

## CHAPTER



# Conservatism

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## Preview

In everyday language, the term 'conservative' has a variety of meanings. It can refer to moderate or cautious behaviour, a lifestyle that is conventional, even conformist, or a fear of or refusal to change, particularly denoted by the verb 'to conserve'. 'Conservatism' was first used in the early nineteenth century to describe a distinctive political position or ideology. In the USA, it implied a pessimistic view of public affairs. By the 1820s, the term was being used to denote opposition to the principles and spirit of the 1789 French Revolution. In the UK, 'Conservative' gradually replaced 'Tory' as a title of the principal opposition party to the Whigs, becoming the party's official name in 1835.

As a political ideology, conservatism is defined by the desire to conserve, reflected in a resistance to, or at least a suspicion of, change. However, while the desire to resist change may be the recurrent theme within conservatism, what distinguishes conservatism from rival political creeds is the distinctive way in which this position is upheld, in

particular through support for tradition, a belief in human imperfection, and the attempt to uphold the organic structure of society. Conservatism nevertheless encompasses a range of tendencies and inclinations. The chief distinction within conservatism is between what is called traditional conservatism and the New Right. Traditional conservatism defends established institutions and values on the ground that they safeguard the fragile 'fabric of society', giving security-seeking human beings a sense of stability and rootedness. The New Right is characterized by a belief in a strong but minimal state, combining economic libertarianism with social authoritarianism, as represented by neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

## Origins and development

Conservative ideas arose in reaction to the growing pace of political, social and economic change, which, in many ways, was symbolized by the French Revolution. One of the earliest, and perhaps the classic, statement of conservative principles is contained in Edmund Burke's (see p. 84) *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ([1790] 1968), which deeply regretted the revolutionary challenge to the *ancien régime* that had occurred the previous year. During the nineteenth century, western states were transformed by the pressures unleashed by industrialization and reflected in the growth of liberalism, socialism and nationalism. While these ideologies preached reform, and at times supported revolution, conservatism stood in defence of an increasingly embattled traditional social order.

Conservative thought varied considerably as it adapted itself to existing traditions and national cultures. UK conservatism, for instance, has drawn heavily on the ideas of Burke, who advocated not blind resistance to change, but rather a prudent willingness to 'change in order to conserve'. In the nineteenth century, UK conservatives defended a political and social order that had already undergone profound change, in particular the overthrow of the absolute monarchy, as a result of the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. Such pragmatic principles have also influenced the conservative parties established in other Commonwealth countries. The Canadian Conservative Party adopted the title Progressive Conservative precisely to distance itself from reactionary ideas. In continental Europe, where some autocratic monarchies persisted throughout much of the nineteenth century, a very different and more authoritarian form of conservatism developed, which defended monarchy and rigid autocratic values against the rising tide of reform. Only with the formation of Christian democratic parties after World War II did continental conservatives, notably in Germany and Italy, fully accept political democracy and social reform. The USA, on the other hand, has been influenced relatively little by conservative ideas. The US system of government and its political culture reflect deeply established liberal and progressive values, and politicians of both major parties – the Republicans and the Democrats – have traditionally resented being labelled 'conservative'. It is only since the 1960s that overtly conservative views have been expressed by elements within both parties, notably by southern Democrats and the wing of the Republican Party that was associated in the 1960s with Barry Goldwater, and which supported Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and later George W. Bush.

As conservative ideology arose in reaction to the French Revolution and the process of modernization in the West, it is less easy to identify political conservatism outside Europe and North America. In Africa, Asia and Latin America, political movements have developed that sought to resist change and preserve traditional ways of life, but they have seldom employed specifically conservative arguments and values. An exception to this is perhaps the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has dominated politics in Japan since 1955. The LDP has close

links with business interests and is committed to promoting a healthy private sector. At the same time, it has attempted to preserve traditional Japanese values and customs, and has therefore supported distinctively conservative principles such as loyalty, duty and **hierarchy**. In other countries, conservatism has exhibited a populist-authoritarian character. Perón in Argentina and Khomeini (see p. 317) in Iran, for instance, both established regimes based on strong central authority, but also mobilized mass popular support on issues such as nationalism, economic progress and the defence of traditional values.

