stratum *between* structure and agency. But, *the solution to this problem is to recast social practice as the middle element in the morphogenetic cycle* (see Figure 5). Social practices are therefore best related to Archer's work through her notions of social and socio-cultural interaction. Archer theorises this interaction using three strata of agency, (i) interest groups, (ii) actors, and (iii) persons, modelling their diachronic interplay as the middle element in her morphogenetic cycle. Within the middle element of both the material and cultural cycles, Archer is clear that "there are causal relationships between groups and individuals" who have been conditioned by the structural level (Archer 1995: 168, 169). Without contradicting Archer's argument, these causal relations can be held to constitute an incredibly diverse range of *social practices* in both the material and cultural realms. It is by bringing Chouliaraki and Fairclough's theory into Archer's morphogenetic model that we can fully understand the middle element of the cycle.

Structural conditioning

T^1

Social practice / Social interaction

T^2 T^3

Structural elaboration

T^4
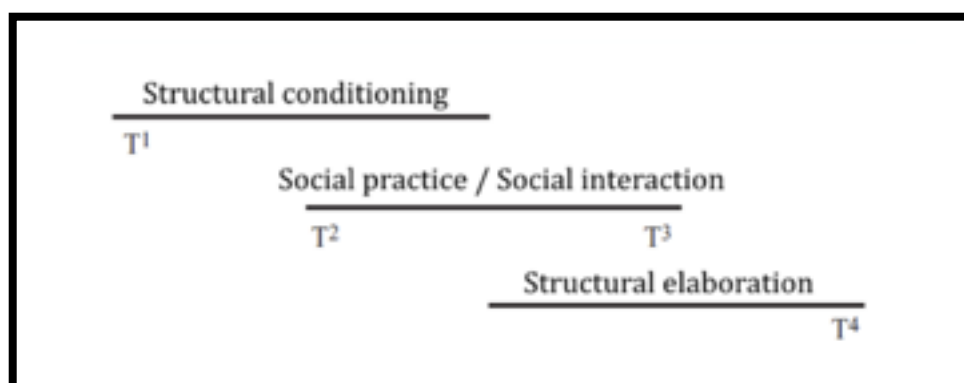
Figure 5: social practice in the morphogenetic cycle

Reflexivity and material-cultural interaction

"Practices vary substantially in their nature and complexity" but "any practice can be characterised in terms of these three aspects": firstly, "they are forms of production of social life", including both cultural and material production; secondly, "each practice is located within a network of practices" at the structural level; thirdly and finally, "practices always have a reflexive dimension" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 22). That practices are *forms* of production suggests that they are *ways in which agents*

produce, rather than being causally productive of social life in their own right. The 'producing agents' are conditioned by both material and cultural structure, allowing us to maintain a commitment to Archer's morphogenesis. The 'networks of practices' proposed in Chouliaraki and Fairclough's second point can be interpreted as a deployment of the concept of material structure, with Fairclough discussing both the 'networking' and 'structuring' of practices on a global scale (Fairclough 2001). The final point, that practices always have a reflexive dimension can be understood as an assurance for the role of agency in Chouliaraki and Fairclough's theory. However, this particular notion of *reflexivity* in social practices allows us to begin to identify the way in which the material and the cultural interact over time, which will in turn allow the modelling of the causal role played by ontological assumptions.

This notion of reflexivity put forward in CDA primarily emphasises the way in which agents "constantly generate representations of what they do as part of what they do" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 25-6). To Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), practices encompass both the material activity of the practice itself and the cultural activity of forming reflexive theories about the practice. "People's reflexive representations of what they do are in a sense already theories", which are identified by Collier (1994) as 'proto-theories' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 26). These 'proto-theories' shall be described here as 'internal-theories' because they refer to theories that are developed within the social practice that they theorise. The suggestion that all practices have 'internal theories' is an important concept for the modelling of material-cultural interaction, because it means that material interaction (material social practice) always entails the production, reproduction, and transformation of *theories*, and therefore of *cultural structure*. This is the mechanism that can explain material-cultural interaction at the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle, and it is therefore worth clarifying by situating it within the morphogenetic approach.

In Chapter 1, Archer's conceptualisation of material-cultural interaction at the middle element of the cycle was said to be a failure because (a) her distinction between the middle element of the material cycle ('social interaction') and the middle element of the cultural cycle ('socio-cultural interaction') could not be maintained, and (b) because her suggestion that primary interest groups can 'endorse doctrines' was shown to be impossible. In response to these failings, it was suggested that the distinction necessary for the modelling of material-cultural interaction is the distinction between material agency and cultural agency. In the current chapter, a further response has been to replace Archer's problematic distinction between 'social

interaction' and 'socio-cultural interaction' with the single concept of 'social practice'. In light of these changes, the morphogenetic model now entails (i) material structural conditioning and cultural structural conditioning, (ii) social practices in which agents exercise both material agency and cultural agency, (iii) material structural elaboration and cultural structural elaboration. In order to explain material-cultural interaction it is necessary to explain the middle element (ii) of the morphogenetic cycle in a little more detail.

The exercising of material agency entails the powers that individuals have over and in relation to each other, and the powers that individuals have to resist, join, change, or create institutions. The exercising of cultural agency entails the powers that individuals have to persuade or share ideas with others, and the powers that individuals have to resist, adopt, change, or create ideas. Within social practices, individuals exercise their material agency, acting within institutions and in collaboration with others in order to complete tasks, perform roles, increase their power etc. The key point is that whenever individuals are exercising their material agency, they produce, reproduce, or transform the 'internal theories' of that practice, meaning that they also contribute to cultural morphogenesis. In many cases, individuals may reproduce (and in some cases transform) cultural structure without any awareness that they are doing so. In this way, agents may exercise material agency and contribute to cultural morphogenesis without exercising their cultural agency in any significant way. In other cases, individuals may be very conscious of their production, reproduction or transformation of the internal theories of the practice, and would therefore be exercising material agency and cultural agency simultaneously. Either way, when an individual exercises material agency within a social practice, they not only contribute to material morphogenesis but they also unavoidably contribute to cultural morphogenesis.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough correctly complicate the matter by introducing the notion of *theoretical social practices*, which are social practices that are "specialised in the production of knowledge about practices" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 26). These are of particular concern because "other practices are increasingly shaped by their relations with theoretical practices", so that internal-theory is "increasingly informed 'from the outside' by theoretical practices" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 26). Therefore, internal-theories emerge from all practices, but *external-theories* emerge specifically from theoretical practices. The term 'external' refers to the externality of the creation of the theory from the practice it theorises. Within *theoretical*

practices, individuals exercise their cultural agency, developing understandings of how other practices work, persuading others to their way of thinking, disseminating their external-theories etc. In these instances, when individuals are exercising their cultural agency, they will unavoidably contribute to material morphogenesis, because they must engage with the institutional and interpersonal relations that govern their interaction with other people. Even if they are sat alone thinking, their thoughts and subsequent actions still exist within, and are considered in relation to, the material structure, meaning that those thoughts and actions are part of material morphogenesis. The contribution to material morphogenesis in these instances may be intentional or strategic and therefore entail a prominent role for material agency, or it may be unconscious and therefore entail no significant role for material agency.

This incorporation of Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) theory of social practice into the morphogenetic model has allowed the modelling of material-cultural interaction through the middle phase of the morphogenetic cycle. This is in itself a theoretical advance that has so far eluded morphogenetic theorists, but it is also one that requires a great deal of further elaboration and deployment if it is to be more widely useful. But, the model will suffice for the current purpose of understanding the place of ontological assumptions in morphogenetic theory. In ordinary social practices, ontological assumptions are an inevitable part of internal theories, and are often unconsciously reproduced by agents. Though they are undoubtedly less common, there may of course also be instances where individuals do exercise cultural agency in the production, reproduction or transformation of the ontological assumptions that underpin the internal theories of the social practice with which they are engaged. When we turn to *theoretical practices*, ontological assumptions can be identified in much the same way, underpinning the internal theories of the practice. Therefore, in the theoretical practice of *UK social policy-making*, there are internal theories, which might include, for example, theories about the general aim of social policy or theories about how social policy making should be conducted; and within these internal theories, ontological assumptions are made. However, theoretical practices, by definition, also produce *external-theories* that aim to understand, and potentially transform, other practices; these external theories also contain ontological assumptions. *It is the ontological assumptions implicit in the external-theories of UK social policy-making that are the focus of this thesis.* Therefore, we can conclude this section having identified the place of ontological assumptions (as causal forces) in the morphogenetic model, and also the particular type of ontological assumptions that the research seeks to investigate.

Section 2: Cultural structure and the constitution of ontological assumptions

In this section, we will discuss the nature of the cultural structure, continuing the use of both morphogenesis and CDA. It is argued that there are three main constituents of cultural structure, one supplied by Archer's theory, one by Chouliaraki and Fairclough's and a third which exists in both. The hybridisation of these two understandings of cultural structure, allows us to explore its three constituents while simultaneously strengthening the social theory of CDA and the morphogenetic approach. The three constituents of the cultural structure are held to be (1) intelligibilia (ideas and ideologies), (2) semiotic systems and (3) the discursive order. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the discussion of these three elements of cultural structure is the transition from the discussion of abstract theory to a more practical framework of analysis. Analysis of intelligibilia, semiotic systems and the discursive order will, in the longer term, allow for a deeper understanding of ontological assumptions, which are held to be constituted by all three. While Archer would characterise ontological assumptions as intelligibilia or 'objective knowledge', Fairclough would insist that, for ontological assumptions to be communicated, they must be expressed through language and therefore through discourse also. The analysis of primary texts will require the analysis of all three elements of cultural structure, even though the focus is ultimately on the *ideas themselves*.

Intelligibilia (ideas and ideology)

In order to achieve the analytical dualism necessary for her cultural morphogenetic model, Archer seeks to separate *ideas, knowledge and beliefs* on the one hand from *their use* on the other, an approach that requires the identification of *a realm of objective meaning*. Archer argues that, "if analytical dualism is to be sustained, let alone prove fruitful, then we need to be able to ascribe properties to systemic relations themselves and in such a way that they do not collapse into judgements of social actors" (Archer 1996: 105). In order to identify 'objective knowledge', Archer turns to Karl Popper's "distinction between subjective mental experiences, on the one hand, and objective ideas on the other" (Archer 1996: 105; Popper 1972); the former provides a foundation for Archer's notion of 'socio-cultural interaction' (reimagined in this thesis as part of 'cultural agency') and the latter provides a foundation for her notion of 'the cultural system'. This underpins the claim "that ideas are real and separable from

knowing subjects" (Archer 2012: 8), a claim that is central to the aims of the current research project.

Building on the premise of "knowledge or thought in an objective sense" (Popper 1972: 108), Archer's cultural system is composed of 'items of intelligibilia' and the 'logical relations between them' (Archer 1996). Items of intelligibilia, seen as the constituents of the cultural system, are defined as all items that are "capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone" (Archer 1996: 104). Archer is ambiguous on exactly when the subjective ideas in somebody's head become items of intelligibilia, but she seems to imply that this occurs when an idea enters the "the multi-media archive" (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012: 101); i.e. when it has gained a degree of permanence as *a text* (e.g. a book, a computer file, a voice recording etc.). As part of the 'archive', intelligibilia are necessarily expressed through language, or if we do not wish to over-stretch the meaning of the concept of 'language', intelligibilia are necessarily expressed through a semiotic system. Intelligibilia expressed through a semiotic system can take the form of *propositional statements* that make claims about reality. Because these propositional statements are ultimately translatable, they can be held to form a single global cultural system (Archer 1996).

Within this single global system of propositional statements, every item stands in a necessary relation to every other item in the form of either a contradiction or a complementarity. Archer mobilises the basic logic that "nothing can be both p and not-p" (Archer 1996: 109) to justify her claim that the relations between propositional statements are *objective*; she identifies this logical rule as a pre-propositional truth rather than merely another item of intelligibilia (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012). Archer's cultural system is therefore composed of (i) propositional statements, which are held to be intelligibilia residing in relatively permanent texts that are expressed through semiotic systems, and (ii) the necessary logical relations between them, which take the form of contradictions and complementarities, and exist objectively regardless of whether anybody notices their existence. The *identification* of contradictions and complementarities and the *actions* taken by agents to disguise, correct, promote or maintain them, entail causal relations and are therefore matters for the agential level.

While this relatively brief sketch of Archer's theory of culture will have to suffice, it is important to engage with three main points of contention. Addressing these points will allow us to further integrate Fairclough's approach and, more importantly, to modify

Archer's theory for the present analytical requirements. The points of contention in Archer's theory can be summarised as follows: the status of texts; the role of language; the absence of discourse. The role of language and of discourse will be addressed under the relevant subheadings below, but we will complete this subsection by resolving the status of *texts*. Chouliaraki and Fairclough's definition of 'texts' brings clarity to Archer's separation of the structural and agential levels within the cultural realm; they "understand a text to be a contribution to communicative interaction [...] which is designed in one context with a view to its uptake in others" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 45). A text is therefore created when "a technical medium is used to increase time-space instantiation" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 42). This clarifies Archer's notion of a 'multi-media archive' but it also raises the inherent problem of whether intelligibilia can exist outside of texts.

This problem is essentially: *at what point* does an idea become part of the cultural structure? Possible answers include; (a) when it is first conceived; (b) when it is first conceived of in language; (c) when it is first communicated to another person; (d) when it is enshrined in the archive (e.g. when it is written it in a book). We can rule out (a) because, as discussed above, an idea is not propositional until it is conceived of in a semiotic medium. We can also rule out (c), because this would define ideas in relation to *their use*, which would collapse the analytical dualism between cultural structure and cultural agency. We are therefore left with two options: (b) a semiotic conception of cultural structure, where it is comprised of all ideas conceived of in language and (d) a textual conception of cultural structure, where it is comprised of all texts. Archer would seem to favour the latter (Archer and Elder-Vass 2012), but one immediate practical problem with the textual conception is that we would have to discount unrecorded culture, e.g. oral histories or memorised passages. A *theoretical* problem also arises, because the textual conception seems to fall foul of the same criticism as option (c); both seem to conflate the objective existence of ideas with their subjective use, thereby forgoing the analytical dualism between them. We will therefore use option (b) and maintain a *semiotic* conception of cultural structure, whereby thought processes become items of cultural structure when, *and only when*, they are conceived of through a semiotic system (usually language).

This clearly gives a central role to language, but before we go on to discuss language as a constituent of cultural structure, we must address the role of texts and the role of assumptions. Although we have rejected a purely textual conception of the cultural structure theoretically, it is important to acknowledge that the observable

cultural structure is almost entirely constituted by texts. Throughout most of human history, the cultural structure largely existed inside the minds of individuals and was passed on through oral histories, but the growth of technology has meant that more and more of the cultural structure resides *in texts*. An early example of the technology-driven textualisation of cultural structure would be the writing down of great epic tales that had been passed orally for generations, while a more recent example would be the video recording of political speeches and debates. With the increase in the existence and availability of technology, there has been a vast increase in the quantity of propositions and a vast increase in the proportion of those propositions that become texts. Therefore, although the theoretical analytical dualism between cultural structure and cultural agency allows for parts of the cultural structure to be non-textual, the only concern of the current research is with texts. This is partly justified by the textualisation of cultural structure but mostly justified because it is methodologically difficult to access non-textual aspects of the cultural system.

Semiotic systems

Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) tentatively support Kress's (1985) suggestion that language is not the primary semiotic system but rather one system among many. While there is not enough space to explore this claim at a fundamental level, we can argue that language is by far the most important semiotic system with regards to policy making and policy reform. Chouliaraki and Fairclough's broad understanding of semiotic systems, includes gesture, sound and touch, which presents a challenge for the specific identification of cultural structure, requiring us to return to the concept of physical/natural structures introduced briefly in Chapter 1. Written language involves the moving of a pen on a piece of paper or the movement of fingers on a keyboard; these particular dimensions of social practices relate to natural/physical structures. Once written, texts have a natural/physical existence in paper, ink and silicon. However, language, both in its systems and usage, is a *cultural* entity because it is constituted by its meaning rather than its medium. We can therefore say that language belongs to the cultural realm even if it relies on natural/physical acts, processes and entities for its existence. We must therefore argue that 'touch' and 'sound' are not semiotic systems but are natural/physical processes and entities; there are semiotic systems based on touch, such as brail, and semiotic systems based on sound, such as spoken language, but it is the *language* that is the semiotic system, not the natural/physical processes.

Before turning to Chouliaraki and Fairclough's more substantive claims about language as a (cultural) social structure, we will first examine the role language plays in Archer's theory. As discussed above, language is discussed by Archer primarily in terms of its *translatability*. The translatability of language is used as a demonstration of the translatability of ideas, which therefore underpins the argument that cultural structure takes the form of an international and all-encompassing network of necessarily interrelated propositional statements. Therefore, Archer's position explicitly relies on the conceptualisation of language to explain the necessary relations between ideas. However, it also implicitly relies on language as the constitutive cultural substance of propositional statements. To clarify, intelligibilia only take the form of propositional statement when they are conceived of in language, which means that language is an essential constituent of cultural structure. However, Archer does not explore the role of language as *conditioning, constituting or expressing* the ideas that form her cultural system, so we will turn to Chouliaraki and Fairclough to elaborate these points and to establish language (and by extension other semiotic systems) as a causal constituent of cultural structure.

Building on a critical realist foundation, Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that although most theories focus on "either the structural or the actional facet" of language, "a dialectic theory of language and other semiotic systems is needed to come to grips with [the] properties of discourse" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 47). This dialectic exists between *the language system* and *the social act of language use* (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), a position that allows us to accommodate the *language system* as part of cultural structure and *language use* as part of cultural agency. Language, therefore, as with many other elements of social life, is best understood as a dialectic between structure and agency. Chouliaraki and Fairclough identify Valentin Voloshinov as their influence in this regard, but we will return to Archer's morphogenetic model to offer an explanation for the dialectic processes of language. At the structural level, the language system enables and constrains agents in particular ways; for example, many languages allow us to make complex arguments against gender essentialism while simultaneously making it extremely difficult to avoid gendered nouns and pronouns. Agential interaction can lead to certain changes in the language system, with vocabulary being particularly changeable and grammar being particularly stable.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough follow Voloshinov in focussing on the dialectic between language and discourse. As we shall see, this dialectic holds significant importance as an analytical device but it should not be confused with the analytical

dualism between structure and agency. Chouliaraki and Fairclough's view "entails a constructivist focus on social life as produced in discourse, as well as a structuralist focus on the semiotic [...] structures" (1999: 48), which seems to establish discourse as coterminous with agency and language as coterminous with structure. The most obvious problem with this position is that it contradicts their prominent concept of "orders of discourse", defined as "the social structuring of semiotic diversity" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough: 1999: 48). In simpler terms... on the one hand Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that language is the structural element and discourse is the agential, but on the other hand they argue that *language systems* must be distinguished from *language use* and that *orders of discourse* must be distinguished from *discourse use*. We will adhere to the second of these positions, arguing that language systems and orders of discourse both belong to cultural structure, while language *use* and discourse *use* both belong to cultural agency. Before we move on to discuss orders of discourse further, it is worth offering a brief summary of what is meant by the 'language system'.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough turn to system functional linguistics (SFL) as an explanatory model for linguistic analysis because it "has contributed to the task of formulating a theory of language incorporating both the dialectic between the semiotic (including the linguistic) and the non-semiotic social, and the dialectic between structure and action" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 49). These two dialectics are equivalent to the two analytical dualisms discussed in Chapter 1 and therefore represent both compatibility and mutual strengthening between critical realism, morphogenesis, CDA, and SFL. In SFL, language is understood in relation to the material-cultural distinction by "arguing that the grammar of language is a network of systems corresponding to the major social functions of language" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 50), whereby language does not simply construct our understanding of reality but also reflects the nature of reality itself. In addition, SFL focuses on the dialectic between text and system, theorising the role of texts as agential creations that hold the potential of changing the system from which they are constituted. While a more detailed discussion of SFL is beyond the current thesis, it is important to repeat Chouliaraki and Fairclough's primary criticism that SFL fails to understand *interdiscursivity* and that therefore ultimately "a theory of discourse is needed *in addition* to a theory of language" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 50). This final point further supports the rejection of language and discourse as coterminous with structure and agency respectively: a theory of language, a theory of discourse and a theory of ideas (intelligibilia) are all needed for a thorough understanding of cultural structure,

and therefore are all needed for a thorough understanding of the constitution of ontological assumptions. Having discussed ideas and language, we will turn finally to discourse.

The discursive order

As with many concepts mobilised by Fairclough's social theory, and especially within his 1999 collaboration with Chouliaraki, the concept of 'orders of discourse' is ambiguous but contains a great deal of potential explanatory power. The first point to make is primarily semantic, whereby we will replace 'orders of discourse' with 'discursive order'. The reasoning behind this is twofold: firstly, 'orders of discourse' is a clumsy phrase that increases the restraining power of the language system over the potential theoretical exploration of its meaning; secondly, and more importantly, 'discursive order' clearly refers to an element of cultural structure, rather than the conflationary intermediary between structure and agency implied by 'orders of discourse'. As with social practices, Chouliaraki and Fairclough suggest that 'orders of discourse' is a concept that unites structure and agency. However, elsewhere they define 'orders of discourse' as the "social structuring of semiotic diversity" and argue that it is "a potential which any discourse only selectively draws upon and dialectically reworks", "analogous to the language system" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 58). Here we will utilise this more substantive theorisation of the 'discursive order', which will function as one of the three main elements in cultural structure.

In order to integrate discourse into Archer's notion of the cultural system, we can use the concept of 'intertextuality'. Archer's focus on logical contradictions and complementarities is essential for securing the cultural system theoretically because it demonstrates that every item is necessarily and objectively related to every other item. Intertextuality is *another* way in which ideas are objectively structured and is one that exists alongside the logical networking of ideas. When one proposition or text *references* another, the two are related at the cultural structural level, regardless of whether agents notice the relation; this demonstrates the objectivity of the reference. Of course, the reference had an author at the agential level and if it is to have any causal influence, it must be noticed by other agents. However, the reference exists at the cultural structural level and can be held to be one link in a vast network of objective intertextual references. For example, this current text is objectively (and extensively) linked to Archer's revised edition of *Culture and Agency* (1996) and to Chouliaraki and Fairclough's *Discourse in Late Modernity* (1999).

Fairclough (2003) explains that intertextuality can occur through more subtle means than direct reference or direct quotation, such as summary of ideas or "free indirect reporting" where other texts are referenced without any linguistic signposting (Fairclough 2003: 49). Fairclough uses as an example that relates directly to the current matter at hand when he argues that "the process of producing a policy paper is a process of moving 'from conflict to consensus' (Wodak 2000), to a text where there is no intertextualising of different voices" (Fairclough 2003: 43). By analysing the quantities and qualities of intertextual referencing, we can therefore gain an insight into cultural morphogenesis, whereby contradictions are repaired or disguised and complimentaries are maintained and emphasised. When analysing intertextuality, it is important to pay attention to the external relations between the two texts and to internal relations within the text (Fairclough 2003), where the type of reference (e.g. quotation) and the combinations within other intertextual references are important focal points for their networking at the cultural structural level.

The 'discursive order' is perhaps best encapsulated by Chouliaraki and Fairclough's concept of the "network of orders of discourse" (1999: 59), which is understood as a network of *interdiscursivity*. While Fairclough uses 'discourse' in the broader sense to refer to the use of language to create meaning, he also uses the term in the sense of *a particular discourse*, such as 'the welfare discourse' or 'the unemployment discourse' (Fairclough 2003). In this latter sense, the discursive order is the structured network of these particular discourses, their hybridisation, colonisation, appropriation, interaction and juxtaposition. These processes arise from the agential creation and novel interpretation of texts and the interdiscursivity that agents can create and interpret both intentionally and unintentionally through their interaction with texts. By bringing the notion of the discursive order into Archer's theory, it is possible to avoid the potential criticism that because ideas rely on interpretation then they cannot exist objectively. This is because the discursive order exists at the structural level constraining and enabling the potential interpretation of any particular idea; the discursive order is more malleable than intelligibilia but it is located at the structural level due to its relative stability and objective causal power. While an idea relies on interpretation, interpretation is not *only* a concept for the agential level. Systems of interpretation, in the form of the discursive order, limit and influence the understandings an agent can have of an item of intelligibilia.

While it is important to counterbalance Archer's approach with a central role for discourse in the creation, constitution and interpretation of ideas, we must not follow

Chouliaraki and Fairclough in their notion of a cultural structure composed of nothing more than discourse and language. Archer's insistence on the importance of *ideas themselves* is an insistence we must maintain against a purely semiotic and communicative notion of the cultural dimension. Discourse is, according to Fairclough, *representative* (Fairclough 2003) and while we can agree with this broader claim we must turn to Archer's meta-theory in order to explain exactly *what* is being represented. Therefore, the cultural structure can be said to be composed of (a) ideas and their logical relations, (b) semiotic systems and the rules that govern those systems, (c) the discursive order of intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Ontological assumptions can be considered to exist in all three areas of the cultural structure, or more accurately, all three elements of the cultural structure comprise ontological assumptions. This research will be primarily focussed on (a) ideas and their logical relations, but the consideration of (b) and (c) has been necessary to secure the theoretical foundation of the analytical dualism between the *use of ideas* and *ideas themselves*.

Section 3: Analysing the content of ontological assumptions

In this section, a number of methodological issues have to be addressed. Firstly, because the research is directed towards the identification of ontological assumptions about the structure-agency and material-cultural issues, this raises questions about how the research findings relate to the theoretical framework outlined in the current and previous chapters. Secondly, there is a more practical question about how the analysis is to proceed on the basis of this theoretical framework. Thirdly, there is the question of whether to include an overview of existing ontological positions before trying to identify the ontological positions taken in policy documents. Finally, there is the question of which policy documents should be analysed in this research and how they are to be selected. These issues will be dealt with in turn in order to explain how the *content* of ontological assumptions is to be analysed in this research.

The ontology of the framework and the ontology of the policy documents

Throughout the first two chapters of this thesis, a theoretical foundation for the research has been presented that primarily relies on, or at least focusses on, the material-cultural and structure-agency distinctions. The overall aim of the research is to seek to identify the ontological assumptions that underpin UK social policy, which will

focus almost entirely on the position that social policy documents take on the material-cultural and structure-agency issues. This raises the question of exactly why the theoretical framework and the primary research are focussing on the same two ontological issues. This link is complicated and it will be the aim of the current subsection to unpack these complications.

It is first worth taking a step back and asking why, in the first place, this thesis seeks to uncover the ontological assumptions of social policy. In the introduction, a number of justifications were given that demonstrated that *ontological assumptions matter in social policy*. These justifications were supplemented with the argument that academic research is currently particularly concerned with *its own* ontological assumptions but seemingly unconcerned with the ontological assumptions in public policy. It is assumed that these arguments sufficiently justify the focus of the thesis and the development of a framework for 'ontological social policy analysis'. However, it should also be acknowledged that it is no coincidence that this gap in the literature was identified by a researcher who was working from a *critical realist* perspective. Critical realism is a perspective that emphasises the importance of ontology in social research, and is a perspective that is largely built on *ontological* claims. This point in no way undermines the justifications mentioned above, nor does it preclude ontological social policy analysis being undertaken from other perspectives, but it is important to acknowledge that the initial conception of the current research project derived from critical realism's emphasis on the importance of ontology.

It is for this reason that, as stated above, ontology plays a crucial triple-role in the thesis: firstly, there are the critical realist ontological assumptions of the researcher, which are a crucial motivation for the research; secondly, these critical realist assumptions are integrated into a coherent framework for analysis, as outlined in these first two chapters; thirdly, the research aims to identify and analyse the ontological assumptions that underpin social policy documents. This raises the question of the extent to which the ontological assumptions of the research, as built into its theoretical framework, will limit or skew the research findings. This is of course a question for all social research, but one that comes to the fore in this instance, where a theoretical framework has been built upon the structure-agency and material-cultural distinctions, *and simultaneously* has the purpose of identifying the structure-agency and material-cultural assumptions in public policy. A few remarks are worth making about this specific issue.

Firstly, it is important to point out that the ontological assumptions of the framework are not outlined as a *competitive alternative* to the assumptions identified in policy documents. In other words, the thesis is not seeking to demonstrate that morphogenetic assumptions about the structure-agency and material-cultural issues are superior to the assumptions identified in the social policy documents. This is because, although ontological assumptions can be more or less coherent, they are ultimately based on *beliefs*, so that different people may hold different positions that have equal validity. Even if the ontological assumptions of this research appear to be more coherent than those identified in the social policy documents, this will not be discussed, because it would not be very surprising that a deliberately developed ontological model is more coherent than the various implicit assumptions underpinning multiple policy documents produced by multiple authors.

Secondly, it may be said that the aim of the research to uncover the ontological assumptions of social policy on two particular ontological issues (structure-agency and material-cultural) is a concern *produced by* a theoretical framework that sees these issues as *the central* ontological issues. As stated above, it is not surprising or problematic that research into the ontological assumptions of social policy has come from a critical realist perspective that is particularly concerned with ontology. However, the claim that the structure-agency and material-cultural questions are the primary ontological questions in social analysis is *not* specifically a critical realist claim. The relationship between the objective and the subjective is a central theoretical consideration of all approaches to social analysis, whether they acknowledge it or not, and it is from this relationship that the structure-agency and material-cultural questions derive. Although these questions are central ontological questions from any perspective or approach, a final consideration has to be made about the *terminology*.

Thirdly, and finally, it does need to be acknowledged that the terminology of 'structure', 'agency', 'material', and 'cultural' are the particular terminology of the morphogenetic perspective. However, the terms 'structure' and 'agency' are used far beyond morphogenetic and critical realist perspectives, and when used in conjunction, they tend to be one of the most common labels given to the actor-context issue. The use of the terms 'material' and 'cultural' are also common outside of morphogenetic theory, although the 'material-cultural issue' is often elsewhere labelled 'material-ideational' or 'discursive-nondiscursive'. Despite this terminology being relatively common across academic disciplines and perspectives, a qualification needs to be made about how the terms will be used for the remainder of the thesis. In both the

current chapter and the previous chapter, structure, agency, material, and cultural were each held to have a very specific meaning based in morphogenetic theory. In the remaining chapters of the thesis, the terms will be used much more loosely to ensure that the research findings are not excessively limited or skewed by the research framework. Inevitably, the use of language constrains research findings, but using the terms in a much looser sense allows the loosening of these constraints.

In summary, it is not a coincidence that an ontology-focussed critical realist perspective has led to a research project that seeks to identify ontological assumptions. However, this does not mean that the ontological assumptions of public policy are only important from a critical realist perspective, nor does it mean that the findings of this research are only of interest to critical realists. Furthermore, it should be noted that the thesis is not seeking to compare its own assumptions with the assumptions identified in policy documents. Instead, a theoretical framework has been developed on the basis of the former in order to identify the content of the latter. In order to avoid the theoretical framework of the thesis excessively limiting or skewing the research findings, the terms 'structure', 'agency', 'material', and 'cultural' will be used in a much looser sense for Chapters 3-6.

How the analysis will proceed

With Section 2 of this chapter suggesting that ontological assumptions exist as ideas, language, and discourse, it will be necessary for the analysis to engage with all three. However, the ultimate focus will be on *the ideas* because the research is seeking to identify and analyse the content of, and logical relations between, *assumptions*. For this reason, it is necessary to begin the analysis (in Chapter 3) by outlining the ideational context. Doing so will allow a range of different ontological positions to be identified that will give a variety of new definitions to the terms 'structure', 'agency', 'material', and 'cultural', and demonstrate a variety of positions on the structure-agency and material-cultural questions. Chapter 4 will add two further layers of context, the political context and the social policy context, allowing an exploration of these assumptions in action. Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the analysis of policy documents, seeking to identify the ontological assumptions that actually underpinned the social policy of the Coalition Government.

Therefore, rather than a single conventional chapter laying out the current literature, this thesis contains two substantive chapters concerning existing academic literature. Chapter 3 maps out the welfare theory and ontological assumptions that

underpin the key political ideologies in the British context, and therefore engages in the existing literature on the ideology of social policy. Chapter 4 focuses in specifically on the formation and tenure of the Coalition Government, and therefore engages with the existing British politics literature about the Coalition Government and the modernisation periods of the two political parties that comprised the coalition. Chapter 4 also includes a substantial section outlining the nature and detail of the Coalition Government's social policy reforms, and therefore engages with the social policy literature about how and to what extent social policy changed under the Coalition Government.

An ideational map

Chapter 3 lays out an 'ideational map' of welfare ideology upon which will be located the assumptions identified in the document analysis of Chapters 5 and 6. By exploring the theoretical positions of various welfare thinkers, it is possible to locate the findings of Chapters 5 and 6 within the traditional debates and gain a greater insight into their ontological commitments. There are two main qualifications to make on this approach. Firstly, this discussion of key welfare thinkers does not entail a claim that they exerted any particular influence over government policy formation; Chapter 3 is not an attempt to draw direct causal links between welfare theorists and policy reform. Secondly, there is a potential trade-off between the accuracy with which the assumptions are portrayed and the depth of analysis that is possible. Chapter 3 will of course be unable to provide a comprehensive map of *all* the ontological assumptions that it is possible to hold. Relative to this unachievable ideal, the chapter will outline a small number of ontological assumptions in a sea of possibilities. However, the assumptions presented are clustered around the major positions in welfare theory and the chapter will engage with the debates about their identification within the literature.

In Chapter 3, the identification of the ontological assumptions of welfare ideologies will be significantly supported by the depth of theoretical discussion and explicitness about assumptions that exists in the literature. Such support will not be available with the analysis of primary sources in Chapters 5 and 6. Therefore, it is important to create this map of welfare theory and its underlying ontological assumptions in order to provide a greater depth of understanding about the implications of particular claims about welfare policy. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, this may (but will not necessarily) result in a loss of accuracy when identifying the meanings of the primary texts. This concern is best illustrated through an example: in a close engagement with abstract theoretical texts, Chapter 3 is able to explore neoliberal assumptions about rationality and the related theoretical

prioritisation of material structure; Chapter 6 identifies assumptions in policy documents that seem to correspond with these neoliberal assumptions. This association allows the analysis of neoliberalism to be transferred to the analysis of policy documents, attaining greater analytical depth. But, the correspondence between the two is also likely to be a simplification because it may well ignore subtle differences between the neoliberal assumptions and the assumptions identified in the policy documents. Ultimately, however, the increased depth of understanding will allow a more complex and specific discussion of the ontological assumptions and the trade-off is therefore considered to be worthwhile.

The trade-off between accuracy and clarity is an inevitable part of political analysis, and it is important to be explicit when such a trade off is being made. The justification for doing so here, as explained above, is that utilising the depth of theoretical exploration that currently exists in the academic literature will allow a greater understanding of the ontological assumptions identified in primary texts. The loss of accuracy that comes from arguing that Assumption A in a policy document is broadly the same as Assumption B in the academic literature is compensated for by the depth of discussion that already exists about Assumption B. A further significant benefit of this approach is the identification of contradictions and complementarities in a text. If a text exhibits a number of assumptions that, in the context of Chapter 3's ideational map, are espoused by opposing ideologies, we can begin to explore these contradictions through the traditional arguments of the differing ideologies.

The selection of primary texts

In Chapter 3, ideas about welfare are discussed in the abstract, whereas Chapter 4 will focus on the ideas of the Coalition Government itself. This chapter will build on the ideational map laid out in Chapter 3 to explore the various ideological strands of the Coalition Government. This will begin with a section on the modernisation processes of the two coalition partners, focussing in more detail on Cameron's Conservative Party but also offering some discussion of the Liberal Democrat's repositioning under Nick Clegg. The remainder of the chapter will discuss the ideological stance of the Coalition Government's social policy, specifically focussing on the DWP and its key reforms from 2010 to 2015.

The selection of texts for discourse analysis will be justified by reference to the analysis undertaken in Chapter 4, ensuring that the analysis of primary texts is grounded in a broader understanding of the context of the Coalition Government.

There are at least two alternative approaches that could have been taken here so it is important to justify this particular method for identifying primary texts, and also to highlight the potential shortcomings of such an approach. The first potential alternative method would have been to use computer software to code large quantities of documents in order to identify the most relevant. However, the benefits of being able to cover more ground are outweighed by the problematic nature of identifying ontological assumptions through key words and key phrases. The identification of assumptions relies on the understanding of arguments, which in turn relies on an in-depth reading of a text by a researcher who has a knowledge and sensitivity to the relevant language, discourse, and ideas. Furthermore, the analysis requires the identification of subtle and implicit contradictions, complementarities, and intertextual references, a process that is currently beyond the capabilities of existing computer software.

The second potential alternative for identifying primary texts would be to focus on a particular type of source that would allow for a manageable amount of data, removing the requirement for any further selection process. An example would be to analyse all Coalition white papers or to analyse all speeches made by Iain Duncan Smith. The main problem with such an approach would be the resultant narrow scope of research. Moving from such a narrow range of primary sources to an identification of ontological assumptions underpinning Coalition social policy would require an unfounded generalisation. Therefore, in light of the weaknesses of these alternative approaches for the identification of texts, the chosen method will be the use of the secondary literature to identify the key texts of welfare reform in the period of study. This task is carried out in Chapter 4, where the most important texts are identified through analysis of the existing British politics and social policy literature.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided the link between the abstract discussions of Chapter 1 and the beginning of the analysis in Chapter 3. In order to do so, it has considered ontological assumptions in three respects: in terms of their *causality*, their *constitution*, and their *content*.

The discussion of the 'causality' of ontological assumptions relates to their positioning within the morphogenetic model of social change. In order to clarify this positioning, Section 1 of this chapter integrated *morphogenetic theory* with *critical discourse analysis*, demonstrating the latter's explicit adherence to Bhaskarian critical

realism and the former's implicit coherence with the morphogenetic model. This integration ensured the overall coherence of the theoretical framework, but it also opened up the possibility of correcting the theoretical problems with morphogenetic theory that were identified in Chapter 1. By importing Chouliaraki and Fairclough's particular understanding of 'social practice' and reimagining it as the middle element of the morphogenetic cycle, it became possible to explain material-cultural interaction. The material and cultural were held to interact *through* the material agency and cultural agency that individuals exercise when they are engaged in social and theoretical practices. Both types of practices necessarily produce 'internal-theories', where agents are producing representations of what they are doing as they are doing it. Such theories unavoidably contain ontological assumptions. *Theoretical practices* necessarily produce 'external-theories', which are representations of, and ideas about, *other practices*. These external-theories also contain ontological assumptions, and it is these ontological assumptions that this research project seeks to uncover.

With Section 1 focussed on identifying the role of ontological assumptions (as causal entities) within the morphogenetic model of social change, Section 2 sought to outline what ontological assumptions are 'comprised of'. Ontological assumptions were primarily discussed as items of cultural structure, because they will be analysed in this thesis in terms of their *content and structuring*, and not in terms of their actual *use* over time. On this basis, identifying the constitution of ontological assumptions involved identifying the constitution of the cultural structure. In Section 2 it was suggested that cultural structure is constituted by three main elements: intelligibilia (ideas and their logical relations), semiotic systems (especially language systems and the rules that govern them), and the discursive order (intertextual relations, discourses, and interdiscursive relations). On this basis, it was concluded that ontological assumptions exist (a) *as ideas* with logical relations to other ideas, (b) *as language* within the rules of the language system, and (c) *as discourses,* which are networks of intertextual relations, and are themselves networked with other discourses (interdiscursivity) to form the discursive order. The *ideas themselves* are the primary concern of the research, but language and discourse are an inevitable part of the analysis of those ideas.

Finally, Section 3 of this chapter discussed the 'content' of ontological assumptions, engaging with a number of methodological questions about how that content will be analysed. Important clarifications were made about the link between the theoretical framework and the research findings. It was made clear that the ontological

assumptions presented in Chapters 1-2 of the thesis are in no way intended to be a point of comparison with the ontological assumptions identified by the research findings. Furthermore, the specific terminology used to construct the theoretical framework will be used in a much looser sense for Chapters 3-6 so that the theoretical framework does not significantly limit or skew the analysis. Finally, Section 3 of this chapter concluded by explaining how the approach of Chapters 3-6 would allow for an accurate but in-depth analysis of the content of ontological assumptions. The key elements of this were the ideational map in Chapter 3, the political and policy contexts outlined in Chapter 4, and the primary document analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6. This chapterisation also allows the research to be situated within the current literature: the welfare ideology literature is considered in Chapter 3, and the British politics and social policy literature are considered in Chapter 4.

<u>Chapter 3</u>

An Ideational Map of Welfare Ideology

Introduction

This chapter will explore the literature on welfare ideology in order to produce an ideational map of the key ontological assumptions that underpin different approaches to welfare. Some discussion of welfare policy proposals will be entailed, but primarily this chapter will be an exploration of the ontological assumptions of key political ideologies. The ultimate aim of the analysis is to identify the main approaches to welfare in the context of British politics and, most importantly, to outline the key ontological assumptions that underpin each of them. In achieving this aim, the chapter as a whole will play an important supporting role in the thesis by providing a depth of discussion unattainable through the analysis of primary documents alone. This chapter also makes an original contribution to the literature on welfare ideologies by highlighting and exploring their ontological assumptions. The analysis that takes place in chapters 4, 5 and 6 is ultimately enabled and constrained by the ideational map produced in the current chapter.

In order to engage in this discussion, it is necessary to first answer a number of pressing questions: (1) what is a welfare ideology?; (2) which welfare ideologies require analysis?; (3) to what extent does the existing literature offer analysis of ontological assumptions? These questions will be answered in Section 1 of this chapter, where four welfare ideologies are identified for analysis. Section 2 will address the ontological assumptions of neoliberalism. Section 3 will do the same for conservatism and Section 4 for social democracy and Marxism. The analysis in each of these sections will be carried out over three themes: (A) Structure-agency; (B) material-cultural; (C) welfare policy. While (A) and (B) will involve a detailed abstract level discussion engaging with the political ideology, (C) will involve a brief summary of the ideology's proposed welfare policies.

Section 1: Welfare ideology and ontological assumptions

Building on the definition of welfare given in the introduction to this thesis, as an institutional system that ensures wellbeing, it is important to assess what is meant by 'welfare ideology'. A welfare 'ideology' is a relatively (though not entirely) coherent set of ideas about welfare that is broadly constituted by both political and social theory. The *political* theory within an ideology relates to ideas about 'what should be' or 'what we ought to do', while the social theory relates to ideas about 'what exists' or 'what is it possible for us to do'. Broadly speaking, the political theory element of a welfare ideology is the most explicit and therefore the easiest to identify. However, it is the *social* theory element that is of particular interest to this research, as this is where we will be able to identify ontological assumptions. Therefore, although some of the *prescriptive* elements of welfare ideologies will be discussed, the main focus of this chapter will be on the *descriptive*. This inevitably means that the discussions about structure-agency and material-cultural will deal in an abstract way with political ideologies as a whole rather than focusing purely on the welfare element. Because the proposal of welfare policies is primarily *prescriptive*, it is difficult to unpack ontological assumptions without bringing in the broader claims and tenets of the ideologies under analysis. To compensate, the analysis of each ideology will conclude with a brief section devoted to laying out its welfare policy proposals.

A typology of welfare ideologies

There are numerous books that seek to organise welfare ideologies in different ways. While no two are the same, all share certain characteristics, allowing us to create a basic schema that is underpinned by the majority of the literature. It is important to acknowledge that typologies of welfare ideologies are devised from particular perspectives and often have a particular purpose. For example, in *Social Theory and Social Welfare* (1981), Peter Taylor-Gooby uses Part 1 to organise welfare ideologies, while in Part 2 it becomes clear that this organisation lays the groundwork for Jennifer Dale's Marxist perspective on welfare provision. On the other side of the political spectrum, Alan Deacon's *Perspectives on Welfare* (2002) offers a five-part categorisation of 'the perspectives' in Part 1 before laying out his own welfare approach in Part 2, which explicitly advocates the importation of the US approach to welfare, and also contains a typology of welfare ideologies using a skewed political spectrum that runs from 'leftist' to 'centrist'. This spectrum positions a number of

Deacon's proposals for welfare reform as 'centrist', while other authors associate similar ideas with neoliberalism (Taylor 2007). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that when particular authors categorise the welfare ideologies, they are often doing so in order to advocate a particular one of those ideologies.

It is for this reason that it is important to consult a broad range of sources rather than simply importing an organisational schema from just one single author or text. In order to amalgamate the typologies of numerous authors, we must first identify the commonly recurring categories. Perhaps the most common category of welfare ideology throughout the literature is 'Marxism' (Taylor-Gooby and Dale 1981, George and Wilding 1994, George and Page 1995, O'Brien and Penna 1998, Hewitt 2000, Fitzpatrick 2001, Taylor 2007, Lister 2010). Although the remainder of the thesis is unlikely to uncover much Marxist ideology within the Coalition Government, it is important to at least briefly address the Marxist ideas on welfare due to its ubiquity in the literature, and due to the historic process in which many of the more recent ideologies have positioned themselves in relation or opposition to Marxism.