While conservatism is the most intellectually modest of political ideologies, it has also been remarkably resilient, perhaps because of this fact. In many ways, conservatism has prospered because it has been unwilling to be tied down to a fixed system of ideas. Nevertheless, it has undergone major changes since the 1970s, shaped by growing concerns about the welfare state and economic management. Particularly prominent in this respect were the Thatcher governments in the UK (1979–90) and the Reagan administration in the USA (1981–9), both of which practised an unusually radical and ideological brand of conservatism, commonly termed the **New Right**. New Right ideas have drawn heavily on free-market economics and, in so doing, have exposed deep divisions within conservatism. Indeed, commentators argue that ‘Thatcherism’ and ‘Reaganism’, and the New Right project in general, do not properly belong within conservative ideology at all, so deeply are they influenced by classical liberal economics. The New Right has challenged traditional conservative economic views, but it nevertheless remains part of conservative ideology. In the first place, it has not abandoned traditional conservative social principles such as a belief in order, authority and discipline, and in some respects it has strengthened them.

#### **HIERARCHY**

A pyramidically ranked system of command and obedience, in which social position is unconnected with individual ability.

#### **NEW RIGHT**

An ideological trend within conservatism that embraces a blend of neoliberalism (see p. 83) and neoconservatism (see p. 88).

Furthermore, the New Right’s enthusiasm for the free market has exposed the extent to which conservatism had already been influenced by liberal ideas. From the late nineteenth century onwards, conservatism has been divided between paternalistic support for state intervention and a libertarian commitment to the free market. The significance of the New Right is that it sought to revive the electoral fortunes of conservatism by readjusting the balance between these traditions in favour of libertarianism (see p. 78).

## **Core themes: the desire to conserve**

The character of conservative ideology has been the source of particular argument and debate. For example, it is often suggested that conservatives have a clearer understanding of what they oppose than of what they favour. In that sense, conservatism has been portrayed as a negative philosophy, its purpose being simply to preach resistance to, or at least suspicion of, change. However, if conservatism

were to consist of no more than a knee-jerk defence of the *status quo*, it would be merely a political attitude rather than an ideology. In fact, many people or groups can be considered ‘conservative’, in the sense that they resist change, without in any way subscribing to a conservative political creed. For instance, socialists who campaign in defence of the welfare state or nationalized industries could be classified as conservative in terms of their actions, but certainly not in terms of their political principles. The desire to resist change may be the recurrent theme within conservatism, but what distinguishes conservatives from supporters of rival political creeds is the distinctive way they uphold this position.

A second problem is that to describe conservatism as an ideology is to risk irritating conservatives themselves. They have often preferred to describe their beliefs as an ‘attitude of mind’ or ‘common sense’, as opposed to an ‘ism’ or ideology. Others have argued that what is distinctive about conservatism is its emphasis on history and experience, and its distaste for rational thought. Conservatives have thus typically eschewed the ‘politics of principle’ and adopted instead a traditionalist political stance (see p. 9, for a discussion of the conservative view of ideology). Their opponents have also lighted upon this feature of conservatism, sometimes portraying it as little more than an unprincipled apology for the interests of a ruling class or elite. However, both conservatives and their critics ignore the weight and range of theories that underpin conservative ‘common sense’. Conservatism is neither simple pragmatism (see p. 9) nor mere opportunism. It is founded on a particular set of political beliefs about human beings, the societies they live in, and the importance of a distinctive set of political values. As such, like liberalism and socialism, it should rightfully be described as an ideology. The most significant of its central beliefs are:

- tradition
- human imperfection
- society
- hierarchy and authority
- property.