Almost as common and far more relevant is a welfare ideology built on economic liberalism, variously named 'Laissez-faire' (Clarke, Cochrane, and Smart 1987), 'The New Right' (George and Page 1995), 'neoliberalism' (O'Brien and Penna 1998, Taylor 2007), and 'radical Right' (Hewitt 2000, Fitzpatrick 2001). While these various labels are all identifying similar welfare approaches, it must be acknowledged that they are not simply synonyms. Levitas (1986) follows Hall and Jacques (1983) in identifying *neoliberalism* as one of the two strands of *new right* thinking, with the other being 'social authoritarianism' or 'neo-conservatism'. The notion that 'new right' and 'radical right' are combinations of more basic ideologies (Lavalette and Pratt 2001) encourages the current theoretical analysis to focus in on the abstract and fundamental ideologies upon which the more concrete political concoctions are based. We can also discard the terms 'Laissez-faire' and 'economic liberalism', partly because they do not capture the 20th century revival of this family of ideas, but most importantly because they focus specifically on the economic element, rather than the broader philosophical underpinnings. Therefore, in order to attain the sufficient *depth of analysis,* by concentrating on fundamental ideologies rather than their practical political combinations, and *breadth of analysis*, by dealing with the ideology as a whole rather than merely its economic prescriptions, the term 'neoliberalism' will be most appropriate on both counts.

Because a number of authors (including Levitas 1986, Lavalette and Pratt 2001, and Hall and Jacques 1983) identify the new right as a combination of neoliberalism and conservatism, and because the new right is expected to be particularly relevant to the analysis that is to come, it is important to take some time to explore *'conservatism'* as a welfare ideology. It is worth noting that only a small number of authors include conservatism in their typologies, with Taylor (2007) offering one of the only dedicated chapters to conservatism as a welfare ideology. Some authors (Lister 2010, Fitzpatrick 2001, 2005) offer a few pages as part of broader summaries, while others capture some key element of conservative thinking, such as Deacon's (2002) treatment of 'paternalism' or Levitas's (1986) chapter on 'Culture, Nation and Race'. Therefore, the assessment of conservatism will necessitate the incorporation of more abstract texts that underpin the political ideology as a whole (Burke 1790, O'Sullivan 1976, Scruton 1980), being unable to rely primarily on the welfare ideologies literature.

So far, three welfare ideologies have been identified for inclusion: Marxism, neoliberalism, and conservatism. The obvious gap is a non-Marxist perspective of the left, which is a common occurrence in the literature but is even more variously labelled than neoliberalism. Some of these labels include: 'Fabianism' (Clarke, Cochrane, and Smart 1987) 'Fabian Socialism' (George and Wilding 1994), 'democratic socialism' (George and Page 1995) and 'social democracy' (Hewitt 2000, Fitzpatrick 2001, Taylor 2007, Esping-Andersen 1990). Again, the ideological landscape is too complicated to smooth over these various concepts with a single label. For example, Lister (2010) identifies a subtle difference between democratic socialism and social democracy relating to a differing focus on 'ends' and 'means' respectively. However, the nuance of the left is clearly not as relevant to the current research as the nuance of the right, and with limited space, it is not possible to explore the differences and connections between these various centre-left approaches to welfare. Therefore, we will focus on 'social democracy', and the implications of its unification of welfare and equality (Deacon 2002).

Much of the literature does not acknowledge a place for self-identified 'centrist' approaches to welfare, and, although this could be largely attributed to the prevalence of pre-New Labour writing on welfare ideology, it is a trend continued in this chapter. However, it is worth briefly justifying the rationale behind excluding New Labour's 'third way' as a welfare ideology worthy of analysis. Firstly, because Giddens's (1998) foundational text is entitled *'The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy'*, there

is a strong case for subsuming discussion of the 'third way' into the analysis of social democracy (an approach also followed by Fitzpatrick 2001, 2005). Secondly, it was noted above that the focus of this chapter will be kept upon the fundamental 'primary colours' ideologies rather than the various theoretical combinations and political concoctions that have emerged through the merging of two or more ideologies. Therefore, it will be assumed that many of the ontological assumptions that underpin the 'third way' will be captured in relation to discussions about social democracy and neoliberalism. Although an ontological analysis of the third way is beyond the scope of the current thesis, it is an important avenue for future research.

We therefore have a list of four welfare ideologies to consider: neoliberalism, conservatism, social democracy, and Marxism.

Ontological assumptions

The literature on welfare ideology has been intermittently engaging with the structure-agency debate for at least 30 years, both as an organising theme, as with George and Wilding's (1985) 'collectivist/anti-collectivist' dichotomy, and as a central strand of discussion, as with Hewitt's *Welfare and Human Nature* (2000). As has been made clear so far, the structure-agency debate is a central concern when analysing welfare ideology, in both this thesis and the existing literature. However, the framework developed in Chapters 1 and 2 made clear that the material-cultural 'debate' must also be a central concern. The arguments surrounding the distinction and separation of the material and the cultural are rarely addressed in the existing literature on welfare ideologies. However, the whole project of categorising, comparing and critiquing welfare ideologies in the first place is founded on the assumption that *ideas* play an important role in the creation of welfare policy. This could be a minor auxiliary role or an entirely determinate one, depending on the approach of the analyst, but there are few explicit discussions in the literature to be clear on this point. Therefore, not only is there very little discussion about the material-cultural debate and welfare ideologies, there is also a lack of justification for focussing on ideologies and ideas in the first place. The extensive theoretical discussions of Chapters 1 and 2 in this thesis aim to fill this gap in the literature. Furthermore, in the existing literature, there is no use of the material-cultural distinction as a framework or lens through which welfare ideologies can be discussed. Therefore, an important contribution of this chapter will be to outline what role the material-cultural distinction plays within welfare ideologies.

Before moving into the analysis, it is worth highlighting two key texts that closely align with the aims of this current chapter, and more loosely the thesis as a whole. Hewitt's *Welfare and Human Nature* (2000) seeks to explore welfare ideologies by laying out their assumptions on human nature. Le Grand's *Motivation, Agency and Public Policy* (2003) offers a four part model of human nature within which to explore the different ways that welfare policies make assumptions about human motivation. Le Grand discusses 'pawns', who lack any agency, 'queens' who are considered entirely responsible for their own actions, 'knights' who act altruistically, and 'knaves' who act selfishly. Clearly the pawns-queens distinction and the knights-knaves distinction bare some resemblance to the structure-agency and material-cultural distinctions respectively, but they are certainly not coterminous. While there is not the space here to enter a full engagement with Le Grand's work, his model will be deployed primarily to question social democratic welfare policy and so will be used when we discuss its underlying ideology in Section 4. Hewitt's work is also useful with regards to understanding the social democratic ontology, and additionally offers some particularly relevant insights on neoliberalism, and so will be heavily referenced in both sections. Both Le Grand (2003) and Hewitt (2000) focus primarily on how welfare ideologies characterise *the individual*, and so this chapter fills a clear gap in the literature by also discussing the important issue of how welfare ideologies characterise *social structure* and the causal significance of the social context.

Section 2: Neoliberalism

(A) Structure-agency

At the heart of neoliberal theory, a *constraining contradiction* exists between an advocacy of the market (structure) and of individual freedom (agency). As discussed in Chapter 2, a constraining contradiction is a tension *necessarily created* by a theory that can only be corrected through significant reformulation or abandonment of that theory (Archer 1996). This problem in neoliberal thought is neither a conclusive nor a particularly devastating one, as nearly all theories contain such tensions, especially in relation to the structure-agency debate, as we shall see in the remainder of this chapter. For example, the constraining contradiction between structure and agency in Marxist theory is just as, if not more, problematic for its central theoretical claims. The aim of this section is not to undermine or critique neoliberalism, but rather to outline the tensions existing in its underlying ontological assumptions, so that we can explain the role they play in the formulation of welfare policy. We will begin by focussing on the strand of ontological individualism that underpins a neoliberal conception of the state

and of the primacy of the individual agent as a "biologically and psychologically discrete subject and epistemically discrete object of knowledge" (Hewitt 2000: 76). We will then move on to discuss the implicit neoliberal advocacy of social structure through the concepts of 'coercion', 'anarchy' and 'the market', concluding by clarifying the exact nature of the constraining contradiction between structure and agency.

Friedrich Hayek argues that the growing power of the state has a snowball effect, whereby the more power it gains through the provision of welfare, the greater its avarice for power, and the more difficult it becomes to halt its centralising and dominating tendencies (Hayek 1944). One way of interpreting this vision of the state comes from 'public choice theory', which has been described by Lavalette and Pratt as "a microcosm of neoliberal political economy, resting in a particularly intense way on the same behavioural assumptions" (Lavalette and Pratt 2001: 47). The basic premise of public choice theory is that each individual within the state bureaucracy seeks to maximise their own power, wealth and prestige because, according to public choice theory, "bureaucrats are just like the rest of us; greedy, vain, ambitious, and keen to follow their own interests" (Lavalette and Pratt 2001: 48). Therefore, although the state is often referred to as an entity in its own right, it is ultimately nothing more than its constituent agents; these agents include both the ministers who pledge increasingly larger welfare packages, and the voters who choose the biggest expansion of the welfare system. This would reinforce Taylor's argument that "from a neoliberal perspective, the character of society is determined by the way that individuals behave" (Taylor 2007: 72).

If society is *determined* by the way that individuals behave, the implication is that the causal powers in society rest entirely with individual agents, a position we can label 'ontological individualism'. However, the individualism advocated by neoliberalism has more than one dimension. George and Wilding (1985: 21-22) argue that, to a neoliberal, "individualism is two things ... firstly, it is a theory of society ... secondly, it is a set of political maxims". The former captures 'ontological individualism' in the sense that society is '*determined*' by individuals, while the latter can be described as 'normative individualism' because it is a *prescriptive* claim that individual freedom is the most important political value. Hewitt (2000) adds a third type of individualism when he describes Hayek as an 'epistemic individualist' in contrast to Milton Friedman's 'ontological individualism'. The contrast between the two hints towards a *competing contradiction* in neoliberalism, but this is an issue we will return to once the material-cultural dimension is introduced. For the remainder of this sub-section, we will focus on

the three dimensions of individualism that, to some extent at least, pervade all neoliberal thought. To summarise, these three types of individualism are: normative, epistemic and ontological.

Normative individualism is a position that neoliberalism shares with a libertarian perspective; both argue that the freedom of the individual leads to the public good. However, the particular point that distinguishes a neoliberal perspective is the belief this can only happen "via a free market based on moral, social and legal rules that are *actively protected by the state*" (Fitzpatrick 2001: 45). Therefore, normative individualism in neoliberal thought can be characterised in the following way: (i) individual agents should be as free from constraints as possible and (ii) the most effective system for providing such freedom is a free market enforced by a minimal but powerful state.

From the neoliberal perspective, individual freedom is decreased or destroyed when the state expands beyond its specifically minimal role, as is supposedly the case with the state provision of welfare (Fitzpatrick 2001). According to this line of argument, the welfare recipient "eventually [loses] all individual initiative and personal responsibility for self maintenance" (O'Brien and Penna 1998: 95), causing their loss of agency. While this 'loss of agency' may initially seem to open the door to social structure, individualism can be maintained by turning to Hayek's definition of coercion. "By coercion Hayek (1960: 20) means 'such control of the environment and circumstances of a person by another ... that he is forced to act not according to a coherent plan of his own but to serve the ends of others'" (O'Brien and Penna 1998: 82). Therefore, state welfare provision is not a structure that removes the individual agency of welfare recipients, but is instead the power of one set of agents (state bureaucrats) to control and manipulate another (welfare recipients). On this basis, it initially appears that normative individualism is compatible with, and complementary to, an ontological individualism where agents are the sole causal force in society.

However, there are three elements in the previous two paragraphs that begin to undermine this ontological individualism and imply a causal role for social structure: firstly, the justification for individual freedom in the first place; secondly, the state-market nexus designed to provide this freedom; thirdly, the notion that an individual's "environment and circumstances" can have a significant impact on their freedom to act. All three points can be explicated and assessed by outlining the notion of 'epistemic individualism'. A number of authors (Hewitt 2000, Tomlinson 1995, Fitzpatrick 2001)

have asserted that it is an *epistemic* argument that ultimately underpins Hayek's dual defence of the market and of individual freedom. This epistemic argument runs as follows: (i) individuals have different beliefs, understandings and ways of viewing the world; (ii) the collective knowledge of humanity is spread across all these different viewpoints; (iii) no single individual is capable of gathering all the knowledge together and no objective measure exists to exclude any particular forms of knowledge; (iv) therefore, it is essential we ensure the freedom of every individual in order to maintain and develop their own viewpoint; (v) furthermore, we need an organic system that can harness this collective knowledge for the good of society, while maintaining individual freedom; (vi) this organic system is the market. An obvious objection to this argument is that advocacy of the market is in itself only one belief amongst many. The neoliberal response is that "although the market is seen as superior to other institutions of exchange and decision-making, its operations are not committed to any singular moral outcome or vision of the good" (Hewitt 2000: 77).

Hayek (1944) staunchly opposes an expansive role for the state because the state can only ever accord to the beliefs and knowledge of the individuals that constitute the government. The market is favoured because it can optimise the collective knowledge of all individuals, arbitrate their collective beliefs and organically provide the information about how society should be organised and what should be produced. It is possible to argue that this neoliberal advocacy of the market demonstrates a strong commitment to the existence and importance of social structures. Firstly, in the above argument, the market is an emergent entity in its own right with causal powers beyond those of its constituent agents, which leads to the conclusion that neoliberal theory understands the market as an emergent causal social structure. Secondly, it is *precisely because* the market is an emergent causal social structure that it is seen as the most effective system for ensuring individual freedom. The *emergence* of the market ensures that it is beyond the control of intentional individual agents. The *causal power* of the market allows it to perform the functions attributed to it in Hayek's theory. Therefore, although Hewitt (2000) identifies Hayek's position as 'epistemic individualism', an important ontological commitment is being made to the causal power of social structure.

This line of argument can be followed further by returning to the neoliberal vision of the state. Although the neoliberal critique of the 'welfarist' state focuses on the power of self-interested individuals, the neoliberal normative vision of the state further illuminates the structuralist tendencies. According to Hayek, the state's central roles

should be to keep the peace and enforce contracts, allowing the market to function effectively (Hayek 1960). This argument suggests that the market is not the natural product of individual freedom, as per the libertarian argument, but is instead a state of affairs that requires government enforcement before it can provide individual freedom. We can therefore talk of a 'state-market nexus' that provides the background conditions for individuals to exercise their agency and pursue their various interests. While we have already seen how the market *enables* individuals to be free, we now can begin to see how the broader state-market nexus also *constrains* individuals. These constraints exist *between* two notions of freedom. On the one hand there exists the 'natural' freedom of individuals, which libertarians argue leads to a harmonious market *but neoliberals argue would lead to anarchy*. On the other hand, there is the 'social' freedom which individuals can only enjoy because the state-market nexus provides the appropriate conditions for this freedom. As Hewitt (2000: 76) argues, "the threat of anarchy leads to a set of normative propositions that are binding on individual action". Therefore, not only does the market act as a social structure in harnessing collective knowledge and providing individual freedom, but the more fundamental state-market nexus actually *constitutes* individual freedom, leading to the argument that neoliberalism posits a social structure that not only *conditions* agency but also *constitutes* the very nature of agency.

We will conclude this discussion of neoliberalism and structure-agency by clarifying exactly why these ontological assumptions entail a constraining contradiction. On the one hand, neoliberalism is committed to three types of individualism: normative, epistemic and ontological. With regards to ontological individualism, Taylor (2007) and George and Wilding (1985) argue that, in neoliberal theory, society is determined by the actions of individuals. As was demonstrated with the theory of greedy state bureaucrats, neoliberal thinkers seem to agree with King's (1999) claim that collective entities, such as 'the state', are nothing more than *other individuals*. This position is again shown with the neoliberal claim that state actors manipulate and coerce benefit claimants by providing overgenerous welfare systems (O'Brien and Penna 1998). Such arguments are built on the assumption that society is nothing more than individuals and their actions. Furthermore, neoliberalism's central normative claim is that individuals should be free to pursue their own interests in their own way according to their own viewpoint. However, simultaneously, this freedom and supposed agential-determinism is fundamentally underpinned by a state-market nexus that has the causal power to organise society and is in some way fundamentally constitutive of individual agency. Therefore, we have a constraining contradiction whereby agency, held to embody the

neoliberal value of absolute individual freedom, stands in tension with structure, implicated as a necessary condition for, a constraining force on, and a fundamental constituent of, individual agency. In order to further explore the nature of structure and agency in neoliberal theory, it is now necessary to consider the material-cultural issue.

(B) Material-cultural

The material-cultural issue is difficult to identify in neoliberal thought, a difficulty that is heightened by the lack of existing literature. However, there are a number of concepts and theoretical commitments that can direct readers of neoliberal writings towards particular assumptions. Three theoretical questions will be discussed in order to explore the material-cultural issue in neoliberalism: firstly, the question of human rationality; secondly, the role and importance of tradition; thirdly, the epistemological debate between positivism and relativism. A discussion of these three theoretical questions will form the key strands in the characterisation of neoliberalism as being split between a culture-centred approach and a material-centred approach. Because this contradiction is between two different approaches, it is classified as a '*competing* contradiction' according to Archer's (1996) theory, because advocates are positioned on one side or the other, rather than being inevitably *constrained* to advocate both sides. One of these approaches is epitomised by Hayek, the other by Friedman. Hayek's position prioritises the cultural dimension: it questions the existence of a knowable objective world, it emphases an important role for tradition and culture, and it posits an irrational model of the human subject. Friedman's position prioritises the material dimension: it advocates a positivist model for analysing the objective knowable world and a rationally calculating model of the human subject.

We shall begin with Hayek's culture-centred approach. As discussed above, Hayek builds his theory from an epistemological argument, where "the limits of human reason are used to attack rationalistic, reformist actions by governments" (Tomlinson 1995: 20). Freedom of individual belief, so the argument goes, is essential in the face of limited and inherently subjective knowledge. This subjective characterisation of knowledge entails a commitment to *relativism* in the sense that each individual's account of the world is as valuable as any other. The particular nature of this theory, with its reliance on relativism as a central building block in the critique of the social democratic state and in the advocacy of a market system, leads to a diminished role for the material realm in Hayek's theory, and therefore a strong focus on the cultural. Two reasons underpin this characterisation of Hayek's theory as culturally-centred. Firstly, if each perspective on the world is equally valuable, the social and cultural production of

knowledge becomes a primary concern. Secondly, as Hewitt (2000) argues, Hayek builds his theory from an epistemological starting point, using assumptions about relativism to underpin his wider theory; which means that the cultural realm, as a theoretical starting point, is held to be in some way more fundamental than the material.

These issues not only demonstrate Hayek's prioritising of the cultural over the material, but also lead to a further contradiction, as explained by Tomlinson (1995): the "fundamental tension in Hayek's work" is between "a transparent desire to deploy reason to improve the human condition" and "an emphasis on traditions and custom as the foundations of the good society" (Tomlinson 1995: 21). On the one hand Hayek argues that an organic evolutionary approach to social change is the only way of dealing with the inherently subjective nature of knowledge, but on the other hand Hayek advocates a series of radical reforms to the state and market on the basis of his own abstract reasoning. One response to Tomlinson's criticism could be to suggest that Hayek's radical changes are not designed to create a rationally planned society, but are aiming to release organic social forces that have in recent decades been captured by rationalist social reformers. However, one would still be left with a problem, because the bedrock of these organic social forces will ultimately be a rationally considered vision of a radically different society that initially requires extensive state reform.

This question of rationality brings us onto the third element of Hayek's culture-centred approach: the explicit *rejection* of abstract rationalism. Bound up with his veneration of tradition, and his advocacy of a slow and organic process of social change, is the suggestion that human beings are ultimately not rational actors. Hayek argues that abstract rationalism has led state bureaucrats to create many of the disastrous social forms that mark the 20th century. This opposition to rationalism seems to imply that the human agent, or at least the society it produces, is in some way irrational. This ties back in to the importance of tradition in shaping society, suggesting that people are creatures of habit, reproducing their social conditions over long periods of time and making small changes at an incremental rate. This *conservative* strand to Hayek's thinking can be identified as the cause of the tension outlined by Tomlinson, because a conservative veneration of tradition precludes any proposals for radical change. Additionally, a model of an irrational and perhaps also habitual individual leads Hayek further away from a materialist approach where individuals are self-serving and calculative. He does not abandon the idea that people are self-serving, but Hayek does seem to reject the *Homo Economicus* model of classical economics.

While Hayek is repeatedly held up as the archetypal neoliberal thinker, Friedman's ideas are also held to be a key example of the neoliberal ideology (George and Page 1995; Hewitt 2000; Taylor 2007). By analysing Friedman's work, it is possible to suggest that the culture-centred approach discussed above is not the only neoliberal answer to the material-cultural question. Friedman's work relies heavily on the traditional *Homo Economicus* model, which assumes that individuals are rational calculators, seeking to maximise their material interests. If agents are primarily driven by their desire to maximise their material position, then the causal significance of the cultural realm is substantially decreased. Rather than building his neoliberal theory on the basis of epistemological assumptions, as Hayek does with relativism, Friedman builds his position on ontological assumptions about human nature and human motivations.

On this basis, Hewitt (2000) offers a distinction between the 'epistemic individualism' of Hayek and the 'ontological individualism' of Friedman. However, although Hewitt's argument is an attempt to capture this distinction between the culture-centred and material-centred strands of neoliberalism, he is wrong to suggest that Hayek's individualism is purely epistemic and wrong to suggest that Friedman's is purely ontological. Clearly both strands of individualism pervade the work of both authors and are combined in various ways with the more dominant strand of *normative* individualism. The strength of Hewitt's argument is in its demonstration that Hayek's position *begins from* epistemic assumptions, while Friedman's position *begins from* ontological assumptions. This further supports the notion of a distinction between Hayek's culture-centred neoliberalism and Friedman's material-centred neoliberalism.

We have so far characterised Friedman's position as being material-centred in two ways: firstly, it posits a rationally calculating and materially self-interested model of the individual; secondly, it *begins* with ontological assumptions about material reality and develops its central tenets on this basis. We will complete this argument with a third way in which Friedman's theory prioritises the material realm: his explicit commitment to positivism. "Friedman's battles with his opponents over inflation and the conduct of macroeconomic policy have been conducted within a particular methodological framework – positivism (Friedman, 1953)" (Barry 1995: 33). As outlined in Chapter 1, positivism seeks to import the dominant assumptions of the natural sciences and is most essentially characterised by the claim that truth can be established through observation. In the social sciences, this concern with observable

reality necessarily results in a close attention to material action and an under-valuing of ideational and cultural factors.

Barry (1995) identifies a notable problem in Friedman's position because his positivism stands in contrast to his fundamental commitment to a rational self-serving model of the individual agent (Barry 1995). This tension arises because an inductive positivist approach seeks to derive, verify and falsify theoretical assumptions according to *observations of empirical phenomena*, while a rational model of human nature is an *abstract assumption* within which observable phenomena are fitted. Friedman, just like Hayek, attempts to negotiate the relativist-positivist dilemma but, unlike Hayek, he has opted for the positivist side and therefore encountered different theoretical challenges. For the current discussion, it is enough to say that Friedman takes a positivist approach and, in doing so, he prioritises the material realm over the cultural by under-theorising the nature of knowledge and the causal power of human interpretation. As a result, Friedman is forced to accept a contradictory combination of a rational model of the human agent and a positivist rejection of the importance of ontological assumptions.

This discussion of the material-cultural distinction in relation to neoliberal thought has primarily identified a *competing contradiction*, where two opposing approaches exist within neoliberalism, one broadly advocating a material-centred ontology and the other advocating a culture-centred ontology. Hayek prioritises the cultural realm by building his theory on epistemological assumptions, emphasising the subjectivity of knowledge, and prioritising traditional habit over rational action. Friedman prioritises the material realm by building his theory on ontological assumptions, advocating a positivist understanding of knowledge, and developing a rationally calculating vision of the individual agent. Tensions, or 'constraining contradictions', exist within both strands, with Hayek unable to reconcile his traditionalist vision of social change with his own proposals for radical reform, and Friedman struggling to bring together a rationalist model of humanity with an inductive positivism. However, despite these internal tensions, the most important point to make about the neoliberal approach to the material-cultural distinction is that a *competing contradiction* exists between the two strands, with one broadly emphasising the material realm and the other broadly emphasising the cultural realm.

(C) Welfare policy

Before providing a brief sketch of the welfare proposals advocated by neoliberalism, it is worth summarising the assumptions and contradictions explicated in this section so far. Simply put, neoliberalism explicitly advocates three types of individualism: ontological, epistemic and normative. However, simultaneously, it relies on an implicit notion of social structure, which not only enables and constrains agents, but also plays a role in the very constitution of agents and, at a more fundamental level, of agency itself. While the structure-agency issue unavoidably forms a *constraining* contradiction at the heart of neoliberal ontology, the material-cultural issue forms a *competing* contradiction, with two opposing sides vying for dominance. On the one hand is culture-centred neoliberalism, epitomised by the work of Hayek, which is underpinned by relativism, anti-rationalism and an epistemic starting point. On the other hand is material-centred neoliberalism, prominently advocated by Friedman, which is underpinned by positivism, rationalism and an ontological starting point. The positivism-relativism dilemma pervades both sides of this competing contradiction, causing tensions for both but in different ways: Hayek's theory is troubled by the contradiction between radical individualism and anti-rationalism; Friedman's theory is troubled by the contradiction between inductive positivism and deductive rationalism.

A central unifying principle of neoliberal welfare policy is that "state welfare [provision] is thought to weaken the economy and sap the morality out of society" (Fitzpatrick 2001: 121). Not only does state welfare provision create these immediate problems, it also begins a spiral where, "impelled by the insatiable demands of greedy electorates and self-interested bureaucrats intent only on empire building, governments have to tax and borrow more and more" (Lavalette and Pratt 2001: 39). Here neoliberalism's ontological individualism underpins the causal identification of 'greedy electorates' and 'self-interested bureaucrats', leading to normative individualism and a retreat of the state from welfare provision. By using the notion of 'the retreat of the state', neoliberal thinkers are able to create a vision of the state stepping back and thereby freeing individuals; i.e. the removal of structure to make way for agency. However, it as this point that the implicit structuralism takes effect, because the state's retreat is not a removal of structural barriers to agents, but is instead the imposition of a *different kind of structure*: the state-market nexus. By maintaining and enforcing the foundation of the market, through property rights, competition laws etc., the state oversees the expansion of the market into the provision of welfare. By making these ontological assumptions clear, we have a different perspective on the neoliberal solution to welfare provision. The idea of state structure being replaced by a state-

market structure is further reinforced by the neoliberal suggestion that the state *should* continue to provide a 'residual' welfare system to support those who cannot operate in the market.

Turning to the implications of the material-cultural distinction on neoliberal welfare policy, it is possible to see the issue of unemployment being approached in two ways, one focussing on the cultural, the other on the material. The cultural-centred neoliberal approach suggests that "poverty is culturally determined through the values, mores, attitudes and lack of aspirations transmitted across generations" (Lavalette and Pratt 2001: 46). It is this vision of unemployment that provides the notion of a 'dependency culture' existing among the unemployed, where a shared culture pervades a class of people who are unwilling to work. The phrase 'culturally determined' clearly gives significant causal power to the cultural realm, excluding or at least reducing the causal significance of the material realm. On this basis, Hayek offers a solution to unemployment that involves providing people with the bare minimum of support so that a morality of responsibility and self-reliance is instilled in the unemployed.

Although material-centred neoliberalism also uses the concept of a 'dependency culture', and even accepts the idea that it is a *shared* culture of dependency, it is theorised as an *effect* rather than a *cause* of poverty. The primary concern is ensuring that people have financial incentives to escape unemployment, because it is the framework of financial incentives that fundamentally causes individual actions. Friedman goes as far as to argue that financial incentives should operate across all welfare provision, with limited cash handouts replacing all 'in-kind' systems (Barry 1995: 39). It is a noticeable similarity between the two neoliberal approaches that the withdrawal of state support is a 'solution', but the competing contradiction continues to operate with regards to the *underlying reasons for advocating this approach*. The material-centred approach supports state withdrawal in order to change the frameworks of financial incentives, while the cultural-centred approach supports state withdrawal to change the dependency culture. The agreement over the solution often leads to the belief that there are two reasons for supporting the same idea, without acknowledgement that the two reasons are fundamentally based on contradictory ontological assumptions.

Section 3: Conservatism

(A) Structure-agency

While neoliberalism presents an explicit focus on 'the individual' underpinned by implicit structural tendencies, it will be argued in this section that conservatism presents an explicit focus on social structure underpinned by individualist tendencies. As with the analysis of neoliberalism, it will be useful here to include discussion of the prescriptive strand of the ideology; a conservative ideology is defined by its normative valuing of enduring social structures, especially traditional customs, the nation, and the family. To place such emphasis on the importance and maintenance of social structures initially seems to exhibit a structuralist ontology, where agents are denied a significant causal power in social change. However, it will be argued here that a conservative ideology views structures as enduring entities *despite their causal weakness* and not *because of their causal strength*, an ontological position that ultimately gives significant causal power to individual agents, who are capable of maintaining and destroying social structures. This is certainly not to argue that conservatism is an individualist ideology, but it is instead to suggest its ontological assumptions set up a constraining contradiction between structure and agency. When conceived together, conservatism actually asserts an ontological dualism between structure and agency, reifying the former and holding the latter separate on the basis of an 'unalterable human essence'.

Some key figures in British conservative thought include Roger Scruton, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Michael Oakeshott and David Willetts, who will all, to various extents, be considered as part of this analysis, but it is Edmund Burke who offers the classic statement of conservative principles (Heywood 1997). Burke (1790) argues that the radical and revolutionary attempts to change society on the basis of abstract rational models are not only undesirable but are doomed to failure and disastrous consequences. Therefore, conservatism is primarily characterised "by opposition to the idea of total or radical change" (O'Sullivan 1976: 9); in the rather graphic words of Roger Scruton, revolution "is like murdering a sick mother out of impatience to snatch some rumoured infant from her womb" (Scruton 1980: 21-22). Burke's conservatism therefore opposed the rapidity of change but, more fundamentally it also opposed change based on *rationally* conceived utopias. Because conservatism is primarily defined by its opposition to radical change and rational utopias, it is through these concepts that we can begin to identify a conservative position in the structure-agency debate.

The conservative opposition to radical and rational change is unsurprisingly paralleled by a valuing of long-standing social structures. In making these commitments, conservatism ascribes to a number of ontological assumptions about the nature of social structure that will be discussed in turn: firstly, that it organically evolves over time; secondly, that it is an emergent entity embodying a national spirit or personality; thirdly, that it is enduring, allowing it to contain the wisdom of many generations; fourthly, that it creates order and stability in society. These assumptions point towards a structuralist vision of society, but conservatism also attributes a significant causal power to agency, as displayed in conservative warnings about the potential power individuals have to destroy the valued evolutionary products of social structures. This indicates the contradiction between structure and agency that lies at the heart of a conservative ontology.

The suggestion that society is organic leads Heywood (1997: 70) to suggest that the conservative "notion of tradition reflects an almost Darwinian belief" in "a process of 'natural selection'" and an institutional survival of the fittest. In this vision, social structure is comprised of institutions and customs that have evolved over time, which gradually adapt in order to meet human need. Scruton (1980: 25) argues that "conservatism presupposes the existence of a social organism" and that "its politics is concerned with sustaining the life of that organism". The idea that society is a social organism is effectively coterminous with a functionalist social theory, and initially seems to eliminate the role of human agency. This is because structural change is held to operate according to a natural pattern and not as a result of individual intervention. Individuals are clearly a necessary part of the process, because the institutions evolve in order to meet their needs, but they seem to be afforded little *agency* in the actual process of structural change, despite Scruton's insistence that conservative politics does have an important role. The tension between a structuralist view of organic societal evolution and proactive conservative politics is somewhat mediated by O'Sullivan's (1976: 12) claim that conservatism is fundamentally about "a limited style of politics", and therefore about letting natural institutional evolution run its course.

The idea that social structures change as a result of individual *action* but not as a result of individual *intention* leads again to the vision of structure as emergent from individuals. Honderich argues that a conservative perspective not only sees society as "a thing persisting through time" (1990: 196), and as "a thing which is more than the sum of its parts" (ibid: 197), but also as involving "that spirit which infuses state, hearth,

sepulchres and altars, that which abides mystically in mother country and fatherland, that which not only speaks in its own voice but expresses its personality and will" (ibid: 198). To understand the position Honderich is ascribing to conservatism, it is useful to bring in a distinction between 'strong emergence' and 'weak emergence' (Elder-Vass 2010). Weak emergence is the concept underlying the critical realist ontology outlined in Chapter 1, where an emergent entity is comprised of nothing more than (a) its constituent elements, (b) the way in which they are arranged, and (c) the causal powers they possess as a result (Elder-Vass 2010). Strong emergence comprises the (a), (b), and (c), but also entails (d) some new resultant substance. In this case, the new substance is some sort of spirit, personality or will that is ascribed to social structure in the conservative tradition. Interpreted in this way, the conservative approach *reifies* social structure, claiming it to be more than a unique set of causal powers, and something more akin to Hegel's (1807) concept of 'Geist'. This mysterious reification of social structure is captured in Honderich's claim that it speaks in its own voice and expresses its own personality, and is also underlying Scruton's (1980: 21) claim that society is "very much more than an organism".

The idea that society is a functionally evolving organism, coupled with the idea that it is a strongly emergent entity with its own spirit or will, clarifies the very high value conservatives place on maintaining social structures. These valuable properties of social structures, however, are only held to exist because of a third important property: *endurance*. Social structure can only evolve to become both organically functional and spiritually invested *over a long period of time*. It is for this reason that the conservative position places so much emphasis on preventing radical upheavals, but it also seems to imply that social structure itself has some property of *durability*, because otherwise there would not be something important to conserve in the first place. This durability is not an absence of change but a preservation of social structure despite, and sometimes because of, superficial changes. Burke (1790: 21) argues that "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation" and then goes on to quote Virgil; "through many years, the fortune of the house stands, and the grandfathers of grandfathers are counted" (ibid). On this basis, O'Sullivan (1976: 23) argues that Burke's conservatism "was an appeal to *a timeless, supra-historical order of things*". Ultimately, superficial change may occur but, in a conservative ontology, social structures have an underlying durability across the ages.

We have so far discussed the conservative vision of *what social structure is* (a durable emergent organism with its own spirit) and *how social structure changes*

(slowly and according to evolutionary functionalism), but we have not addressed the issue of how social structure affects individuals. This leads us to the fourth main conservative assumptions about social structure: that it creates stability and order. The specific source of this stability is government, identified by Coleridge as "the idea of the state" (O'Sullivan 1976: 91), and identified by Scruton (1980: 19) as "the authority of established government"; i.e. "authority vested in a given office, institution or arrangement". It is at this point that agency comes back into what has so far been a structuralist portrait of conservative thought. A competing contradiction exists between conservatives on the issue of how government authority should be exercised in order to maintain the stability of society. On the one hand are conservative advocates of the free market, such as Willetts (1992), who argue that the organic nature of the free market reinforces a conservative view of society, which in turn creates stability. On the other hand are conservatives, such as Gray (2009), who see the market as merely one dimension of society, and one that must be balanced with others (Page 2015). Some in the British conservative tradition, such as Benjamin Disraeli, and to an extent Coleridge also, go further and suggest the market has the potential to *destroy* societal stability by introducing stark inequalities and an infinite rapidity of social change (O'Sullivan 1976).

The competing contradiction, which we will return to below in greater detail, is one that provides two clear paths for conservative thought, but both are ultimately faced with a more fundamental *constraining* contradiction between structure and agency. The agency attributed to government officials, especially in their dilemma between free market conservatism and the one nation conservatism of Disraeli, demonstrates *the power of the individual to immediately undo the long-standing stability of society*. This creates a contradiction, one that goes all the way back to Burke's (1790) founding conservative text, between the functionalist, evolving, durable and stable organism of society on the one hand, and the vast potential power of individual agents in killing the social organism and unravelling its complexly fragile fabric on the other. In O'Sullivan's discussion of Burke, he emphasises that the French Revolution clearly demonstrated "man's power to destroy completely a social order which had previously been accepted as natural and immutable" (O'Sullivan 1976: 11). It has been shown that the conservative functionalist vision of institutions relies on the assumption that they have endured for many generations in order to garner the collective wisdom of the ages. However, if individual agents have a vast destructive power through their ability to conceive of and disastrously implement rational utopias, it seems impossible that the social organism could have survived so long in the first place.

In an attempt to overcome this longstanding problem, conservative thought has ultimately imposed an ontological dualism between structure and agency. For example, Oakeshott argued that "the individual self or personality assumed in practice is separate, unique and self-contained, and stands in contrast to its environment" (Greenleaf 1966: 18). The strong separation of agency and structure is a notable commonality between conservatism and Marxism. O'Sullivan points out the similarity, suggesting that both doctrines "place great stress on the independence of the external world from man's will" (1976: 15), and he goes on further to suggest that both doctrines "rest upon the idea that historical change is governed by inner laws which determine the socio-economic structure of a community" (ibid). If social structure is a separate organic entity governed by its own 'inner laws', then agents have no way of controlling it and certainly cannot engineer it to perform specific functions (O'Sullivan 1976). Individuals, governed by their *own* inner laws, are held to possess a vastly destructive potential and are capable of devastating the fabric of society if they seek to manipulate the social organism. This ontological separation between structure and agency only makes the contradiction between the harmonious social structure and the destructive agent more obvious: if agency is powerfully destructive, how has a harmonious social organism managed to emerge from millennia of agential (inter)action?

(B) Material-cultural

Oakeshott's 'sceptical' conservatism provides an explicit and nuanced position on the material-cultural debate, with much of his work developed in an abstract philosophical style that stands in contrast to the 'pragmatism' of O'Sullivan (1976) and 'dogmatism' of Scruton (1980), labels that these two authors explicitly ascribe to themselves. This contrast however is not a pressing concern for the current discussion. What is perhaps more important is to assess the similarities and differences between Oakeshott and Hayek, who in some key respects represent an area of agreement between conservatism and neoliberalism. In making these comparisons, some of the threads of the current and previous sections can be brought together. However, this sub-section is primarily concerned with mapping the conservative position in the material-cultural debate, which is encapsulated by the following assumptions: an anti-foundationalist view of reality; a relativist approach to knowledge; an opposition to rationalism; a belief that ideas are embedded in institutions; and the suggestion that ideas are an emergent entity of *practice*, not of thought.

While much of this chapter is concerned with trying to identify *implicit* ontological assumptions, Oakeshott offers a shortcut by already arriving with a label: "philosophical idealist" (Eccleshall 1992: 174). Just as a structuralist would suggest that free-will is an illusion, and agency merely an epiphenomenon of structure, so a strict idealist would suggest that the material realm is an illusionary epiphenomenon of the cultural realm. Oakeshott would perhaps not state his position in such strong language, but a number of his ontological and epistemological assumptions do seem to preclude the causal significance of the material realm. Firstly, "Oakeshott rejects, as do all idealists, the claim [...] that objective reality is 'out there', something external to the human subject" (Eccleshall 1992: 174). If, "in a significant way, the world we inhabit is *a product of mind*" (ibid), then Oakeshott clearly identifies the cultural realm of ideas, beliefs and theory as the most prominent. It is worth noting that this again links strongly to Hegel's (1807) concept of Geist, with Eccleshall (1992) suggesting Hegel is one of Oakeshott's most important influences in this respect. This anti-foundationalism is inevitably tied up with a relativist concept of knowledge, because if 'mind' is determinate of matter than each individual mind produces a different experience that cannot be measured against any objective material reality.

These two claims of anti-foundationalism and relativism were both explored in the previous section in relation to Hayek's cultural-centred neoliberalism. A third significant ontological assumption shared between Oakeshott and Hayek is an opposition to rationalism. Both Hayek (O'Brien and Penna 1998: 79) and Oakeshott (Eccleshall 1992: 173) wrote their works in response to the post-war era of 'state rationalism', both rejecting the vision of full employment, economic planning and universal welfare. Therefore, not only do both thinkers reject rationally planned societies at an ontological level, both reject such societies on the basis of a particular historical experience of rational planning and the welfare state. As we have seen, the rejection of rationalism underpins a vision of an organically evolving society that prioritises structure over agency. However, this anti-rationalism also has implications for the conservative understanding of how the cultural and material realms *relate to one another*.

Oakeshott rejects *all* rational attempts to understand and change society, which includes a rejection of Hayek's liberalism. Oakeshott (1962) uses the imagery of a ship sailing in an endless ocean to represent a conservative conception of society, suggesting that there is no land and the ship has no destination but must be kept in good working order nonetheless. Hayek's ideal of individual freedom and a market

society are, in Oakeshott's metaphor, a fictional land towards which the ship is sailing. In his essay '*Why I am Not a Conservative',* Hayek himself claims that "what a liberal must ask, first of all, is not how fast or how far we should move, but *where* we should move" (Hayek 1960: 344). This demonstrates his belief in an abstract future society towards which we should travel, which is the ultimate source of the contradiction in Hayek's work between anti-rationalism and a rationally derived belief in individual liberty in the free-market, as outlined in the previous section. Oakeshott is much more consistent in his anti-rationalism, leading to another key conservative assumption on the material-cultural issue: that ideas, knowledge and beliefs (the cultural realm) are embedded in institutions, not devised by rational writers or thinkers. Therefore, real knowledge and useful ideas are not devised by authors like Hayek who sit down and decide that (a) individual liberty is the most important value, (b) the free-market is the best way to obtain this value, and (c) that we therefore need a programme of reform to implement a free-market. Instead, to Oakeshott, real knowledge and useful ideas are a naturally emergent property of *practice*.

This discussion has so far painted a picture of Oakeshott as an idealist who rejects a causal role for, and perhaps even the existence of, the material realm. However, the suggestion that knowledge is embedded in institutions and is an emergent property of practice seems to inconsistently suggest he is ultimately a materialist who sees material social practices as the *actual source* of ideas and knowledge. Hamilton (2016) argues that the conservative tradition explicitly advocates the conflation of the material and cultural aspects of social life, "for them, the ideal and the practical are inseparable". This creates a contradiction in Oakeshott's theory: his anti-foundationalism and relativism reject the idea that the material world can be an arbitrator on ontological questions, but his theory rests on the materialist ontological suggestion that knowledge is embedded in institutions and emergent from practice. Oakeshott's scepticism also has more practical problems that are partly a consequence of this ontological contradiction. Hayek suggests that this kind of conservatism can only advocate a slowing down of change, which means that it has "invariably been the fate of conservatism to be dragged along a path not of its own choosing" (Hayek 1960: 344). To conclude with an appropriation of Oakeshott's metaphor of the ship: even if conservatives believe only in the endless ocean, their theory has to take account of the fact that there will always be people aboard the societal ship trying to redirect it towards a promised land, be it socialist, liberal, fascist etc., and that the vision of society as an organism has to accept that these rationalist attempts at redirection are an undeniable part of society and an undeniable causal

force in its evolution. This relates back to the structure-agency issue, because the ship metaphor seems to focus only on social structure (the ship) and those intent on preserving it (the crew), without accounting for the agency of those intent on changing it. In other words, conservatism venerates the inherited social structure without acknowledging that those structures have partly (and in some cases significantly) been produced by (perhaps long-dead) rationalists and radicals; it is unclear whether this theoretical tension is the cause or the effect of the strong dualism between structure and agency.

(C) Welfare policy

There are no doubt many reasons why there is a lack of discussion about conservatism in the literature on welfare ideology, but one of these reasons perhaps relates to the variety of welfare models that can be advocated from a conservative position. The anti-rationalism of Oakeshott (Greenleaf 1966) and the free-market conservatism of Willetts (1992) create a strong opposition to the welfare-state, especially in the form it took during Britain's post-war era. Scruton's (1980) focus on the maintenance of stability through authority and Disraeli's one-nation conservatism (O'Sullivan 1976) lead to an active advocacy of the welfare state. In the wake of Hayek's criticism about conservatives being able only to control the *pace* of change, one could also argue that a third conservative position would advocate the maintenance of the welfare state on the basis that it has been in place for the best part of a century and that its dismantling would represent a radical and rationally motivated reform. The existence of these differing perspectives makes it difficult to identify any single conservative vision of welfare, but this does not mean that conservative ontological assumptions are not an important part of welfare policy. In the remainder of this section, each of the three positions outlined above will be considered briefly.

Oakeshott's anti-rationalism emphasises a key assumption that is common to all conservative thinkers: an opposition to any attempted micromanagement of social structure according to a rational blueprint. This approach led Oakeshott to oppose the implementation of the welfare state in post-war Britain (Eccleshall 1992), opposing both the demand management of Keynesian economics and the complex and comprehensive welfare provision controlled by the state. The complementarity between the twin assumptions of anti-rationalism and organic structural change leads conservatives like Willetts (1992) to suggest that the free-market advocacy is a central conservative tenet, as it removes the need for rationalist planning and in doing so allows social structure to evolve organically. Therefore, one conservative approach to

welfare provision is to transfer control from state to market and allow organic systems of welfare provision funded by private insurance policies. Although this approach is one shared by neoliberalism, the conservative advocacy of the marketisation of welfare is underpinned by different assumptions and motivated by the goal of *stability* rather than the goal of *freedom*.

From the second key conservative position, two British Conservative prime ministers are particularly notable for their advocacy of the *state* provision of welfare. Harold Macmillan "argued in favour of a mixed economy that combined private enterprise and state planning" in order to ensure 'social peace' and to try and provide a pragmatic middle way between capitalism and socialism (Taylor 2007: 32). The conservative idea that providing welfare creates a 'social peace' is one that dates back at least to Benjamin Disraeli, who originated the 'one nation' approach that saw the need for an alliance between a ruling aristocracy and the workers that they protected (O'Sullivan 1976). While O'Sullivan (1976) points out that the actual policies of Disraeli did not really match his one nation rhetoric, the idea that the upper classes offer paternalistic care to the working classes in exchange for support and obedience is one that has been notably durable in conservative thinking on welfare provision. Scruton, who sees the central conservative aim to be stability through government authority, argues therefore that state welfare provision is necessary both to reinforce government legitimacy and to bring stability to the lives of the poor. He states that "the posture of state is all-important, and that, without the state's surveillance, destitution and unemployment could result at any time" (Scruton 1980: 113).

Hayek's (1960) criticism that conservatism can only address the speed and not the direction of change leads to the characterisation of a third conservative position on welfare, in which the maintenance of the current welfare state is supported because it has, over the course of nearly a century, become a stable social institution. This position, though difficult to attribute to any key thinker, could perhaps best be associated with the modern Conservative Party's advocacy of the NHS. However, this question of opposition to radical and rational change, which is how this current discussion on conservatism began and will now conclude, relates directly to the constraining contradictions at the heart of the ideology. With regards to the structure-agency distinction, conservatism opposes radical and rational change on the two contradictory assumptions that (a) social structure is an organically evolving entity and (b) that individual agents possess vastly destructive powers in their attempts to change social structure. With regards to the material-cultural distinction, conservatism is

relativist and anti-foundationalist, while simultaneously offering a materialist ontology with the view that ideas are institutionally embedded and emergent from practice.

Section 4: Marxism and Social Democracy

This section will cover two political ideologies that, in the literature, are seen to be particularly important in the underpinning of welfare policies, but with regards to the current research are expected to only have limited relevance. Therefore, it is important to address these two welfare ideologies, but it is not necessary to explore them in any great detail. For this reason, Marxism and social democracy have been grouped together as the main approaches of the left, and will be analysed briefly in turn with regards to their ontological assumptions.

(A) Structure-agency

As Marxist assumptions are not expected to be a major part of the Coalition's ontological outlook, there is no requirement for this section to be anything other than brief. The Marxist position on the structure-agency debate is fractured and complicated, with Marx himself contributing one of the most oft quoted and perhaps most ambiguous statements on the matter: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1852: 1). One could argue that this statement attributes causal power both to individual agents and to social structures, but this would be to erroneously assume that Marx offers some theoretical model for fitting the two together. The ambiguity, which can be characterised as a contradiction between Marx's early and later works, coalesced into deeply entrenched and ongoing disagreements between Marx's successors. Therefore, structure and agency form a *constraining* contradiction within Marx's writings, but form a *competing* contradiction within the Marxist tradition as a whole.

In Marx's own works, *The Paris Manuscripts* (1844) give primacy to the role of the individual, but *Capital* (1867) gives a dominant role to social structure. For our current purposes the main argument to be made is that Marxism does not offer a coherent position on the structure-agency debate, but instead offers another arena in which the battle between structuralists and intentionalists can be fought. This battle is particularly notable in the disagreement between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas

over the nature of the state in a capitalist system. Poulantzas (1969: 75) took up the mantle of structuralism, claiming that "the State apparatus forms an *objective system* of special 'branches' whose relation presents a *specific internal unity* and obeys, to a large extent, *its own logic*". The idea of an 'objective system' obeying 'its own logic' demonstrates a structuralist determinism where agency is given little, if any, causal power in a Marxist ontology. As Miliband (1970: 57) argues in his famous reply, Poulantzas' "structural super-determinism makes impossible a truly realistic consideration of the dialectic relationship between the State and 'the system'".

However, Miliband's own position raises problems also. While Poulantzas temporarily side-steps the constraining contradiction between structure and agency by simply denying the existence of agency, Miliband overstates the power of agency by arguing that the focus of any Marxist state theory should be the *motivations* of the individual members of the capitalist class. The methodological individualism of Miliband's theory, however, cannot be characterised as *ontological individualism* because he clearly advocates some role for the structural power of institutions. The underlying problem with Miliband's position is not that he entirely denies the existence of structures, but that he implies that structural power can be fully co-opted by agents. In this view, 'the state' is a powerful structural instrument *to be wielded by* the agents of the capitalist class. Structure is therefore held to possess a causal power, but one that is at the disposal of agents rather than one that in any way conditions or constitutes agents or agency. It can therefore be argued that structure and agency form a *competing contradiction* in Marxism between a structuralist ontology and an instrumentalist ontology. This contradiction comes to directly affect the actions of Marxists, with some watching and waiting for the revolution and others actively trying to bring the revolution about through political organisation.

When we turn from Marxism to social democracy, there is no 'structural super-determinism' among its ontological assumptions, but this does not mean that structure does not play an important role in a social democratic ontology. To some extent, social democratic thought incorporates the Marxist competing contradiction between agency-centred accounts, encapsulated by the 'basic needs approach', and structure-centred accounts, as exhibited by the 'mutual reciprocity approach' (Hewitt 2000). The former focuses on the needs of individual agents, calling for the state to provide a basic minimum but allowing individuals to pursue other needs and desires in the open market. The latter focuses on the connections between individuals and the resultant social fabric that arises, calling for the creation of a fellowship of reciprocity in the

provision of needs and desires alike. However, it is a stretch to label this disagreement a *competing contradiction* at the ontological level; it is a disagreement about focus, but both approaches incorporate structure *and* agency into their ontologies. It is therefore more appropriate to discuss social democracy as a single ideology which has an ontology that includes both structure and agency. The immediate concern, therefore, is to assess how social democratic thinkers have dealt with the two concepts and the tension between them.

Hewitt (2000) discusses a number of social democratic thinkers, giving particular emphasis to the work of R.H. Tawney because "Tawney's thinking works with an ontology that separates inner-character and outer-environment, focussing policy on the latter in the hope that the former will adapt through material nourishment and encouragement" (ibid: 41). This characterisation of Tawney's ontology gives us a particularly useful insight because it shows that (1) social democracy entails an *ontological distinction between* structure and agency and (2) social democracy entails a belief that *structure can condition agency.* This second point leads social democratic thinkers to highly value social structure. As with conservatism, social democracy explicitly exhibits a *normative structuralism* underpinned by ontological assumptions that attribute social structure significant causal power. This comparison between conservative and social democratic approaches will help clarify the latter, especially when we look at how the two conceive of a different *relationship between* agency and structure. In social democratic approaches, structures need to be rationally considered and carefully planned to ensure that they maximise agency. In conservative approaches, structures need to be left to evolve organically to ensure that they maximise order in society. We can also bring in neoliberalism as a comparison, because neoliberal approaches argue that structures need to be initially planned before being left to evolve organically to ensure that they maximise agency.

These comparisons further specify the treatment of structure and agency in social democratic thought, allowing us to add that (3) social democracy is primarily concerned with maximising agency, in the sense that "governments should assist people in achieving their goals in life (Taylor 2007: 57) and (4) social democracy's ontological assumptions include the belief that agents can *intentionally design social structures* to fulfil this purpose. The implication of assumption (4) is that social democracy gives a much more prominent role to individual agency than is often assumed. Indeed, it is possible to argue that agency has primacy in a social democratic ontology because, although it is conditioned and distributed by structure, it

is assumed to have the power to intentionally reshape structure in such a way as to reshape human nature itself and in doing so further strengthen the spread of agency in society. One final addition needs to be made to this portrait of a social democratic ontology: whereas conservatism is concerned with authority and stability, social democracy is concerned with *power* (Scruton 1980). Power and agency are held to be effectively coterminous, to the extent that powerless individuals are at the mercy of social structures, while powerful individuals are able to control and direct them. Therefore, it is through the concept of power that social democracy seeks to resolve the structure-agency tension.

(B) Material-cultural

With regards to the material-cultural distinction, we can offer a clearer, if not entirely satisfactory, understanding of Marxist thought. Broadly speaking, Marxism is a materialist ideology, which supports the view that economic conditions *determine* culture, knowledge, ideas and beliefs. Such an evaluation can be made on the basis of Marx's distinction between 'base', the causal power of society's economic arrangements, and 'superstructure', the consequential social arrangements that derive from the base (Marx 1859). Marx's clarity about his materialism means that competing contradictions do not emerge in the same way as they did in relation to structure-agency. Thinkers who seek to discuss Marx's ideas from a cultural-centred ontology, such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985), take up the label 'post-Marxism', with the 'post-' primarily referring to the departure from materialism. However, this is not to say that all Marxist writers have been content with Marx's material determinism, with many Marxist thinkers seeking to incorporate a causal role for ideology in some form.

Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' is just one attempt, with the suggestion that the dominant class can establish control of the cultural structure and in doing so control the thoughts and beliefs of individuals. Critics point out that materialism still reigns, because hegemony is ultimately the *effect* of the material class conditions and is accorded little causal power in its own right (Archer 1996: 46-71). Miliband and Poulantzas in their influential dispute also cover the question of ideology, with Poulantzas arguing that ideology is embodied in institutions, forming "*the ideological apparatus of the state*" (1969: 77). Because of his structuralism, Poulantzas seems to be giving a causal role to *ideas themselves* when they are embodied in institutions. Predictably, Miliband disagrees, but he does not disagree about the notion that ideas can be embodied in institutions; he disagrees about whether these institutions are part of the state. Miliband (1970: 59) claims that ideological institutions "*are* part of a system

of power" but "retain a very high degree of autonomy" from the state. Miliband therefore seems to go further in giving ideology a causal role, and therefore seems to put more emphasis on the cultural realm. Despite these varying causal roles for the cultural realm, Gramsci, Poulantzas and Miliband all operate within a Marxist framework that fundamentally gives priority to the material aspects of society. They essentially face the same problem as Oakeshott, who also attempts to build a theory around the assumption that ideas are *embedded* in institutions.

When considering the material-cultural distinction in social democratic thought, Hewitt argues that an assumption of primary relevance is that "moral rather than material ends govern individuals" (2000: 37). To suggest people's motivations are governed by their thoughts and ideas rather than their material interests, points towards a clear departure from Marxist thought, and suggests social democracy ontologically prioritises the cultural over the material. The framework offered by Le Grand supports Hewitt's claim. Le Grand (2003) distinguishes two models of human agency: 'knaves', who are the self-interested individuals theorised by neoliberalism, and 'knights', who are the altruistic individuals theorised by social democracy. This altruism ensures that people do not act on the basis of material interests, and instead turn to morality, seeking what is best for others or for the collective good. However, the implication that a social democratic ontology is culture-centred stands in contradiction to its broader concern with material conditions.

If individuals were motivated only by ideas and morality, the mode of production in society would clearly be of little importance. Social democracy *does* play down the importance of the mode of production, rejecting the Marxist calls for the abolishment of the capitalist market (Taylor 2007), but it does not consider the market an *irrelevance*. As discussed in relation to structure-agency, social democracy is underpinned by the suggestion that structures can be created to increase agency through empowerment; these structures primarily involve meeting basic material needs. Therefore, the material conditions clearly do matter in determining who has the freedom or capacity to exercise their moral altruism, or perhaps in determining whether people can become altruistic in the first place. Material conditions can ensure that individuals without power and agency are unable to exercise *cultural agency* and are therefore at the mercy of material structures. Although the ontological assumptions of social democracy offer one of the most balanced and nuanced visions of the material-cultural distinction, there is a fundamental gap with relation to *cultural structure,* with ideas themselves given little causal power in their own right.

(C) Welfare policy

This two paragraph discussion of the welfare policies of social democracy and Marxism can only excuse its brief treatment of a vast subject because of its limited relevance to the current research project. Marxism, at least in its revolutionary forms, ultimately aims for the establishment of a communist society, which effectively means that the question of welfare is not one to be answered by a particular government department or a particular area of academic literature; it is instead a central goal (if not the central goal) of the communist society. On this basis, the existing 'welfare state' is simply a form of capitalism, 'welfare capitalism', within which the collective welfare cannot be met, because the provision of welfare benefits is merely the function by which capitalism provides a reserve of labour and maintains its public support (George and Wilding, 1994). This view can be maintained through intentionalist or structuralist Marxist explanations. An intentionalist Marxism view would argue that the agents of the state have intentionally created the welfare state in order to maintain and further their interests as capitalists, while a structuralist view would argue that the welfare state has emerged in response to a threat to capitalism. Either way, welfare provision in capitalism is assumed to be the product of material forces working in the interest of the capitalist system. Despite the influence of Marxism in many other regards, "its influence upon western social policies has been marginal" (Fitzpatrick 2011: 138).

George and Wilding (1994) identify a number of key social democratic positions in relation to welfare policy: firstly, an 'unreserved support' for the welfare state; secondly, an aim of eliminating poverty, especially child poverty; thirdly, a strong support of education to overcome inequality of opportunity; fourthly an expansion of social services in order to stimulate the economy and promote social integration. However, these various positions, can mean very different things in practice, as can be seen in Fitzpatrick's claim that social democracy combines democratic socialism and social liberalism (Fitzpatrick 2005). This means that in any particular time or context, social democracy can be a type of socialism, a type of liberalism or somewhere in between. 'Democratic socialism' sees the implementation of a welfare state as a step on the way to a socialist society (George and Wilding 1994), whereas 'social liberalism' seeks to provide equality of opportunity so that individuals may fulfil their potential (Fitzpatrick 2001). In terms of structure-agency, any type of social democratic welfare policy aims to change the social structure so as to increase the agency of the disadvantaged, but a more liberal type largely involves the identification and removal of unfair barriers that prevent individuals fulfilling their goals, while a more socialist type

involves the reorganisation of society so as to change the very goals that individuals have in the first place (e.g. in opposition to consumerism and in the attempt to create a more altruistic society). It would seem, therefore, that social liberalism seeks change through material and agential leavers, while democratic socialism seeks change through cultural and structural leavers.

Conclusion

With Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 having established the theoretical framework for analysis, this chapter has set that analysis in motion by offering *an ideational map of ontological assumptions in British welfare ideology*. By integrating existing analyses of welfare ideology, this chapter has identified four ideologies that are particularly prominent in the literature, and has offered a detailed analysis of each in terms of their ontological assumptions. Clearly, this process of identification and inclusion is necessarily a process of simplification and exclusion. This chapter has been limited as a map of welfare ideologies in a number of ways: it focusses specifically on the British ideological context; it focusses on a *limited number of ideologies* and a *limited number of theorists* within those ideologies; and, it has had a primary focus on the *right-wing* of British politics. However, these various limitations can be justified for two main reasons. Firstly, this research is specifically directed towards the UK Coalition Government, making it necessary to consider the ideological terrain within which the Coalition operated and the ideological heritage of the two constituent parties, with particular attention paid to the Conservatives as the dominant partner. Secondly, as there is only a limited amount of space within which to draw the ideational map, it is necessary to ensure the attainment of sufficient theoretical depth. In terms of 'ontology analysis', the theoretical depth is important because it is unlikely to be attainable in the analysis of actual policy documents. Chapters 4-6 are able to refer back to these positions and features, conceived of as an 'ideational map', which therefore deepens the overall analysis. To this end, it will be useful to conclude the current chapter with a summary of the main ideas that are held to form the ideational map.

In neoliberalism a constraining contradiction exists between the freedom of the individual and the specific necessity of the state-market nexus as the only structured context within which that freedom can exist. Also, a competing contradiction exists between the culturalist neoliberal model of the habitual agent and materialist neoliberal model of the rational agent. Within the conservative ideological tradition, there is a contradictory separation of structure, as an organic evolutionary stabilising force, and

agency, as a constant destructive threat to the structures of society. Conservative theory also contains contradictory strands of thought on the material-cultural question, with some conservatives arguing that knowledge is practical and develops within (material) institutions, while others exclude the material altogether on the basis of philosophical idealism. Marxist ideology is riven by the most explicit disagreement about structure-agency, with a famous competing contradiction between Marxist structuralists and Marxist intentionalists. Marxism's explicit and inherent materialism creates a constraining contradiction for any Marxists who attempt to allocate a significant causal role to ideas. Finally, social democracy argues that an individual's agency is the product of the social context, specifically related to the power that the individual has within that context, leading to a central concern with redesigning social structures so that they maximise agency and equalise power. Perhaps deriving from Marxist influences, social democracy's coherent modelling of structure-agency is largely underpinned by *materialism* and subsequent contradictory attempts to incorporate the causal power of ideas.

These various positions and contradictions appear regularly in the remaining chapters of the thesis, where policy assumptions are identified that appear to closely align with the ontological assumptions of neoliberalism, conservatism, and even occasionally social democracy. It is worth concluding this chapter with some brief examples of the way in which these welfare ideologies arise in the analysis to come. A particularly useful and important example is the Conservative Party's attempt to rethink their position on social policy while in opposition under the leadership of David Cameron (explored in detail in Chapter 4, Section 1, and Chapter 5, Section 1). During this time, the Conservative Party's social policy review group offered an explanation of poverty based primarily on the notion of 'family breakdown'. In a number of policy documents from this period, the causes of family breakdown are identified using material-centred neoliberal assumptions about the role of incentives in decreasing the number of marriages and increasing the number of unemployed parents. However, simultaneously, there are cultural-centred neoliberal assumptions focussed a culture of worklessness that passes down generations and spreads within communities. The strand of culture-centred neoliberalism is also closely linked to conservative assumptions about the need to maintain the traditional family structure of two heterosexual married parents, and with a more general concern that over recent decades these family structures have been declining. Conservative assumptions are further reinforced by a discussion of the social 'fabric' and the ways in which it is fraying and tearing; such analogies closely align with the organic and enduring conception of

social structure. Finally, although they are short-lived, there are also some social democratic assumptions implicated in the Conservative Party social policy review documents; notably, there is a concern with how material deprivation of children affects the overall life-course of adults. These examples show the diversity of assumptions identified during the Conservative Party's policy review, and give some indication of how the ideational map outlined in this chapter will be used in the remainder of the thesis.

This ideational map indicates some of the major ontological contradictions and assumptions that appear in welfare ideology. The complexity of party politics means that we cannot assume that any particular party will replicate one of these positions or even offer some simple combination of these positions. It is much more likely that each party contains a huge variety of ontological assumptions, some more widespread than others, some more coherent than others, and some more intertextually networked than others. In addition to considering the sheer complexity of ontological assumptions in British politics, we must also consider a distinction between beliefs held by individuals and beliefs held within texts, where texts are defined by their constitution in language. Understanding both is necessary for any attempt to identify the ontological assumptions of a political party, but this research project is focussed specifically on identifying ontological assumptions in *government policy* and is therefore only a partial contribution to the wider project identifying the ontological positioning of parties. The inevitable complexity of ontological assumptions in this thesis has been mitigated partly by focussing specifically on *texts and public policy* rather than *individuals and party ideology*, but it has also been more productively mitigated through ideational map outlined in this chapter.

<u>Chapter 4</u>

The Conservative Party and Coalition Social Policy

Introduction

With the theoretical groundwork complete, we can now move to the political and policy context within which the Coalition Government passed its social security policy. When David Cameron was elected leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, he set about a project of 'modernisation' that sought to make major changes to the party's image and policy programme. Regardless of whether this was a party-rebranding for the purposes of electoral strategy or a profound ideologically shift in the party's orientation, the ideas produced in the 'modernisation period' ultimately became entrenched in the social policy reform of the Coalition Government. The key elements of these ideas were the (i) 'Big Society', (ii) 'social justice', (iii) 'broken Britain', and (iv) the 'responsibility agenda'. Together, they entail a complex mix of ontological assumptions: 'the Big Society' was an attempt (sincere or otherwise) to overcome the agency-centred individualism of the Thatcher years, and the supposedly structure-centred collectivism of the New Labour years; the emphasis on 'social justice' involved a cultural explanation of poverty and an awareness that the social context affects individual disadvantage; the 'broken Britain' discourse offers a view of society as a social fabric, which is fundamentally composed of family structures, and an ambiguous role for individual family members; finally, the responsibility agenda emphasised the duty and causal power of individual agents.

This mix of assumptions is unpacked and explored in Section 1, where each of these major discourses of Conservative Party modernisation, and subsequently of the Coalition Government, are explored in detail. This detail effectively entails the identification of ontological controversies and their situation within the political context. In Section 2, the focus shifts from the political context to the social policy context, allowing for an identification of ontological controversies within the actual policies of the Coalition Government. Section 2 begins by explaining and justifying a further narrowing of the research focus, excluding social policy beyond the DWP (e.g. health and

education), and excluding certain policy areas within the DWP (e.g. disability and pensions). Instead of replicating the five themes used in Section 1, the discussion of the social policy context in Section 2 uses three main themes based on particular policy reforms: (i) benefit caps, (ii) Universal Credit, and (iii) workfare. (iv) Disability benefits are also considered, given their acknowledged importance in Coalition welfare reform but there is not space for their analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

Therefore, this chapter explores the Coalition Government's ontological assumptions in two different contexts: the political-ideological context and the social policy context. Each relates to a different focus of the analysis, with the former focussing on the ideological orientation of political parties and the latter focussing on the nature and details of the social policy reforms. Each of these two contexts also entails an engagement with a distinct area of the academic literature. This chapter therefore aims to situate the research within both the British politics literature and the social policy literature. Central to this approach is the identification of ontological questions, tensions, and contradictions that act as focal points for the primary document analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Furthermore, the very selection of those policy documents is based on, and justified by, the analysis presented in the current chapter.

Section 1: The political-ideological context

In this section, the analysis focusses on the ideology of the Cameron-era Conservative Party and of the Coalition Government, and is organised according to a number of key themes in the Conservative/Coalition discourse. Rather than hope to group together all political discourses of this era into an exhaustive categorisation, the most achievable approach is to pick out the most important discourses as identified in the literature and focus on those that relate directly to social policy. Firstly, both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats underwent a self-ascribed period of 'modernisation' in the years preceding the Coalition. Leading figures in both parties, though particularly David Cameron's faction within the Conservatives, used the discourse of 'modernisation' in an attempt to increase their electoral chances and to shift their party's ideology closer to an imagined centre-ground (McAnulla 2010). As a key part of this project in the Conservative Party, multiple authors identify 'the Big Society' as the flagship policy in the run up to the 2010 general election (Hayton 2014; Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014).

Indeed, Cameron himself claimed that the Big Society was "a guiding philosophy" and "the thread that runs consistently through [the] whole policy programme" (Cameron 2010 quoted in Smith 2010). Although the Big Society proved unsuccessful as a communicative device, and was subsequently dropped as a prominent discourse, its underlying ideas remained central to Coalition policy as a whole and to social policy in particular.

Another key theme in Conservative discourse, 'broken Britain', can be seen as the critique of current society from which the policy solutions of the Big Society were developed (Evans 2011). As with the Big Society, the notion of broken Britain began to fade throughout the Coalition period, but its importance in shaping DWP policy in particular justifies a closer analysis. Fourthly, the discourse of 'responsibility' is one that features prominently in the literature. Atkins (2015) identifies 'responsibility' as the most important of the Coalition's three guiding principles, which also include 'freedom' and 'fairness'. Because the notion of responsibility is central to the conservative belief in duty and the neoliberal belief in self-reliance, analysis of this discourse opens up possibilities for linking back to the ideological discussion undertaken in Chapter 3. Furthermore, responsibility is the central concept of the Big Society (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley 2014), which in turn is a cure for the 'broken Britain' diagnosis (Evans 2011). Fifthly, 'social justice' is a crucial discourse because it was within the '*Social Justice* Policy Group' and in collaboration with the 'Centre for *Social Justice*' that the Conservative Party developed their 'new' approach to welfare. Once in government as part of the Coalition, these policies were pursued as part of the *social justice* agenda. In summary, five discourses will be analysed in this section: modernisation, the Big Society, social justice, broken Britain, and responsibility.

Modernisation

The 1997 general election defeat not only ended an 18 year period of continuous Conservative government, but saw the party achieve their lowest number of seats in over 90 years. In response, the newly elected leader William Hague led an attempted 'modernisation', but, as Hayton (2012) argues, his failure to significantly shift the party's neo-Thatcherite ideology, his failure to develop a narrative with mainstream appeal, and his failure to imbue the party's faltering image with 'governing competence', were key factors in the party's 2001 electoral defeat, and Hague's subsequent replacement by Iain Duncan Smith. The selection of both leaders can be traced back to competing ideologies (Heppell and Hill 2005) that each offer different responses to the legacy of Thatcherism. Duncan Smith's two year leadership was

marked by internal party tensions and a growing doubt over his personal qualities. A notable event of his leadership was his imposition of a three-line whip to vote against same-sex adoption in 2002 (Hayton 2012: 11). This is important because of Duncan Smith's future influence over welfare policy, and particularly his future emphasis on the importance of 'fatherhood' in solving social problems.

Shortly after the party ousted Duncan Smith from his position, and therefore after another failed period of 'modernisation' (Hayton 2012), the new party leader Michael Howard allowed a free vote on the related issue of same-sex civil partnerships in an attempt to show that the Conservative Party truly was modernising. Although this may have initially indicated Howard's modernising credentials, his leadership was actually noted for its reactionary Thatcherite principles and particularly for its right-wing manifesto in 2005, which focussed on traditional Conservative issues of migration, taxation, and criminal justice. David Cameron's authorship of this manifesto may have indicated to many at the time that he advocated a Thatcherite traditionalism. However, following the Conservative Party's defeat at the 2005 election, David Cameron's own bid for leadership was explicitly characterised by a 'moderate' and 'modernising' positioning.

In his 2005 conference speech, which Denham and Dorey (2006: 41) argue was the turning point in his campaign to be party leader, Cameron promised 'fundamental change', emphasised social problems, and explicitly distanced himself from Thatcherism (see Extracts 4.1 and 4.2). However, it would seem Cameron's 'fundamental' shift was, for many party members, *necessary* rather than *desirable*; Evans (2008: 292) argues that "the main reason why Cameron was elected party leader was that the Conservatives thought that he was the candidate most likely to win them the next election". Hickson (2009: 356) offers a variation on this same point, suggesting that "it was only after the third successive General Election defeat that the modernisers were able to provide a clearer sense of ideological direction". Cameron's early vision of modernisation has been characterised as 'socially liberal' (Heppell and Hill 2009). As a key example, Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski (2006: 18) note Cameron's "intention to increase the representation of women at Westminster", which entails an acknowledgement (though an insufficient one in the view of those authors) that structural constraints prevent women entering politics. Cameron's broader strategy involved explicit distance (though not rejection) of the Thatcher years, with silence on traditional issues of Europe, immigration, criminal justice, and tax, and a new focus on health, education and the environment (Bale 2009). This change in the focus of party

discourse was also accompanied by a major review of party policy, in which five policy groups were tasked with a radical rethink of the Conservative position. Although a significant shift seemed to be underway in the 2005-2008 period, it must be acknowledged that Cameron's position was fragile due to his thinly spread and uncommitted support among MPs, party members, and voters (O'Hara 2007), and it must also be acknowledged that doubts remained over Cameron's sincerity, with Evans suggesting that Cameron's own Thatcherite tendencies were "just as much a barrier to change as the party he led" (Evans, S. 2008: 293).

Extract 4.1: "We have to change and modernise our culture and attitudes and identity. When I say change, I'm not talking about some slick rebranding exercise: what I'm talking about is fundamental change." (Cameron 2005)

Extract 4.2: "We know we have a shared responsibility, that we're all in this together, that there is such a thing as society; it's just not the same thing as the state." (Cameron 2005)

Although the Conservative modernisation period is often presented in terms of its rebranding and detoxification, many argue there was an underlying attempt to offer a new vision of British conservatism. Bochel (2010: 3) points out the importance of Iain Duncan Smith's 'compassionate conservatism', which found "an audience, particularly amongst a group of new, young Conservative MPs" who eventually came to prominence during Cameron's leadership. Dorey (2007) identifies a host of particular policy changes that underscore this shift towards a new conservatism, including a concern with 'work-life balance', 'general well-being', and an active criticism of excessive consumerism. In contrast, Finlayson (2007), Kerr (2007), O'Hara (2007), and Norton (2008) all argue, in various ways, that Cameron's modernisation project was a return to a pre-Thatcherite form of 'conservatism', concerned with localism, preservation, and moral duty. Despite an apparent cleavage in the literature, the idea that the Cameron modernisation period represented an old form of conservatism updated for modern times seems to effectively align with the view that it represented a new form of conservatism based on old principles. In a more significant contrast, an alternative view is offered by those authors, like Evans (2008), who doubt the sincerity of Cameron's departure from Thatcherism. The suggestion that Conservative Party modernisation had effectively been a rhetoric to disguise an underlying commitment to Thatcherism became a much more convincing interpretation as the Conservative Party responded to the 2007-8 financial crash.

Numerous observers (Bale 2009; Dorey 2009; Bochel 2010) point out the problem that the crash caused for the modernisation project and the difficulty the Conservative Party had in responding. However, after some initial confusion, a new version of the modernisation project emerged in which New Labour's high spending (pre-crash) and state-interventionism (post-crash) were characterised as part of the left's historic failure to manage the economy. This change of tack "led friends and foes alike to claim (accurately or not) that [Cameron] was returning to Thatcherism" (Fielding 2009: 169). Therefore, the modernisation period, including its pre- and post-crash phases, would seem to allow numerous interpretations. The pre-crash era could be seen as a new form of conservatism or the revival of an old form of conservatism, though both claims ultimately entail a similar position. On the basis of this position, one could interpret the post-crash era as a new electoral strategy for the implementation of this new/old conservative vision, or one could interpret the post-crash era as a genuine return to Thatcherism. An entirely different strand of thought can be based on the view that Cameron's *initial* departure from Thatcherism was *never* sincere, and that the pre-crash modernisation discourse was effectively a repackaging of Thatcherism, or even an attempt to hide a full-blown Thatcherite project. On this basis, the packaging and the masks could be removed in the post-crash era, when political events allowed a return to true colours.

Hayton (2014) observes that this debate about whether Cameron repackages Thatcherism, reworks it, or departs from it for an updated version of traditional conservatism, ultimately rests on disagreements about whether Cameron's leadership is "essentially driven by pragmatism" or "underpinned by a robust ideological agenda" (Hayton 2014: 6). While debates about the specific causes of Conservative Party change are beyond the current research, this thesis seeks to unite both causes through its model of material-cultural interaction presented in Chapter 2. However, rather than putting that model into action, the analysis to come remains focussed on the role of ontological assumptions, and will therefore contribute significantly to the understanding of the 'ideological agenda' and an assessment of its 'robustness'. Hayton (2014) also argues that the most significant step in Cameron's attempted modernisation was his agreement to form the Coalition Government in 2010; it is therefore necessary to consider the other partner in that coalition.

In the years leading up to the 2010 general election, the Liberal Democrats had also been undergoing a period of 'modernisation'. Three long-standing points of

tension had always existed within the Liberal Democrats: firstly, disagreement over whether the party should join coalitions (Bogdanor 2007); secondly, tensions between a strong grass-roots tradition and a growing parliamentary party (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2011); and thirdly, an ideological divide between social liberals and economic liberals (Grayson 2007). In response to New Labour's increased public spending and economic liberalism, the Liberal Democrats found little to challenge, leading them instead to emphasise their opposition to New Labour's interventionist foreign policy and general state centralisation (Grayson 2007). The Liberal Democrats' growing concern with the size and power of the state was expressed by the publication of the *Orange Book* in 2004, which laid out a number of localised and market-based alternatives to Labour's perceived statist and centralising tendencies. Although the detail-light policy review of 2005-6 led broadly to consensus (Dorey and Denham 2007), tensions were growing over dissatisfaction with Charles Kennedy's leadership, the electoral threat of Cameron (Denham and Dorey 2006), and the *Orange Book* challenge to the party's social liberal orthodoxy (Grayson 2010).

By the time of the 2007 Liberal Democrat leadership election, the party was faced with a choice between two candidates who both hailed from the economically liberal 'Orange Book tradition' (Francis 2010). After a "bad-tempered" contest and a close result (Francis 2010), the victor Nick Clegg immediately set about reforming party structures (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2011). The vehicle of this reform, 'the Bones Commission', significantly advanced a longer-term trend of party centralisation and, although policy-making remained a relatively democratic process, there was a significant increase in the power of the leadership (Evans and Sanderson-Nash 2011). After the promising election campaign of 2010 had delivered a small decrease in seats, the Liberal Democrats found themselves king-makers, and therefore facing a crucial decision. The parliamentary maths, the increased power of the leadership, the ascendancy of the Orange Book liberals, the ascendancy of the coalition-supporting tradition, opposition to Labour's statism and foreign policy, ideological overlap with Cameron's modernisation, and the first chance of power in a generation, all converged towards one outcome: a full coalition between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives.

The Big Society

The 'Big Society' is often considered as a rhetorical stratagem. It is can be seen as an unsuccessful attempt by the Conservative Party in the 2010 general election to communicate the social policy accompaniment to its economic austerity. However, here

the concept will be considered as an opportunity to identify the party's underlying ideas and therefore their ontological assumptions. On this basis, the Big Society can be conceived of as an answer to an ideological problem that predates the rhetoric. McAnulla (2010) argues that in Cameron's attempt to appeal to the psephological centre, he copied New Labour's search for an ideological 'third way' between "the damaging effects of economic state interventionism and libertarian individualism" (McAnulla 2010: 311). The search for the centre ground may have been motivated by political expediency, but it was in part ideological, and indeed *ontological*, in that Cameron's modernisation sought to take up assumptions that rejected the extremes of collectivism and individualism, and by extension the structure-centred and agency-centred justifications that respectively underpin these 'extremes'. However, avoiding these two extremes is a difficult ideological challenge that relies not just on negotiating the political, economic, and discursive contexts but also relies on a successful negotiation of the structured nature of *ideas*, and ultimately on finding a coherent answer to the structure-agency question. The Big Society was an attempt to answer this challenging theoretical question.

In the early development of his position, Cameron turned to the 'civic conservatism' of David Willetts, the 'neighbourly society' envisaged by Oliver Letwin, and the 'compassionate conservatism' advocated by Iain Duncan Smith (Kerr 2007: 49; Hickson 2009: 357). As has already been mentioned, there is disagreement in the literature about whether these influences represent a revival of one-nation Conservatism (Hickson 2009), or a *new* strand of Conservatism (Dorey 2007), but either way it is clear that they are central to Cameron's modernisation project. The common theme of these overlapping influences is the promotion of 'civil society' as an arena in which non-state (and non-market) collective-actors provide services and solutions to social problems. Under the influence of Willetts, the "emphasis on *individualism* has been replaced by a discourse stressing *collective* activity through the institutions of civil society", and under the influence of Letwin, there is the acceptance "that *society had a role in shaping individual behaviour*" (Hickson 2009: 357). This idea, which was later branded the Big Society, became Cameron's guiding philosophy. Crucially, the notion of bottom-up, non-state collectivism offers the promise of transcending the individualism-collectivism divide, but only if a coherent answer to the structure-agency question is also implicated.

Kerr, Byrne and Foster (2011: 196) argue that 'Cameronism' and its central tenet of 'the Big Society' were, even in the pre-crash years, little more than

"Thatcherism with a human face". Although they reject the idea that Cameron directly continued Thatcher's project, they argue that Cameron, Blair and Thatcher all offer a variant of "the neoliberal governmental project" (ibid: 198). In this view, the Big Society never contained genuine commitments to collectivist principles, but was instead "nothing more than [a] recycled Thatcherite [slogan] in inverted form", which operated as a rhetorical device to hide the central neoliberal agenda of rolling back the state (ibid: 198). If the Big Society is a largely hollow concept operating as a rebranding of neoliberalism that combines a Thatcherite philosophy with a Blairite presentation, then it does not merely fail as an ideological third way but it fails to be a genuine attempt to forge one. From the Kerr, Byrne and Foster (2011) perspective, Cameron had used the Big Society as a way of disguising the neoliberal commitment to ideological individualism, and by extension ontological agentialism.

Where Kerr et al (2011) argue that the Big Society was a rebranding of Thatcherism, Smith (2010) argues that the Big Society was an attempt to deal with the contradiction that emerged between large-scale reductions in public spending and a commitment to maintaining the level of public service. Smith and Ker et al agree that Cameron explicitly commits to both a Thatcherite reduction in the state and a New Labour commitment to public service, and that 'the Big Society' agenda is in some way an attempt to deal with the contradiction. However, the disagreement between these authors arises not over what Cameron *says*, but about what Cameron *means*. On the one hand, Kerr et al argue that while the state-reduction commitments were genuine, the public service commitments were merely rhetoric to disguise them; the Big Society therefore becomes a further layer of insincere rhetoric to disguise the subsequent rhetorical contradictions. On the other hand, Smith seems to suggest that the simultaneous commitments to state-reduction and public service are *both* genuine and that the Big Society agenda is a sincere attempt to overcome the contradictions between them. However, when Smith looks back on the Coalition era in his collaboration with Rhonda Jones (Smith and Jones 2015), they do acknowledge that, regardless of whether Cameron meant what he said during the modernisation period, the actual result of the Conservative led coalition was a shrinking of the state, focussed particularly on welfare, a reduction in public service provision, and a lack of any notable 'Big Society' solutions.

Therefore, the Smith interpretation of the Big Society can be summarised in the following four steps... (1) Cameronism begins from the view that state-provided services should instead be community-provided services (aka the Big Society), a view

that combines collectivist notions of service provision with an individualist rejection of statism; (2) faced with the financial crash and Labour's response, Cameronism incorporated the view that there needed to be a significant reduction in state spending; (3) the Big Society therefore came to embody the view that the roll-back of the state would create a spontaneous roll-forward of civil society; (4) but, when put into action, this roll-forward unfortunately failed to materialise. An alternative interpretation of Cameronism put forward by Kerr et al, suggests that the Big Society was a discursive ruse rather than a genuine theory, and that Cameron's approach had always implicitly entailed a commitment to significant reduction in state spending and always implicitly held an individualist rejection of tax-and-spend service provision, regardless of whether it was delivered by the state or not.

The first interpretation suggests that the Big Society was a failed attempted to overcome ideological contradictions, while the second interpretation suggests that the Big Society attempted to overcome *discursive* contradictions in order to disguise an unchanged ideological stance. Although it is difficult to settle these different interpretations in this research, it is shown in Chapter 6 that a number of contradictions between collectivism and individualism, and between structural and agential explanations, find their way into the welfare policy of the Coalition. Therefore, whether the notion of the Big Society was an attempted ideological synthesis or a rhetorical device, it eventually became embedded in social policy in such a way that its logical coherence *matters*. It is therefore worth looking at two contradictions of the Big Society that are identified in the literature.

Firstly, Smith and Jones (2015) build on Smith's (2010) earlier analysis, identifying the contradiction between the civic conservatism of the Big Society agenda and the rational choice theory that pervades much of the Coalition's approach to government. This contradiction is a manifestation of a deeper ontological contradiction relating to material-centred and cultural-centred approaches. Smith's analysis shows that the 2010 Conservative manifesto was "underpinned by an apparent rational choice ontology" (Smith 2010: 830), and can therefore be seen as an example of the material-centred neoliberalism discussed in Chapter 3, insofar as it relies on a view of human nature as rational, financially motivated and ultimately self-serving. In contrast, the Big Society, and its underlying influences of compassionate/civic conservatism, posits a view of human nature as community-spirited, altruistic and motivated by moral duty. Unlike the neoliberal materialism of the rational choice approach, the Big Society is more difficult to situate within the ideational map laid out in Chapter 3. Smith and Jones

(2015) clearly link the ideas of the Big Society to traditional conservative ideology, emphasising the moral dimension and referring directly to Burke's vision of 'little platoons', an association also made by Kenny (2009), McAnulla (2010) and Barker (2011). The reliance on the moral duty of the agent and the organic formation and development of institutions within communities further underlies this connection to a conservative ontology. However, a conservative ideology also warns against radical change (such as rapid state retrenchment), rejects significant redistributions of power (such as those explicitly claimed by the Big Society agenda), and also would look to *existing* institutions to provide services and solve problems, rather than trying to create new ones over the course of a single parliament. It can be argued therefore that on the material-cultural question, the Big Society agenda combines conservatism with cultural-centred neoliberalism, two positions that already have a historical and theoretical overlap, as discussed in Chapter 3. Regardless of the weighting in this combination, this means that the Big Society project ultimately stands in contrast to the rational choice material-centred neoliberalism of the 2010 Conservative Party Manifesto (Smith 2010).

The second contradiction of the Big Society exists within the logic of the idea itself, and relates to the assumptions about which causal force will actually make the Big Society theory a reality. Hopkin and Viarengo (2012) argue that the concrete policies of the Big Society, which only "took shape after the formation of the coalition", involved "proposals to decentralise decision-making in the health service and the education sector, as well as a range of reforms to the welfare state that are likely to create a vacuum of public provision in some areas" (Hopkin and Viarengo 2012: 126). The contradiction that emerges relates to the nature of this 'vacuum' and "whether we can entertain the prospect of forces of social cohesion emerging 'naturally' as a response to fragmentation, or whether they have to be created, as it were, 'artificially', and if so, by what agency?" (Buckler and Dolowitz 2012: 588). McAnulla asks: how can they "hope to promote social responsibility at all levels of society, without either falling back into authoritarian action by government, or engaging in heavy moral sermonising"? (McAnulla 2010: 308). Therefore, the question is effectively by what causal force is the Big Society to be created? If the Big Society is created by the vacuum of the state's absence, then there would have to be a gap between state retreat and Big Society growth, which would necessarily represent a period of time without public services, in which the need of individuals would have to grow to sufficient levels to instigate the spontaneous creation of voluntary services. If the Big Society requires the actions and financing of the state, then it is undermined by the

austerity programme of the Coalition Government. If the Big Society relies on the dutiful actions of morally responsible individuals, it is unclear what the state can actually do other than wait for these individuals to form the Big Society, which begs the question of why they haven't already done so.

Social justice

After a moment of 'epiphany' on a visit to the deprived Glasgow suburb Easterhouse in 2002, and after being deposed as Conservative leader in 2003, Iain Duncan Smith established the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) in 2004, which became the think tank from which he espoused a programme of welfare reform and developed an ideological position that fleshed out his leadership-era slogan of 'compassionate conservatism'. It is certainly possible to identify Iain Duncan Smith's ideological influence *via* the Big Society agenda, but it was through the 2006 Conservative Party policy review that he and his think tank began to have a *direct* influence on the party's ideological positioning. The policy review began with the document *Built to Last* (Conservative Party 2006), in which Cameron laid out the broad "aims and values" that the party would embody. After the publication of *Built to Last*, a policy review was undertaken, chaired by Oliver Letwin, whose ideological influence we have already noted in regards to 'the neighbourly society'. Six different policy groups were established to review and overhaul Conservative policy in preparation for an expected 2009-10 general election. As these groups reported back, their findings and recommendations were collated by party leadership into a series of 14 policy papers, collectively entitled 'The Responsibility Agenda'.

The six policy groups were: 'National and International Security', 'Globalisation and Global Poverty', 'Economic Competitiveness', 'Public Service Improvement', 'Quality of life', and 'Social Justice'. Because the 'Public Service Improvement Policy Group' dealt primarily with housing, education, and health, and because the 'Social Justice Policy Group' dealt primarily with social security and poverty, it is notable that the Conservative approach to social policy made a distinction between those welfare institutions that provided for most, if not all, of the population, such as the NHS, and those welfare institutions that provided for those disadvantaged by poverty, unemployment and disability, such as Jobcentre Plus. Although, by focussing on the latter strand, this research is effectively reinforcing the Conservative Party's problematic distinction between these two areas of social policy, there is simply not the space here to challenge the distinction and explore both policy areas together. It is important to note that this distinction, and especially the implication that 'social justice'

applies to one area of welfare and not the other, is in itself an ideological decision. But, in the name of identifying and exploring ontological assumptions, this thesis focuses on the ideas and subsequently implemented policy recommendations of the 'Social Justice Policy Group' (SJPG) for two reasons: firstly, its chair Iain Duncan Smith, has already been identified as a central influence of Cameronism; secondly, and more importantly, the remit of this group inevitably leads to a positioning on key ontological issues, including the structure-agency and material-cultural issues.

The SJPG was chaired and organised by Iain Duncan Smith and 'hosted' by the CSJ, which effectively meant that rather than merely influencing policy making, the CSJ *produced* Conservative Party social policy in the years preceding the Coalition (Kenny 2009: 154). This gives an indication of the influence that Iain Duncan Smith had over the policy development but also shows that the CSJ, as an independently funded think-tank, had considerable direct influence on Conservative Party policy. The CSJ-SJPG partnership reported its findings and its policy recommendations in two landmark publications, *Breakdown Britain* (2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (2007) which have both been highlighted as key documents for understanding Cameronism by numerous authors (including Bochel and Defty 2010 and Bennett 2008). Bochel and Defty (2010: 76) argue that these reports "contained a mix of fairly conventional Conservative thinking" and some new specific policies, such as childcare tax credit. Bennett (2008: 455) describes the reports as 'neo-conservative' in both their preference of the private sector over the public, and their focus on "positive responsibility". McAnulla offers a similar assessment, arguing that "Cameron is using the language of social justice to present what is in substantive terms a long-standing Conservative, even Thatcherite, goal; roll-back state influence to foster a culture of self-help" (McAnulla 2010: 308). On this basis, 'social justice' is simply a way of branding the Big Society approach rather than an ideological strand in its own right. However, the concept cannot be interpreted as an empty signifier because it inevitably brings with it ideological and discursive connotations, regardless of whether such connotations represent ideological shifts or simply represent unwanted baggage. Either way, by building their social policy approach under the title 'social justice', the Conservative Party and the Coalition faced ideological complications.

The concept of 'social justice', from which both the think-tank and the policy group draw their name, had long been rejected by Thatcherite Conservatism (Hickson 2010), but from 2010 it came to be the central concept in a new wave of Conservative welfare reform, with the Iain Duncan Smith-led DWP organising its reforms around the

guiding project of the 'social justice agenda'. A key part of Hayek's influence on the Thatcher government had been the rejection of 'social justice' as a concept, partly because 'justice' was held to pertain only to the intentional actions of individuals rather than the unintended outcomes in society, and partly because 'social justice' is underpinned by the notion of positive liberty rather than neoliberal concern with negative liberty (Hickson 2010). These two justifications for rejecting the concept of 'social justice' display the ontological assumptions of Hayekian neoliberalism outlined in Chapter 3. A concern only with the intentional actions of individuals rather than their unintended consequences demonstrations an overwhelming prioritisation of *agency* (as the intentions of individuals) over *structure* (as the unintended social outcomes of action). This is further underlined by the agentialist focus on negative liberty, where the structured context is considered only in terms of material constraints, and not in terms of material enablements, cultural constraints, or cultural enablements. To reject social justice is, therefore, to ascribe to an ontological position in which social structure is a particularly weak causal force.

In contrast, the SJPG, Cameron's Conservatives, and the Coalition Government, put 'social justice' at the centre of their approach to social policy. Hickson argues that this represented the Conservative Party's overdue recognition of the existence of '*relative poverty*' (Hickson 2009). Both 'social justice' and 'relative poverty', traditionally associated with social democracy, are underpinned by an ontology where the causal power of structure is attributed a more significant role: relative poverty is a conceptualisation of structured power inequality, which is held to have a significant causal effect on those disadvantaged by the structured context. However, despite adopting a social democratic discourse and a basic acceptance that inequality has negative effects, the ideological positioning of the SJPG (while the Conservatives were in opposition) and the DWP (during the Coalition Government), was far from socially democratic. As Evans puts it, when Cameron was talking about relative poverty, he "was still really thinking in terms of absolute poverty" (Evans, S. 2008: 306). Although Evans implies an insincerity that is difficult to evaluate, it must be acknowledged that the prevalence of 'social justice' and 'relative poverty' does not represent the Conservative Party's embracing of a social democratic ideology. Instead, these social democratic concepts are imported into the party's existing neoliberal-conservative ideology. Again, we can highlight the causal power of ideas, because the importing of concepts in this way, whether rhetorically or ideologically, engenders a number of ideational contradictions that must be overcome or disguised. These contradictions are brought to light in Chapters 5 and 6.

Broken Britain

The influence of the SJPG and CSJ on the Coalition Government not only impacted directly via Duncan Smith and the DWP, but also gained importance due to the discourse of 'broken Britain' (Kenny 2009; Bochel 2010). The idea of the 'broken society' outlined in the SJPG reports offered Cameron a theoretical and discursive line of attack against New Labour that became especially powerful after an economic crash and two major political scandals (MP's expenses and cash-for-honours). The collocations 'broken economy' and 'broken politics' emerged as two particularly common variations of the original notion of the 'broken society'. All three terms, along with a plethora of other terms that diagnosed various things as 'broken', were united under the umbrella term 'broken Britain'. The diagnosis of British society offered by the SJPG texts therefore not only influenced the Conservatives' social policy, but also gave Cameron his most prominent discourse of the 2010 general election.

Bale (2009) argues that Cameron's early strategy entailed an assumption that the country's economic problems had been solved by Thatcherism and that the Conservatives now needed to turn their attention to social problems. However, the financial crash of 2008 required a new approach, and this entailed a contrasting of "Tory savings and sound finance" with "Labour's 'debt crisis'" (Bale 2009: 230). As the Conservatives responded to the crash, they developed a unified discourse on economic and social problems. Where they had initially accepted New Labour's economic management as evidence of the success of Thatcherism and developed a social policy that blamed the 'broken society' on both individualism and collectivism, the post-crash period saw "the increasingly frequent and vocal Conservative claim" that 'big government' has caused both a 'broken society' and a 'broken economy' (Dorey 2010b: 405). These two lines of attack are the central features of the 'broken Britain' discourse.

The 'broken *economy*' diagnosis can be interpreted as a discourse that the Conservatives used to justify a hasty prescription of neoliberal state retrenchment in the form of 'austerity'. However, the idea of the 'broken *society*' had originally been carefully considered by the SJPG-CSJ partnership, and a detailed critique of the broken society had been developed in the *Breakdown Britain* (2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (2007) policy papers. Kenny (2009: 154) argues that this critique of society, which he claims to be the heart of Cameron's overall approach, entailed the identification of a "deep-seated crisis running from top to bottom of British society, a

pathology that is apparent in the demise of important social relationships, the breakdown of community life and values and the alleged rise of instances of violent crime and anti-social behaviour". Bale (2009: 228) argues that Iain Duncan Smith's policy documents on Britain's apparently broken society were "focused on the need, above all, to tackle family breakdown". The alternative to family breakdown is held to be 'traditional family structure', and the return to this traditional approach is offered as *the central solution* to the broken society (Bochel and Defty 2010). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Kirby argued that "support for the marriage-based family has become the focal point of Conservative social policy under Cameron's leadership" (Kirby 2009: 243). Indeed, both within and beyond social policy, Cameron "put the family at the heart of his policy agenda and his public image" (Hayton 2010: 497). Hayton notes that "Cameron has frequently claimed that his central priority is to 'mend Britain's broken society', and has argued that strengthening families is central to this" (Hayton 2010: 497).

Hayton (2010; 2012, 113-117; 2015; with McEnhill 2015) offers a detailed analysis of Cameron's position on the family, arguing that, in contrast to Michael Howard, whose tenure is remembered for his traditional conservatism, and in contrast to Duncan Smith, whose opposition to same-sex adoption has already been noted, Cameron "sought to portray himself as a social liberal", giving "strong support to civil partnerships for same-sex couples" while in opposition (Hayton 2010: 497) and 'pushing through' the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act during his time as Prime Minister (Hayton 2015). Hayton and McEnhill (2015) argue that advocacy of same-sex marriage was effectively a concession that allowed Cameron to portray himself as a social liberal, while at the same time reinforcing a traditional view of the nuclear family. Although Cameron accepted same-sex couples, Iain Duncan Smith was more reluctant to do so; Chapter 5 identifies the recurring importance of 'fatherhood' in solving the broken society, which reaffirms traditionalist notions of gender, sexuality, and the family. Bennett goes further, arguing that the Conservative's social policies "are based upon social conservatism, viewing the world as being undermined by permissiveness and asserting a particular traditional, middle-class, patriarchal and ethno-centric morality based upon the nuclear family of a dominant working father, a non-working nurturing mother and obedient children" (Bennett 2008: 465).

Beyond the extension of marriage to same-sex couples, the attempt to solve the broken society through marriage was also pursued through the implementation of tax breaks for married couples, a recurring policy proposal in the SJPG's *Breakthrough*

Britain (2007). The importance of marriage in Coalition social policy can be summarised in the following way: society was broken and the central problem was family breakdown; family breakdown occurred because too few families were held together by the social glue of marriage. At the level of ontological assumptions, this concern with marriage demonstrates a particular understanding of the causal power of social structure. Although structure is only considered at the micro level in terms of the relationship between two people, it is held to have a causal power beyond the individuals who form it. Family policy therefore offers a potential focus for the identification of ontological assumptions. Because Chapter 5 engages primarily with the SJPG-CSJ landmark reports *Breakdown Britain* (2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (2007), it offers further analysis on the ontological assumptions underpinning the Cameron-era conception of the family. The importance of these two reports is highlighted by numerous observers, including Hayton, who argues that "Cameron's policy on the family represents a clear continuation of the direction set by Iain Duncan Smith" (Hayton 2010: 497).

Responsibility

Hickson argues that the "various themes of Conservative Party modernisation have been drawn together by David Cameron in his use of the term 'social responsibility'" (Hickson 2009: 359). Indeed, in the 2006 Conservative publication *Built to Last: The Aims and Values of the Conservative Party*, the central theme is 'responsibility', conceived of in terms of a 'responsibility revolution' in government, in business, in the public sector, among individuals, and in civil society. In the build up to the 2010 general election, the party published a series of policy papers covering every area of government policy, including social security (Conservative Party 2009) and these were collectively branded '*The Responsibility Agenda*'. Once the party were in power, Atkins (2015: 87) argues that 'responsibility' was the most important of the Coalition's three central principles, because it was "a core Conservative value and a mainstay of the 'Big Society'". All of these examples show how the notion of 'responsibility' was a central concept in the discourse of Cameronism from the first statement of his party's values right through to the policy reforms of the Coalition Government.

According to Atkins (2015), 'responsibility' was defined "in terms of the obligations we owe each other, the fulfilment of which will provide the foundations for a strong society" (Atkins 2015: 87). Atkins further argues that Cameron and his faction within the Conservative Party held 'responsibility' to be a more important concept than

freedom, which points towards the importance of conservativism as an ideological basis. In order to address this further, we can consider the implied assumptions about structure-agency. In the previous chapter it was suggested that a *neoliberal* ontology involved an explicit prioritising of agency and an implicit reliance on structure. In light of Atkins' analysis, Cameron's Conservatives seem to prioritise structure in their concern with 'obligations' and the 'strong society'. However, simultaneously, an underlying agentialism suggests that each individual has a personal 'responsibility' or 'obligation' to play their part in the creation and maintenance of the social structure. Therefore, although the focus on personal responsibility would initially seem to evoke a neoliberal focus on the self-reliance and autonomy of individuals, there actually seems to be a more prominent focus on the duty that individuals have to consciously build social structures, which contrasts sharply with the neoliberal suggestion that if agents act according to self-interest, effective social structures will automatically emerge. The concern with an individual's duty towards society sits more comfortably with conservative assumptions, but again there are tensions, because conservatism focusses on inherited institutions that have evolved over generations, and actively opposes the notion that we each have a duty to remake society.

With regards to the structure-agency debate and the particular issues of 'responsibility' and 'the Big Society', there are links to a social democratic ontology in which intentional agents design and construct effective social structures. As Atkins (2015: 87) reports, Cameron even goes as far to say that "those who are unable to play their part would receive the help they need". However, a crucial difference between a social democratic position and the 'responsibility agenda' is that the former places *responsibility* on government policy makers, while the latter seems to place *responsibility* on the general public. Therefore, when viewed through the lens of the responsibility agenda, the Big Society calls for everybody to fulfil their responsibilities by establishing new institutions through which public services can be delivered. There is a uniqueness to this call that does not fit neatly with conservatism, neoliberalism, or social democracy. Its uniqueness is not necessarily a positive attribute, because there is ultimately a failure to specifically *allocate* responsibilities and a failure to recognise how the differential placement of individuals within society affects their capabilities to fulfil responsibilities. These observations take us back to the Big Society contradictions identified above. These contradictions can in turn be traced to the level of ontological assumptions, because the allocation of responsibility in the Big Society is based on problematic assumptions about structure and agency.

Bochel and Defty (2010: 75-76) identify some of the specific elements of the responsibility agenda, which includes "a commitment to a strong voluntary and social enterprise element in society and the provision of public services". However, Bochel and Defty show that the 'responsibility agenda' went beyond the Big Society and manifested itself in a number of other policies: "a continued use of assessment and increased sanctions for benefit claimants", "promises of reductions in bureaucracy, but retaining inspections and audits", and "choice for consumers of services" (2010: 75-76). Therefore, beyond the responsibilities allocated to everybody as part of the Big Society, responsibilities are allocated to benefit claimants to become self-sufficient, responsibilities are allocated to public sector staff to make their own decisions outside of a centralised bureaucratic framework, and service *users* take on the responsibility for making choices about the services they receive. These features of the responsibility agenda all point towards a prioritisation of individual agency with varying degrees of recognition for the place of social structure. As discussed in much more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, the suggestion that benefit claimants have a responsibility to become self-sufficient seems to ignore the causal importance of their structured social context. The aim to reduce bureaucracy in the public sector, and the aim to give service users more choice, both imply an acceptance that institutional structures limit agential freedom, but also imply a value assumption that institutions are run more effectively by increasing the number of individual decisions and reducing the structural constraints.

Although these ontological assumptions seem to point to a mix of ideological influences, there are a number of authors in the existing literature who identify the responsibility agenda specifically with traditional conservatism. O'Hara (2007) identifies 'social responsibility' as one of Cameron's three central principles alongside 'localism' and 'preservation', and argues that together they therefore constitute a form of Burkean conservatism. Norton makes a very similar claim but puts it more bluntly by saying that Cameron is a conservative because he advocates the need "to embrace a sense of social responsibility, especially in terms of family and the local community" (Norton 2008: 329). Both authors are arguing that the combination of 'social responsibility' and 'localism' points clearly towards a conservative ideology. This combination is summed up by Bennett: "Rather than the State taking responsibility for social policies such as family life, diversity, exclusion and crime, this shifts to become the primary responsibility of 'individuals, families, associations and corporations'" (Bennett 2008: 454). It is on this basis that we are again led back to the contradictions of the Big Society, which are considered in relation to *responsibility* by Buckler and Dolowitz:

"Cameron's Conservatives have been caught in something of a bind in terms of how we reconcile a 'social' picture, where social problems appear to invite structural interventions of a sort that the state is equipped to make, and, on the other hand, a more 'voluntarist' picture, where the state becomes less relevant (and more intrusive) in the light of a commitment to individual freedom and responsibility" (Buckler and Dolowitz 2012: 588).

Summary of the political-ideological context

This section has considered the political-ideological context of the Coalition's social policy reforms. Five main themes have been discussed that capture the key elements of this context, and allow for the identification of the main ontological controversies. The section began by considering the Cameron-led modernisation project in the Conservative Party. There is disagreement in the academic literature about the Conservative Party's ideological shift between 2005 and 2010. Some argue that Cameron revived and modernised a traditional conservative ideology, and therefore departed from the party's Thatcherite positioning. Others argue that Cameron repackaged Thatcherism and changed the Conservative Party brand, but was effectively Thatcherite at heart. In light of the 2008 financial crash, the modernisation project clearly changed, and these two interpretations offer different visions of that change. In the 'departure-from-Thatcher interpretation', the financial crash forced Cameron back towards a neoliberal position, forcing him to reconcile this with his new 'compassionate conservatism'. From the 'Thatcherite-at-heart interpretation', the financial crash allowed Cameron to reveal his true colours and publicly pursue the neoliberal policies he actually believed. This demonstrates that the differences between these interpretations seem to revolve around the *intentions* rather than the *actions* of the Conservative Party leadership. As a result, it matters little to the current research whether Cameron pursued 'compassionate conservatism' in order to disguise his Thatcherite core, or whether he genuinely tried but failed to depart from the Thatcherism, because the ideas themselves had to be publicly outlined regardless of their sincerity, and the ideas themselves eventually find their way into policies whether the politicians originally intended them to or not.

The 'ideas themselves' were discussed in this section in relation to four main themes, which each represent one of the Coalition's central welfare ideas: 'the Big Society', 'the social justice agenda', 'broken Britain', and 'responsibility'. The Big Society is often considered a failure because of its public reception both pre- and post-2010, indicating its failure as a communicative discourse. However, in this section,

the Big Society has been considered as a set of ideas and in terms of its underlying assumptions. Effectively, the Big Society can be seen as the Coalition Government's attempt to transcend the individualism of Thatcherism and the collectivism of (New) Labour. The problem with this attempt is that a middle way between these positions requires a middle way in the structure-agency debate, presenting policy makers with an ontological challenge. That this challenge was effectively unmet can be demonstrated by two contradictions of the Big Society: (1) its assumptions about morally-motivated individuals stands in tension to the financially-motivated individuals assumed by the Coalition's widespread use of incentivisation; (2) more problematically, there is a fundamental ambiguity over how the Big Society will come about, because if it is to be created by the state then it seems to be a collectivist approach by slightly different means, and if it is to be delivered by the voluntarism of communities, it seems to be individualism by a different name. The state-retrenchment of the austerity agenda meant that the Big Society effectively became little more than an inclusion of some more charities in state services contracts and a vague hope that individuals would fill the vacuum left by the state. It therefore failed to transcend individualism and collectivism, which can in part be attributed to the problematic nature of the structure-agency question.

As explored in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, the 'social justice agenda' was central to the policy reforms of the DWP during the Coalition's five years in office. In this section, the social justice agenda has been explored in relation to the Centre for Social Justice and the Social Justice Policy Group, which initially developed many of the Coalition Government's social policy reforms. The appropriation of the 'social justice' concept from social democratic discourses may have been a convenient political strategy for the Conservative Party and for the Coalition, but it was accompanied with ontological tensions between the structuralist assumptions underpinning the notion of *social* justice, and the agency-centred assumptions of the responsibility agenda. The discourse of 'responsibility' is one that pervades many areas of the Cameron-era Conservative Party and the Coalition Government, and it can be seen as a key part of the Big Society assumption that individuals will take responsibility when and where the state retreats. The importance of responsibility can also be seen in a range of policies that seek to transfer decision-making powers to public sector workers, benefit claimants, and service users. The call for a responsibility revolution has an agency-centred ontological implication, as the responsibility of the individual agent replaces the rules, regulations, and institutions of government backed systems.

The 'broken Britain' narrative is one that was particularly prevalent in the build up to the 2010 general election, but, just like the Big Society, it contained important ideas that continued to influence social policy after it declined as a communicative discourse. At the heart of the broken Britain narrative is the claim that poverty, unemployment, and related social problems, are the product of family breakdown in deprived communities. This family breakdown is primarily traced to the decline in the institution of marriage, which is theorised as the glue that holds together families, communities, and therefore society as a whole. As a result, numerous policies were pursued to increase the prevalence of marriage, including tax incentives, changes to benefit payments, and the legalisation of same sex marriage. While family policies are generally understood to be ends in themselves, it is clear from the broken Britain narrative that the attempt to increase the prevalence of marriage is an attempt to fix the broken social fabric of society and to cure the poverty and social problems that this broken society has been causing. In Chapter 5, the question of family breakdown is explored in more detail.

Section 2: The social policy context

Of the various departments that constituted the UK Coalition Government (2010-2015), the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Treasury can all be seen as important contributors to Coalition social policy reform. However, it is the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) that is the primary focus for the document analysis in this thesis. The DWP is of particular interest for a number of reasons and, given the range of possible focusses within the area of social policy, it is necessary to outline some of these reasons in order to justify the analysis that follows. Firstly, during the initial year of the Coalition Government's tenure, and before any notable reform had taken effect, the DWP's expenditure was £152.3 billion, amounting to over a fifth of total government spending (Dorey and Garnett 2016: 137). With austerity often regarded as the central project of the Coalition (Gamble 2015), the DWP's position as the highest spending department clearly gives it a key role in the austerity project. However, "while economic context is clearly vital in understanding coalition social security policy, ideological goals are also key" (McKay and Rowlingson 2016: 180). This brings us to the second reason for focusing on the DWP: the issues to be addressed within the department's remit push key ontological assumptions to the fore, especially those about the structure-agency and material-cultural issues. For example, in order to reduce unemployment, one first has to provide an explanation of why people

are unemployed in the first place, which in turn requires one to take up a position in these ontological debates.

A third reason for focussing on the DWP relates to the research and policy renewal undertaken by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and its founder Iain Duncan Smith during the Conservative Party's 'modernisation' period (2005-2010). As discussed in Section 1, the Social Justice Policy Group (SJPG), operating in close collaboration with the CSJ, was one of six policy renewal groups established by Cameron. The ideas of the CSJ and the SJPG provided the ideological foundation for the 'Big Society', David Cameron's overarching political project (Bochel 2011; Mooney 2009). Williams (2015: 81) argues that "Duncan Smith aspired to champion a revived model of 'Compassionate Conservatism'" and that this became a dominating influence over Cameron's interests and focus. With Duncan Smith retaining the role of Secretary of State for Work and Pensions throughout the Coalition era and with his supposed importance in the Conservative Party's ideological renewal, the DWP is a fertile ground for an in-depth analysis of the Coalition Government's ontological assumptions.

The DWP was a particularly active department during the Coalition Government (2010-2015) despite its notably policy-light position within the Coalition Agreement (Cabinet Office 2010). In order to discuss the reforms in enough depth to ascertain their underlying assumptions, it is first necessary to establish a focus within the DWP. The area of pensions can be set aside from the current study because of its '*separateness*' from other DWP activity (McKay and Rowlingson 2016). In Section 1, we noted the Conservative Party's separation of welfare policy for all (education, health, housing etc.) from welfare policy for those in poverty (DWP). This separation creates a problem for the research because it must either choose one of the two strands, or challenge the separation and define its own area of focus. As there is clearly not the space for the latter, the former option was taken, and the DWP was selected for the reasons explained above. The issue of pensions raises the same problem. The institutional structures and policy proposals of government create a separation between pensions and other DWP policy, which presents a series of extra challenges for any attempt to research across both areas. As space is limited, these extra challenges must be avoided. Because the thesis is ultimately in search of ontological assumptions, pensions will be set aside on the basis that the DWP's 'social justice agenda' offers a more promising line of investigation into the underlying ontological assumptions. Putting aside pensions, we are still left with a vast array of reforms to discuss.

In the remainder of this section, the reforms of the DWP are grouped together into four main areas. Firstly, the three benefit caps will be briefly discussed. Secondly, the flagship policy of Universal Credit will be discussed on its own, partly because it was the major priority of the DWP during this period and partly because it is fertile ground for discussing ontological assumptions. Thirdly, the various schemes and policies surrounding the 'Work Programme' will be dealt with together under the umbrella term 'workfare'. Fourthly, policies relating to disability will be dealt with as a group, encompassing a broad range of legislation. Although this is an analytical choice, it must be acknowledged that disability legislation and 'back to work' legislation are very closely related and overlap in various complex ways. The four areas, benefit caps, Universal Credit, workfare, and disability policy, will be discussed in turn in order to begin the analysis of the ontological assumptions underpinning the Coalition's social security policy.

Benefit caps

During the tenure of the Coalition Government, two notable caps were applied to social security spending. Firstly, there was "the introduction of a uniform £500 per week benefit 'cap' to all claimant couples from April 2013" (Page 2015a: 140). Secondly, the annual increase of social security payments to working-age claimants was capped at a sub-inflation limit of 1% (ibid). In addition to these two caps, a less obvious third benefit cap existed in the form of "a fixed level of non-pension Department for Work and Pensions spending" imposed by the Treasury (ibid). Dorey and Garnett (2016: 173) suggest that all three caps were "were *imposed* by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne" and were deemed unwelcome by Iain Duncan Smith who was primarily "concerned with the moral dimension of promoting independence and greater self-reliance" (ibid: 149). From this perspective, a tension existed in the DWP reforms between Osborne's interest in deficit reduction and Duncan Smith's interest in promoting individual independence. While Dorey and Garnett suggest that the benefit caps were the product of Treasury imposed cuts, McKay and Rowlingson (2016: 185) argue instead that the benefit caps were related to "an underlying debate [as to] whether social security is about providing only a temporary respite from short-lived economic difficulties, or is instead supporting those choosing a 'lifestyle' on benefits". It is clear from this perspective that Osborne and Duncan Smith would be united in support of the former. Furthermore, Page (2015: 140) implies that Duncan Smith was at least complicit in these caps by stating that he "was keen to portray [them] as fair proportionate and carefully crafted". Although it is debatable whether Iain Duncan

Smith supported the benefit caps, it appears that he did not support their continued tightening, as he made clear immediately after his resignation in 2016 (See Extract 4.3).

Extract 4.3: "I simply say that the problem was the institution of a welfare cap which was lowered directly after the last election pretty arbitrarily. And that meant that everything we were doing put us above the line essentially ... my point really was we shouldn't be debating that in the context of just being above a welfare cap, which is an arbitrary position. We should be discussing it in terms of how could we get the best aid to those who most need it, and then work from there as to how those changes came" (Ian Duncan Smith speaking on The Andrew Marr Show 2016).

While it is possible to say that Duncan Smith and the DWP more broadly were complicit in the imposition of the benefit caps, it is much more difficult to suggest that these caps relate in some way to ontological assumptions. McKay and Rowlingson (2016) suggest that the caps were an attempt to prevent people from 'choosing' a 'lifestyle' on benefits, but it is unclear whether they attribute this position to Osborne and the Treasury or Duncan Smith and the DWP. Therefore, the main strand of analysis that will be taken forward in relation to the benefit caps is whether there is a suggestion that claimants *choose* benefits as a *lifestyle*. If this is answered in the affirmative, then the assignment of individual responsibility would seem to form a problematic contradiction with the structuralist assumptions identified in the next policy area, Universal Credit.

Universal Credit

The work of the SJPG and the CSJ during the Conservative modernisation period culminated in the publication of policy recommendations shortly after the formation of the Coalition Government. These policy recommendations were built around the flagship programme of Universal Credit (UC), which attempts to bring together a number of different benefit payments into one single system of assistance. As identified by numerous authors (Patrick 2014, Page 2015a, McKay and Rowlingson 2016), UC had two primary aims: firstly, it aimed to ensure that social security claimants who took on (more) work would always see an increase in their income; secondly, and partly in support of this first aim, UC aimed to simplify the benefits system, making it easier to navigate for policy makers, policy implementers, front line staff and, most importantly, for benefit claimants themselves. The DWP argued that UC would correct the system of "perverse incentives" that made it financially preferable for many claimants to stay in

part-time work and, in some situations, for claimants to stay on benefits rather than taking on any employment at all (DWP 2010b).

"The key innovative aspects of Universal Credit were the 'taper' and 'earnings disregard' to be deployed when calculating the entitlement of a low-paid claimant" (Dorey and Garnett 2016: 147). Together, these two measures ensured that for every extra hour of work undertaken by a claimant each week, they would see an increase in their income. The complexities of implementing this system and the untested IT system required has meant that UC has faced numerous problems and left many claimants without any means of subsistence for long periods of time (ibid). The debate regarding the fairness and success of UC's 'innovative' approach and 'problematic' implementation has to be put to one side so that we may discuss the ontological assumptions that underpin these reforms. The central concern of the flagship policy of the Coalition's social security reform is *financial incentives to work*. This seems to prioritise the material realm as the most important causal force in society, because it implies an assumption that financial incentives are the main issue to be addressed in social security reform and in poverty-reduction more generally. UC therefore seems to be built on the materialist assumption that agents are primarily motivated by financial incentives in their unemployment and underemployment and could be financially motivated into (more) work through changes to benefit payments.

The simplification of the benefits system does also acknowledge some role for the cultural realm, to the extent that systems of financial incentives can only operate successfully, and can only have a causal impact on behaviour, if claimants themselves have an awareness of these incentive systems. The causal power of the cultural realm is thus reduced to a binary effect, whereby it affects individual behaviour only to the extent that agents either have knowledge of the material incentives or they do not. In order to assess the extent to which UC is underpinned by this materialist ontology, it is necessary to undertake a primary analysis of the policy documents that proposed and supported its implementation. Daguerre and Etherington (2016) identify the two most important documents in this regard to be *21st Century Welfare* (DWP 2010a) and *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* (DWP 2010b). These documents will be subject to more detailed analysis in the chapters to come.

With regards to structure-agency, the UC reforms offer a particularly interesting case. A structuralist ontology seems to be implied in the basic suggestion that financial incentives have been keeping people out of work and in the belief that a reformed

system of financial incentives will move people into work. There is further support for this structuralist interpretation when one looks at the complexities of the UC system; most importantly, the reforms aim to ensure that *every extra hour* of work is financially incentivised, which implies that even at the micro-level of decision making, individuals are affected by incentive structures. If financial incentive structures are held to operate with such effectiveness that they control individual decisions about whether to work one extra hour, then it would be possible to argue that DWP reforms are underpinned by a structuralist ontology that allows little space for human agency. However, this in turn would contradict any suggestion that welfare claimants could or should take any personal responsibility for their actions. In order to explore the extent to which financial incentives imply a structuralist ontology, it will be necessary to explore these ideas further as part of the primary document analyses in Chapters 5 and 6.

One final element of UC that is worth discussing before we move on to deal with the various other DWP reforms, is the way in which benefits are actually paid to claimants. Three important details are highlighted in the literature: UC is paid to claimants 'monthly in arrears' (Page 2015b: 73), it no longer allows for direct-to-landlord payments (ibid), and it "is paid directly to one recipient in the family (likely to be the man in most cases)" (McKay and Rowlingson 2016: 184). Despite the simplicity of the financial incentives system implied by the central features of UC, these three details seem to demonstrate a greater complexity of assumptions. For example, Bennett (2012) discusses problems with 'joint responsibility', a presumption implicit in the payment of UC to couples; Bennett ultimately argues that economic independence is denied to many individuals (usually women) who live in couples. Other issues that arise in the payment of UC relate to the justification for paying claimants 'monthly in arrears' and ending direct-to-landlord payments. Most importantly is the idea that giving individuals more control over their finances will have some desirable effect on their decision-making and behaviour, in the sense that these measures were "intended to imbue social security claimants with greater individual responsibility" (Dorey and Garnett 2016: 148). These issues arise at the juncture of the structure-agency and material-cultural distinctions, with questions arising over how individual agency relates to material motivations. Therefore, analysis of these elements of UC will also be undertaken as part of the primary document analysis in Chapter 6.

Workfare

The notion of 'workfare' derives originally from social security reform in the US, and essentially involves mandatory unpaid work as a condition for continued receipt of

social security payments. The argument runs that if an individual is unable or unwilling to find paid employment and continues to claim social security payments, they should, after a designated amount of time, be required to work under the threat of benefit-withdrawal. The Coalition Government introduced a number of different workfare or 'work-for-your-benefit' schemes, building on reforms laid down by New Labour. The first of these schemes, 'work experience', applied to young people (18-24) who had been claiming JSA for a total of 3 months; the scheme required them to take on an unpaid work placement of up to 8 weeks. Controversies surrounding the scheme and a number of legal challenges resulted in the 'work experience' programme evolving from a mandatory obligation to a voluntary option by February 2012 (Daguerre and Etherington 2016: 209). This concern with young people was also reflected in another scheme, the 'Work Programme', which applied to young people at the 9 month point of their claim but did not apply to over-25s until the 12 month point.

These differences in ages are an interesting feature of reform, with similar examples in the changes to minimum wage legislation, misleadingly entitled the 'Living Wage', which introduced a new 21-25 age bracket, as well as proposed changes to Housing Benefit that withdraw support from under 25s and an 18-25 bracket in the new Employment and Support Allowance. Previous governments have tended to approach the benefits system with three main age brackets: children, working-age adults, and pensioners. While the Coalition have broadly maintained these three categories, they have begun to give other age distinctions more importance, especially the 18-25 group who have been the target of numerous reforms. As well as the introduction of more age brackets into the social security system, it is notable that the differences between these age brackets have begun to gain more importance. This is especially notable with the difference between pensioners and those of working age (McKay and Rowlingson 2016). These two changes, towards more age brackets in social security and greater differentiation of age brackets, lead to questions about the role of *age* in ontological assumptions. It may be the case that policies relating to age are purely the result of attempts to cut spending and/or attempts to win votes, and are therefore little more than practical lines in the sand. However, there is a possibility that the increased importance of age in policy relates to ontological assumptions about the difference between children, young people, adults, and pensioners. This issue, which has potential implications for assumptions about individual agency, will be returned to in Chapter 5.

Aside from raising questions about age, the Work Programme may also allow insights into the more general issues surrounding the structure-agency and material-cultural distinctions. Page (2015a: 139) and Williams (2015: 82) both suggest that Duncan Smith's policy reforms were influenced by Lawrence Mead (1997), an American scholar who advocates a 'paternalist' approach in guiding people back into work. Whitworth and Carter (2014: 105) also focus on Mead's paternalism as one of the twin pillars of Coalition welfare reform (the other being neoliberalism), explaining that paternalism "emphasises the state's role as persuading, encouraging, tutoring and if necessary compelling the poor to act as 'good citizens'". Whitworth and Carter (2014) argue that it is through welfare-to-work schemes that policy makers seek to create materially motivated rational agents. This intersection of neoliberalism and paternalism therefore offers a complementarity in the sense that neoliberalism assumes economically motivated rational actors, and paternalism provides them (ibid). It could be argued that the former is embodied by UC's incentive structures, and the latter in the Work Programme's mandatory requirements. However, complexities arise. Whitworth (2016) draws a distinction between Mead's 'hard paternalism' of remaking subjects on the one hand, and Thaler and Sunstein's (2008) 'nudge theory' on the other. In the latter, the rationality and agency of individuals is not doubted and the focus is instead given to guiding behaviour through modifying incentive structures. This distinction is drawn in relation to Coalition welfare policy, with a suggestion that both ontologies are at work, leading to contradictions in policy. These issues will be a crucial part of the document analysis in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

While the extent of Lawrence Mead's influence on DWP policy requires research beyond the current project, it is worth noting Mead's argument that 'Western' welfare states are linked to deep rooted international economic structures and cultural differences, primarily in relation the claim that "the West has the only individualist culture" (Mead 2015: 529) and that it is this culture of individuals putting their own interests first that apparently explains the global dominance of the West. The observations being made here about political development are controversial to say the least, but what is important is that Mead (2015: 529) sees 'culture' to be a dominant causal factor, where 'culture' is defined as "the way people in a given society see the world". Also of note is Mead's claim that his individualism is not an ontological assumption about human existence but an assumption about cultural norms in Western society.

Therefore, Mead's paternalism emphasises, and possibly prioritises, the causal role of culture in the formation of both economic structures and in the formation of agency itself. This ontological position leads him to argue that a primary goal of welfare policy is to change the culture of individual claimants, with the ultimate aim of changing claimant behaviour. In contrast, Sustain and Thaler's nudge theory assumes that agents act rationally and that material systems of incentives influence, or perhaps even *control*, the ways in which individuals act. The notion of the individual in nudge theory is therefore assumed at an ontological level, rather than seen as the product of cultural norms as in Mead's paternalism. This leads to proposals of welfare reform that involve changing the 'choice frameworks' within which people operate, which again have the aim of changing individual behaviour. Both nudge theory and paternalism can to some extent be seen in the strict sanctions applied as part of the Work Programme and more generally to JSA (and by extension UC also). These sanctions involve a withdrawal of social security payments for extended periods of time and could be applied "if a claimant was judged *not* to be actively seeking work, refused to participate in an employment or training scheme 'offered' to them, or failed to attend an interview with a Jobcentre Plus 'adviser'" (Dorey and Garnett 2016: 151). These sanctions could be seen as a deterrent in a nudge-theory-inspired choreography of choice frameworks and incentive structures, but they could equally be seen as an attempt to change the culture of the individual agent in a Mead-inspired reformation of character.

Disability benefit reforms

"Work Capability Tests have formed a key part of the Coalition's social security reform agenda" (Page 2015b: 75). Although they were introduced under New Labour, the Coalition Government has used these tests on a much wider scale, reassessing large numbers of people claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) and Income Support (IS) (Page 2015b), and an attempted reassessment of *all* Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants (Garthwaite 2011). These reassessments, known as Work Capability Assessments (WCAs), have been "fundamentally concerned with individual capacities to 'move towards work'" (Yates and Roulstone 2013: 463), implying that many people claiming these benefits are out of work due to personal failings (ibid), which in turn implies a prioritisation of agency over structure. Yates and Roulstone (2013: 461) explicitly argue that Coalition policies to move disabled people into work have built on agent-centred assumptions, to the extent that "the ultimate responsibility for solving the problems of unemployment rest with an aspiring, self-investing and choosing individual". Garthwaite (2011: 370) identifies similar assumptions, arguing that disability benefit reform has been underpinned by the

view that "economic inactivity and unemployment are not caused by a lack of demand, but by the individual characteristics of the economically inactive".

Depending on the outcomes of WCAs, claimants were moved away from SDA, IB and IS as part of their phasing out. Those deemed fit to work by the WCAs were redirected towards UC and treated in the same way as other claimants from that point onwards. For those who were deemed to have a disability or illness, two types of ESA were available; those who were considered incapable of work became part of the 'support group', and those who would be able to undertake limited work with special training or support became part of the 'work related activity group' (Dorey and Garnett 2016). In order to engage with the assumptions underpinning these changes, it is necessary to discuss the problem with which the ESA and WCAs are themselves engaging; i.e. the problem of *defining* disability. Roulstone (2015: 674) argues that, "unlike ethnicity, sex and gender, disability is more challenging a concept and defies easy boundary-setting in academic and policy terms given the interplay of objective, subjective, official and personal constructions of disability". Roulstone develops his arguments from Stone (1984), who argues that the concept of disability is expanded and contracted by politicians and policy makers for a number of reasons but primarily in reaction to the economic cycle. Dorey and Garnett (2016) suggest that expansion of the definition of disability has been expanded in recent decades in order to massage unemployment figures. However, despite the economic crash and initially high unemployment, the DWP actually sought to shrink the category of disability (Roulstone 2015).

In addition to the WCAs, it is important to acknowledge certain other reforms that affect disabled people disproportionally. For example, the cap on the amount of benefits a family may receive has, on average, a greater impact on disabled people, despite government exemptions (Cross 2013). Similarly, the 'spare room subsidy' does not take into account the possibility that a spare room may be specially adapted for a disabled person or may be required to meet certain needs that exist as a result of a particular impairment (ibid). These examples may not initially appear relevant to the identification of ontological assumptions, but once these issues are viewed through the lens of the 'social model' of disability, it is clear that positions are being taken in the structure-agency debate. The social model argues that although people may have impairments, they are *dis-abled* by the society in which they live. This stands in opposition to the 'medical model' where a disability is, like an illness, an attribute of a person, which must be cured for their continual functioning in society. A number of the

reforms to disability benefits and the consequences of other reforms seem to be matched more closely to the medical model of disability (Roulstone 2015), and hence to an agency-centred stance in disability policy.

Although the disability policy of the Coalition Government offers an important opportunity for analysing ontological assumptions in DWP policy, it will not form a major part of the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. Again, the DWP's treatment of disability is to separate it from other social security policy, meaning that the analysis must follow one of the two branches of policy, or challenge their separation through an analysis of both. Because the current research must focus on its already significant task of analysing ontological assumptions, there is not the space to analyse both strands. On the basis of analysing the policy area that offers the best insight into ontological assumptions, Chapters 5 and 6 will set aside the area of disability policy. The place of the physical environment in the theoretical framework of the thesis, the impact of disability theory on welfare ideologies, and the ontological assumptions underpinning Coalition disability policy was a whole strand of the thesis that had to be removed due to time/space constraints. However, as discussed further in the concluding chapter, this area must be a priority for future ontological policy analysis.

Summary of the social policy context

In this section a number of different government reforms have been discussed in relation to their ontological assumptions. Ultimately, more questions have been raised than answered, as each area of reform has been problematised with regards to the key ontological assumptions that underpin its aims and justification. These questions and problems will now be summarised so that they can be addressed by the document analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

The flagship reform of the DWP during the Coalition era was Universal Credit (UC), which was primarily aimed at increasing the working hours of the unemployed and underemployed through a system of financial incentives. The use of financial incentives as the centrepiece of reform clearly demonstrates a focus on the material realm, albeit one that relies on individual awareness of incentive systems. With regards to structure-agency, UC seems to prioritise structure to such an extent that systems of financial incentives are intended to control the number of hours an individual works day-to-day. Although the assumptions underpinning the financial incentives model seem relatively simple in their materialism and structuralism, the actual payment process of UC to claimants raises some more complicated questions about the

underlying assumptions. By paying UC monthly in one lump sum, it is assumed that individuals will gain responsibility and control over their finances; it is important to understand whether this is an attempt to *forge* individual agency, an opportunity for individuals to use the agency that they are already assumed to posses, or a further use of financial structures to modify behaviour. Finally, by paying UC only to one member of a family, there is potentially a suggestion that agency resides at the level of 'the family' rather than 'the individual'.

With regards to the Work Programme and related schemes, two main issues have been raised. Firstly, questions were raised about the role of age differentiation in Coalition welfare reform, with a growing number of age brackets and a growing importance of these age brackets in social security provision. Whether these changes reflect *ontological* assumptions about the difference between age groups remains to be seen. Secondly, questions were raised regarding the role of 'paternalism' in the Work Programme and related reforms. The culturally-based assumptions of Lawrence Mead (1997, 2015), which suggest agency is a cultural product that can therefore be imbued in individuals through paternalistic policies, stand in contrast to the 'nudge theory' of Thaler and Sustein (2008), which assumes a materially motivated agent at the ontological level. The difference between these theories relates back to differences between material-centred and cultural-centred neoliberalism discussed in Chapter 3, and also relates to differences between the incentive structures of UC on the one hand and the attempt to forge responsible agents through the Work Programme on the other. The subtle difference between these contradictory ontologies are difficult to detect in DWP policy, because they can both lead to similar policy proposals, such as the sanctioning of claimants who do not adhere to the obligations of the Work Programme.

The implementation of a number of 'caps' on social security benefits and social security spending overall lead to a disagreement in the literature as to whether they represent the policy agenda of the DWP or the austerity agenda of the Treasury. The comments of Duncan Smith on his resignation point towards the possibility that benefit caps were a part of DWP reform but their tightening by the Treasury prevented them from being effective. Attempts to reduce spending are also prominent in Housing Benefit reforms, with the Housing Benefit bill constituting a significant proportion of DWP spending and representing a driver of longer-term spending growth (McKay and Rowlingson 2016: 180). It is difficult to assess he extent to which the austerity programme was a significant causal factor in Coalition social security policy. Did the austerity agenda prompt reforms to social security policy? Did the austerity agenda

determine the nature of those reforms? Did the DWP really accept benefit caps and did they really oppose their tightening? Such questions are beyond the focus of the current research, and it will suffice to make the rather uncontroversial claim that the Treasury had some influence but not total control over social security policy. It is worth restating that the current research is not an attempt to map the causes of Coalition social security reform; it is instead concerned with the ontological assumptions implicated in those reforms and their explicit justification.

Despite the analysis of UC and the Work Programme indicating a prioritisation of material structures in the prevalence of financial incentives, the policies surrounding disability seem to place more emphasis on the role of agency. The literature is dominated by the identification of agent-centred policy reform, especially in the arguments put forward by Yates and Roulstone (2013), Roulstone (2015), and Garthwaite (2011). As suggested by these authors, the use of WCAs assumes that the responsibility for unemployment lies with the individual. In order to assess the accuracy of this claim, two conceptual debates must be engaged with: firstly, the shifting category of 'disability', specifically asking why it shrunk under the Coalition Government, despite the politically challenging transfer of people into the unemployment statistics; secondly, the difference between the social and medical models of disability, specifically asking which has most prevalence in DWP reform. Unfortunately, further analysis of disability policy is beyond the scope of Chapters 5 and 6, but these observations do establish the basis for an important piece of future research using the 'ontological social policy analysis' framework developed in this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined two main contexts of the Coalition's reforms to social security policy, and engaged with the existing literature in each context. The first of these contexts, the political-ideological context, was discussed in relation to a number of key themes in the Conservative Party and Coalition Government discourse: 'modernisation', 'the Big Society', the 'social justice agenda', 'broken Britain', and 'responsibility'. The second context, the social policy context, was discussed in relation to four key areas of policy reform: benefit caps, Universal Credit, workfare, and disability benefit reform. Although this final area, disability benefit reform, offers a great deal of potential for the application of ontological policy analysis, and although it is closely related to the other areas of reform, there is not the space to include disability

policy in the primary document analyses of the remaining chapters. In each of the subsections of this chapter, ontological issues have been raised and policy documents have been identified for analysis. By way of conclusion, and as a link forward to Chapters 5 and 6, it is worth offering a brief summary of the most pressing ontological questions.

The 'Big Society' is seen to be a central feature of the Conservative Party's modernisation project and an underlying approach during their time in coalition. Effectively, the Big Society can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the collectivist-structuralist focus on state provision and the individualist-agentialist focus on market provision, by bringing in conservative notions of localism, community, and duty. However, the search for the political centre is not just about political negotiation, media management, and electoral strategy; the search for the political centre requires the resolving of theoretical, and indeed ontological, contradictions between competing ideological perspectives. On this basis, the Big Society came up against a theoretical problem that can be traced back to the structure-agency problem. On the one hand, the Big Society was a celebration of community-minded voluntarism and individual duty, and a rejection of state direction. On the other hand, the Big Society was proposed as an alternative to a number of existing public services and as a solution to a number of specific policy problems. Ultimately, it is unclear how the Big Society can solve these specific problems without any state direction. More fundamentally, it is unclear why and how individuals and communities would act to create the Big Society. Are people acting according to material motivations, and therefore need incentivising, or are people acting according to cultural motivations, and therefore need inspiring?

Another notable tension emerged between the focus on social justice and the focus on responsibility. The concept of social justice is based on notions of relative poverty and an opposition to inequality, which are traditionally social democratic ideas. The importing of the concept of social justice from social democratic discourses may have been useful for the image of the Conservative Party and the Coalition Government, *but* the import created tensions with the other main discourse of the Coalition, *responsibility*. The project of achieving social justice necessarily involves correcting social injustices that have left people in poverty or at disadvantage. This therefore relies on *structural* explanations, because social injustices are, by definition, injustices caused by society rather than by individuals. On the other hand, the responsibility discourse focuses on the causal power agents. If an individual is *responsible,* then they are to blame for a particular outcome and/or it is their remit to

bring about change, which stands in contradiction to the notion of *social* justice, which holds society to blame.

A final notable ontological issue that arose in Section 1 was the assumptions made about the family. The centrality of the family to causal explanations was shown through the 'broken Britain' discourse. The broken Britain argument runs as follows: society is 'broken' because the social fabric of communities is falling apart; this social disintegration is caused by the breakdown of families; the breakdown of families is caused by a significant decline in the institution of marriage. This would seem to locate a great deal of causal significance on the issue of marriage, which is perhaps why the Coalition pursued a range of policies aimed at increasing the rate of marriage. However, the question arises as to who is responsible for the decrease in marriage. The 'broken Britain' discourse, much like the social justice discourse, suggests that the causes of poverty are structural and are not the responsibility of any particular individuals, but the specification of marriage as the causally significant factor, would seem to place responsibility on individual agents for choosing not to marry. Such issues will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 5.

In Section 2 a number of ontological issues were raised in relation to Universal Credit, which seems to be primarily focussed on incentivisation. This priority of material causes is seen both in the emphasis of the material motivations of individual agents and the causal power of material incentive-frameworks. Cultural issues are reduced to questions of whether or not an individual is *aware* of the material incentives available. This material model would seem to stand in stark contrast to the cultural motivations assigned to individuals in the Big Society discourse, and it would seem to stand in contrast to cultural notion of the social fabric in the broken Britain discourse. Furthermore, Universal Credit seems to be underpinned by a certain structuralism whereby it is the framework of incentives that are really exerting causal power, and not the responsible decisions of individual agents. The issues surrounding Universal Credit particularly, but also the questions that arose in relation to workfare, will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5

Document Analysis: Policy Formulation in Opposition

Introduction

In 2006, the Conservative Party, under their new leader David Cameron, engaged in a period of policy development as part of the broader 'modernisation' project. After initially laying out the broad principles on which the party would be based, six working groups were established to conduct research and develop policy. When these groups published their reports, the party leadership collected their outcomes together and attempted to reconcile them in a series of policy papers. This process is therefore comprised of the following three phases: the first phase, 'initial principles', the second phase, 'the working groups', and the third phase, 'the green papers'. The central text of the first phase, *Built to Last: The Aims and Values of the Conservative Party* (Conservative Party 2006), was a short document drafted by the party elite to outline their guiding beliefs; it was later approved by the party membership. In the second phase, the six working groups researched and reported on a range of issues, with the Social Justice Policy Group (SJPG) covering poverty and social security policy. This group's two main reports were published in collaboration with the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), allowing Iain Duncan Smith to unify his chairmanship of the SJPG and his chairmanship of the CSJ; those two crucial reports were *Breakdown Britain* (SJPG 2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (SJPG 2007). The final phase of policy development saw the party leadership collect together the policy suggestions in a series of green papers, which were then published under the collective title of 'the responsibility agenda'. The most relevant of these papers to the current research is *Work for Welfare* (Conservative Party 2008), which focussed almost exclusively on social security policy. By focussing on the four texts named in this paragraph, Section 1 is able to analyse the ontological assumptions that underpin the *development* of the Conservative Party's social security policy.

This period of policy development culminated in the 2010 Conservative Party Manifesto, which packaged together many aspects of the 'responsibility agenda green

papers', including the relevant strand on welfare and social justice. Manifestos do inevitably exclude certain policies and simplify others, but through a consideration of those policies that *are* included, and through an identification of the document's assumptions as a whole, Section 2 of this chapter is able to offer a fruitful analysis of the manifesto's policy proposals and ontological assumptions. However, because the following chapter focusses exclusively on the Coalition Government in office, it would be problematic to move from *Conservative policy development* to *Coalition policy reform* without considering the role of the Liberal Democrats in the formation of the 2010 government. Therefore, although arguments made in the previous chapter go some way to justifying the research's primary focus on the Conservative Party, Section 2 of this chapter will also seek to uncover the implicit ontology of the 2010 Liberal Democrat Manifesto. Throughout the analysis of Liberal Democrat assumptions, comparisons are made with the Conservative position, a process that offers further insights into both, and highlights the ontological differences between the two Coalition partners. In summary, Section 1 of this chapter offers a detailed analysis of the ontological assumptions underlying the Conservative Party's review of their social security policy, and Section 2 analyses the ontological positions taken in the two party manifestos that were the basis for the Coalition Government.

The approach to document analysis

In Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this thesis, a theoretical framework was established. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, the ideological, political, and policy contexts were identified and explored. In the current chapter and the one that follows, we move to the document analysis. Before entering into this final part of the thesis, it is worth offering a brief recap and worth establishing the basis upon which the analysis will proceed. Firstly, it is important to note that the current research builds from critical realist assumptions, and therefore considers ideas, including ontological assumptions, to be just as 'real' as any other social or physical entity. More specifically, and moving from the question of whether ontological assumptions *exist* to the question of whether ontological assumptions are *causally significant*, the analysis relies on a *morphogenetic* approach to social change. The modified morphogenetic model used in this thesis identifies two social structures that condition agent activity, material structure (relations between people) and cultural structure (relations between ideas). Both material and cultural structure condition agents through constraints and enablements, so that when agents engage in 'social practices', they are likely to replicate the existing material and cultural structure. Where agents do act in such a way as to change the material and/or cultural structure, intentionally or otherwise, they do so through their

uniquely creative causal powers of material agency and cultural agency. Although agents in all social practices generate 'internal-theories' about what they are doing, agents engaged in theoretical practices also generate 'external theories' about what *others* are doing. The policy documents analysed in the current chapter and in Chapter 6 are examples of external theories, and it is the ontological assumptions of these external theories that is the focus for the analysis.

Despite the need to situate ontological assumptions in a realist causal account of social change, the main focus of this document analysis is the identification of the *content* of ontological assumptions and the logical complementarities and, more importantly, contradictions that exist therein. Because the focus is on the content and structure of ideas (and not on ideas in social interaction), these two document analysis chapters are effectively analysing *cultural structure.* This cultural structure is held to have a constraining and enabling causal force on the agents of policy making and, even though this thesis does not follow the consequences of those causes to discover the specific effects, some tentative claims are made about the ways in which ontological contradictions closed off certain policy options and made others particularly appealing. Given that the research is seeking to identify contradictions and complementarities, the focus on *cultural structure* is largely a focus on *ideas* (or in the words of Margaret Archer (1996), *intelligibilia*). However, this focus on ideas cannot ignore two other major constituents of cultural structure: language and discourse.

Therefore, although the document analysis was conducted 'towards' ideas, it necessarily had to go 'through' language and discourses. Each document was read in search of particular sentences and particular discourses that relied in some notable way on ontological assumptions. Any phrase, sentence, or paragraph that, in itself or as part of a discourse, entailed an ontological claim about the structure-agency or material-cultural questions was extracted and listed within a particular theme. Many different themes were identified, some examples being 'cultures of worklessness', 'the family', and 'material rationalism'. With thousands of words of extracts from each policy document, a further layer of analysis was needed. Themes were reorganised so that some were abandoned, and some were grouped together under broader umbrella themes. The final major part of the analysis was to write detailed summaries of the ontological assumptions, contradictions, and complementarities that existed within (and in some cases *between*) different themes. This also entailed more detailed analysis of a handful of key sentences that effectively state ontological assumptions explicitly; all of these sentences are included as extracts in the analysis below.

Note to the reader: In the current and following chapters, the analysis is presented using a number of key extracts from the analysed texts. These extracts should be read immediately after the sentence in which they are first introduced.

Section 1 - The Conservative Party 2005-2010

Texts analysed in this section and their abbreviations:

BtL: *Built to Last: The Aims and Values of the Conservative Party* (Conservative Party 2006)

BdB: *Breakdown Britain: Executive Summary* (SJPG 2006)

BtB: *Breakthrough Britain* (SJPG 2007)

- *Breakthrough Britain: Overview (SJPG 2007 v0)*
- *Breakthrough Britain: Volume 1: Family Breakdown* (SJPG 2007 v1)
- *Breakthrough Britain: Volume 2: Worklessness and Economic Dependency* (SJPG 2007 v2)
- *Breakthrough Britain: Volume 3: Educational Failure* (SJPG 2007 v3)
- *Breakthrough Britain: Volume 6: Third Sector* (SJPG 2007 v6)

WfW: *Work for Welfare: REAL welfare reform to help make British poverty history* (Conservative Party 2008)

The analysis in this section is presented according to a number of key themes, which reflect the underlying assumptions of the four texts under consideration. Each theme corresponds to a causal force that is assumed by the texts to impact on poverty, and to impact on unemployment specifically. Firstly, *BtL* (Conservative Party 2006) focusses on 'responsibility', a concept that was considered in the previous chapter due to the importance it is allocated in the existing literature. 'Responsibility' is considered as the first theme of the section, and is discussed in relation to three different meanings that it seems to hold within the texts: causal responsibility, remit responsibility, and moral responsibility. The second theme of this section considers a causal model of poverty outlined throughout *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007) that is explicitly referred to as 'the pathways to poverty'. 'The pathways to poverty' model was, and continues to be, the CSJ's overall framework for understanding poverty and unemployment, and it is therefore the most substantial theme in this section. The central component of this model, 'the family' is worthy of consideration as

a theme of its own, partly because *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007) explicitly emphasise its central importance, and partly because it offers a great deal of potential for discussing ontological assumptions.

The 'pathways to poverty' model, with the family at its heart, is the primary explanation of social *problems* within the four texts. When it comes to the policy *solutions*, there is a recurring use of the term 'welfare society'; this phrase seems to be a combination of 'welfare state' and 'Big Society', through which importance is ascribed to the collective delivery of welfare, but the state is not seen as the most suitable institution for that delivery. The 'welfare society' is loosely defined with reference to three alternative welfare institutions: the family, the community, and the 'third sector'. Because the texts only very occasionally refer to the causal significance of 'the community', it is not considered as a theme of its own in this section. Instead, 'the family', as the third theme, is followed by 'the third sector' as the fourth theme. In all of the analysed texts, the third sector is considered as a *distinct* causal force in the creation and perpetuation of poverty and unemployment, to the extent that three of the texts allocate the issue a specific subsection, and in *BtB* (SJPG 2007) a full volume is allocated to the third sector as a policy solution. A final theme to be considered in this section is perhaps the most obvious, the benefits system itself. It is unsurprising that the Conservative Party emphasises the causal importance of the benefits system as New Labour's supposedly failed legacy, but this potentially strategic emphasis does not reduce the usefulness of the theme in the identification of ontological assumptions. This is because ontological assumptions are implicitly made regardless of whether a particular text is a sincere exploration of a policy area, or a strategic instrument deployed for the achievement of political goals. Either way, the assumptions are made and, either way, those assumptions logically relate and therefore have a causal potential.

In summary, five themes are discussed in this section, each of which is considered by the texts to be a significant causal force in the creation and perpetuation of poverty and unemployment: (1) responsibility; (2) the pathways to poverty; (3) the family; (4) the third sector; and (5) the benefits system. The notable exclusion from this list, the economy, reflects a notable exclusion from the texts themselves, which rarely mention the wider economic situation and seem to offer little to no acknowledgement of its causal role in poverty and unemployment. The five themes in this section reflect the more readily identifiable assumptions in the texts about the primary causal forces of poverty and unemployment. Through their analysis, it becomes possible to identify the

ontological assumptions implicit within the logical construction of each. According to the framework developed throughout this thesis, the identification and analysis of ontological assumptions will focus on the structure-agency and material-cultural issues.

The ontological assumptions underpinning the 'responsibility' discourse

The 'pathways to poverty', 'the family', 'the third sector', and 'the benefits system' will each be analysed under separate sub-headings, but to make the analysis of them possible, it is first necessary to outline the 'responsibility discourse'. The 'responsibility discourse' is the dominant discourse across these four policy documents, both in terms of its prevalence and the extent of its explicitly identified logical connections with other areas of Conservative Party policy. *BtL* (Conservative Party 2006) calls for a "responsibility revolution" as its overarching aim; *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007) discuss welfare as a "shared responsibility" between state and society as the central feature of its proposals for reform; and *WfW* (Conservative Party 2008) was itself published as part of the 'responsibility agenda" green papers.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the notion of responsibility has a basic causal definition whereby A is *responsible* for B in the sense that A *causes* B. With this basic definition, there can be both structural and agential responsibility because either could be a causal force. But, when we are dealing specifically with the responsibility of agents, there are two further dimensions to the concept of responsibility. The responsibility *of an agent* refers firstly to a moral duty to make the right decision, identified in Chapter 3 as a primary concern of conservative ideology about each person's societal duty. And, secondly, an agent's responsibility refers to their *remit*, an area for which or within which they are deemed to be responsible; this form of responsibility is a primary concern of neoliberal ideology about each person's responsibility for their own lives. Closer analysis of these three forms of responsibility (causal, moral and remit) provides a point of entry into the ontological assumptions underpinning the "Responsibility Agenda" (*WfW,* Conservative Party 2008) and the wider 'responsibility discourse'.

The first two sentences of *BtL* (Conservative Party 2006), under the heading "Our Values", make up Extract 5.1 and have a clearly elevated importance as a result of this positioning within the texts. From the clause "by trusting people, we help individuals grow stronger", it can be inferred that an assumption is being made about

the link between 'remit responsibility' and 'causal responsibility'. The suggestion is that by increasing an individual's *area* of responsibility (their remit), one can automatically increase their *causal* responsibility (their agency). Put in another way, by giving individuals more responsibilit*ies*, one also increases their actual control over their own lives. This would seem to present a particularly agent-centred view of social change, whereby agents have direct control over all aspects of their life that they are deemed to be responsible for, and are only constrained by external institutional structures to the extent that their remit is limited by, for example, the law, their political rights or the terms of their employment.

Extract 5.1: "Our Party seeks to cherish freedom, advance opportunity and nurture responsibility. By trusting people, we help individuals grow stronger; by sharing responsibility, we help society grow stronger." (*BtL,* Conservative Party 2006: 1)

However, some further nuance does seem to be introduced to this assumption when we look at Extract 5.2. Here the basic assumption that remit responsibility leads directly to causal responsibility is qualified by the acknowledgement that an attempt to increase individual agency also requires an increase in the 'skills', 'resources' and 'confidence' that *constitute* agency. Therefore, two major themes are established here that are prevalent throughout the analysed policy documents: firstly, there is the basic assumption that the increase of an individual's *remit responsibility* is the primary change necessary to increase their *agency* and give them greater control over their own lives; secondly, and indeed secondarily, is the assumption that as part of this change individuals must be *supported* in their attainment of personal skills in order to fully realise this control.

Extract 5.2: "A revolution in personal responsibility – giving every individual the skills, the resources, and the confidence to take control of their life." (*BtL*, Conservative Party 2006: 3)

The ontological assumptions underpinning the 'pathways to poverty' model

This subsection focusses on the 'pathways to poverty', a concept introduced and outlined in detail by both *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007). Both documents use the 'five pathways to poverty' as a means of structuring their research and findings, with each document divided accordingly into sections on 'worklessness and economic

dependence', 'family breakdown', 'educational failure', 'addiction', and 'indebtedness'. In order to research and prepare material for *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007), the SJPG divided into a number of *sub*-working-groups, one for each poverty pathway. Therefore, the centrality of this concept is demonstrated by the fact that it is not only a theoretical feature within these texts, it was also an institutional construction within which the research was conducted. Despite this dual-importance, there is a fundamental ambiguity as to whether the 'pathways' are actual causal entities or merely ways of describing patterns of individual behaviour. As shown in Extract 5.3, there are strong hints that the 'five pathways' are *the five causes* of poverty, but the texts stop short of explicitly stating this. This ambiguity is captured in the term itself; a 'pathway' enables somebody to move more quickly and easily in a particular direction, and may even guide them to unintended destinations, but a pathway must ultimately be walked by an individual actor. The question of whether the pathways to poverty are held to actually exist is a prime example of the utility of ontology analysis, and is one that can be answered by considering the material, cultural, structural, and agential elements in the theoretical construction of the five pathways.

Extract 5.3: "The group will look at a number of different factors which contribute to poverty and have identified five key "paths to poverty"" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 2)

There are certain sections of the text that give a clear and unqualified privilege to material structure in their ontological assumptions. Perhaps the most prominent of these relates to the educational failure pathway, which seems to exhibit a position of economic determinism. In a section of *BtB* (SJPG 2007) on child development and 'socio-economic status', the claim of Extract 5.4 is made. In suggesting that the socio-economic position of a 22 month old child can be used to predict their educational outcomes at 26 years, the primary, if not only, causal force being considered is that of material structure. This position, stated in both *BdB* (SJPG 2006: 54) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007 v3: 5), is further developed in the argument that, as a result of their economic resources, 'disadvantaged families' are unable to provide "supplementary educational activities", such as private tutoring, and are unable to find better schools when their current ones are failing (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v3: 7). In a similar vein, explanations of 'intergenerational worklessness' focus on childhood deprivation and how this leads to educational failure and a future lack of skills, as illustrated by the "children [who] have no quiet place to do their homework" or no "food to feed their minds" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 55). Such claims are underpinned by the assumption that, through their parents' lack of economic resources, children can be fundamentally disadvantaged in their educational

attainment. Therefore, both in the more abstract discussion of childhood development and in the more specific assertions about the role of economic distributions, appeals are made primarily to material structures. However, in all of these instances, it is not the 'pathways to poverty' themselves that are the material structures; 'educational failure' and 'worklessness' are areas within which material structures, such as economic inequality, are having a causal impact. To explore this in more detail, we can focus in on the 'economic dependency' pathway.

Extract 5.4: "research shows that a child's developmental score at 22 months is a predictor of educational outcomes at 26 years old" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v3: 5)

Economic dependency is understood as a financial position in which one agent (e.g. the benefit recipient) is reliant on another (e.g. the state) for their material necessities. The use of the dependency discourse links together the state-recipient relationship with the parent-child relationship and in both relationships a situation is implied in which society is materially structured by networks of dependence; the resultant economic and institutional connections between agents represent enduring social arrangements. As Extract 5.5 explains, the dependencies between individual agents and the state exert a causal force upon agents, thereby constraining their actions. However, this causal force comes from the *benefit system* rather than the resultant networks of dependency. Dependent individuals are held to be trapped because they have no incentives or material interest to provide their own source of material necessities, but this trap is caused by the benefit system; *dependency itself is merely the effect*. A childlike reliance on the state would seem to allow little agency for individuals, and would therefore seem to locate causal power primarily with the material incentives of the benefits system. However, the more specific explanation of these 'barriers to work' given in Extract 5.6, does open up some space for agency by suggesting that 'long-term dependency' is created by a system of financial incentives that "*encourages benefit dependency as a way of life*" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 90, emphasis added). The extent to which a system of incentives represents an insurmountable structural constraint therefore depends upon an individual's 'way of life', implicating the power of individual agents to develop and prioritise *cultural* interests.

Extract 5.5: "The structure and administration of the benefits system act as barriers for many people to obtain or sustain work. There are still too many benefit traps..." (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 79)

Extract 5.6: "There are higher rate long-term benefits which have the perverse incentive of encouraging long-term dependency" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 5)

If economic dependency was nothing more than the material situation of financial reliance, it would make little sense to discuss a "culture of long-term welfare dependency" (*WfW,* Conservative Party 2008: 11) or to represent dependency as "a way of life" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 90). A strand of cultural assumptions is therefore present. For example, within the documents, there is a clear concern with the social norms instilled in children by their parents, whether it is "the culture of 'something for nothing'" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 89) or the explicitly preferred "family exposure to the culture of work" *(WfW,* Conservative Party 2008: 23). The importance of the concept of culture within these texts can also be seen in relation to the other pathways to poverty and the references to an "anti-schooling culture" contributing to educational failure (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 7), "a culture of intoxication" causing alcoholism (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 41), and an "aggressive rap culture" exaggerating drug addiction (*BdB,* SJPG 2006: 45). Similarly, the rise of 'indebtedness' as a pathway to poverty has supposedly occurred because of a cultural shift in which "credit [has] moved from being *perceived* as dangerous, to morally neutral, to beneficial" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 71, emphasis added). Therefore, while some parts of the texts seem to prioritise material structures, sometimes to the extent to which they are the only causal force to consider, it is clear that other parts of the texts focus on the importance of culture as a powerful, if not *the most* powerful, causal factor. This prioritisation of culture is explicitly stated in Extract 5.7.

Extract 5.7: "In the end, welfare reform is less a question of rules and regulations, systems and procedures; it is more a question of culture and values" (*WfW,* Conservative Party 2008: 9)

The various examples given so far in this sub-section lead to two observations in particular. Firstly, the argument that the 'five pathways to poverty' are simply *the* five causes of poverty is partially undermined by the underlying assumptions of the texts, which seem to locate causality elsewhere. For example, 'economic dependency' has no material causality, it is instead the effect of the 'perverse incentives' of the benefit system. Another key example is the way 'educational failure' is merely the effect of broader economic distributions among parents. However, it seems that the pathways *are* considered to be causal forces in their own right when conceived of as cultural

phenomenon, to the extent that the 'culture of dependency' and the 'anti-schooling culture' have some form of constraining power on individual agents. This leads to the second important observation of this sub-section, that two dominant strands of explanation, 'cultures' and 'economic structures', stand in a competing contradiction whereby, in most sections of the texts, either one or the other is the exclusive focus. For example, Extract 5.7 explicitly states the importance of cultural factors over material factors, whereas Extract 5.4 is taken from a section in which a form of economic determinism is being posited. Therefore, in the sections where material explanations dominate, the 'pathways to poverty' are merely the *effects* of economic structures, including the benefits system, unequal distribution, and market regulations, but in sections where cultural explanations dominate, the 'pathways' would appear to take on a causal role themselves as cultural phenomena.

The existence of these two competing strands of ontological assumptions presents a challenge in trying to weigh the balance between them, which in turn makes it difficult to say whether the 'pathways to poverty' are ultimately held to be causal factors in their own right. One more effective way of understanding the importance of this balance is to assess the extent to which material and cultural factors are respectively held to constrain the actions of individual agents. With regards to cultural factors, it is particularly difficult to identify ways in which they are held to have actual causal power over agents. Extract 5.8 suggests that the 'dependency culture' is little more than the collective outcomes of individual 'lifestyle choices', and Extract 5.9 not only identifies a culture of *deliberate* worklessness, but also clearly identifies this culture to be the direct product of individual choices. Cultural factors are therefore considered to be attributes of individual agents, making it possible to tentatively link cultural factors to the *moral responsibility* of agents. This argument is further supported in relation to educational failure, because the creation of a "culture of education" is repeatedly linked to "help[ing] parents *take responsibility* for their children's education" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v3: 6-7, emphasis added). This link is prominent in numerous policy proposals that seek to modify the culture of education by improving the individual skills of parents.

Extract 5.8: "The current culture of 'something for nothing' must be ended. The receipt of benefits should not be seen as an entitlement, and should not be a lifestyle choice." (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 90)

Extract 5.9: "We believe that the time has come to put an end to the culture of deliberate worklessness in Britain. We believe that it should not be possible for any person who can work to choose not to do so and live on out of work benefits instead." (*WfW*, Conservative Party 2008: 11)

The dominance of individual agency in the creation and maintenance of 'cultures' does not seem to be mirrored with regards to the creation and maintenance of *economic structures*. As discussed above, material structures are held to have causal effects of their own through the unequal distribution of resources, replicating themselves over time so that individuals lacking in material resources are severely limited in their potential future acquisition of further resources (material and cultural). This can be seen in the role of material deprivation in educational failure, and the 'debt spirals' in which people "lose the ability to take control of the situation" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 68). Material structures are also implied to have causal effects through systems of incentives, such as those that cause 'worklessness and economic dependency'. However, the particular effects of *incentives* are more complex and seem to open a space for individual agency, in that individuals who are caught in the benefit traps identified in Extract 5.5 are also choosing not work as expressed in Extract 5.9. It can therefore be argued that although systems of incentives are held to exert a causal force as material structures, they can also be resisted by those individual agents who manage to fulfil their *moral responsibility*. A tension emerges here between incentive structures and agential responsibility, with Extract 5.5 and Extract 5.9 seeming to contradict one another on the extent to which incentives present people with a trap or a choice.

To conclude this discussion of the 'pathways to poverty', it is worth summarising the various ontological assumptions that have been identified in the attempt to ascertain whether those pathways actually exist as causal forces. Firstly, there is a competing contradiction between material and cultural factors in general, with different parts of the text prioritising one or the other without an explicit discussion of their relation. Secondly, when the focus is on material causes, the pathways are merely seen to be effects, but when the focus is on cultural causes, the pathways themselves are held to be causal phenomena. Thirdly, this causal power of the pathways, heavily implied in the discourse of the texts, stands in contradiction with the underlying assumption that cultural factors are determined by individual agency. Fourthly, with cultural factors largely reduced to individual choices, material structure is the other major causal force considered; material structure does have a causal power in its own

right, constraining individuals through economic inequalities and financial incentives. However, fifthly, the specific implication of financial incentives leads to another tension between the causal power of incentives and the causal power of agents to *overcome* incentives by exercising moral responsibility. This fifth tension is explored in more detail in the 'benefits system' theme of the current section.

In summary, the existence of the 'pathways to poverty' as causal forces depends upon a causal role for culture, a causal role that seems to be extinguished by the conceptualisation of culture as nothing more than the sum of individual action. Therefore, the 'pathways to poverty' are *presented* as causal forces but the underlying assumptions instead seem to suggest that the moral responsibility of agents are by far the most important causal factors. Furthermore, in various parts of the texts, the notion that the 'pathways to poverty' are causes seems to be abandoned, and they are instead assumed to be the *effects* of material structures. This in turn opens a tension between the moral responsibility of agents and the determinism of economic structures, a tension that most clearly arises over the question of whether incentives create choices or traps.

The ontological assumptions underpinning the centrality of 'the family'

All five of the pathways to poverty are held to interconnect, but the 'family breakdown' pathway is identified as the primary problem and the location of the primary solution to poverty, especially as a causal influence on two other key pathways: 'worklessness and economic dependency' and 'educational failure'. It is argued throughout the documents that "the primary institution in our lives is the family" *(WfW,* Conservative Party 2008: 5) because "it is the context from which the rest of life flows" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v1: 3). As made clear in Extract 5.10, the texts conceive of the family over three levels, each with a potential causal role: individual (the "personal"), internal structure (the "family level"), and external structure (the "wide variety of external social factors"). The internal dynamics, focussed on parental relationships and the role of marriage, exhibit an ambiguity about the extent to which individuals are causally responsible for family breakdown. A wide variety of external influences on the family are considered in the texts, but primary among these is government policy, in its design of the benefits system, legal system, tax system etc. The ambiguity most clearly emerges as the texts implicate but avoid the question of whether internal family dynamics are caused by individual decision-making or by the influence of government policy.

Extract 5.10: "The factors which drive family breakdown and varied and complex (sic). They exist at a personal and family level, and are impacted by a wide variety of external social factors." (*BdB*, SJPG 2006; 34)

The internal 'structure' of the family is held to be the primary factor in family breakdown and, by extension, a primary factor in the other pathways to poverty. As Extracts 5.11 and 5.12 demonstrate, this internal structure depends on marriage in order to increase stability and prevent family 'dissolution'. With an almost exclusive focus on parental relationships within families, family structures are considered in three main forms: marriage, co-habitation, and lone parenting. Marriage is preferred to co-habitation because it is less likely to lead to family breakdown and to lone parenting. The discussion of these different structural forms obfuscates the role of individual agents, focussing instead on the nature and causal power of each form. This is underscored by the centrality of marriage as a *solution* to social problems and the suggestion that family breakdown "has been driven by the dissolution of cohabiting partnerships" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v1: 3). Furthermore, these micro-structures within the family are regularly discussed in relation to broader cultural trends, such as the "decline in marriage" "since the early 1970s" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v1: 3) or the "collapse in marriage and committed relationships in many low-income communities" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v1: 5). This could be an implied causal role for social norms or cultural change as some form of constraining cultural structure. However, following the trend identified in relation to the 'pathways to poverty' both the micro-structure of the family and the cultural changes in society seem to be ultimately based upon the decisions of individual agents.

Extract 5.11: "Family structure and family process matter - making a commitment can make a significant difference to behaviours and attitudes" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v1: 4)

Extract 5.12: "Government must therefore value and support positive life choices. At the heart of this approach is support for the role of marriage." (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 7)

Although the texts focus almost exclusively on the *forms* of family structure, it is clear that the primary cause of these forms is the individual decision making of couples. One key indicator of this underlying assumption is the discussion of cohabitation in *BtB* (SJPG 2007 v1), where it is argued that the problem with improving the rights for cohabiting couples is that this removes the choice from individuals; if co-habitation lacks any representation in law, as these policy documents advocate, then

individuals are able to choose between the stability of marriage and the instability of co-habitation. Understood in this way, couples (mostly referred to as parents) *choose* a family structure of either marriage or co-habitation but, once chosen, these forms have the constraining and enabling effects of structures. If couples opt for a non-marriage family structure, they increase the risk of family breakdown, dissolution and lone parenting. Therefore, although "lone parents rarely choose that status" (*BtB,* SJPG 2007 v1 106), it is implied that they did choose whether or not to marry in the first place. This would imply that the internal family structure has its own causal role in 'family breakdown', but it ultimately derives from the moral choices of individual agents. The most notable of these choices is whether or not to marry, as discussed here, but there is also reference to choices individuals make about the age at which they have children and the extent to which they involve other relatives and other personal relationships in the parent-child family.

While the creation of internal family structures are held to be the responsibility of individuals, and therefore a product of their choices, the texts propose that government policy makers are also able to have a significant, if not determining, causal influence on the formation and transformation of internal family structures, through the use of *incentives* and the education of children. Extract 5.13 encapsulates the contradiction created here, because it refers to 'life choices' for which the individual is presumably causally and morally responsible, but it also suggests that the government must 'value and support positive life choices', which implies that the government will seek to make policy that has a causal influence on those life choices. One such policy is implied in Extract 5.14, where it is proposed that the tax rules are disincentivising marriage. The 'Family Breakdown' volume of *BtB* (SJPG 2007) goes on to outline a correction so as to increase the incentives for marriage in the tax system (*BtB,* SJPG 2007 v1: 8-9). Another such policy is outlined in Extract 5.15, where it is proposed that children should learn about 'marriage, families, and relationships', so that they are eventually more likely to choose marriage over "less stable" alternatives (*BtB,* SJPG 2007 v1: 3). The existence of these, and many other, government policies to increase the rate of marriage are ultimately designed to reduce family breakdown, and therefore reduce poverty. Setting aside the question of the effectiveness of such a policy, it must be acknowledged that it raises an ontological problem whereby individuals are held to have moral responsibility for their choices about marriage and family structure, while simultaneously policy makers are assumed to have a causal impact on those choices through incentive structures and the (re)education of children. Whether the issue of incentives leads to an ontological contradiction is discussed later in this section, but we

will conclude this subsection by highlighting an ontological tension that arises with regards to the socialisation of children and the free choices of adults.

Extract 5.13: "Government must therefore value and support positive life choices. At the heart of this approach is support for the role of marriage" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 7)

Extract 5.14: "Britain's tax rules around marriage is a key cause of its relatively high rates of family breakdown" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 10)

Extract 5.15: "curriculum changes to provide a specific opportunity to learn about, explore and discuss the nature of marriage, family and relationships" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 7)

When focussing on *children*, the texts conceive of individuals as passive in their 'inheriting' of intergenerational trends such as 'worklessness', trends that are maintained through the socialisation of children within the family. However, when the texts focus on *parents*, especially in relation to the 'educational failure pathway', it is suggested that a prime cause is the failure of parents to fulfil their 'responsibilities', as seen in the policy recommendation put forward in Extract 5.16. This difference between parents and children is based on ontological assumptions about age, in which parents (adults) are held to have agency and children are not. This assumption risks causing an ontological contradiction whereby individual thought, action and the faculties for both are explained as the product of socialisation, *until* individuals reach adulthood, when all of these elements are reimagined as the product of individual agency. However, this contradiction is minimised in these texts because, as demonstrated in Extract 5.16, it is proposed that parents need supporting and empowering, a proposal that seems to acknowledge (though does not explicitly state) the limitations placed on the agency of parents as a result of their own childhood socialisation. It is unclear whether the notion of offering people 'support', a feature of various parts of the texts on various levels, is actually proposed as a counterweight to childhood socialisation, but, deliberate or otherwise, it implies an assumption that agency is restricted by more than just present institutional rules and regulations; there is an implied acceptance that agency is constrained through its *initial constitution.* The adult-child distinction is one that is embroiled in tensions, but these tensions do not present themselves as unavoidable contradictions until we reach the texts analysed in Section 2 of this chapter.

Extract 5.16: "We need to build a partnership between school and home which helps parents take responsibility for their children's education, supporting them to get involved and empowering them to make the best decisions" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v3: 6)

The ontological assumptions underpinning 'the third sector' as a policy solution

In *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007), the third sector is understood to be the product of individual agents giving time and money to support others, which links back to the extensive discussions about 'the Big Society' in Chapter 4. Bound up with the 'Big Society' is the concept and discourse of responsibility in the sense of a *moral duty*. Although the term 'duty' is rarely used in any of the documents, the importance of individual duty can be inferred by looking at 'inspirational people', 'volunteering' and 'philanthropy'. *BtB* (SJPG 2007) focusses on possible solutions to the problems identified in *BdB* (SJPG 2006), and one of its main arguments is that the government needs to listen to "voluntary sector leaders" and learn from "inspirational people" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0). The focus on the individual leaders rather than their institutions is a key theme in this document and can be seen on page 4 of the text, where a list of "voluntary sector leaders" is presented in relation to the work they do without mention of the organisations of which they are a part. The prioritisation of individual action in the third sector goes beyond the named leaders to include an emphasis on volunteers. This can be seen in Extracts 5.17 and 5.18, where it is stated that the third sector is built upon volunteers. Although a variety of synonyms are still used, it is "voluntary sector" that is by far the most common in *BdB* (SJPG 2006), and it becomes part of a wider discourse that centralises volunteering as the most important aspect of the third sector.

Extract 5.17: "Underpinning the third sector, and a further example of its value, is a vast amount of formal and informal volunteering" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 76)

Extract 5.18: "At the heart of the Welfare Society is the army of people who, for love of neighbour and community, shoulder the massive burden of care." (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 6)

The focus on individual action appears not just in the concern with volunteering and leadership, but also with regards to funding. Although *BdB* (SJPG 2006) does call for increased government funding in the third sector, it also calls for less government intervention. It is identified that there is a risk that the government "could end up

shaping a third sector in the image of the public sector" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 82), and therefore destroy the third sector's "independence, enthusiasm, commitment, innovation and diversity" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 74). In contrast to the activities of the "controlling state paymaster[s]" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 88), 'philanthropy' "provides freedom and flexibility for charities to pursue their core aims and values" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 77). Philanthropy is only brought about when "individuals are demonstrating their concern for the most vulnerable in a concrete and tangible way" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 78), bringing us back to the core assumption that the third sector is the product of individual agents fulfilling some form of moral duty. Indeed it is only through the individual actions of agents that the third sector acquires its unique causal powers, preventing it from becoming a mirror image of the public sector.

One of the most prevalent policy proposals across the four texts is the transfer of welfare provision from the government to the third sector. For example, it is suggested that third sector organisations should provide support for unemployed people in order to prevent dependency, or that they should provide relationship counselling for couples in order to prevent family breakdown. This transference of services to the third sector causes a problem for policy makers that is not explicitly acknowledge in these four texts. This problem is as follows: the third sector has value because it is the product of individuals fulfilling their moral responsibility through volunteering, philanthropy and acting as 'community leaders', *but* the government must increase the size and change the function of the third sector in order to ensure it is capable of providing welfare of the desired quality and quantity. The contradiction is encapsulated in the suggestion that the third sector needs "to be trusted *and* equipped" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v6: 4), in the sense that *trusting* the third sector implies a laissez faire approach, while *equipping* the third sector implies substantial state intervention.

The main solution offered is summarised in Extract 5.19 and involves the government 'stimulating' volunteering and philanthropy. In *BtB* (SJPG 2007 v6) a range of policy proposals are made with the aim of realising this solution, proposals which demonstrate a prioritising of material assumptions. Of the six policy recommendations made in *BtB* (SJPG 2007 v6: 8) to increase charitable donations, five are geared towards increasing financial incentives in the area of philanthropy, including "tax-efficient vehicles" for large donations and "corporate social bonds" to encourage private sector investment. The sixth is a minor proposal about a "one-off initiative" to instil "habits of charitable giving" among "Year 6 pupils in England" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v6: 8).

Although this is a proposed *cultural intervention* that could have interesting implications, the policy is of such limited scope that it merely further emphasises the focus on the material solutions of financial incentives. This focus seems problematic in the area of philanthropy because there is a theoretical opposition between individuals seeking to fulfil their material interests and individuals seeking to fulfil their morally responsible charitable giving. Furthermore, a government utilisation of financial incentives would seem to contradict the necessary role of moral agency in the third sector, because if financial incentives are to have a causal power over individual behaviour, the causal power of individual agency is necessarily decreased in the process. To summarise: on the one hand, the third sector derives its value from the essential role of *individual agency* and *moral responsibility*, exhibited in philanthropy, volunteering and community leadership; on the other hand, the government seeks to direct the behaviour of individuals in the third sector by using *systems of financial incentives*. Therefore, the policies of financial incentives contradict individual agency in their basis on structural conditioning and contradict moral responsibility in their prioritising of material interests.

Extract 5.19: "[T]he Government must continue to do what it can to stimulate and assist volunteering and philanthropy" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 85)

The ontological assumptions underpinning the portrayal of the benefits system

The social security system itself is conceived of as both a material system of financial incentives and a cultural system of training, learning and support. The weighting of these material and cultural factors seems to lack stability resulting in a relationship between material incentives and cultural knowledge that is in some places a contradictory relationship about agents *overcoming* disincentives and in other places is a coherent relationship about agents *understanding* incentives. In terms of structure-agency and the benefits system, a consistent policy proposal is put forward that advocates a move away from the structural bureaucracy of the current system to a more agent-led public service with fewer regulations and greater power for individual actors. However, this is overshadowed by the policy proposal discussed in the previous subsection of transferring welfare provision from the public sector to the third sector. The current "rigid state superstructure" (*WfW*, Conservative Party 2008: 4) is held to have a significant causal power over benefit recipients, isolating people "in long-term dependency on the state" (*WfW*, Conservative Party 2008: 4) and trapping them in government safety nets (*BdB*, SJPG 200: 22). The overarching solution provided to this

problem is as follows: "in order to reverse social breakdown, we need to start reinforcing the Welfare Society" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 6). Extract 5.20 offers more detail on how this solution should be pursued. The welfare society, "that which delivers welfare beyond the state" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 6), is implied to cover a whole range of non-state actors, but is primarily conceived of in relation to families and third sector organisations. It is therefore important to analyse how the benefits system can supposedly support their flourishing.

Extract 5.20: "The interconnected nature of the pathways to poverty described necessitates an interconnected response. This must include scope for local solutions to be developed that are enabled rather than dictated by government." (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 106)

The term 'welfare society' is a concept derived from the notion of the 'welfare state'. By encouraging the replacement of the state with society, the Conservative's approach to welfare is linked into the guiding philosophy of the 'Big Society' and the dominant discourse of the 'responsibility agenda'. Extract 5.21 explains how the delivery of welfare is a shared responsibility between the state and society, a responsibility understood in the sense of a 'duty' that "is not reserved for the state alone" (*BtL,* Conservative Party 2006: 5). Here both the moral and remit dimensions of responsibility are being linked together: the provision of welfare is not just the remit of the state, it is also the remit of society, presumably in the form of the family and the third sector, *but* because this remit cannot be ascribed by law, it is instead the moral responsibility of the family and the third sector to take on the duty of welfare provision. However, this creates a potential problem for the state, because if the family and the third sector do not fulfil their moral responsibility of providing their share of welfare, then the state cannot hope to tackle poverty and unemployment. Therefore, a problem arises because families must be based on their micro-structures (as chosen by parents) and the third sector must be based on the volunteering and philanthropy that gives it its unique attributes. The main aim for the welfare state is to ensure that the family and the third sector *freely* choose to fulfil their moral responsibility. This need for the welfare society to act freely according to its own agency and the simultaneous need for it to it to act according to the plans of Conservative policy makers creates an ontological contradiction, which was identified and discussed in the previous sub-section.

Extract 5.21: "The test for a strong and just society is how it looks after the least advantaged - but this duty is not reserved for the state alone. It is a shared responsibility: we are all in this together" (*BtL,* Conservative Party 2006: 5)

It is worth concluding analysis of this final theme by discussing *incentivisation*, which is held to be the main solution to this ontological conundrum, a conundrum that the policy documents themselves explicitly acknowledge, as demonstrated by Extract 5.22. The use of financial incentives would initially seem to overcome many of the ontological tensions and contradictions analysed in this section, and would seem to allow the Conservative Party to promise an approach that is "based on the belief that people must take responsibility for their own choices", while simultaneously being committed to a "government ... responsibility to help people make the right choices" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 7). A first point to made about the success of this solution to the ontological problem is that the four texts analysed in this section all have significant internal inconsistencies to the extent that they move between different ontological assumptions in different sections; e.g. the fluctuation between the pathways to poverty as the effects of material structures and the cultural causes of poverty.

 Extract 5.22: "This report steers a course between two different views of how to fight poverty. The traditional 'laissez-faire' approach understands poverty simply as a product of wrong personal choices about family, drugs, crime and schooling. That view says that poverty is always the fault of the person who makes the wrong choices. On the other side of the political divide, the elimination of poverty is seen principally as the job of government – thus if a person is in poverty it must be the government's fault and it must be the government that develops a top down solution to the problem. Our approach is based on the belief that people must take responsibility for their own choices but that government has a responsibility to help people make the right choices." (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v0: 7)

However, if we put aside the inconsistencies of the texts and focus in on incentivisation as a solution to the ontological problem identified in this section and seemingly acknowledged in Extract 5.22, there is a fundamental contradiction that remains. If the choices of individuals are the product of morally responsible agents, then they cannot also be the product of incentive frameworks. If the choices of individuals are the product of incentive frameworks, they cannot also be the product of morally responsible agents. There may indeed be some theoretical integration of these two positions, but the texts don't seek such a solution and instead seek a full assertion

of both positions. Are individuals rational financial maximisers? Or, are individuals morally responsible agents? The solution of 'incentivisation' only works if one accepts that incentives have *a causal responsibility for individual choices*, but this would be to acknowledge that individuals themselves only have *a limited causal responsibility* for those choices, which in turn is to assume that individuals logically cannot have full moral responsibility for their decisions.

Summary of Section 1

In this section, four texts have been analysed: *Built to Last* (Conservative Party 2006), *Breakdown Britain* (SJPG 2006), *Breakthrough Britain* (SJPG 2007), and *Work for Welfare* (Conservative Party 2008). This analysis began by identifying the main causal factors that are assumed by these four texts to create and perpetuate poverty and unemployment. On this basis, this section has considered each of the following causal factors under its own subheading: responsibility, the pathways to poverty, the family, the third sector, and the benefits system. To be clear: that these are 'the main causal factors' in the creation and perpetuation of poverty is an assumption made by the texts themselves, and not one made by this research. By analysing each causal factor separately, the current section has had a number of different themes within which to analyse the more fundamental *ontological* assumptions about the structure-agency and material-cultural issues. It is worth briefly summarising the findings.

The first theme analysed in this section was the 'responsibility discourse'. Three meanings of responsibility were ascertained: remit responsibility is the area for which, within which, or over which, an individual is responsible; causal responsibility is the extent to which something or someone has a causal power; and moral responsibility is the extent to which an agent fulfils their moral duty to make the 'right' decision. All three of these meanings of responsibility are used throughout the texts. In *BtL* (Conservative Party 2006), two notable assumptions are made about responsibility. Firstly, and primarily, it is assumed that the most effective way of increasing an individual's causal responsibility (agency) is to increase their remit responsibility. Secondly, and secondarily, it is assumed that increasing an individual's causal responsibility (agency) may also entail providing support to increase skills, confidence etc.

The second theme analysed was 'the pathways to poverty'. In their discussion of the pathways, many parts of the texts prioritise material structures, either as economic inequalities or financial incentives. Where economic inequalities are considered, the role for individual agency seems to be extinguished. Where financial

incentives are considered, there is a fundamental ambiguity over whether incentives present agents with a trap or with a choice. These parts of the texts, where material structures are prioritised, imply that the 'pathways to poverty' are the *effects of* those structures. However, in other parts of the texts, the 'pathways to poverty' are held to be 'cultures' (e.g. the dependency culture), which *are* implied to possess causal significance. However, these cultures are ultimately based on a reductionist ontology where they are held to be little more than the patterns of individual behaviour, which are in turn seen to be the *effects of* individual moral agency. Therefore some parts of the texts identify the pathways as the effects of material structures, while other parts identify the pathways as cultures that are assumed to be causal but also assumed to be determined by the moral agency of individuals.

The third theme, 'the family' was discussed in relation to three causal strands: individuals, internal structures, and external structures. Internal family structures such as a married couple or young parents are held to be the products of individual choices, but those structures then take on a causal power of their own, as they can stabilise or destabilise families. Therefore, individuals are morally responsible for family breakdown to the extent that they are morally responsible for choosing the internal structure of their family. The choice of internal family structure is held to be the choice of the adult individuals who comprise it, while simultaneously being something that government policy makers can manipulate through incentivisation and socialisation of children. A potential tension emerges between the assumption that children's actions are determined by their socialisation and adults' actions are determined by their moral responsibility. However, in these texts at least, this tension is mitigated by a number of policy proposals that seek to give adults, and especially parents, various forms of social support, which can be interpreted (perhaps generously) as corrections to their childhood socialisation.

The fourth theme analysed was 'the third sector', which is offered as the source of the primary solution to poverty and unemployment, as per the party's overarching theme of the 'Big Society' discussed in Chapter 4. In the analysed texts, discussions of the third sector focus on individuals as community leaders, volunteers and philanthropists, rather than focussing on the institutions that comprise the third sector. Indeed, the third sector is assumed to derive its value and uniqueness from the fact that it is comprised of morally-motivated and free-acting individuals. However, it is in relation to this assumption that a contradiction arises, because the third sector must be free in order to have value, but there must be state intervention for the third sector to

perform the welfare functions required of it. The government solution is to turn to incentivisation, but this would seem to contradict the free and moral motivations of individuals that are at the heart of the third sector. Therefore, the government's attempt to direct the third sector would seem to compromise the necessity of its freedom, and the particular use of incentives would seem to compromise the necessity of its morally-motivated action.

Many of these tensions derive from an ontological problem identified and discussed in relation to the fifth and final theme of the section: 'the benefits system'. How does the government assign causal and moral responsibility to individuals, while simultaneously making major changes to individual decision making? One answer is through the education of children, but this risks exposing a contradiction between the socialisation of children and the free moral decisions of adults: if each adult is the product of their childhood socialisation, their causal responsibility decreases, and we are left wondering to what extent adults can then be held morally responsible for their decisions? Another answer is through the use of financial incentives, but this creates a another ontological problem, because if policy makers are able to have a direct causal influence on individual decision making through the manipulation of incentive frameworks, this would seem an unavoidable recognition that individual decisions are not solely the causal responsibility of agents; this would therefore limit the extent to which individuals can be held to be *morally* responsible for their decisions and actions. Ultimately the main proposed changes to the benefits system are to use incentivisation and to incorporate the third sector, but in the third sector the use of incentives becomes even more problematic because the third sector is fundamentally based on the freedom and non-financial-motivation of volunteers.

Section 2: The formation of the Coalition

Texts analysed in this section and their abbreviations:

CM2010: *The Conservative Manifesto 2010* (Conservative Party 2010)
LDM2010: *Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2010* (Liberal Democrats 2010)

The aim of this section is not to offer the maximum *depth* of analysis in the identification of ontological assumptions; it is instead a comparative analysis, focussed on the differences and similarities between three sets of ontological assumptions: (1) the assumptions of the Conservative modernisation period, as laid out in Section 1; (2) the assumptions present in *CM2010*; (3) the assumptions underpinning Liberal

Democrat policy proposals, explored through an analysis of *LDM2010*. Such comparisons are essential for understanding the basic foundation of the Coalition Government, and therefore for providing an overview that contextualises the more detailed analysis of the Coalition in the following chapter. These comparisons also form an important link between the analysis of the Conservative Party out of government and the Conservative Party *in coalition*, with a particular focus on continuity and discontinuity. Finally, the comparisons made in this section perform a broader role within the thesis by addressing the important question of the Liberal Democrat influence on Coalition social policy. The analysis of this section is used in the conclusion to reinforce the justification for focussing most of the analysis of this thesis on the Conservative Party.

The continuation of Conservative assumptions

CM2010 (Conservative Party 2010: vii) explicitly states that it advocates "a change from one political philosophy to another" and that this can be summed up "in a simple phrase", "the change we offer is from big government to Big Society". It is clearly stated that this change is *not* a change within Conservative thinking but refers to a change in *government* from the Labour Party to the Conservative Party. Extract 5.23 explicitly claims that there has been a stability and consistency in Conservative ideas, built around the concept of 'responsibility'. In order to assess this claim of consistency, it is necessary to compare the assumptions identified in Section 1 with those that underpin *CM2010*.

Extract 5.23: "[O]ur core values have not altered and our core beliefs remain consistent. We believe in responsibility: government responsibility with public finances, personal responsibility for our actions, and social responsibility towards each other." (Conservative Party 2010: vii)

As Extract 5.23 makes clear, the centrality of 'responsibility' remains. However, the shared responsibility for welfare between state and society seems to have shifted slightly to the extent that the government's responsibility is to the public finances rather than the welfare of citizens. Welfare is alternatively attributed to both 'social responsibility', presumably in the form of the welfare society, and to the now more prominent concept of 'personal responsibility'. The greater explicit focus on individual responsibility can be seen in another subtle shift: the changed assumptions about the concept of responsibility itself. It was identified that during the Conservative modernisation period, the increase in *remit* responsibility was assumed to lead to an

increase in *causal* responsibility, (i.e. an increase in *agency*)*,* and that in the process people would require support to increase their confidence and personal skills. However, Extract 5.24 makes the much bolder assumption that an increase in remit responsibility will also lead to an increase in *moral* responsibility, and that the provision of support is no longer required. Therefore, rather than merely assuming that *increasing an individual's remit leads to an increase in their agency*, it is now assumed that *increasing an individual's remit leads to an increased likelihood of them making the 'right moral decisions'*. The position on human agency seems to have shifted from Section 1 in two ways: firstly, individuals are now assumed to be more in control of their actions, acquiring both causal and moral responsibility; secondly, individuals are no longer thought to be in need of state '*support*' in the acquisition of the skills necessary to exercise their agency and moral responsibility.

Extract 5.24: "As Conservatives, we trust people. We believe that if people are given more responsibility, they will behave more responsibly." (Conservative Party 2010: ix)

These shifts can be understood as an attempt to solve the ontological problem identified in Section 1, whereby the success of Conservative welfare reform relies on the 'right' moral decisions of individuals in the family and the third sector. That problem arose because, although these moral decisions must be the product of individual agency, it is simultaneously necessary for the government to bring them about. Therefore, in making the suggestion that more remit responsibility inherently leads to more *moral* responsibility, the Conservatives seem to have found a way to enact their desired changes without compromising the necessary role of individual agency. However, the problem is only avoided *if* one assumes that there is an *objective* morality, because if morality is subjective, then a Conservative government would be using state power and state structures in order to bring about particular forms of behaviour that accord with their party's *own* morality. If morality *is* held to be objective, then the Conservative approach can be understood as an attempt to give people more agency so that they can adhere more closely to objective morality, and avoid being corrupted by state structures, such as the benefit system. Therefore, two assumptions are being made in Extract 5.24: explicitly, it is claimed that individuals with more responsibility (both remit and causal) are more likely to make morally correct decisions; implicitly, it is assumed that there is such a thing as *morally correct decisions* in an objective sense, so that people can be understood to be exercising their moral responsibility either successfully or unsuccessfully. Therefore, the state can give

individuals more remit responsibility and expect that those individuals will act both (a) freely, and (b) according to the wishes of policy makers.

The ontological problem is also addressed in another claim made in *CM2010*; there is an open acceptance that the proposed reforms "*require a social response in order to be successful*" (Conservative Party 2010: 37, emphasis added). This assumption coherently reinforces the notion of 'shared responsibility' between state and society, because for the reforms to be successful, the *morally* responsible actions of policy makers must be matched by the *morally* responsible actions of individuals. In summary, there is an ontological contradiction left over from the Conservative Party's modernisation period that is as follows: the state wants to bring about social change but necessarily requires that this social change is brought about by causally and morally responsible agents. *CM2010* makes three assumptions as solutions: firstly, it assumes that giving people a greater remit (the area for which they are responsible) will automatically give them causal responsibility (agency) *and* moral responsibility (the likelihood of making the right choice); secondly, it implicitly assumes that there is such a thing as 'right choices', making a belief in an objective morality a necessary part of the first solution; finally, it argues that, as a result of the shared remit between state and society, policy makers are not fully responsible for the success or failure of their policies, because this is now also the responsibility of individuals (in the third sector and the family).

However, despite these subtle changes in assumptions, the central ontological problem continues to arise on this issue. This is because of the new emphasis on the importance of the 'social response' alongside an intensified role for the state in creating this response, as demonstrated in Extract 5.25. If the state is the primary causal force in the 'remaking of society', then society is not taking responsibility for itself in terms of either causal or moral responsibility: individuals would not be significantly *causal* in the resultant change, because the dominant causal force would be the state. And, without any significant causal responsibility, it is impossible to ascribe moral responsibility to individuals, because the moral duty has been performed by the state and not by the people. Therefore, although the issues surrounding responsibility no longer exhibit an open ontological contradiction, tensions continue to exist on this issue. Furthermore, this shift has led to contradictions in other areas, most importantly with regards to education and unemployment.

Extract 5.25: "The state must take action to agitate for, catalyse and galvanise social renewal. We must use the state to help remake society." (Conservative Party 2010: 37)

The interrelated importance of worklessness, dependency and educational failure retains a role in the Conservative Party's causal explanations, as seen in the claim that people who leave school without skills are consigned "to an uncertain future of worklessness and dependency" (Conservative Party 2010: 17). The overarching policy proposal in the section "Get Britain working again" (ibid: 15-16) is the introduction of "a single Work Programme for everybody who is unemployed" (ibid: 15). This programme is a combination of "targeted, personalised help" (ibid: 15) delivered through the third sector and a series of measures to prevent people from avoiding work. There is an underlying assumption that people have been claiming benefits in order to avoid work, which can be seen in the proposed reassessment of all Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients to identify those who are "genuinely disabled" (ibid: 15) or the withdrawal of benefits from those who turn down "reasonable job offers" (ibid: 16). These proposed changes of tighter regulations seem to contradict the notion of 'trusting people' by giving them more responsibility. The increase in sanctions deliberately reduces individuals' causal and remit responsibility based on the assumption that they have failed or indeed *will* fail to exercise their moral responsibility. In making this assumption, the text seems to be directly contradicting the position set out in Extract 5.25. The approach to unemployment can be summarised abstractly as a withdrawal of agency through an implementation of a stronger structure in the welfare system.

The link between educational failure and worklessness continues to be based on tackling the problem of "workless households" (Conservative Party 2010: 15), which in turn links to the notion that "strong families are the bedrock of a strong society" and that "the relationships they foster are the foundation on which society is built" (ibid: 41). However, although the links between worklessness and the family still seem to be implied, there is no longer any clear association between 'marriage', 'family breakdown' and 'poverty', which was the explicitly stated central argument of *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007). There is still a clear proposal to challenge 'worklessness and dependency' and a clear argument about "strengthening the relationship between all family members" (Conservative Party 2010: 41), but the causal links between these two areas seem to be largely ignored. Instead, there is a further increased importance for the other major institutions of the 'welfare society', third sector organisations; "in a simple phrase, the change we offer is from big government

to Big Society" (ibid: vii). This shift in emphasis is accompanied by a shift in language, with the terms 'third sector' and 'welfare society' replaced by the 'Big Society', which is more directly linked to the responsibility agenda in its definition as a "a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control" (ibid: 37). Extract 5.26 captures this intensification of the link between the central discourse of 'responsibility' and the central idea of 'the Big Society'. Therefore, while the modernisation period gave a central causal role to the family and a secondary role to the third sector, *CM2010* gives a central causal role to 'the Big Society', a concept that links the third sector with the 'responsibility agenda', and in doing so displaces the importance of the family as the central causal force in social change.

Extract 5.26: "Our alternative to big government is the Big Society: a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility" (CM2010: 37)

Despite a reduced importance for the family, many of the ontological contradictions inherent in the Conservative modernisation era approach to 'family breakdown' still persist. The recurring ontological tension between individual responsibility and state control arise in relation to the family as they do in relation to the third sector. However, an additional ontological problem arises that is specific to the way in which the family is conceived: the difference between adults as agents and children as agency-less. During the modernisation period, this problem was mitigated by policy proposals to provide adults with 'support' so as to counteract the negative influences of their childhood socialisation; but, in *CM2010* this tension has intensified into a contradiction because the 'support' given to families can no longer be interpreted as a 'correction' or 'counterbalance' to socialisation. Despite a central aim of the text to "make Britain the most family-friendly country in Europe" (Conservative Party 2010: 41) and "help families with all the pressures they face" (ibid: 41), the support offered to families is largely *material* in nature, based on financial incentives and the greater availability of childcare. While these policies may certainly help many families, it is the underlying assumptions that are the concern here, and the assumption here seems to be that parents are in need of 'material assistance' but not 'cultural support'. Extract 5.27 hints towards the resultant problem. Children are supposedly being raised and socialised within the family without exercising any agency of their own, but once they become adults, and especially parents, their socialisation is no longer considered as a causal factor; the person they become is designated as the product of their agency.

The contradiction emerges here because of the *strictness* of the separation and the apparent failure to acknowledge the lasting effects of childhood socialisation on adults.

Extract 5.27: "How will we raise responsible children unless every adult plays their part?" (Conservative Party 2010: iii)

In Section 1, the notion of 'culture' was given a prominent role both in terms of identifying the causes of problems and as a target for solutions. Although there was some ambiguity about the causal power of culture and although culture was often seen to be a direct product of agency, it clearly held some importance as a causal factor. For example, the "anti-schooling culture" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 61), the "dependency culture" (*BtB*, SJPG 2007 v2: 96) and the "culture of worklessness" (*WfW*, Conservative Party 2008: 22) were considered as important factors in intergenerational poverty. Indeed, it was through culture that the 'pathways to poverty' were held to exist as *causes* of poverty. However, in *CM2010*, there is no ambiguity, culture is not held to exert causal power in its own right; it is instead seen to be the product of individual agents, a position neatly captured in Extract 5.28. Along with the reimagining of culture as an effect rather than a cause, it is also no longer a feature of any parts of the manifesto that relate to welfare or poverty. In a similar vein, the 'pathways to poverty', which was both the framework and central argument of the SJPG, are entirely absent from the manifesto. In place of these cultural causes and cultural solutions, is a much increased concern with financial incentives. A system of incentives is proposed for rail franchises, the NHS, university graduates, energy policy, community-led planning, recycling, water conservation and encouraging environmentally friendly behaviour (Conservative Party 2010). Although there is no clear discussion of incentives in relation to poverty and welfare, Extract 5.29, taken from the section "vote blue, go green" (ibid: 89), gives an explicit insight into the material-centred ontological assumptions of the document as whole.

Extract 5.28: "This is an age of personal freedom and choice, when culture and debate are shaped by a multitude of voices." (Conservative Party 2010: 63)

Extract 5.29: "Instead of using rules and regulations to impose a centralised worldview, we will go with the grain of human nature, creating new incentives and market signals which reward people for doing the right thing." (Conservative Party 2010: 89)

Extract 5.29 offers an explicit declaration of a material-centred ontology, a position that is consistent with numerous other policy areas in the text, including the incentivisation of marriage, which was the main concrete policy proposal for tackling poverty in the modernisation era documents. This shift towards a more materially dominated ontology links clearly to the discussions of neoliberalism in Chapter 3: culture-centred neoliberalism identifies cultural phenomena, such as the 'culture of dependency', to be the main causes of poverty, and thus the changing of these cultures is the solution to poverty; material-centred neoliberalism identifies cultural phenomena to be the effects of poverty, which is ultimately held to be caused by problems with material incentive frameworks. While the texts analysed in Section 1 lacked stability in their assumptions on this matter, there was a clear, perhaps even dominant, position for the cultural-centred view and, although the material-centred view was also significantly present in the modernisation period, it becomes the dominant ontological position in *CM2010,* where the cultural-centred approach is effectively abandoned.

We have already seen how this move away from cultural-centred assumptions has created a contradiction between socialised children and free-agent adults, but it also has to be acknowledged that this shift causes problems for the tension between individual responsibility and government control. If the government simply increases individuals' remit responsibility, for example by giving them a choice over back-to-work service providers, or if the government offers training and support in order to increase individual agency, then a contradiction does not arise, as discussed above. However, if the government seeks to "go with the grain of human nature" (Conservative Party 2010: 89) and use incentives to change behaviour, then the contradiction re-emerges between individuals 'doing the right thing' as a result of causal and moral responsibility on the one hand, and individuals 'doing the right thing' as a result of government-designed frameworks of incentives on the other. If personal responsibility is central to the welfare society in terms of individuals, families and the third sector, then these frameworks of financial incentives would seem to be eroding the foundations on which the 'Big Society' is (or will be) built. In other words, financial incentives are a 'top-down' solution of the kind explicitly opposed across all five documents discussed so far, because they do not bolster agency, they instead seek to modify the behaviour of individuals, often in opposition to their agency, which necessarily *reduces* the remit, causal and moral responsibility of those individuals.

The role of Liberal Democrat assumptions

One difficulty with the Liberal Democrat manifesto is the scarcity of discussion about welfare, benefits, and poverty. The section of the manifesto that focusses on the welfare system begins by arguing that "Labour has created a hugely complex and unfair benefits system, and it needs to be reformed" (Liberal Democrats 2010: 17), but most of the proposed reforms made in this section specifically relate to pensioner benefits. The only policy outside the pension reform proposals is displayed in Extract 5.30 and focusses on some more specific amendments to the tax-credit system, offering little insight into the underlying assumptions. This absence of social security policy proposals and general discussion of social security policy is notable in *LDM2010*, as it marks an area within which minimal interest is displayed, which in turn has consequences for the Coalition negotiations that occurred after the 2010 general election. In order to identify the ontological assumptions that do appear in *LDM2010*, it is necessary to look at some other related areas of the text.

Extract 5.30: "Ending the rollercoaster of tax credit overpayments by fixing payments for six months at a time. We will also target payments towards those who need them most." (Liberal Democrats 2010: 18)

Extract 5.31 shows the only direct mention of unemployment in *LDM2010*. The claim that people have taken pay cuts and reduced hours in order to keep their jobs suggests that these individuals are not a causal factor in their own unemployment and underemployment. Instead, it is held that this unemployment is caused by Britain "struggling to emerge from a long and difficult recession" (Liberal Democrats 2010: 5). This assumption can be identified in various other parts of the text, where there are a number of different policies focussed on job-creation, an area of policy that is entirely absent from the Conservative documents analysed in this thesis. If the proposal to "create jobs for those who need them" (ibid: 21) is considered as one of the Liberal Democrats' "big ideas for fundamental, structural changes in the way our country works to make it fair" (ibid: 5), then we can see that the party is concerned with unemployment at a *macro-economic* level. By focussing on the supply of jobs rather than the skills or moral responsibility of individuals, the text is exhibiting a structuralist position that is most closely aligned to the social democratic ideology laid out in Chapter 3. Furthermore, the focus on economic systems as the primary causal factor in unemployment demonstrates a concern with material causes, rather than a cultural focus on the values or ideas held by individuals or within communities.

Extract 5.31: "Millions are unemployed, and millions more have taken pay cuts or reduced hours to stay in their jobs." (Liberal Democrats 2010: 8)

The "four steps to a fairer Britain" that form the central framework of the text include: (1) "fair taxes", focussed on tax cuts for the low paid and the pension reforms mentioned above; (2) "a fair future", focussed on cutting the deficit and environmental protections; and (3) "a fair deal", which is focused on reforms to the political system (Liberal Democrats 2010: 6-7). The fourth 'step', "a fair chance for every child" (ibid: 6), is the one that is most relevant to social security policy and most likely to give an insight into ontological assumptions. Policies in this area are directed towards the family and the education system, two factors that were discussed in some detail in Section 1 of this chapter and therefore offer useful points of comparison.

There is a remarkable similarity between the policy proposals about the family in *CM2010* and *LDM2010*, with both documents calling for shared maternity leave, more free childcare, an extension of the right to flexible working, and a range of benefits for those of pension age. While these policies offer little insight into the underlying ontological assumptions of the texts, a related area demonstrates assumptions about the socialisation of children. Both manifestos present policies that seek to reduce advertising directed at children: *LDM2010* directs its attention towards "negative body images" that develop from "airbrushing in adverts" (Liberal Democrats 2010: 50), and *CM2010* takes a broader approach seeking to "reverse the commercialisation of children" (Conservative Party 2010: 43). The concern with advertising and children implies a shared assumption about the ways in which individuals are socialised in their early life, introducing doubts about the extent to which people exercise agency free from the *cultural* constraints of society. However, unlike *CM2010*, *LDM2010 does* assume that children have *some* agency, putting forward various policy proposals that would give children choices about their education, including a choice from the age of 14 about taking up a college course and a concern that the education system provides "enough flexibility for every young child" (Liberal Democrats 2010: 36). In *CM2010*, the focus is on "giving every *parent* access to a good school" (Conservative Party 2010: 53) and increasing the powers of teachers, headteachers and parents, without any part of the text suggesting that children should or can exercise agency. By ascribing some agency to children, *LDM2010* avoids the contradiction between a structure-centred conception of children and an agency-centred conception of adults.

The socialisation of children would seem to acknowledge some causal force for cultural factors in society, but the Liberal Democrat view of education is largely based on material-centred assumptions. In opposition to the Conservative position that "funding is not the answer" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 52), *LDM2010* puts forward a range of substantial policies about increasing funding for schools in order to challenge the trend identified in Extract 5.32. The actual claim made in Extract 5.32 stops short of an economic determinism that would have attributed all causal power to material structures; instead the phrase "more determined" highlights the important role of material structures, but also implies a scalar view of economic determinism, where individuals in some countries are more or less determined by parental income than in others. This in turn suggests that the dominance of material structures in determining life chances is accompanied by other causal factors, and more importantly, it is held to be a contingency rather than an inevitability.

Extract 5.32: "in Britain today your chances in life are more determined by your parents' income than anywhere else in the developed world." (Liberal Democrats 2010: 33)

This important, if not determining, role for material factors in education has to be understood in the wider context of assumptions in order to understand the Liberal Democrat position on the material-cultural issue. Firstly, the very notion that education is a *solution* to the restraints of economic structures, suggests an underlying concern with the power of cultural agency; that is, the extent to which increasing an individual's *knowledge* gives them the power to overcome the material structuring of society. This is a position that shares a social democratic focus on a planned restructuring of society so as to increase the agency of those in poverty. Secondly, although the central reform proposal for education relates to the increase of school funding and changes to the distribution of that funding, an important supporting policy suggestion is to "free schools from the present stranglehold of central government" (Liberal Democrats 2010: 34). This policy of "setting schools free" (ibid: 33) is designed to increase 'innovation' (ibid: 34), which again relates to cultural factors, specifically the importance of fostering new ideas in the provision of education. Although this is by no means exclusively a neoliberal idea, it closely resembles the assumptions put forward by the cultural-centred neoliberalism of Hayek, in the sense that greater freedom for individuals is important because of the inevitable dispersal of knowledge in society. The prevalence of this assumption in *LDM2010* can also be seen in relation to broader public sector reforms.

The broader reform in the provision of public sector services is a concern for both *LDM2010* and *CM2010*. Extract 5.33 shows that the Liberal Democrat approach shares certain features with the Conservative's 'Big Society', by focussing on the provision of services at a local level by local people freely cooperating. Extract 5.34 reinforces the importance of voluntary activity as the underlying driver of third sector institutions, emphasising the importance of individual agency as a causal force. However, unlike the strong Conservative concern with minimising government influence in the third sector, the Liberal Democrats advocate the increased involvement of communities *via the institutions of the state*. Therefore, although there are some brief proposals to increase volunteering and charitable donation, *LDM2010* does *not* advocate the transferal of power and service provision to third sector institutions. Instead the Liberal Democrats seeks to transfer the voluntarism of the third sector *into public service provision*. *LDM2010* advocates more power and choice for "local people" in the police service, the criminal justice system, public transport and rural land management, *but all of these freedoms are to be exercised through existing state institutions*. An important difference therefore arises here between the two texts on the conceptualised role of agency in the third sector: in *LDM2010,* the contradiction between state control and the voluntary action of individuals is somewhat mitigated. This is because it is proposed that the institutions through which voluntary action operates are to be established by the state. Therefore, where the Conservative's offer the problematic proposal that these institutions will perform the roles required by the state, while simultaneously being organic products of individual agency, the Liberal Democrats instead acknowledge and embrace the state as the instigator and director of third sector provision.

Extract 5.33: "Liberal Democrats believe in strong communities, where local people can come together to meet local needs" (LDM 2010: 70)

Extract 5.34: "We believe that society is strengthened by communities coming together and engaging in voluntary activity, which sets people and neighbourhoods free to tackle local problems." (LDM 2010: 84)

This brief overview of the ontological assumptions in the Liberal Democrat manifesto has allowed some useful points of comparison with the Conservative position. *LDM2010* focusses on the link between the level of unemployment and the 2008 economic crash. While it may seem uncontroversial to draw links between the

economy and unemployment, such links are notably absent in the Conservative Party documents. This implies a Liberal Democrat concern with material factors and structural factors, though not necessarily a 'materialist structuralism'. The same pattern of assumptions can be seen in the education system, where economic factors are seen to be major determinants of individual behaviour, but these economic factors are held to be a contingency rather than an inevitability. The education policy also provides insights into assumptions about the role of culture, with *LDM2010* seeming to ascribe to a social democratic project of restructuring society so as to increase individual agency through education, and a neoliberal project of freeing schools to make their own decisions. The tension between these projects is worth noting, but there is not the space to allocate any further discussion of this possible contradiction. The concern with the cultural effects of marketing on children are a notable similarity between the two parties, but *LDM2010*, is distinct in its proposal to offer children decision making capacities in the education system. This proposal recognises the agency of children, and therefore avoids the Conservative Party's contradiction between a structuralist explanation of childhood and an agentialist explanation of adulthood. Finally, this sub-section engaged with the proposals of both parties to increase the role of the third sector in public sector provision. While both see this as an important policy goal, the Liberal Democrat manifesto focusses on the state direction of this project, and therefore avoids the Conservative Party's contradiction between the need for state direction and the need for institutions of spontaneous voluntarism.

It is necessary to conclude this discussion of the Liberal Democrats by making two points of clarification. Firstly, this section has largely been a comparison between the assumptions underpinning Conservative social policy proposals and the assumptions underpinning Liberal Democrat policy proposals. The former have been explored at length and in detail throughout this chapter, while the latter have been briefly discussed in relation to one document. This imbalance has prevented a thorough discussion of Liberal Democrat assumptions, and has given the (potentially false) impression that the party's social policy proposals are underpinned by a more coherent set of ontological assumptions. Although it has been shown that *LDM2010* avoids some of the contradictions identified in Conservative Party documents, it would be wrong to conclude that this necessarily means that the Liberal Democrat assumptions are more coherent, because different ontological contradictions could be present, but missed due to the brevity of the analysis. The second point of clarification to be made is that *LDM2010*'s lack of discussion about social security policy is an important indication that the Liberal Democrats had a limited impact on this area of

social policy, focussing instead on education and pensions. This observation has been noted in other analyses (e.g. McKay and Rowlingson 2016), and offers a justification for the primary focus on the Conservative Party when exploring Coalition social security policy. This reinforces a more compelling justification, made across chapters 4-6 of this thesis, namely that Iain Duncan Smith's 'social justice agenda' appears as a continuous policy project through the Conservative modernisation period and through the Coalition's five year administration.

Conclusion

The complexity of the assumptions discussed in this section and their disjointed and often contradictory nature is in part a reflection of the policy process, the early phases of which Fairclough (2003) characterises with reference to the numerous conflicting voices within texts. As policy becomes solidified and prepared for legislation, it becomes less dialogous (contains fewer different voices), and therefore more homogenous, in its inevitable movement towards consensus. This is perhaps an important reason why the texts discussed in Chapter 6, which are closer to the point of policy implementation, have a clearer set of underlying ontological assumptions. However, as the ontological assumptions become clearer, the ontological contradictions also become clearer, and it becomes apparent that three different strands of assumptions underpin the policy documents. In the current section, the analysis has instead identified a multiplicity of assumptions, some of which stand in tension, some of which complement one another.

Chapter 6

Document Analysis: Policy Implementation in Coalition

Introduction

The texts analysed in this chapter were all published by the DWP during the five years of the Coalition Government. The earliest text, *21st Century Welfare* (DWP 2010a), was published in July 2010 just two months after the Coalition came to power, while the latest text, *Universal Credit at Work: Spring 2015* (DWP 2015), was published in the February before the 2015 general election. As with the modernisation period analysed in the previous chapter, it is possible to identify some nuanced changes in policy over the Coalition's period in office, but with the complexity of the underlying assumptions, these changes do not form a part of the central argument of this chapter. Instead, the texts are considered as a single representation of the assumptions underpinning the DWP reforms during the Coalition's five year period in office, and are organised according to their subject matter. Section 1 is an analysis of the 'social justice agenda' policy documents, dealing with the broad framework within which welfare reform was undertaken. This 'social justice' framework can be understood as the descendent of the Social Justice Policy Group of the Conservative modernisation period and its central theory of the 'five pathways to poverty'. Section 2 deals with Universal Credit and the Work Programme, offering analysis of the documents in which these policies were developed and evaluated.

As interrelated strands of policy *within* the broader social justice agenda, Universal Credit and the Work Programme are explored together as a case study of welfare reform. Such policies are primarily designed to address 'worklessness and economic dependency' but are indirectly held to contribute to other areas of social policy, including education and the family. Universal Credit was, and at the time of writing continues to be, the flagship welfare reform of the UK Government and the primary policy concern of the DWP. It seeks to simplify and integrate existing benefit systems for the stated aims of creating incentives to work and ensuring that these incentives are made clear to benefit claimants. The Work Programme was also an

amalgamation of previous systems, but where Universal Credit deals with financial support, the Work Programme focusses on training and experience for unemployed benefit claimants, usually as a condition of the continued receipt of benefits. The key policy documents relating to the social justice agenda, to Universal Credit, and to the Work Programme are analysed in detail in order to establish the underlying ontological assumptions of Coalition's welfare reform. Where Section 1 investigates the ontological assumptions underpinning the DWP's *explanation* of poverty, Section 2 explores the extent to which these assumptions underpin *actual policy solutions*.

In Section 1, the analysis of the 'social justice agenda' is structured in the following way: firstly, there is an identification of the main structure-agency assumptions implicit in the texts, and it is argued that they roughly fall into three ontological models, which are labelled the 'life-course model', the 'rationalist model', and the 'responsibility model'; secondly, these models are discussed in relation to assumptions about material and cultural causes, and it is broadly argued that the 'life-course model' focusses on the causal power of *cultural* phenomena, the 'rationalist model' takes a purely *materialist* outlook, and the 'responsibility model' incorporates both cultural and material causes. Section 2 then analyses the role of these models in action, exploring the extent to which the contradictions identified in Section 1 lead through to contradictions within and between particular policies. Ultimately, it is argued that a number of problematic contradictions exist within the Coalition Government's *explanation* of poverty and that some of these are carried through to the actual policy reforms; certain key differences that do exist open up further contradictions *between* the social justice agenda's explanations on the one hand, and the Universal Credit and Work Programme *solutions* on the other.

Section 1 - The social justice agenda

Texts analysed in this section (abbreviated collectively as the SJA texts):

Social Justice: transforming lives (DWP 2012a)

Social Justice Outcomes Framework (DWP 2012b)

Social Justice: transforming lives one year on (DWP 2013a)

Social Justice: transforming lives progress report (DWP 2014a)

In March 2012, the government released the first of their publications that explicitly addressed social justice: *Social Justice: transforming lives* (DWP 2012a). Following up

on the work of *BdB* (SJPG 2006) and *BtB* (SJPG 2007), the DWP produced a holistic exploration of the causes of poverty in their 'social justice agenda' (SJA), which had implications for a number of government departments, including the Department of Education and the Ministry of Justice. During their time in opposition, the Conservative Party used the 'pathways to poverty' model as the organising structure of their approach to welfare, dividing the broad issue of 'social justice' into six areas, five of which were labelled the 'pathways to poverty' and the sixth of which concerned the role of third sector institutions. This approach has effectively been maintained as the backbone of the SJA texts. The family, the education system and employment remain the three central concerns and each have their own chapter in all four of the SJA documents. Although the term 'pathway' is entirely absent from the texts analysed in this chapter, the specific terms for each pathway remain unchanged; 'family breakdown', 'educational failure', and 'worklessness' are still held to be the primary causes of poverty. The other causes, 'addiction' and 'indebtedness', are merged together with 'homelessness', 're-offending', and 'mental ill health' under the umbrella term 'disadvantaged adults'. The concern with the third sector is much reduced, with the chapter heading 'delivering social justice' focussed generically on 'providers', including both private and third sector institutions.

In the current section, *Social Justice: transforming lives* (DWP 2012a) is analysed alongside a number of follow-up texts: *Social Justice Outcomes Framework* (DWP 2012b), *Social Justice: transforming lives one year on* (DWP 2013a), and *Social Justice: transforming lives progress report* (DWP 2014a). These texts, collectively described as the SJA texts in this chapter, offer an important source for understanding the underlying assumptions of the Coalition Government's approach to welfare reform, because they lay out the broad explanation of poverty that underpins the specific policy solutions. Each of the texts has been closely analysed for phrases, sentences, and sections that offer an insight into underlying ontological assumptions. The approach to analysis in this chapter, in its theoretical underpinnings and practical method, is the same as in Chapter 5, with the only major difference being the documents under analysis. In this section, the findings of the analysis are presented under two main headings, the first deals with the structure-agency issue and the second the material-cultural issue.

Ontological assumptions about structure and agency

In the SJA policy documents, it is possible to identify three main strands of assumptions about structure and agency. In the following analysis, these three strands

are outlined and the logical relations between them are explored, with consideration of both contradictions and complementarities. The first of these strands will be labelled the 'life-course model', a name derived from the policy documents themselves, which all state that their central strategy "follows a life-cycle structure" (DWP 2012a: 13). The second strand will be labelled the 'rationalist model', not because the texts themselves refer to 'rationality', but because there are key sections and policies that are fundamentally based on a rational understanding of the individual. The third main strand of structure-agency assumptions will be labelled the 'responsibility model', because, following the centrality of 'responsibility' to the Conservative modernisation period, the concept retains a significant position within the social justice agenda. Although it may be possible to further divide each of these three strands or perhaps to detect other more minor ones, this section argues that the 'life-course model', as the dominant ontological position, and the 'rationalist' and 'responsibility' models as significant supplements, capture the main structure-agency assumptions within these texts.

The life-course model emphasises the social formation of individual agents in a chronology from their childhood socialisation in the family, through the education system, into the world of work and welfare, and finally in their experiences of the 'disadvantages' of debt, addiction, homelessness, domestic violence and the criminal justice system. Extract 6.1, which is an extract from the first principle of the social justice strategy, offers a clear summary of this life-course model. Because the contextual settings of the life-course are held to shape and mould individuals, they are theorised as being important causal forces *external from* the individuals of which they are comprised. Therefore, the life-course model attributes significant causal power to *institutional structures*, primarily to the micro-structure of the family, the structuring of the education and welfare systems, and the positive conditioning force of employment, but also to numerous other contextual settings, including the care system and the short-term loans market. The extent and depth of the causal role attributed to these contexts ascribes limited agency to the individuals *who are formed by them*. Therefore, to some significant extent, the life-course model assumes that *agents are constituted by the social contexts in which they have lived and through which they are socialised*. Extract 6.2 demonstrates this in its long-term outlook on the socialisation of individuals. Finally, the dominant position that the life-course model holds in these texts is made clear in Extract 6.3, which explicitly states the centrality of this approach to the overall strategy of the social justice agenda.

Extract 6.1: "This starts with support for the most important building block in a child's life – the family – but also covers reform of the school and youth justice systems, the welfare system, and beyond to look at how we can prevent damaging behaviours like substance abuse and offending." (DWP 2012a: 1)

Extract 6.2: "it will take many years to see the impact of our reforms work their way through, as today's children reach adulthood" (DWP 2012a: 35)

Extract 6.3: "This strategy follows a lifecycle structure, showing how Social Justice offers a new approach to preventing problems occurring at different stages in people's lives, as well as providing a second chance where disadvantages have already set in." (DWP 2012a: 13)

The texts are rather ambiguous on the processes or mechanisms through which 'socialisation' actually occurs in the life-course model. Perhaps one reason for this ambiguity is that explicit considerations of the individual in these texts tend to rely on one of the other two strands of structure-agency assumptions. The first of these is the rationalist model, where the individual is conceived of as self-interested and materially motivated, and the social context is considered as a framework of incentives. Extract 6.4 shows how financial incentives, including both the incentives themselves and the individual's knowledge of them, can 'trap' people as benefit claimants. The suggestion that people can be '*trapped'* by incentives, shows that they are assumed to have little of the free-thinking or creative agency necessary to act against their material interests. It therefore follows that the most important causal force in this model is the material context from which interests are derived, or in other words, the framework of incentives within which an individual is situated.

Extract 6.4: "The welfare system this government inherited" ... "Its complexity and failure to incentivise employment trapped people in the security of claiming benefits, unsure of whether they would be better off in-work" (38)

As with the life-course model, the rationalist model therefore prioritises the causal significance of the structured context over the reflexive or creative power of the individual. But, unlike the life-course model, which posits a chronological explanation of how individuals are socialised, and therefore *constituted*, by their institutional contexts, the rationalist model assumes agents to be fundamentally alike in their rational material self-interest, regardless of their family upbringing, educational history etc. The shared

characteristics between individuals, specifically their self-interest and material motivation, shifts the explanatory focus towards the structuring of financial incentives and disincentives. This implies that the structural context does not have the lasting constitutive effect on agents that it has in the life-course model, but instead exerts causal power through the financial rewards and penalties on particular courses of action in particular situations. However, despite lacking the causal power to constitute an individual's character, the rational conception of the social context still has a significant, almost deterministic, impact on the behaviour of individuals. The power of incentives can be seen in the payment-by-results approach alluded to in Extract 6.5, where material incentives not only change the behaviour of 'Work Programme providers', but also incentivise these providers to solve long-standing social problems by changing the behaviour of 'participants'.

Extract 6.5: "Increased incentives for Work Programme providers, through a higher job outcome payment, improves employment outcomes for participants" (DWP 2014a: 42)

The life-course model and the rationalist model both accord a privileged causal role to social structure, with the former highlighting the *constitutive* power and the latter highlighting the *conditioning* power of the social context. However, the third significant strand of assumptions, the 'responsibility model', emphasises the causal power of the agent. As discussed in the previous chapter, 'responsibility' is variously held to stand for: the causal power of individual agents (causal responsibility); their ability to adhere to a moral course of action (moral responsibility); and also the remit attributed to them by their social position (remit responsibility). If individuals are assumed to have significant control of both their internal functioning (moral responsibility) and external environment (causal responsibility), then the notion of *choice* becomes paramount, because both individual actions and wider social events are assumed to be the causal product of such choices. It is on this basis that Extract 6.6 argues that individuals are best placed to identify their own support needs. The responsibility model does not entirely eclipse social structure because 'remit responsibility' relates to an individual's *social positioning*, such as their parental responsibility or the responsibilities of their job role. Within the responsibility model is the assumption that the extent of one's remit of responsibilities affects the development of one's capacity for moral and causal responsibility. Extract 6.7 neatly captures this assumption of the responsibility model.

Extract 6.6: "An individual's support needs are often best understood by the individual themselves." (64)

Extract 6.7: "Enabling people to make choices and exercise control over the support they receive can develop their sense of responsibility and independence" (64)

These three distinguishable models of structure-agency underpin different parts of the social justice agenda policy documents. However, their delineation above has simplified their overlapping and interrelated natures. In order to reintroduce some of this detail and complexity, the relationships between the three models can be discussed in terms of complementarities and contradictions. Throughout the texts, a complementarity between the life-course model and the rationalist model is developed in order to unite a complex causal explanation of poverty and a much simpler, incentives-based solution to social problems. The rational assumptions implicit in incentives-based solutions are incorporated into the complex causal explanation of the life-course model by means of the former becoming a detail within the latter. Therefore, the life-course model is maintained as the dominant ontological framework but incentive-systems are held to be one example of how life-course socialisation occurs. Extract 6.8 restates the primacy of the life-course model by discussing the chronology of individuals leaving education and moving into work, but it also incorporates the rationalist model in relation to working age individuals. The absence of the rationalist model from explanations of family and education, and its clear presence with regards to work and welfare, demonstrates its positioning *within* the life-course model. On this basis, there is a complementarity between the two sets of assumptions because rationalist theory explains one of the mechanisms through which socialisation operates in the life-course model.

Extract 6.8: "In chapter three we focus on people of working age and our reforms to welfare, ensuring that, once young people leave education, they are met by a system which is supportive and incentivises work." (13)

This incorporation of one explanatory model into another may be of theoretical and practical convenience, but it creates ontological tensions that, over the course of the texts, resolve themselves into a problematic contradiction. In the life-course model, individuals are the products of their own life course, socialised within various institutions and acquiring particular habitual behaviours, characteristics and capabilities. However, in the rationalist model, the assumptions about the individual are uniform, with all individuals considered to be economically motivated and self-interested. Therefore, the contradiction arises in relation to the conceptualisation of

agency, and specifically between a view that individuals are unique products of their lives and a view that they are uniformly rational financially-motivated actors. These two positions can be seen in Extracts 6.9 and 6.10. In Extract 6.9, educational disengagement is seen to affect the individual to the extent that it has a lasting effect on their likelihood of finding work later in life. In Extract 6.10, it is explained that Universal Credit incentivises each extra hour of employment, which assumes a particularly powerful place for incentives that are held to pervade even the smallest decisions about work. Therefore, although these two models both focus on the causal power of the social context, and although there is some attempt to mould them together, there is ultimately a contradiction between a rational materially self-interested individual and a socialised habitual individual. Because both of these positions attribute minimal free-will to the individual, both therefore contradict with an agency-centred third strand: the responsibility model.

Extract 6.9: "disengagement from education, employment or training [...] can lead to a cycle of re-offending and increase the risk of further disadvantage such as worklessness or benefit dependency, as a young person grows older" (2012b 10)

Extract 6.10: "The introduction of Universal Credit is vital – from this year, replacing the main out-of-work benefits and tax credits with a single, simple payment that will make work pay at each and every hour." (DWP 2013a: 26)

Although the rational and responsibility models are both fitted within the dominant life-course framework, their simultaneous inclusion causes contradictions. Under the heading "the importance of work", there is a particularly clear example of a contradiction between rational and responsibility explanations of unemployment. According to the rationalist model, unemployment is caused by a financial incentive to claim benefits and a financial disincentive to enter employment. Extract 6.11 is a clear elucidation of this position, emphasising the dominant causal power of incentive systems by repeating the analogy of an incentives 'trap'. In contrast, the responsibility model is based on the assumption that individuals are causally and morally responsible for their *choice* to claim benefits rather than working. Extract 6.12 offers a clear statement of this position, where it is the individual who makes the choice and the incentives merely determine whether or not that choice is deemed 'logical'. The intertwined nature of the two models is visible in these two extracts, with the 'springboard' of Extract 6.11 opening space for a responsible individual to make the jump into work, and the 'logical choice' of Extract 6.12 acknowledging the existence of

incentive frameworks. However, rather than there being a balance or potential integration of the two models, there is a fluctuation between them throughout the texts, so that in some instances the dominant causal role is attributed to incentive frameworks with individual responsibility being merely epiphenomenal (as in Extract 6.11), while in other instances the dominant causal role is attributed to individual responsibility and it is incentive frameworks that become the epiphenomenon (as in Extract 6.12).

Extract 6.11: "Universal Credit marks a complete shift in our welfare culture, changing the incentives in the benefit system so that it acts as a springboard into work rather than a trap." (DWP 2013a: 27)

Extract 6.12: "The Government will do everything it can to make sure that taking a job is the logical choice, but we expect the individual to make that choice." (DWP 2013a: 39)

Having addressed two of the logical relationships between these three models, we come finally to the relationship between responsibility and life-course assumptions. An attempt seems to be made in the texts to fit the responsibility model into the dominant life-course model and realise a potential complementarity between them. This complementarity involves the assumption that some life-courses are held to produce responsible adults while others are not. For example, in Extract 6.13, it is possible to see how government policy is attempting to change people's life-courses through education so that they become responsible adults, making sound financial decisions. Another, more general, example can be seen in the differential treatment of 'disadvantaged adults'; all four texts donate a specific chapter to this subject in order to propose tailored support for addictions, debt, criminal records, and homelessness. This implies that those who experience these problems have been unfortunate enough to experience a life-course in which they are unable to develop individual responsibility, and as a result are not morally or causally responsible for their 'disadvantages'. These assumptions also underpin the regular references to the care system throughout the texts, and the repeated claim that growing up in the care system is a common *cause* of the social problems listed above, acknowledging that the care system currently fails to socialise individuals in such a way as to endow them with moral or causal responsibility.

Extract 6.13: "We are strengthening the national curriculum to better prepare young people for making sound financial decisions in adult life." (DWP 2014a: 44)

However, the life-course model and the responsibility model generate a tension at the heart of the social justice agenda. A potential for contradiction exists between the "two fundamental principles" of the "social justice strategy" as set out by Iain Duncan Smith in the foreword to the initial document (DWP 2012a: 1). One of these principles, the 'second chance society' (see Extract 6.14), is underpinned by the implication that an individual is causally and morally responsible for their disadvantage. This conception of 'second chance' is not merely a reflection of the choice of words in this particular instance but a central concept that appears in numerous contexts throughout the four texts (see for example Extract 6.15). Although the concept is often used alongside an obfuscation of the underlying causes of disadvantage, as in the phrase "those whose lives do go off course", the logical implication of the concept is that causal and moral responsibility lies with the individual agent. By offering support for disadvantaged people under the principle of 'a second chance', individual responsibility is assumed in a number of ways: (a) in that an individual has failed in their first chance, (b) in the suggestion that they do not deserve further 'chances' beyond the second, and (c) in the use of the word 'chance', which implies an opportunity created for an individual who is causally responsible for taking or not taking the opportunity. The other main principle, 'prevention' (see Extract 6.16), is underpinned by the life-course model, suggesting that government policy is capable of preventing disadvantage by reforming the institutions in which an individual is socialised. This assumption that the government is capable of preventing an individual life from "going off course", does not entirely exclude personal responsibility, but it certainly limits the extent to which an individual can be held causally and morally responsible for their own situation.

Extract 6.14: "the strategy sets out our vision for a 'second chance society'. Anybody who needs a second chance in society should be able to access the support and tools they need to transform their lives." (DWP 2012a: 1)

Extract 6.15: "We are giving those whose lives do go off course a meaningful second chance" (DWP 2013a: 10)

Extract 6.16: "prevention throughout a person's life, with carefully designed interventions to stop people falling off track and into difficult circumstances." (DWP 2012a: 1)

Therefore, the two main principles of the social justice agenda open up the *potential for contradiction* between the responsibility model and the life-course model: 'prevention' implies that outcomes are explained through a life-course model in which individuals are the product of socialising institutions (family, education, etc.); 'second chance' on the other hand implies that outcomes are explained through personal responsibility and, even though there is a commitment to support 'disadvantaged' people, this support is given with the recognition that the individuals are morally and causally responsible for their current and future situation. This potential for contradiction is realised in relation to unemployment. As captured in Extract 6.17, the life-course model explains current unemployment as a product of an individual's socialisation. For example, children with "no working adult to look up to as a role model" (DWP 2012a: 37) will struggle to find work when they are of working age (see Extract 6.18). Here any notion of joint responsibility is extinguished by the assumption that childhood experiences *determine* life chances and that children are in no way responsible for their disadvantage. This therefore stands in contradiction to the responsibility model, which explains current unemployment as a failure of individuals to fulfil their responsibilities, as captured in Extract 6.19.

Extract 6.17: "It is unacceptable that young people should have their future life chances determined by their upbringing" (DWP 2012a: 28)

Extract 6.18: "Children growing up in workless households are more likely to experience worklessness themselves" (DWP 2012a: 37)

Extract 6.19: "By strengthening the sanctions regime we are ensuring that there are consequences when people claiming benefits do not fulfil their responsibilities." (DWP 2012a: 39)

The life-course model implies that behaviours, and indeed the decision-making faculties that underlie behaviour, are the product of an individual's socialisation, especially in childhood. Because an individual's agency is *constituted by* the institutional contexts within which they live, the causal responsibility of that individual's character and behaviour rests largely, perhaps entirely, with those institutional contexts. However, by definition, the responsibility model ascribes both causal and moral responsibility to the individual agent, a position that seems to entirely ignore the supposed constituting and socialising power of the context of an individual's life.

Furthermore, as explained above, the rationalist model presents yet another set of assumptions in which the socialising institutional context and the responsibility of the individual are ignored, as the causal explanation is instead based on the incentive frameworks within which individuals operate. Although there are potential complementarities between the approaches, these are either unrealised, as with the failure to find a balance between individual responsibility and incentive frameworks, or they are undermined, as with the failure to *consistently* advocate the view that an individual's capacity for responsibility is determined by their life-course. Ultimately, therefore, three structure-agency positions exist within the texts, creating a number of deeply rooted ontological contradictions.

Ontological assumptions about material and cultural factors

As with structure-agency, the material-cultural problem is an issue that must be engaged with, implicitly or explicitly, by the authors of any social policy document. The issue is particularly relevant to welfare reform because policy solutions may be designed to change economic and power structures, or they may be directed towards patterns of thinking and attitudes, or they may be directed towards both. Abstractly, the key issue at stake is whether power relations, inequality, physical resources and economic phenomena are held to be the important causal forces in society, or whether beliefs, attitudes, ideas and texts are instead held to be causally dominant. When we refocus on the three models of structure-agency assumptions discussed above, it is possible to see that each can also be linked with a particular stance on the material-cultural issue, allowing us to detangle the various assumptions and claims made within the Coalition's 'social justice agenda' texts. It is argued in this section that the life-course model is based on culturalist assumptions, the rationalist model is based on materialist assumptions and although the responsibility model is more complicated, the crucial notion of 'moral responsibility' tends towards a culturalist explanation. Contradictions and complementarities are explored throughout this section, but the main contradiction arises between the exclusive concern with cultural causes in life-course assumptions and the exclusive concern with material causes in rationalist assumptions.

The dominant life-course explanation of poverty was identified above as a belief in the socialising force of institutions upon individuals, who are each constituted by the context of their lives and especially the context of their childhood. The life-course assumptions in the social justice texts are entirely focussed on the causal effects of *cultural* phenomena, explicitly so with regards to the repeated phrase "culture of

worklessness". It is argued that in certain families and communities, the "culture of worklessness" exists as "the way [in which] people think about work" (DWP 2012a: 38). Because "this Government wants to change the way people think about work and its wider benefits" (DWP 2012a: 38), it has a preoccupation with changing the "culture of worklessness" and it aims to do so by reducing the number of "workless households" and therefore ensuring that all children have a working role model. In "workless households" a negative cycle is assumed to occur because "too many find themselves passing on their difficult circumstances from one generation to the next" (DWP 2012a: 5). The idea that "worklessness" passes down families represents a move away from any significant implication of material deprivation to a concern with cultural phenomena, in this case the beliefs and attitudes parents instil in their children. In Extract 6.20, we can see that when the negative cycle of "intergenerational worklessness" is broken and replaced by a positive cycle, it is *attitudes and ideas* that drive the cycle forward, demonstrating that cultural rather than material resources are assumed to pass from parent to child. As Extract 6.21 explains, the employment of one member of the family leads to an increase in 'aspirations and confidence' for all family members.

Extract 6.20: "work provides a sense of purpose and personal responsibility and enables parents to act as role models for their children" (DWP 2012a: 37)

Extract 6.21: "We know that worklessness can be a particular issue for some troubled families. Helping members of troubled families make progress towards, get and keep a job can be important in turning around the lives of all family members, bringing improved structure and stability and increased aspirations and confidence." (DWP 2012a: 23)

As argued in Chapter 5, the publications from the Conservative modernisation era explained potential *material* dimensions of the life-course model, in which "intergenerational worklessness" can occur when "children have no quiet place to do their homework" or no "food to feed their minds" (*BdB*, SJPG 2006: 55). However, in the SJA texts, the materialist explanation of intergenerational poverty has been eclipsed by a purely cultural understanding of childhood socialisation, as there is no longer any discussion about potential material mechanisms through which poverty becomes intergenerational. A material life-course model where income inequality and income poverty cause intergenerational social deprivation would be much closer to the social democratic ontology outlined in Chapter 3. It is therefore unsurprising that such

assumptions are given little space in these texts. There are regularly references to 'income inequalities', but these are only considered in terms of their usefulness as *indicators* of social problems, with the clear caveat that they are not themselves causal forces. As made clear in Extract 6.22, income inequalities are held to be a *symptom* of poverty. It is explicitly argued in Extract 6.23 that correcting income inequalities through the welfare system is not a solution to the problems people face. The texts are far more concerned with the *source* of income rather than the level of income. As demonstrated in Extracts 6.24 and 6.25, the source of an individual's income can have a significant effect because they move away from the negative cultural conditioning of the benefit system and into the positive cultural conditioning of employment.

Extract 6.22: "...low income is a useful proxy measure, it does not tell the full story of an individual's well-being. Frequently, very low income is a symptom of deeper problems..." (DWP 2012a: 10)

Extract 6.23: "This Government believes that the vast majority of people cannot and will not have their lives changed through ever-increasing benefit rates" (DWP 2012a: 10)

Extract 6.24: "work provides a sense of purpose and personal responsibility and enables parents to act as role models for their children" (DWP 2012a: 37)

Extract 6.25: "For those who can work, getting a job is about more than just money; it shapes people, gives them purpose" (DWP 2014a: 29)

The concern with 'workless households' and 'intergenerational worklessness' therefore demonstrates an underlying assumption that cultural phenomena drive both negative and positive cycles forward, entrenching particular attitudes and beliefs. Although cultural phenomena are most regularly linked to attitudes, as in Extract 6.26, the assumptions of the life-course model outlined so far would dictate that these attitudes are *not freely chosen* by individuals, but are the product of their family-life, educational experience, employment status, and community dynamics. Therefore, when the broader view of "intergenerational transmission" is offered in Extract 6.27, the cultural agency of individuals is replaced with the causal power of "broken communities" and "multiple disadvantages". By denying a causal role to material factors and to agency, the life-course model entails a problem: *explanations built on these assumptions can only account for entrenchment and stability, and are unable to*

account for social change. Therefore, although it is assumed that cultural-structural dynamics entrench "worklessness" for the unemployed and entrench a "sense of purpose and personal responsibility" for those in employment, there is no explanation of how people move from one to the other. It is perhaps partly for this reason that the texts turn to the material-based explanations of the rationalist model and the agency-based explanations of the responsibility model.

Extract 6.26: "the tangible outcomes we want to see over the longer term": "critically, a change in attitudes. Work must be seen as desirable and something to be aspired to, and a life on benefits for those who can work must become unacceptable." (DWP 2013a: 46)

Extract 6.27: "Growing up in broken communities and facing multiple disadvantages, too many find themselves passing on their difficult circumstances from one generation to the next." (DWP 2012a: 5)

Certain parts of the texts insist on the responsibility of individuals, which mitigates the weakness of the life-course model because individual agency is an answer to the question of how a negative cultural cycle can become a positive one. Although the position of the responsibility model in the material-cultural debate is more difficult to interpret, an analysis of three different meanings applied to the word 'responsibility' in the SJA texts can help us establish that the model *ultimately relies on cultural-centred assumptions*. Firstly, 'remit responsibility' is the area for which one is responsible; in Extract 6.28, it is argued that a parent's area of responsibility should extend to the monitoring of their children's school attendance. Although it is possible to infer that one's remit is defined in cultural rules and in laws, and exercised in material institutional power relations, such details lack any notable realisation in the texts. Secondly, 'causal responsibility' is an individual's causal power in the world; Extract 6.29 assumes that individuals are able to exercise *causal* responsibility to the extent that they will be able to "make choices" and "exercise control", having a causal impact on themselves and their lives. Because causal responsibility is synonymous with agency, it therefore includes the causal power that individuals have over their material situations, such as "choosing not to work" (DWP 2012a: 38), and the causal power that they have over their cultural beliefs and attitudes, such as deciding that "a life on benefits" ... "is desirable" (DWP 2012a: 46). As explored in relation to the structure-agency issue, responsibility assumptions about an individual's causal power contradicts the structuralist notions of the rationalist and life-course models. However,

when looking for the source of social change in the *material-cultural* debate, we can see that it is the cultural causal power of an agent that allows them to break the negative (and positive) cycles of the life-course model, because unless they are able to challenge their *attitudes* towards work, their choices will be determined by their life-course. This culturally focussed responsibility model is further underlined by the third meaning of responsibility: moral responsibility.

Extract 6.28: "We are considering putting measures in place to incentivise schools to improve attendance and encourage parents to take responsibility for their children's poor attendance" (DWP 2012a29)

Extract 6.29: "Enabling people to make choices and exercise control over the support they receive can develop their sense of responsibility and independence" (DWP 2012a: 64)

'Moral responsibility' is an individual's adherence to a morally appropriate course of action. It would seem to be a *cultural* consideration because it concerns the attitudes of the individual and an assumed moral code with which to judge them by. On the issue of unemployment, rather than relying on an unspecified moral code of behaviour, the SJA texts move towards a more codified and extensive list of behavioural expectations to be placed on people who are unemployed and underemployed. These behavioural expectations, such as attendance at training courses on the Work Programme and participation in "Mandatory Work Activity" (DWP 2012a: 40), are assumed to help individuals fulfil their moral responsibilities. This is presumably a cultural process, through which people learn what is morally right but also learn how to exercise the self-control necessary to adhere to the moral course of action. However, moral responsibility specifically, and the responsibility model in general, are undermined by the proposed *enforcement* of this morally desirable behaviour through the use of financial penalties. Although the moral responsibility of the individual is clearly held to be a cultural causal force, it becomes clear that the texts assume morally responsible behaviour can only be expected if it is externally reinforced with the threatened withdrawal of material necessities (see Extract 6.30). Therefore, although the texts regularly appeal to individual responsibility in their explanation of poverty, and more fundamentally in their explanation of how the life-course of an individual can be *changed*, these explanations are ultimately undermined in the imposition of material mechanisms upon individuals in order to ensure a

particular course of action is taken. We must therefore look at these material mechanisms of social change in more detail.

Extract 6.30: "By strengthening the sanctions regime we are ensuring that there are consequences when people claiming benefits do not fulfil their responsibilities." (DWP 2012a: 39)

The primary *material* causal factor in the ontological assumptions of the SJA texts is captured by the notion of '*incentives*', a central concept of the rationalist model. Individual incentives are used in family policy to encourage couples to stay together and to marry, and they are used in education policy to dissuade parents from allowing truancy, but it is in relation to unemployment that individual incentives are given their most important role. In the SJA critique of the existing welfare system, the argument is made that "worklessness" is a product of "perverse incentives" in the benefit system. The main solution to this problem is offered in the form of Universal Credit, which is designed to ensure that there is always a financial incentive to work and take on more work, as demonstrated in Extract 6.31. The materiality of incentives arises in the assumption that individuals engage in employment according to a *financial* motivation. Although the *communication* of incentives and the *awareness* of incentives are cultural phenomena, it is the *material motivation* that is assumed to determine action and therefore cause social change. Cultural forces, such as those held to drive the intergenerational transmission of attitudes or those held by the morally responsibly individual, seem to lack causal power in this application of the rationalist model. Deeply rooted attitudes to work that have been passed down generations and have formed individuals through childhood socialisation can supposedly be swept away in a reorientation of financial incentives. The assumed moral responsibility of an individual to take a particular course of action is replaced by a system of material mechanisms that guide or even drive individual actions. Because the SJA texts are dominated by and structured according to a cultural life-course approach, there is a major contradiction in the deployment of a material rationalist model as the ultimate explanation of social change. The nature of its deployment as *individual incentives and sanctions* undermines cultural assumptions not only in the life-course notions of 'childhood socialisation' and 'intergenerational transmission', but also in the responsibility model's notion of individual moral responsibility.

Extract 6.31: "The introduction of Universal Credit is vital – from this year, replacing the main out-of-work benefits and tax credits with a single, simple payment that will make work pay at each and every hour." (DWP 2013a: 26)

Incentives are also used in relation to *institutions*, especially in the 'payment-by-results' approach to third sector and private sector service providers. Extract 6.32 demonstrates their wide-spread use "across government" and Extract 6.33 explains their main advantage. Ontologically, institutional incentives create a further problem, because they undermine the DWP's own explanation of the causes of poverty. The institutional incentives approach represents an ontological pluralism, whereby it is only the outcomes that matter, rather than the underlying assumptions and explanations of poverty. The social justice agenda and the Conservative modernisation texts that proceed them are all directed towards providing an elaborate and holistic explanation of poverty and of unemployment, mostly centred around the individual's cultural socialisation, but also including a clear, if paradoxical, insistence on their moral agency. The notion of institutional incentives, on the other hand, is a policy that would accept any solution to unemployment based on any set of ontological assumptions as long as it made a notable change to the employment statistics, and of course as long as it could be provided at a low cost. Despite these apparent contradictions, it is possible to see the appeal of incentives and of the rationalist model that underpins their use. Rationalist assumptions not only offer an explanation of how social change has occurred or could occur, which the life-course model fails to offer, but they also offer an explanation of how policy-makers could actually instigate social change, which neither the life-course model nor the responsibility model is able to offer. The moral agency of an individual may provide a theoretical explanation of social change, but if the causal power is with individuals and not policy makers, then policy-makers cannot hope to instigate any significant changes through policy reform.

Extract 6.32: "We are embedding payment by results across Government" (DWP 2013a: 43)

Extract 6.33: "Government stops paying for the process of delivering social services and starts paying for the outcomes that are achieved." (DWP 2014a: 48)

Therefore, on the material-cultural issue, the material-centred rationalist model is used to explain social change, such as the change from a system that incentivises "worklessness" to a system that incentivises work "at each and every hour", and the

culture-centred life-course model is used to explain social stability, such as the cycle of "intergenerational worklessness" mentioned in Extract 6.34. In this combination of assumptions, the system of material incentives is held to be the ultimate determinant of poverty, while cultural pressures of stability merely entrench the positive or negative cycles created by those incentives. There is a possible complementarity in the view that material phenomena cause change and stability, and cultural phenomena entrench stability. However, in the SJA texts, a major contradiction arises from the fluctuation between an *explicit* dominance of the culture-centred life-course model, which is prominent during explanations of childhood and holistic explanations of poverty, and the *implicit* dominance of the materialist rationalist model, which is prominent during discussions about the benefits system and the potential solutions to poverty. The overall centrality of the culturalist life-course model to the explanation of poverty and the structuring of the reform agenda, is contradicted by the appeal to rationalist assumptions, which implicitly shift the explanatory framework towards a materialist ontology. Extract 6.35 offers a useful example. Although the "complete shift in our welfare culture" is the overall aim of the policy, it is the material incentives that ultimately drive the social change.

Extract 6.34: "an intergenerational cycle of worklessness and entrenched poverty ... can be devastating to individuals, families and communities across the UK" (2013a: 15)

Extract 6.35: "Universal Credit marks a complete shift in our welfare culture, changing the incentives in the benefit system so that it acts as a springboard into work rather than a trap." (2013a: 27)

In summary, an ontological contradiction arises between material assumptions and cultural assumptions in the SJA texts. The texts are dominated by an exclusively cultural life-course explanation of poverty, which explores the transmission of attitudes through families, the education system, work environments and communities. Crucially, however, this life-course explanation fails to account for social change, focussing only on the entrenchment of attitudes in positive and negative cycles. The responsibility model, a cultural-centred approach based on the attitudes of individuals and their will-power to act 'responsibly', offers one solution to the problem of change. If individuals are each assumed to have an area of responsibility, a causal power as agents, and a moral responsibility to pursue a positive course of action, then they can be considered to be a causal force capable of changing negative cycles of 'worklessness' into positive cycles of employment. However, this raises two problems. Firstly, it reaffirms the

structure-agency contradiction between a life-course explanation of attitudes/will-power as the product of a life time of socialisation and the responsibility explanation of attitudes/will-power as the product of human agency. Secondly, the responsibility model is an explanation of social change that gives policy-makers very little control over social change, because responsibility is instead devolved to individuals. Although the cultural explanations of the life-course and responsibility models explicitly dominate the SJA explanation of poverty, these two problems emphasise the appeal of a materialist-rationalist approach, and it is the materialism of the rationalist model that ultimately provides the explanation of social change in the SJA texts. Material incentives are held to have the causal power to shift individuals from cycles of negative reinforcement to cycles of positive reinforcement, easily overriding their cultural life-course socialisation. Furthermore, it is only the threatened withdrawal of material necessities that is held to ensure individuals fulfil their 'moral responsibilities'.

Section 2 - Universal Credit and the Work Programme

Texts analysed in this section:

21st Century Welfare (DWP 2010a)

Universal Credit: Welfare that Works (DWP 2010b)

Universal Credit Evaluation Framework (DWP 2012c)

Universal Credit Guidance on personal budgeting support (DWP 2013b)

Universal Credit at Work (DWP 2014b)

Universal Credit at Work - Spring 2015 (DWP 2015a)

The Work Programme (DWP 2012d)

The Work Programme - The First Year (DWP 2012e)

Section 1 of this chapter outlined the three main sets of ontological assumptions that underpin the Coalition Government's *explanation of poverty,* as laid out in the social justice agenda: 'the life-course model', 'the rationalist model', and 'the responsibility model'. This fragmented explanation of poverty and the theoretical contradictions implied therein are themselves important as a part of the government's ideological output and as the theoretical starting-point from which problems are identified and solutions developed. However, these theoretical contradictions take on a new level of importance when they are identified *within enacted policy*, which is what the current

section demonstrates. Furthermore, as well as there being a continuation of certain key contradictions in the development from explanation to policy, this section also demonstrates that differences arise *between* the ontological assumptions underpinning the explanation of 'the problem' in the social justice agenda and the ontological assumptions underpinning the flagship 'policy solutions' of Universal Credit and the Work Programme. Therefore, there are ontological contradictions *within* the Coalition Government's identification and explanation of the *problems*, there are ontological contradictions *within* the Coalition Government's policy *solutions*, and there are ontological contradictions *between* the explanation of 'the problems' on the one hand and 'the policy solutions' on the other.

In this section, a total of 8 texts have been analysed. Chronologically, the first two texts are the green paper *21st Century Welfare* (DWP 2010a) and the white paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* (DWP 2010b), both published shortly after the Coalition came into government. After the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the government published a series of documents to evaluate its flagship reform of Universal Credit: *Universal Credit Evaluation Framework* (DWP 2012c), *Universal Credit at Work* (DWP 2014b), and *Universal Credit at Work - Spring 2015* (DWP 2015a). Also analysed in this section are three documents giving further detail on supplementary policy reforms: *The Work Programme* (DWP 2012d), *The Work Programme - The First Year* (DWP 2012e), and *Universal Credit Guidance on personal budgeting support* (DWP 2013b). Central to the DWP reforms is the policy of Universal Credit, which is primarily designed to simplify the benefits system and incentivise work (DWP 2010b). However, within and alongside UC a number of secondary policies have been implemented and it is only by including these policies in the analysis that the underlying ontological assumptions can be discussed in any detail. The main secondary policies discussed in these papers, and therefore analysed in this section are: monthly benefit payments, direct-to-tenant payments, the Claimant Commitment, Universal Support, conditionality, and the work Programme. The complexity of identifying ontological assumptions across multiple interlinked policies is simplified by the framework developed in Section 1, which identifies the three main strands of assumptions underpinning the DWP's policy programme. These strands, neatly captured in Extract 6.36, exhibit problematic contradictions that derive from the ontological level but create problems at the level of practical policy solutions.

Extract 6.36: "By design, Universal Credit: ensures work pays; fosters independence and personal responsibility; supports more households into work; and, grows the economy." (DWP 2014b: 6)

Promoting personal responsibility

From the analysis of all six UC texts, three key policies have been identified that rely to some significant extent upon the responsibility model: monthly UC payment, the abolition of direct-to-landlord payments, and the claimant commitment. The texts themselves recognise the responsibility assumptions shared by these three policies when the three are brought together in the texts under the heading "promoting personal responsibility" (DWP 2014b: 8). The first paragraph of text accompanying this heading is copied below as Extract 6.37. In Extract 6.37, the proposed aim of '*fostering* responsibility' implies that life-course assumptions also underpin these three policies, because claimants are not simply expected to exercise responsibility but can expect the government to '*foster*' their responsibility through their '*interaction with services*'. Therefore, although these policies relate to personal responsibility, they are justified by the texts as attempts to condition agents through institutional reform, and can therefore be identified as an attempt to fulfil the potential complementarity between the responsibility model and the life-course explanation of how some people come to have moral and causal responsibility and others do not. However, although this collective justification for the three policies can be seen as an attempt to realise this complementarity, a closer analysis of each policy in turn demonstrates that the responsibility of the individual is ultimately held to be causally dominant regardless of their childhood socialisation and adult life-course.

Extract 6.37: "Universal Credit deliberately fosters independence and personal responsibility. It does so through a series of important changes to the way claimants are required to interact with the service." (DWP 2014b: 8)

Firstly, there is the decision to pay UC on a monthly basis in order to "replicate the world of work" (DWP 2014b: 8). As explained in Extract 6.38, the primary aim of this policy is to encourage a culture of individual responsibility. In its attempt to change cultural norms in order to produce responsible individuals, this policy is therefore justified as an attempt to realise the life-course/responsibility complementarity. However, the life-course model is based on *cultural* socialisation, especially in the transmission of attitudes within the family, the education system, and the community. In contrast, the transition from weekly benefit payments to monthly benefit payments is a

material mechanism presented without any explanation as to how it actually changes individuals or how it actually challenges the 'culture of worklessness'. In other words, the assumption that this policy will actually work does not seem to be based in the ontological assumptions of the life-course model. Instead, the policy rests upon the responsibility model assumption that increasing an individual's remit automatically leads to an increase in their moral and causal responsibility. There is an implicit notion that by giving individuals more responsibilit*ies*, one causes them to develop more control over their own actions *and* a closer adherence to a 'moral' course of action, but this is not explained in any of these texts, or any of the Conservative modernisation texts in which it regularly features, and it is instead simply *assumed* to be the case. Therefore, despite an apparent life-course justification, it is ultimately a responsibility model assumption that underpins the policy of paying UC on a monthly rather than weekly basis.

Extract 6.38: "Universal Credit is not just about consolidating the number of welfare benefits, it is about changing the culture of benefit receipt, encouraging individuals to become self-reliant, financially independent and productive (in work). Moving to a monthly system of payments and encouraging greater responsibility for claimants to manage their finances whether in or out of work is a key feature of Universal Credit." (DWP 2014b: 42)

The second key reform relating to the payment of UC is captured in Extract 6.39 and effectively entails the abolition of direct-to-landlord benefit payments. The life-course justification for this policy is the same as that given for monthly payments, as seen in Extract 6.40, which highlights the government's assumed causal responsibility in "delivering life change for people". However, it is again the case that this policy is underpinned by responsibility model assumptions. A clear example of this can be seen in Extract 6.41 where personal responsibility is not *created through* this policy but is instead *expected by* the policy. Therefore, the policy itself is not held to reform the attitudes of individuals or to help them develop their capacity for agency but is simply a reform that allows and expects individuals to use their causal agency and moral responsibility in the organisation of their own affairs. The key ontological assumption here is that individuals are assumed to have a causal and moral responsibility that can be restricted by immediate external restrains but is not bound by the internal restraints or deficiencies assumed by the life-course model. The justification of these two benefit payment reforms therefore provides an insight into the underlying ontological assumptions: there is a subtle fluctuation between the explicit justification of these

policies, based on the life-course assumption that institutional change is necessary for the creation of personal responsibility in people who currently lack agency (as displayed in Extract 6.40), and the underlying assumptions of the policies themselves, based on the responsibility assumption that giving people a larger remit of responsibility will allow them to exercise their causal and moral agency (as displayed in Extract 6.41). Although this fluctuation is subtle, it does expose a contradiction because certain parts of the texts assume individual agency needs to be created, while other parts of the texts assume individual agency simply needs to be set free.

Extract 6.39: "Universal Credit further promotes personal responsibility by paying the housing element directly to the household, which is then responsible for paying the rent to their landlord." (DWP 2014b: 9)

Extract 6.40: "we are delivering life change for people, setting them on a path from dependence to independence." (DWP 2014b: 3)

Extract 6.41: "Universal Credit promotes personal responsibility and expects the majority of tenants to manage their finances, including their own housing costs" (DWP 2015: 32)

One policy that further demonstrates the presence and importance of the responsibility model in UC is the 'claimant commitment', which has been "rolled out nationwide, for all those making new claims to Jobseeker's Allowance" (DWP 2014b: 8). As explained in Extract 6.42, the claimant commitment is a document signed by benefit recipients that lays out their responsibilities. The signing is presented as an attempt to "encourage and promote personal responsibility" (DWP 2014b: 8), which again implicates the potential life-course/responsibility complementarity. However, this complementarity again seems to go unfulfilled due to a downgraded position for assumptions about the causal significance of an individual's life-course. Where a genuine complementarity would recognise those individuals who are capable of exercising personal responsibility and those who are not on the basis of their life-course, the policies presented under the heading "promoting personal responsibility" suggest that the Claimant Commitment document is a list of expectations signed by *all* jobseekers. In Extract 6.43, one of the clearest statements of an undiluted responsibility model is made using the words of one of a Jobcentre staff member. Using the claimant commitment to place moral responsibility on claimants ontologically contradicts the detailed life-course explanations of institutional conditioning identified in

Section 1 of this chapter. The life-course model places the causal-burden with the institutions in which an individual has lived, but the claimant commitment, underpinned by the responsibility model, places the causal and therefore the moral burden of responsibility firmly with the individual.

Extract 6.42: "We will introduce a 'claimant commitment' to clearly set out what is expected of each recipient. We will raise the requirements placed on some individuals and will introduce tougher sanctions to ensure recipients meet their responsibilities." (DWP 2014b: 24)

Extract 6.43: "Claimants and staff are positive about the Claimant Commitment: Wendy Grant, a Work Coach in Rugby, states that: "the onus is firmly on the claimant to take responsibility for themselves."" (DWP 2014b: 8)

Universal Credit and incentivisation

"Universal Credit lies at the heart of the Government's commitment to reform the Welfare State" (DWP 2014b: 5), and "at *its* heart, Universal Credit drives behaviour change among jobseekers by helping them understand that Universal Credit rewards work and showing that employment is the best route to financial independence" (DWP 2015: 36). On this basis, it is possible to argue that the incentivisation of work is the most important policy goal for the Coalition Government's reform of the welfare state. The UC policy documents focus almost exclusively on financial incentivisation as the primary causal mechanism through which employment will be increased and poverty alleviated. The place for the responsibility model does still exist in the allusions to individual choice, and the place of the life-course model still exists with references to the impact of incentives on work culture, but the majority of the causal power of UC is held to come from its reformation of the incentive structures in the benefit system. It therefore attributes a dominant role to a rationalist model of ontological assumptions, as captured in Extract 6.44.

Extract 6.44: "In order to put our principles into practice it is essential to improve work incentives." (DWP 2010a: 18)

Although the pre-existing benefits system already provided incentives for people to move into work, one of the central aims of Universal Credit is to ensure that these incentives apply equally for every extra hour of work. By bringing multiple benefits together, UC allows an individual's total benefit payments to be steadily

withdrawn as they increase their earnings through work, meaning that the system is able to guarantee claimants "a minimum financial gain of 35 pence for every £1 extra take home pay." (DWP 2014b: 35). This primary concern with a standardised application of incentives demonstrates an assumption that financial incentives are a key causal force behind individual decision making, as expressed in Extract 6.45. The extension and standardisation of financial incentives is one of the two central aims of Universal Credit. The other central aim is the 'simplification' of the benefits system, which is in turn justified on the rationalist basis that by making benefit income easier to understand, the incentives become more effective, ensuring not only that "work always pays" but also that it "is clearly seen to pay" (DWP 2010a: 2). The amount of theoretical weight put on these central reforms to improve incentives is demonstrated in the assumption that they will change individual behaviour on a mass scale, as captured in Extract 6.46.

Extract 6.45: "Household members would be incentivised to enter work by a consistent, reasonable, rate of withdrawal of the Universal Credit as earnings increase." (DWP 2010a: 19)

Extract 6.46: "By improving the incentives to work, and to work more, the business case estimates that there will be up to an additional 300,000 households in work, once the impact of Universal Credit is fully realised." (DWP 2014b: 31)

Within discussions of incentives, it is the rationalist model that is almost exclusively implied or deployed. The responsibility model is noticeable in its absence from expositions or explorations of incentivisation. The role of individual choice is only occasionally mentioned in the UC documents and, in the few instances where the word 'choice' appears, it is proceeded by either 'rational' or 'logical', as in Extract 6.47. The collocations 'rational choice' and 'logical choice' transfer the theoretical causal power from the individual making the choice to the choice-framework within which the individual operates. Extract 6.47 suggests that individuals are assumed to make rational choices to maximise their income, which in turn would suggest that the decision is not caused by the individual's agency but by the structures of incentives, which, in this case, are produced by the benefit system. Therefore, although the notion of 'choice' does appear in relation to incentives, its infrequency demonstrates its insignificant role as a concept. More importantly, its incorporation within the phrase 'rational choice' demonstrates that when the word does appear, it is implicating the

structuralist-materialism of the rationalist model rather than the intentionalism of the responsibility model.

Extract 6.47: "allowing people to keep more of their money as they move into work, will make legitimate work a rational choice for recipients." (DWP 2010b: 42)

The dominance of incentive systems over the agency of individuals is further apparent in Extract 6.48, where the word 'tyranny' is used to characterise the relationship between individual claimants and disincentivising force of the benefit system. Within this same extract, the benefit system is held to possess the power to '*stop*' individuals from taking more work, which reinforces the structuralist notion prevalent in the SJA texts that the welfare system can create inescapable traps. Extract 6.49 highlights a different instance of the same phenomenon as part of a justification for reforming the benefit withdrawal rate in order to disincentivise fraud. Although the extract begins with the statement that "fraud is always wrong", it is simultaneously praising the 'valuable work' and the work 'aspiration' that leads people to commit fraud. Fraud in the benefit system is therefore assumed to occur not because of individual failures of moral responsibility but because "working legitimately is not a rational choice for many poor people to make" (DWP 2010a: 13). This leads us to the conclusion that within the central concept of incentivisation, the tension between the rationalist model and the responsibility model is overcome by simply denying the moral and causal agency of individuals. Clearly, as discussed in the previous sub-sections, the responsibility model does play a crucial role in underpinning other more minor policies, but it lacks any theoretical significance in explaining the central incentivising features of Universal Credit. This therefore opens up the potential for contradiction between rationalist-based policies and responsibility-based policies, a contradiction that can be seen within the policy of 'conditionality'.

Extract 6.48: "Gone at last will be the tyranny of the 16 hour job, stopping lone parents from improving their circumstances through additional hours." (DWP 2015: 6)

Extract 6.49: "Fraud is always wrong, but we must recognise that the benefits system is making matters worse by pushing valuable work, and the aspiration that this can engender, underground." (DWP 2010a: 13)

Conditionality and sanctions

Conditionality is a principal and policy that pre-existed the Coalition Government, but it is one that the Coalition has embraced as a central feature of its welfare policy. The policy documents explain that the requirements of jobseekers will no longer be three work-search activities per fortnight, but instead will entail full-time hours in order to find work, with the inclusion of compulsory 'work coaching', 'skills training', and 'work experience'. These increased compulsory expectations are accompanied by an increased use and severity of sanctions, which entail a withdrawal of benefits for periods of 4 weeks, 3 months, 6 months or 3 years. Therefore, although incentivisation is described as the central aim of UC, the conditionality and sanction system clearly represents a more significant change to the lives of claimants. The underlying ontological assumptions of the conditionality reforms are difficult to interpret because the texts fluctuate significantly between a responsibility justification and a rationalist justification. Although the two models both provide a justification for increased conditionality, they ultimately contradict at an ontological level. Furthermore, the increased use of conditionality stands in contradiction to the life-course model in a number of important ways.

Explained through the rationalist model, conditionality is a system of incentives and disincentives (deterrents) that is intended to guide the behaviour of claimants. The reforms in this regard are justified as "a new approach to conditionality that [aims] to incentivise people to enter work and progress – increasing hours and earnings until they move off benefits altogether" (DWP 2010a: 29). Although the notion of incentivisation appears in the policy documents primarily in relation to the calculation of benefit payment, the assumptions of the rationalist approach would seem to imply that the imposition of sanctions has a much more significant effect on behaviour. While the reforms to the calculation of individual benefit entitlement standardise incentives across the system, the change in these incentives is very marginal for most people. Conditionality sanctions, on the other hand, entail the full withdrawal of all support for a minimum of four weeks for jobseekers, increasing to 3 years for three serious failures, where a 'serious failure' is held to include "failure to apply for a job" and "failure to accept a job offer" (DWP 2010b: 30). In terms of the 'rational choices' with which a claimant is faced, the withdrawal of their only income for weeks, months or years is clearly a more powerful causal mechanism than even the highest change to benefit entitlement of an additional 35p per pound earned. Put simply, if the changes to benefit payments are expected to be causally responsible for mass behavioural change of the magnitude stated in Extract 4.46, then the conditionality regime, understood from the

rationalist model, must have an even larger causal power. This power is only partially acknowledged in Extracts 6.50 and 6.51

Extract 6.50: "we could continue to apply conditionality to push that individual to extend their working hours and/or increase their earnings until they were working full time or until they were off benefits altogether." (DWP 2010a: 29)

Extract 6.51: "The recently established Claimant Communications Unit is reviewing the sanctions communications and providing expert advice and behavioural insight to ensure they are understood by claimants and drive the appropriate behaviours." (DWP 2014b: 11)

Despite a theoretical mismatching between the incentivising effects of benefit entitlement and the incentivising effects of sanctioning, the rationalist framework of assumptions is coherently applied in its own terms. However, the policy documents only occasionally present the conditionality regime in rationalist terms. Conditionality and sanctions are more commonly justified in terms of the responsibility model, where benefits are labelled 'rewards' and conditionality is understood in terms of the inherent fairness of sanctions for those who have failed to fulfil their moral responsibility. In Extract 6.52, sanctions are considered to be punishments that are justified on moral grounds because the individuals concerned have failed to meet their responsibilities. Crucially, the responsibility model is assuming the primary causal force to be individual agency, the moral power of an individual to *overcome* the temptation to follow the easiest or most rewarding course of action, and their causal power to enact that moral responsibility. While Extract 6.52 discusses sanctions as punishments for those who fail to act according to their responsibilities, Extract 6.53 discusses benefit payments as a reward for those who meet their responsibilities. Therefore, the contradiction between the rationalist justification for conditionality and the responsibility justification for conditionality relates to (1) whether the burden of responsibility is on the individual decision maker or the framework of incentives, and (2) whether benefit payments and sanctions therefore operate as a system of rewards and punishments for moral failures and achievements, OR as a system of incentives and deterrents that have the causal power to drive individual behaviour in a particular direction.

Extract 6.52: "Individuals who are able to look for work or prepare for work should be required to do so as a condition for receiving benefit and those who fail to meet their

responsibilities should face a sanction such as a benefit reduction. This is known as conditionality." (DWP 2010a: 28)

Extract 6.53: "We will introduce important changes to the existing conditionality and sanctions regime to strengthen the link between people receiving benefits and meeting their responsibilities." (DWP 2010b: 26)

Extract 6.54: "Having strong and clear sanctions are critical to incentivise benefit recipients to meet their responsibilities." (DWP 2010b: 28)

Although the rationalist model and the responsibility model share a practical complementarity in that they both justify an increased use of sanctions, the ontological contradiction between them becomes entrenched in the policies themselves. This creates problems for further policy development, because the complementarity between the two models is only realised in this particular policy in this particular form, and may well lead to significant contradiction if further reforms are attempted or if specific details of the policy require further consideration. In this instance, the underlying ontological assumptions are acting as a causal force for stability because divergence from the current policy risks revealing and realising the underlying contradiction between the rationalist attempt to generate particular behaviours through incentives and the responsibility model's expectation of particular behaviours on the basis of an individual's moral agency. The tendency toward stability caused by the constraining contradiction between the responsibility and rationalist justifications of conditionality has to be considered alongside the tension created by another contradiction brought about by the policy of increased conditionality: the intent to cause hardship.

This second contradiction relates to the acknowledgement within the policy documents that sanctions cause hardship and *are intended to cause hardship*. Firstly, it is noted that complexities in the old system caused "overpayments and subsequent recoveries" which "often lead to hardship amongst those who can least afford those recoveries" (DWP 2010a: 36), an acceptance that any significant financial costs to benefit claimants cause hardship. Secondly, as demonstrated in Extract 6.55, there is a discussion of the payments currently available for sanctioned claimants and the need to reform this system to ensure that sanctioned claimants cannot use hardship payments to avoid the hardship that the sanction is intended to cause. If the texts had maintained the material life-course approach, which was notable in the Conservative

modernisation era and is prominent in social democratic ontological assumptions, then any material hardship would be assumed as both a cause of poverty and indeed an instance of poverty itself. The exclusion of this approach allows sanctions, and their deliberate consequences of hardship, to be justified as punishments for a failure of moral responsibility. However, this opens up a contradiction between the responsibility model's justification of sanctions and the life-course model's explanation of poverty. From the life-course position, dominant in the SJA texts analysed in Section 1, poverty is primarily caused by the cultural conditioning of the institutions through which an individual lives their life, particularly the family and education system. By removing, or at least significantly reducing, the causal responsibility of the individual for their situation, the life-course model makes it problematic to argue that individuals are *morally* responsible for their situation. The increased use of sanctions and the deliberately imposed hardships that they entail are largely justified on the assumption that individuals are morally responsible for their situation, creating a problematic contradiction between the explanation of poverty and the solution to poverty.

Extract 6.55: "We are considering replacing the current system of hardship payments with loans [so that] those who persistently fail to meet the requirements imposed upon them cannot rely on these alternative sources of support for the entire duration of their sanction." (DWP 2010b: 29)

Universal Support and the Work Programme

In Section 1, it was inferred that the relationship between the life-course assumptions and the rationalist assumptions represents a problematic contradiction between cultural and material explanations of poverty and unemployment. The cultural life-course explanation explains how poverty becomes entrenched as a set of attitudes, which are passed from parent to child and from one member of a community to another. This cultural force is understood purely as a stabilising force that can entrench the positive attitudes of work as well as the negative attitudes of poverty. In order to explain social change, the material rationalist model offers the assumption that incentive frameworks are the real causal force in society, because they dictate the behaviour of individual rational actors. The problem that this raises is as follows: if a change in incentive frameworks causes social change, then a stability in incentive frameworks causes social stability, which would seem to make obsolete any reference to the causal power of cultural dynamics. This problem arises in the Universal Credit policy documents because the central focus on incentivisation would seem to prioritise the role of material mechanisms to such an extent that cultural dynamics are considered merely in

terms of information about incentives. However, the cultural life-course model continues to appear in detail wherever incentives-based solutions are absent. Life-course assumptions are particularly notable in the justification of two key policies: Universal Support and the Work Programme. It is therefore worth considering these policies in more detail in order to establish whether the life-course model is merely being used as an explicit justification, as with monthly payments, or whether it is actually underpinning the policies themselves.

The cultural life-course explanation of poverty and unemployment was developed during the Conservative modernisation period and outlined in more detail in the social justice agenda. However, its ontological deficiencies in explaining social change make it particularly unsuitable for underpinning a comprehensive reform of the welfare system, which perhaps explains the centrality of the rationalist model in UC. In the final years of the parliament, *Universal Credit at Work* (DWP 2014b) and *Universal Credit at Work: Spring 2015* (DWP 2015) indicate a partial return to cultural life-course assumptions in their brief but notable outlining of 'Universal Support' (see Extract 6.56). The main features of Universal Support include budgeting advice, alternative payment arrangements, support for those who need assistance accessing the internet, and support for people who need help understanding the new benefits system. Operating within the life-course model, these policies seek to change behaviour by supporting people to change, instead of devolving responsibility to them, as in the responsibility model, or changing their behaviour via material mechanisms, as in the rationalist model. The policy of monthly payments and the policy of rent-to-tenants are both accompanied with a commitment that "there will be appropriate budgeting support to ensure recipients are supported effectively" (DWP 2010b: 34). The budgeting support offered alongside these policies can take the form of budgeting advice, where a referral to the Money Advice Service is made "to help claimants cope with managing their money on a monthly basis" (DWP 2013b: 1).

Extract 6.56: "The aim is a joined-up, holistic service, particularly for vulnerable claimants and those with complex needs, helping the claimant move from welfare dependency." (DWP 2014b: 15)

In this instance, a degree of complementarity is realised between the life-course vision of reforming individuals through institutional change and the responsibility model that highlights the importance of individual agency in social change. If the claimant continues to have budgeting problems and there "is a risk of financial harm to the

claimant or their family" (DWP 2013b: 1), 'alternative payment arrangements' would re-establish weekly benefit payments and direct-to-landlord payments. However, the ambition of these policies falls short of the life-course vision of long-term cultural socialisation, in that is merely an attempt to support people using a particular system rather than any attempt to change "the way people think about work" (DWP 2012a: 38) or to change their "troubled and chaotic lives" (DWP 2012a: 8). If "Universal Credit is really about ... a sweeping cultural change" (DWP 2015: 3), then Universal Support can at most be seen as a small part of that change.

A policy that is both more significant and more significantly underpinned by cultural life-course assumptions is the Work Programme, which "provides support for people who are long-term unemployed – or are at most risk of becoming so" (DWP 2012d: 2). The Work Programme is held to be "central to the Coalition Government's ambitious programme of welfare reform" ... "along with the Universal Credit benefit reforms" (DWP 2012d: 2). Two guiding principles of the Work Programme are 'personalised support', as captured in Extract 6.57, and 'long-term contact', as captured in Extract 6.58. These values overlap considerably with the cultural life-course model identified in the previous section and the previous chapter. The idea that each individual is the product of a unique life-course is reflected in the notion of 'personalised support'. And, the idea that behavioural change requires a long-term change to the cultural context of the individual is reflected in the notion of 'long-term contact'. Furthermore, in the two policy documents that focus on the Work Programme, there are concerns about "households where no one has ever worked" (DWP 2012e: 2), which are underpinned by assumptions about intergenerational cultural transmission, and explicit claims that "long-term unemployment is damaging to individuals and communities" (DWP 2012e: 2); this in turn relies on assumptions about the reinforcement of negative attitudes towards work *within communities*. These various assumptions would suggest that the Work Programme is an attempt, though seemingly the only attempt, to maintain a cultural life-course explanation of poverty and to offer a policy solution that coherently maintains the same ontological assumptions.

Extract 6.57: "The new Work Programme will replace many of the current back-to-work programmes and will provide personalised help to people based on their needs." (DWP 2010b: 39)

Extract 6.58: "Individual participants will stay on the programme for up to two years, and will stay in contact with their provider once they move into work." (DWP 2012d: 2: 10)

Although 'personalised support' and 'long-term contact' begin to provide an explanation of social change using cultural life-course assumptions, the *actual delivery* of the Work Programme uses institutional incentives and therefore an underlying rationalist ontology. The Work Programme is only able to realise its culturally motivated aim of 'long-term contact' by paying Work Programme providers significantly more for supporting participants over the longer term. To some extent, this represents a complementarity between the cultural life-course assumption that individuals need long-term support, and the material rationalist assumption that institutions as well as individuals always seek maximum financial gain. However, this solution would also seem to be an acknowledgement that policy makers are unable to explain how social change actually occurs from a cultural life-course perspective. More importantly, a clear contradiction arises in relation to the crucial concept of 'personalised support', because there is nothing within the Work Programme framework that is intended to ensure or even encourage personalised support. If the "government is providing freedom for providers to personalise support for the individual" (DWP 2012d: 2: 8), then the government is equally providing freedom for Work Programme providers to provide the "one-size-fits-all services" (DWP 2012d: 2: 8) that they explicitly oppose.

Therefore, although the cultural life-course model remains a significant part of the ontological assumptions underpinning these welfare reforms, it is largely unrealised in policy. This failure to follow through the Conservative Party's dominant explanation of poverty into policy solutions is in part due to the failure to develop an understanding of social change alongside cultural life-course assumptions, and a repeated return to material rationalist assumptions, which are assumed to offer a causally powerful force for change. In other words, the Conservative Party developed a complex holistic explanation of the causes of poverty through the SJPG and the SJA, but ultimately turned to a simpler rationalist model in their actual policy reforms. The causal power of ontological assumptions do seem to be apparent here, because rationalist assumptions offer a much clearer notion of social change and therefore provide policy makers with discernible levers for the solution of social problems.

Conclusion

In this chapter, two main types of texts have been analysed. The texts analysed in Section 1 belonged to the 'social justice agenda' (SJA), a macro-level policy project that operates within the remit of various departments in order to address poverty and social problems. Despite this image of interdepartmental collaboration, the SJA texts were all written within the DWP and all published with a foreword from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith. The ideas within the SJA texts can be traced back to the Social Justice Policy Group (SJPG), a Conservative Party policy renewal group formed during David Cameron's time as Leader of the Opposition, and the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a think tank that collaborated with the SJPG and continued as a semi-independent entity once the Coalition came into government. The main texts produced by these two organisations, *Breakdown Britain* (SJPG 2006) and *Breakthrough Britain* (SJPG 2007) were analysed in Chapter 5, and this chapter has demonstrated a degree of continuation in ontological assumptions. In Section 2 of this chapter, the continuation of assumptions was traced through into the actual policies of the DWP, specifically the flagship policy Universal Credit but also secondary and supplementary policies such as Universal Support and the Claimant Commitment. The documents analysed in this chapter include green papers, white papers and policy evaluation documents, ensuring a good coverage over the parliament and either side of the 2012 Welfare Reform Act. Although some changes have been noted between the earlier and later texts, the main aim of this chapter has been the identification of the ontological assumptions underlying these texts and the complementaries and contradictions between those assumptions.

An analysis of the SJA texts revealed that the underlying ontological assumptions can be categorised as three distinct ontological models: the 'life-course model', the 'rationalist model', and the 'responsibility model'. The life-course model focusses on the causal power of the institutions of the life-course, which are held to form individuals through cultural socialisation. The rationalist model assumes that individuals are all materially-motivated rational actors that will act according to their material context of incentive frameworks. The responsibility model focusses on the assumed moral and causal agency of all individuals, and assumes that the primary (if not only) external influence on individuals is their remit of responsibility within society. On the question of structure-agency, the responsibility model is the only one that attributes significant causal power to agents; the other two models have structuralist tendencies. There is therefore a separation of structure and agency in the ontological

assumptions of the SJA texts. On the material-cultural question, the life-course model is purely culturalist, while the rationalist model is purely materialist; although the responsibility model blends the two to some extent, it ultimately relies on the cultural power of moral agency, and is unable to overcome the significant divide in the texts between cultural life-course explanation and material rationalist explanation. Therefore, the underlying ontological assumptions of the SJA texts do not represent any significant depth of understanding as to how structure and agency interact or how material and cultural causes interact. Instead, there is a fluctuation between three positions, the life-course model, the rationalist model, and the responsibility, which offer positions of culturalist-structuralism, materialist-structuralism, and culture-centred-agentialism respectively. It is unsurprising therefore that there are ontological tensions within the texts.

Section 1 of this chapter began by addressing the structure-agency question. The life-course model and responsibility model have a potential complementarity, *if* it is assumed that different life-courses produce individuals with different levels of moral and causal responsibility. However, especially but not exclusively in the case of unemployment, the texts fluctuate significantly between the assumption that dysfunctional institutions create poverty through negative cultural socialisation and the assumption that individuals are causally and morally responsible for their situation. A potential complementarity also exists between the life-course model and the rationalist model, *if* the rationalist model is assumed to explain one mechanism of change within a more dominant life-course approach. However, this would be to significantly dilute the rationalist model, because life-course assumptions do not allow for all individuals to be uniformly rational actors. This dilution is not achieved in the texts, and again a fluctuation is apparent between those parts of the texts that are underpinned by rationalist assumptions and those parts underpinned by life-course assumptions. Finally, although the texts assume a complementarity between rationalist and responsibility assumptions, the two are ultimately divided by the structuralism of the former and the intentionalism of the latter. This contradiction most clearly appears in the phrase 'rational choice', where it is simultaneously assumed that all individuals act rationally to maximise material gain and that the decisions they make within this rigid system are somehow the product of unbridled agency.

After addressing the structure-agency question, Section 1 moved on to deal with the material-cultural question. Despite the Conservative Party's modernisation era engagement with the social democratic assumptions associated with a *material* life-

course model, the SJA texts take a purely cultural life-course approach, explaining poverty in terms of the distribution of values and beliefs rather than the distribtuion of economic resources. Unfortunately for the government, a consequence of this culturalist-structuralist position was that it significantly constrained any explanation of how social *change* occurs or could be made to occur. With the life-course model seemingly only able to explain stability, the assignment of causal power to agents offered a potential solution. By ontologically assuming agents to be causally and morally responsible, the responsibility model assumed the freedom and creativity of the individual, thereby providing an explanatory mechanism of social change. However, the shared cultural focus of the life-course and responsibility model merely highlights the contradiction between the structuralism of the former and the intentionalism of the latter; the texts therefore fluctuate between the life-course view that attitudes are socially given and the responsibility view that attitudes are freely chosen by the agent.

Unlike both the life-course and responsibility models, the materialism of the rationalist model offered both an explanation of social change and, crucially, it also offered an explanation of how policy makers can instigate positive social change. Despite being conducive to policy making, the rationalist model stands in contradiction with the responsibility model because the former suggests the use of material mechanisms to *ensure* that individuals follow a moral course of action, while the latter assumes individuals are causally and morally responsible for their actions. The final point to make about the material-cultural issue is on the relationship between the culturalism of the life-course model and the materialism of the rationalist model. The relationship between the two holds a potential complementarity *if* it is assumed that material mechanisms cause macro-level changes that are stabilised by cultural entrenchment. However, the texts consider material mechanisms, in the form of incentives, to be causally determinate at all levels, which fundamentally removes the causality of cultural entrenchment. Furthermore, while the texts attribute an implicit dominance to the material rationalist model, they continue to explicitly advocate a cultural life-course approach, which dominates the way in which the texts are organised and dominates their self-ascribed values, principles and aims.

One of the most notable differences between the SJA texts and the UC texts is that the rationalist model moves from a position of *implicit* ontological dominance to a position of *explicit* explanatory dominance. The most important policy reform is held to be the incentives to work created by the changes to benefit entitlement in Universal Credit. These incentives are assumed to be the primary causal force in the take-up of

work by unemployed and low-paid individuals. In parts of the texts in which incentives are under discussion, the notion of individual responsibility is either excluded or denied causal power through the concept of 'rational choice'. However, in contradiction, other policies are developed on the assumption that individuals are morally and causally powerful. The move from weekly to monthly benefit payments and the abolition of direct-to-landlord rent payments represent responsibility model assumptions that individuals have agency in their choices and actions, and are capable of adhering to a moral course of action if given the opportunity. The responsibility of individuals is underlined by the Claimant Commitment, a document signed by all claimants in which they effectively declare that they are responsible for their future interactions with the welfare system and the employment market. This contradiction between the rationalist model and the responsibility model becomes apparent when both are used to justify the increased use of benefit sanctions. The rationalist view of sanctions as incentives fundamentally contradicts the responsibility view that sanctions are punishments, because the latter ascribes causal power to agents while the former does not. Beyond the apparent absence of the life-course model, the acknowledgement that sanctions deliberately cause hardship seems to further imply its insignificance, because, unlike work and education, 'workless hardship' is not seen as a positive life-course institution. Although the life-course model is implicated in the policy of Universal Support, it does not dominate these texts as it does with the SJA texts. The Work Programme is perhaps the only major attempt to offer a life-course policy, but it is ultimately delivered according to rationalist assumptions that further undermine the life-course approach.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated major contradictions with the Coalition Government's *explanation* of poverty (Section 1), a number of problematic contradictions within and between policy *solutions* to poverty (Section 2), and, finally, a central contradiction between the cultural life-course *explanation* of poverty and the material rationalist *solution* to poverty. The main ontological assumptions underpinning the DWP's policy agenda have been identified and explored in detail and the relationship between these assumptions have been outlined in order to identify these notable contradictions. Furthermore, a number of logical pressures have been identified that emanate from the ontological level and could have had a causal influence on policy makers. One example is the failure of the life-course model to explain social change, which may well have contributed to an ultimate turn to rationalist assumptions in both the delivery of Universal Credit and the Work Programme. Another example is restricted room for manoeuvre created by the fragile complementarity between the rationalist and responsibility justifications of conditionality. Therefore, this

chapter has shown that ontological assumptions exist in the policy documents, it has identified the content of those assumptions, it has outlined the logical contradictions and complementarities between them, and it has theorised the causal influence that these assumptions exert on policy makers.

<u>Chapter 7</u>

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the possibility and practicalities of analysing ontological assumptions in social policy. Moreover, it has shown the importance and theoretical rewards of analysing ontological assumptions in social policy. In the process, it has developed an original theoretical framework for the analysis of those assumptions. This framework has a huge potential for applicability in future research because it allows for the investigation of ontological assumptions in terms of their particular *content*, their *logical and intertextual relations* with other assumptions, their *existence* within texts and minds, and their *causal effects* on social change. The need to apply the framework arises because of a major gap in current social research. In recent decades, there has been a movement within academia for social research to be open and clear about its underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions (Hay 1995; Furlong and Marsh 2010). However, this thesis observes that outside of academia, and especially in the arena of social policy making, reflexivity and explicitness about ontological assumptions is crucially lacking. For those academics who accept the inevitable importance of ontological assumptions in their own research, it is a small theoretical step to accept that ontological assumptions have an inevitable importance in the formation of social policy, and indeed in many other areas of social life. It is unclear why so few have taken this theoretical step and why so few have commenced research into the ontological assumptions of policy and policy makers. However, this thesis has demonstrated that a great deal of analytical fruit awaits when such research is undertaken.

This research project therefore offers the first concerted attempt to *analyse* ontological assumptions in social policy, and therefore it represents a potentially landmark study in the broader analysis of ideas and ideology in public policy. Not only has an important and previously overlooked research question been posed, and not only has the answer provided a particularly novel piece of research, but the process has entailed the meticulous development of an original theoretically framework that integrates existing realist accounts of *ideas*. This integration brings together Bhaskar's critical realism, Archer's morphogenetic theory, and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and it has been orientated specifically towards the understanding and

explanation of ontological assumptions. Although the framework has been applied here specifically to the social security policy of the UK Coalition Government, it has a vast potential for application across the social sciences. By considering ontological assumptions as real entities constituted by ideas, language, and discourse, and by considering them to play a causal role in the constraint and enablement of human agency, the theoretical framework developed here offers the potential to identify, analyse, and explain the content and causality of ontological assumptions in any political text or policy document. With further methodological development, the framework could also be adapted to offer the same potential with regards to the ontological beliefs of individuals.

These claims made about the importance of ontological assumptions in public policy and the fecundity of the framework devised for their analysis can be supported by looking at the contribution that the research project has made to its specific area of empirical study. The empirical contribution is twofold in that the findings of this research have implications for two overlapping areas of the existing literature. Firstly, a contribution has been made to the existing literature on UK social policy. Part of this contribution comes from the analysis of welfare ideologies in Chapter 3 but, primarily, the contribution made to the social policy literature is the identification of three contradicting strands of ontological assumptions within the Universal Credit (UC) project. The UC project, broadly taken, is one of the most important reforms to social policy in recent years and it is therefore notable that it is founded on ontological contradictions. A materialist rational model, a culturalist life-course model, and an intentionalist responsibility model all jostle for position throughout the UC project and the wider social justice agenda of which it is a part. The tensions between these models are not just problems within rhetoric but problems within actual policies: the effectiveness of certain policies relies on the assumption that individuals primarily act according to incentives, while the effectiveness of others relies on the assumption that individuals primarily act on the basis of their own personal responsibility. Although it is possible to argue that people act for a variety of reasons, or that they act differently in different situations, such integrations do not appear in the Coalition Government's policy documents. Instead of explaining how these ontological claims can and should be integrated, the texts simply fluctuate between a number of ontological positions, each of which offers a different set of beliefs about structure, agency, the material and the cultural.

These specific observations about the assumptions of Universal Credit have been made within a broader analysis of British politics, which leads us to the second area of empirical contribution made by this thesis: the ideology of the UK Conservative Party. It has been demonstrated through the literature analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, and through the document analysis of Chapters 5 and 6, that the post-2005 'modernisation' and supposed ideological shift of the Conservative Party have been notably limited. Much of the existing literature in this area either argues that the Cameron era represents a new post-Thatcher era of conservatism, or argues that Cameron's Conservatives merely offer a new rhetoric in order to execute an underhanded continuation, or even expansion, of Thatcherite politics. However, the findings of this research would suggest that although Cameron's party ended up with a largely neoliberal assumption-set based on the uneasy unity of rationalism and individualism, the reversion to this position has followed a period in which genuine attempts were made to advance the debates about Conservative Party ideas, and genuine attempts were made to investigate new possibilities for party policy. That these new ideas were dropped, or only maintained in rhetorical form, is at least partly the product of the difficulties the party had in negotiating the structure of ideas. The Social Justice Policy Group attempted to offer a new Conservative explanation of poverty based on culture, but found that such an explanation did not lead to an obvious policy solution without a broader acceptance of social democratic positions. Unable to accept such shifts in ideology, and unable to accept a defeatist view of poverty, there was a causal force pushing the Conservative Party away from an imagined but untenable centre-ground and back towards traditional neoliberal and conservative explanations of poverty.

If the reader casts their mind back to the introduction, they will recall that this thesis laid out four main areas in which it makes an original contribution to the existing literature, and a fifth in which it potentially opens up new research possibilities. The contribution to the existing literature on social policy and the contribution to the existing literature on British politics were seen to be two of those four contributions. The other two were held to be, firstly, the contribution to social theory made in Chapters 1 and 2, and secondly, the contribution made to the existing literature on welfare ideology in Chapter 3. The fifth area, to which the research opens new research possibilities is the overall approach of *ontological social policy analysis* and the particular framework developed for the purpose. In order to explore the findings of the thesis in more detail, this concluding chapter will offer an overview of these five areas in which it makes an original contribution. Section 1 will consider the thesis's contribution to social theory,

particularly the modifications made to the morphogenetic approach and its integration with critical discourse analysis. Section 2 will consider the contribution made to the understanding of welfare ideologies and political ideologies in general through the exploration of their underlying ontological assumptions. Section 3 will consider the contribution made to the social policy literature, and recap the findings of the ontological social policy analysis. Section 4 will consider the contribution made to the British politics literature and discuss the consequences that the findings presented in Sections 2 and 3 have for the understanding of the Cameron era. Finally, Section 5 will consider the extent to which this first iteration of ontological social policy analysis has been a success, how it could be improved, and what research possibilities it opens up.

Section 1: Social theory

Chapter 1 of this thesis began by introducing three central concepts of critical realism: intransitivity, transfactuality, and stratification. The former identifies an ontological distinction between knowledge itself, and that which knowledge is about. This distinction underpins, though does not mirror, the morphogenetic distinction between the cultural and the material, which is in turn the foundation for an analytical dualism between the two. Transfactuality, the claim that there are experiences, events, and structures, underpins, though does not mirror, the morphogenetic distinction between the agent and the structural context, and again acts as the foundation for an analytical dualism between the two. Stratification is the assumption that social reality is made up of synchronically emergent layers, each of which is distinguishable as a result of the causal powers that its constituent elements do not have when they are not arranged into that particular kind of whole. In Chapter 1, these arguments were used to defend the ontological and meta-theoretical foundations of morphogenetic theory against the criticisms of Colin Hay (2002) and Andreas Gofas (Hay and Gofas 2010). In defiance of these criticisms, ontological distinctions (dualities) between the agent and the structure, and between the material and the cultural, were held to be grounded in critical realist theory, while the analytical separations (dualisms) between the concepts of these two pairings were held to be both theoretically possible and analytically useful, in that they allowed the before-during-after model of social change that is characteristic of the morphogenetic cycle.

However, despite this defence, a number of ambiguities and problems were brought to light through the theoretical engagement with Hay and Gofas. This thesis has sought to provide clarification to those ambiguities and solutions to these

problems. With regards to terminology, a clearer and more general morphogenetic definition of structure was given, so that structure referred generally to the structured context within which agents act. This allowed material structure to be defined according to Porpora's (2015) notion of emergently material social relations, and cultural structure to initially be defined according to Archer's (1996) notion of the logical relations between intelligibilia. Clarity was also provided on the material-cultural distinction, which was held to derive from the critical realist distinction between the transitive and intransitive. More crucially, an emergent chain of social stratification was outlined so that from natural/physical structures emerges agency, from each and both emerges cultural structure, and from each and all emerges material structure. These clarifications were important for the overall security of the morphogenetic position, but one of the most significant contributions to social theory was the modification of morphogenetic theory so that it incorporated an ontological distinction (duality) and an analytical separation (dualism) between material agency and cultural agency. This provided the basis upon which material-cultural interaction could be modelled, but it also allowed morphogenetic theory to be based on a clearer meta-theoretical foundation, whereby the two fundamental analytical dualisms, structure-agency and material-cultural, are held to underpin the identification of four fundamental causal social forces: material structure, cultural structure, material agency, and cultural agency.

In Chapter 2, in pursuit of a model of material-cultural interaction and in search of the place of ontological assumptions (as causal forces) within the morphogenetic model, 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA) was introduced and integrated with morphogenetic theory. This integration is a contribution in itself because a distinct compatibility was demonstrated between the explanatory power of morphogenetic theory and the analytical toolbox of CDA. More importantly this integration allowed for a model of material-cultural interaction, which critics of morphogenetic theory have deemed impossible (Hay and Gofas 2010), and proponents of morphogenetic theory have deemed underdeveloped (McAnulla 2002). This model involved the bringing together of the material morphogenetic cycle (Archer 1995) and the cultural morphogenetic cycle (Archer 1996) around the shared 'middle element' of *social practices* (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), while maintaining the distinction (made in Chapter 1) between material agency and cultural agency. Agents are conditioned by material structures and cultural structures, they exercise (to a lesser or greater degree) material agency through social practices and form internal theories about those practices, which (to a lesser or greater degree) involves the exercise of cultural

agency; agents therefore contribute to, but by no means determine, both cultural and material morphogenesis. This same model can be applied to *theoretical* practices, which are practices directed towards the production of knowledge or ideas. However, theoretical practices not only have internal theories (theories about themselves), but also have external theories (theories about *other* practices). Theories both internal and external contain ontological assumptions, but it is specifically the ontological assumptions of the external theories of *social policy making* (as a theoretical practice) that are the concern of ontological social policy analysis.

The final part of the contribution made to social theory in this thesis was the integration of the morphogenetic and CDA conceptions of cultural structure. Although neither theory uses the term cultural structure, both offer theories of language *as a system*, and from this develop a systemic understanding of the cultural. Morphogenetic theory outlines the systemic nature of *ideas* ('intelligibilia'), which are held to interrelate logically in networks of contradiction and complementarity. CDA outlines the systemic nature of *discourses*, which are held to be the product of relations between texts (intertextuality), and are held to be networked together on a macro scale (interdiscursivity). The integration of these theories allowed this thesis to propose a richer conceptualisation of cultural structure than is currently proposed by either approach independently. Cultural Structure is therefore held to be constituted by the *language system*, the *logical network of ideas,* and the *discursive order*. This allowed the current thesis to consider ontological assumptions as existing on all three levels, but it is an important contribution in its own right, and is one that opens up two further areas of research. Firstly, it opens up a theoretical debate about the constitution of cultural structure in morphogenetic theory, and in critical realist approaches more generally. Secondly, it allows the explanatory power of the morphogenetic meta-theory to be used alongside the methodological toolbox of CDA.

Section 2: Welfare ideology

Chapter 3 began by clarifying terms, which, unlike the clarification of morphogenetic terminology, does not itself offer an original contribution, but such clarifications were an important foundation for the ideational map of welfare. Welfare was considered in terms of the *delivery of well-being* in the sense that an institution provides for, or provides the conditions for, the well-being of an individual or individuals. In order to situate this focus in the thesis as a whole, 'social policy' was considered to be public policy that was directly relevant to welfare. The aim of Chapter 3 was to provide an

ideational map of the various ontological assumptions that underpin the relevant ideological positions on welfare. The discussion of *which* ideological positions were deemed to be *relevant* was undertaken through an engagement with the existing 'welfare ideology literature' and a consideration of the research's focus on the British Conservative Party. On this basis, the ontological assumptions of *neoliberalism*, *conservatism*, *social democracy*, and *Marxism* were considered in relation to their stances on welfare. Similar analysis has been conducted by Hewitt (2000) in his *Welfare and Human Nature* and Le Grand (2003) in his *Motivation, Agency, and Public Policy.* These texts implicitly demonstrate the importance of ontological assumptions in welfare ideology and therefore in social policy. However, neither discusses welfare ideology *specifically in terms of ontology* focussing instead on 'human nature' and 'agency', approaches that tend to exclude assumptions about *structure*. Furthermore, neither text systematically engages with the material-cultural distinction, which therefore also excludes analysis of the relationship between the structure-agency and material-cultural debates. Chapter 3 aimed to fill these gaps.

In Marxism, structure and agency are both acknowledged as important causal forces, but Marx's failure to explain how they relate has produced a competing contradiction between structuralist Marxists who view history as the inevitable procession of pre-determined social change, and instrumentalist Marxists who emphasise the struggle between the agents of the proletariat and the agents of the bourgeoisie. In the material-cultural debate, Marxism is fundamentally and explicitly materialist, and although various Marxist thinkers have sought to incorporate the causal role of ideas, they have failed to, or at least been unwilling to, overcome the underlying materialism. Those who seek to re-establish Marxism in the material-cultural debate have tellingly taken on the label post-Marxist (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

In social democracy, structure is held to have a significant causal power over agents, so that agency is both initially constituted and subsequently conditioned by the structural environment. From this premise, social democrats argue that the state should engineer social structures so as to maximise the agency of individuals. The tension between the free agency of the state to engineer social structures, and the agency-less individuals who are at the mercy of social structures, is partially overcome by emphasising differential levels of *power*. In the material-cultural debate, social democracy assumes individuals to be motivated by morality and ideas rather than material interest. However, the material condition of individuals is of paramount importance in determining whether they are able to exercise their natural moral

altruism. Therefore, social democracy seems to emphasise the material power of the social structure and the cultural power of the agent. Although social democracy represents the most balanced welfare ideology discussed in this thesis, it is limited in its explanation of the structural role of ideas.

In the structure-agency debate, neoliberalism puts forward three types of individualism: ontological, epistemological, and normative. However, its explicit ontological claims, that society is determined by *individual agency*, stand in contradiction to the implicit ontological assumptions made in relation to epistemological and normative individualism. Crucially, neoliberalism theoretically attributes a central importance to a 'state-market nexus', which is the social structure deemed necessary for individual freedom. In neoliberalism therefore a constraining contradiction arises between the assumption that society is determined by individuals as free agents, and the assumption that their agency is constituted by, conditioned by, and constrained by the social structure of the state-market nexus. In the material-cultural debate, two distinct strands of neoliberalism contradict one another, forming what Archer (1996) labels a 'competing contradiction'. On the one hand is the culturalist position associated with Hayek, which starts from epistemological assumptions about the subjectivity of knowledge and leads to a prioritisation of cultural traditions over rational material mechanisms. This position faces internal contradictions relating to the irreconcilability of traditionalism and radical market liberalism. On the other hand is the materialist position associated with Friedman, which starts from ontological assumptions about rationally calculating individuals and leads to a positivist epistemology and a rejection of cultural causes. This position faces internal contradictions relating to the irreconcilability of its positivism and its rationalist ontology.

Conservatism assumes an ontological dualism between structure and agency, and without any theoretical work to link them together, its position within the structure-agency debate leads to a constraining contradiction. Social structures, a central part of conservatism's organic analogy, are reified as a spiritual and stabilising system of accumulated knowledge. Agency is defined in terms of an unalterable human nature that endures despite the supposed dominance of structure, and maintains a potentially destructive power. The contradiction arises because an organic evolutionary understanding of social change is asserted separately from an assertion about the unchanging destructive power of individuals. If individuals are destructive, then it is unclear how harmonious institutions have evolved, and if agency is unchanging, it is unclear how the social structure actually effects individuals. In the material-cultural

debate, a tension exists within the conservative understanding of ideas. On the one hand, ideas are held to be embedded in institutions and emerge out of social practice, which suggests that ideas are practical features of an essentially material social environment. However, on the other hand, an anti-foundationalist view of society is held, so that claims about social reality inevitably dissolve into our experiences of it. On one level these positions complement each other, so that institutions are imbued with a plethora of ideas that represent the disparate experiences of individuals, and therefore contain the collective wisdom of the ages. However, a fundamental contradiction arises here, because this vision rests upon an ontologically realist conception of institutions as carriers of ideas, while simultaneously asserting that institutions are nothing more than the various ways in which we experience them. Therefore, conservatism attempts to blend a fundamentally materialist position with a fundamentally idealist one.

This analysis of 'welfare ideologies' in terms of their ontological assumptions has been conducted in such a way that the analysis can apply to political ideologies more generally. Therefore, this systematic engagement with the underlying ontological assumptions of these four major political ideologies is in its own right a significant contribution of the thesis, as well as being an important underpinning for the empirical analysis in the latter chapters. The analysis of the ontological assumptions of political ideologies in terms of their positioning in the structure-agency and material-cultural debates, has allowed for the systematic comparison between ideologies, the identification of contradictions within ideologies, and a consideration of ontology beyond the existing focus of the literature, which tends to be concerned with 'agency' (Le Grand 2003) and 'human nature' (Hewitt 2000), rather than the more comprehensive category of 'ontology'.

Section 3: Social Policy

The 'social justice agenda' can be considered as the Coalition Government's guiding approach to poverty and unemployment. The agenda was developed by the Conservative Party in opposition through the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and the Social Justice Policy Group (SJPG), and taken forward into coalition as the guiding approach of the Department of Work and Pensions, as outlined in the policy document *Social Justice: Transforming Lives* (DWP 2012a). The analysis of the social justice agenda in Chapters 5 and 6, revealed three main strands of ontological assumptions, between which various tensions and contradictions emerged.

The 'life-course model' was the dominant strand in the documents published by the Conservative Party in opposition, and although it continued to survive into the Coalition Government, it primarily survived in rhetorical form and was implicated to a very limited extent in actual policy reform. The life-course model, synonymous with the CSJ's 'pathways to poverty' approach, theorised poverty as the product of childhood socialisation. During the opposition years, the life-course model was occasionally considered in terms of *material* factors, but for the most part, and exclusively so during the Coalition years, it was considered in terms of *cultural* factors. The rational model, based around the use of incentives as policy levers, was a strand throughout the period under analysis in this thesis. However, it rose from being a minor strand of assumptions during the Conservative Party's policy formulation in opposition, to being the dominant approach to social policy by the time that Universal Credit was introduced. Finally, the responsibility model, which assigns causal and moral responsibility to individual agents was prevalent throughout the period under analysis, remaining a steady and significant undercurrent of assumptions and the dominant social policy discourse of the whole period.

That these various models existed in the DWP's guiding framework of the social justice agenda is significant in itself. However, more importantly, this thesis has found that the three contradictory ontological models underpinned different elements of policy reform. Universal Credit, the flagship policy programme of the DWP during the Coalition Government, has two central aims: firstly, it seeks to simplify the benefits system; secondly, it seeks to ensure that claimants are always incentivised to take on work. The first aim is largely justified because it helps achieve the second. These policy aims may be uncontroversial but they are proposed in the texts as a major solution to unemployment and poverty, which places a great deal of causal power on the operation of *incentive frameworks*. In the ascription of a dominant causal power to *incentives*, ontological assumptions are being made about the material motivation of individuals, and more importantly, about the dominant causal power of incentive frameworks *as material structures*. These rational model assumptions stand in tension with the responsibility model, in which individuals are held to be morally and causally responsible for their poverty and lack of employment. Responsibility assumptions are not only dominant in the explicit discourse of the Coalition, but they also underpin certain key policies, such as the suggestion that individuals should be given more control over their benefit income, through monthly (rather than weekly) payments and through an end to direct-to-landlord benefit payments. The tension between the rational model and the responsibility model is most notable in the dual-justification of benefit

sanctions, a policy that leads individuals to have their basic income withdrawn for not following Jobcentre Plus requirements. On the one hand, sanctions are justified as *rewards and punishments* for the moral decisions of individual agents. On the other hand, sanctions are seen to control the behaviour of individuals through *systems of incentives and disincentives*. Although in this particular instance the two models justify the same policy, the ontological assumptions of the two justifications clearly contradict, with the responsibility model implying that individuals are the primary causal force and the rational model implying that incentive structures are the primary causal force.

The *life-course model* explains poverty to be the product of childhood socialisation. Key elements of this explanation are: 'intergenerational worklessness' where the ethics and values of employment are supposedly passed down families from one generation to the next; 'family breakdown' where the internal family structure chosen by the adults can lead to unstable family arrangements in which children's life chances are negatively impacted; 'community culture', which especially includes 'gang culture' but can also be considered in terms of the absence of a culture of employment and a culture of marriage; and 'educational failure' where children are failed by their parents and schools when it comes to the value and quality of education. These explanations are prevalent in the documents of the Conservative Party in opposition and in the social justice agenda documents of the Coalition in government. This model stands in contradiction to the responsibility model because it is unclear how much moral responsibility can be attached to an individual whose life chances are determined by the culture of their upbringing. The model also stands in contradiction with the rational model because the suggestion that individual agents are formed through childhood socialisation stands in contrast to the assumption that individuals are all materially motivated and self-interested.

The main policy in which the life-course model was implicated was the Work Programme, which sought to counteract the various cultures that sustained poverty and unemployment. However, on a closer analysis, the Work Programme was ultimately seen to be underpinned by *rational model* assumptions, because it contracted out all services on a payment-by-results model despite making explicit recommendations of its own about how to counteract poverty and unemployment. Therefore, the dominant cultural explanation of poverty developed by the CSJ and SJPG was ultimately abandoned when it came to the passing of actual policy reforms. It was argued in Chapter 6 that this is an instance in which *the logical relations between ontological assumptions can be seen to have had a causal role in policy*

reform. This can be traced over the following steps: (a) a new approach to welfare was developed by the Conservative Party, which offered a complex cultural-structural explanation of poverty, (b) this 'life-course' model very effectively explained how poverty was sustained and entrenched, *but* seemingly offered no explanation about how poverty *changed* or *could be changed*, (c) this failure to explain change was a result of the cultural-structuralist ontological assumptions, which therefore offered no obvious *policy solutions*, (d) in light of these theoretical problems, the ontological assumptions underpinning the life-course model influenced policy makers to look elsewhere for different explanations of poverty that would offer obvious policy solutions, (e) the Coalition Government turned to material-structuralist rational assumptions and agentialist responsibility assumptions in order to find policy solutions, and the original life-course explanation was retained for rhetorical purposes only.

Section 4: British Politics

When we consider these observations about social policy in the wider changes of British politics, some important claims can be made on the basis of the research presented in this thesis. Firstly, the notion of 'the Big Society' can be seen to be a major political project that failed *partly as a result of its problematic ontological assumptions*. There are disagreements in the academic literature about what the 'Big Society' actually was, with Kerr et al (2011) arguing that it was effectively an attempt to disguise a Thatcherite policy agenda, McAnulla (2010) arguing that it was an attempt to publicly position the party between Thatcherite individualism and New Labour collectivism, and Smith (2010) arguing that it was a genuine attempt to forge a new conservative approach to service delivery. However, whether it was an insincere discourse, a political strategy, or a new ideological position, the Big Society was a major strand of Conservative Party policy that can be seen to have become embedded in Coalition policy, particularly in its focus on the third sector's role in public services. However, rather than the Big Society being a revolutionary new approach to welfare provision, it ended up being little more than (a very minimal) attempt to favour third sector organisations in government tendering. It has been argued in this thesis (especially in Chapter 4 Section 1 and Chapter 5 Section 1) that the failure of the Big Society can be traced back to its problematic ontological assumptions: on the one hand it is necessarily the product of individual voluntarism and moral responsibility but on the other hand it is required to perform particular functions of service delivery. Ultimately, the Conservative Party and the Coalition Government were unable to explain how the former could be maintained in the achievement of the latter: either the Big Society was

going to emerge and if so it was unclear how, or the Big Society needed to be created by the state, in which case it would lose the uniqueness that made it valuable in the first place.

Another key feature of the Cameron-era was the significance of the family, which Hayton (2010) has identified as being at the centre of Conservative Party social policy during the modernisation period. Reflecting on the same topic after five years of coalition government, Hayton (2015: 155) argued that marriage had been a "central plank of Cameronite Conservatism". This thesis has supported Hayton's position by considering the underlying assumptions made by the Conservative Party and the Coalition Government about the key causal forces in poverty. The 'broken Britain' discourse outlined in Chapter 4, and analysed further in Chapter 5, was seen to be based on the notion that the social fabric was "crumbling" and that the social fabric was based on the family unit, which in turn was based on the institution of marriage. As well as highlighting the centrality of the family and marriage to the Cameron project, this research has also identified ontological tensions underpinning the conceptualisation of the family. Firstly, there was seen to be a tension between the assumption that children are socialised by their structured context and the assumption that adults are morally responsible for their values, decisions, and actions. This paints two contradictory pictures of the 'broken society', one in which a problematic childhood socialisation leaves people with little hope in life, and another in which the moral failings of causally responsible agents leads to family breakdown. There seems to be no consideration that childhood socialisation even partly explains the actions of adults. Secondly, tensions emerged about the extent to which individuals were responsible for the decline in marriage and the extent to which disincentives in the benefit and tax systems were responsible. Thirdly, a related tension arose about the extent to which family structures (especially but not exclusively the presence of marriage) were responsible for family breakdown, or whether individuals were responsible in their choice of family structures. This in turn relates back to the first tension and the broader question of whether individuals can be held responsible for repeating the 'mistakes' of their parents.

These various questions relate back to the central discourse of the Cameron-era, *responsibility,* a discourse which was prevalent both while the Conservatives were in opposition and while they were in coalition. The 'responsibility agenda' was the overall theme with which the Conservative Party began and concluded their major policy review in the years immediately preceding the 2010 general election. It has also

been identified by Atkins (2015) as being the most important of the three central values of the Coalition Government. This research has found that the word 'responsibility' is variously used to mean the cause of an effect (as in A was the cause responsible for B), the moral decision making of individual agents, and the area for which an individual is responsible. Through these various definitions, the 'responsibility' discourse is used to make various claims and propose various policies, but throughout all of these it entails a focus on *the causal power of agents*. This agentialism demonstrates a fundamental adherence to individualism that runs throughout the Cameron project. This agentialism stands in contrast to the rationalism inherent in the Coalition's preferred policy tool of incentivisation, which represents a major ontological contradiction at the heart of the Cameron project. However, the ontological assumptions of the 'responsibility agenda' also stand in contrast to the 'social justice agenda' developed by Iain Duncan Smith in his foundation of the CSJ in 2004, in his chairmanship of the SJPG in 2006, and in his publication of guiding policy programme entitled '*Social Justice...*' (DWP 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2014b) as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. As explained in the previous section, Duncan Smith's social justice agenda is based on cultural-structuralist assumptions that contradict the agentialism of the responsibility agenda. However, furthermore, the importation of the very notion of '*social* justice' commits the government to solving poverty and correcting inequalities, which stands in contradiction to the suggestion that individuals are responsible for their own poverty.

The 'Cameron project' or 'Cameronism' has been shown in this thesis to be riven with ontological contradictions. Many of these tensions have already been identified or detected in the existing literature, but this thesis has pinpointed the ideational source of those tensions at an ontological level, providing detail on exactly how and why contradictions arise. It is problematic that these contradictions have been detected in actual policy reforms, and it is expected that these contradictions will lead to less effective results from those policies. Furthermore, the continuous focus on a cultural-structuralist explanation of poverty constructed through the 'social justice agenda', and the primary use of material-structuralist policy solutions in the form of financial incentives, both demonstrate structuralist ontological assumptions that make it contradictory, and perhaps even hypocritical, to continue to hold individuals morally responsible for their own poverty or unemployment.

Section 5: Ontological Social Policy Analysis

Ontological policy analysis is the analysis of ontological assumptions in public policy. This thesis has set out to analyse ontological assumptions in *social policy* and has therefore been conducted under the title *ontological social policy analysis*. The analysing of ontological assumptions in social policy was justified on a number of grounds: (1) we all hold ontological assumption that partly influence our beliefs, decisions, and actions, so it follows that the ontological assumptions of social policy makers are worth investigating; (2) social policy is always influenced by social research and ontological assumptions are generally accepted to matter in social research (Hay 2002; Furlong and Marsh 2010; Parsons 2010); (3) due to the nature of their remit, social policy makers must engage with ontological controversies about human motivation, human nature, the existence and causal role of social structures, culture, and ideas; (4) intertextual relations (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), contradictions, and complementarities exist between different beliefs, and these relations have exert a causal influence on policy makers (Archer 1996); (5) increasingly, social policy documents themselves acknowledge the importance of ontological assumptions, as shown in Extract 5.22 (see p. 181). The findings presented in Sections 2, 3, and 4 of this conclusion further justify the fruitfulness of analysing ontological assumptions in social policy. However, this is not to say that ontological assumptions are the only or even the most important influence on social policy outcomes.

This wider causal model developed in this thesis, underpinned by critical realism, morphogenetic theory and critical discourse analysis, demands that we acknowledge not only the structuring of ontological assumptions, but the structuring of other ideological elements, such as epistemological and normative assumptions. It demands that we acknowledge not only the structures of ideology, but the structures of discourse and language through which ideology holds meaning. It demands that we look beyond the cultural and consider the material context (e.g. political structures, economic structures, and institutional structures). It demands that we look beyond the structural level and consider the causal power of individual agents, both in terms of their cultural powers (to think, believe, imagine etc.) and in terms of their material powers (to dominate, exploit, organise etc.). Finally, it demands that social factors must be considered in relation to the causal powers of our natural environment, especially including the physical resources, physical restrictions and physical artefacts that are

crucial to our social world. This research cannot hope to develop such a comprehensive causal explanation of Coalition social policy, which is why it has been crucial to emphasise these various pressures *in the abstract*. The first two chapters of this thesis presented an abstract model that incorporated the structural, the agential, the material and the cultural, which allowed for the remainder of the thesis to focus in specifically on cultural structure without ascribing to an idealist or structuralist position.

This thesis has developed a framework for the identification and explanation of ontological assumptions, particularly those about the structure-agency and material-cultural questions. This particular focus could have been broader to include a larger variety of ontological assumptions, such as those about the self, physical/natural reality, religion, and time. All of these areas could be incorporated into the framework for future research. The focus could have been even broader to include epistemological assumptions (Bevir 2005; McAnulla 2007), propositional assumptions, and normative assumptions (Fairclough 2003). 'Epistemological social policy analysis' in particular holds potential for future research, as has already been emphasised in Bevir's 2005 work *New Labour: A Critique* and McAnulla's (2007) response. In that engagement, Bevir and McAnulla offer differing accounts of the epistemological assumptions of policy making under New Labour. Furthermore, the focus of this thesis could have considered the *causality* of ontological assumptions in its empirical research, as well as just their content. There is potential for ontological social policy analysis to trace through the causal effects that ontological assumptions actually have on policy makers, policy reform, and policy implementation using the morphogenetic model of causality outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. However, all of these various possible expansions of the framework were beyond the scope of the current research, due to limitations of time and space.

The exclusion of another area of ontological assumptions presents a more problematic limitation of the thesis: social stratification and intersectionality. Not all assumptions about gender, age, disability, race, and sexuality are ontological assumptions, but ontology plays a crucial role in the conceptualisation of each, and each of these issues has the potential to offer insights into structure-agency and material-cultural assumptions. This is particularly true of assumptions about welfare, where all five of these issues, but especially age and disability, are explicitly built into most existing welfare systems. The current research project originally began with the intention of including these five social stratifications as a third ontological issue alongside the structure-agency and material-cultural issues. Unfortunately, the lack of

existing literature on 'ontological policy analysis' meant that the more fundamental development of a theoretical framework and an ideational map of welfare ideologies left little space for this strand of analysis. Ontological social policy analysis in its present form could be applied to any area of contemporary UK social policy, and with minor modifications could be applied to social policy in other eras and in other countries. However, the most obvious future strand of research that arises as a result of this research is the investigation into the ontological assumptions of disability policy during the Coalition Government. If such a piece of research were to be undertaken, it would be able to build significantly on the conclusions drawn here, and further develop the fledgling approach of ontological policy analysis.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the ontological assumptions of (1) academic theories (briefly, positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, and, at length, critical realism), (2) political ideologies (neoliberalism, conservatism, Marxism, and social democracy), and (3) social policy documents (the Conservative Party's modernisation texts, the DWP's social justice agenda texts, and the DWP's Universal Credit texts). There has also been some analysis of the ontological assumptions underpinning (4) political discourse, with Chapter 4 considering Coalition discourse and Chapter 5 analysing party manifestos. The analysis of ontological assumptions in these various, and variously interlinked, areas of theoretical practice has been motivated by the aims of 'ontological social policy analysis'. The development of this novel approach to the analysis of social policy is one of the five main contributions made in this thesis, as explored in this concluding chapter. It has also been the overall guiding framework of the research, and it is therefore worth concluding this thesis with some general thoughts about *ontological social policy analysis*.

The starting point of any ontological social policy analysis is a discussion of ontology. In the introductory chapter, ontology was considered in terms of three 'layers'. Firstly, there are assumptions about the self: (i) the assumption of one's consciousness; (ii) the assumption of one's existence; (iii) the assumption of one's self-consciousness; (iv) the assumption of one's capacity for reason. Secondly, there are assumptions about the relation between internal experience and external stimuli, including assumptions about the existence of other people and debates about the ontology-epistemology relationship. Thirdly, there are assumptions about social causality and the stability/ change of society over time, including the structure-agency and material-cultural

debates. A fourth layer of ontological assumptions could also be added to include social stratifications such as gender, age, disability, race, and sexuality. The range and complexity of ontological assumptions demonstrated in the delineation of these four layers shows the vast potential scope for future research using ontological social policy analysis; this thesis has been one minor foray into the much broader question of the role of ontological assumptions in human society. It was suggested in the introduction that ontological assumptions are the 'base level' of ideas and knowledge, because any claim or belief relies at least on the assumption that the claimer or believer exists and that the object of their claim or belief also exists in some way.

Considering all four layers of ontological assumptions, it is essential to recognise that one's basic beliefs about the nature of reality are deeply held and complexly interwoven with one's understanding and experience of the world. The position one takes on such issues is deeply important for the position one takes on a multitude of other crucial social and political questions. Because rival theories on such issues are ultimately unfalsifiable, we cannot escape the deeply *controversial* nature of our ontological assumptions. It is for these various reasons that academics have accepted ontological assumptions as fundamentally crucial to social analysis. It would therefore appear to be a glaring oversight to ignore the importance of ontological assumptions when it comes to the creation of the rules and policies that ensure our well-being and govern our societies. Ontological social policy analysis is an attempt to remedy that oversight.

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