## Tradition

Conservatives have argued against change on a number of grounds. A central and recurrent theme of conservatism is its defence of **tradition**. For some conservatives, this emphasis on tradition reflects their religious faith. If the world is thought to have been fashioned by God the Creator, traditional customs and practices in society will be regarded as ‘God given’. Burke thus believed that society was shaped by ‘the law of our Creator’, or what he also called ‘natural law’. If human beings tamper with the world, they are challenging the will of God, and as a result they are likely to make human affairs worse

### TRADITION

Values, practices or institutions that have endured through time and, in particular, been passed down from one generation to the next.

rather than better. Since the eighteenth century, however, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain that tradition reflects the will of God. As the pace of historical change accelerated, old traditions were replaced by new ones, and these new ones – for example, free elections and universal suffrage – were clearly seen to be man-made rather than in any sense ‘God given’. Nevertheless, the religious objection to change has been kept alive by modern fundamentalists, particularly those who believe that God’s wishes have been revealed to humankind through the literal truth of religious texts. Such ideas are discussed in Chapter 11.

Most conservatives, however, support tradition without needing to argue that it has divine origins. Burke, for example, described society as a partnership between ‘those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born’. G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), the UK novelist and essayist, expressed this idea as follows:

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes: our ancestors. It is a democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around. (Chesterton, 1908)

Tradition, in this sense, reflects the accumulated wisdom of the past. The institutions and practices of the past have been ‘tested by time’, and should therefore be preserved for the benefit of the living and for generations to come. This is the sense in which we should respect the actions, or ‘votes’, of the dead, who will always outnumber the living. Such a notion of tradition reflects an almost Darwinian belief that those institutions and customs that have survived have only done so because they have worked and been found to be of value. They have been endorsed by a process of ‘natural selection’ and demonstrated their fitness to survive. Conservatives in the UK, for instance, argue that the institution of monarchy should be preserved because it embodies historical wisdom and experience. In particular, the crown has provided the UK with a focus of national loyalty and respect ‘above’ party politics; quite simply, it has worked.

Conservatives also venerate tradition because it generates, for both society and the individual, a sense of identity. Established customs and practices are ones that individuals can recognize; they are familiar and reassuring. Tradition thus provides people with a feeling of ‘rootedness’ and belonging, which is all the stronger because it is historically based. It generates social cohesion by linking people to the past and providing them with a collective sense of who they are. Change, on the other hand, is a journey into the unknown: it creates uncertainty and insecurity, and so endangers our happiness. Tradition therefore consists of rather more than political institutions that have stood the test of time. It encompasses all those customs and social practices that are familiar and generate security and belonging, ranging from the judiciary’s insistence on wearing traditional robes and wigs, to campaigns to preserve, for example, the traditional colour of letterboxes or telephone boxes.

## Human imperfection

In many ways, conservatism is a ‘philosophy of human imperfection’ (O’Sullivan, 1976). Other ideologies assume that human beings are naturally ‘good’, or that they can be made ‘good’ if their social circumstances are improved. In their most extreme form, such beliefs are utopian and envisage the perfectibility of humankind in an ideal society. Conservatives dismiss these ideas as, at best, idealistic dreams, and argue instead that human beings are both imperfect and unperfectible.

Human imperfection is understood in several ways. In the first place, human beings are thought to be *psychologically* limited and dependent creatures. In the view of conservatives, people fear isolation and instability. They are drawn psychologically to the safe and the familiar, and, above all, seek the security of knowing ‘their place’. Such a portrait of human nature is very different from the image of individuals as self-reliant, enterprising ‘utility maximizers’ proposed by early liberals. The belief that people desire security and belonging has led conservatives to emphasize the importance of social order, and to be suspicious of the attractions of liberty. Order ensures that human life is stable and predictable; it provides security in an uncertain world. Liberty, on the other hand, presents individuals with choices and can generate change and uncertainty. Conservatives have often echoed the views of Thomas Hobbes (see p. 84) in being prepared to sacrifice liberty in the cause of social order.

Whereas other political philosophies trace the origins of immoral or criminal behaviour to society, conservatives believe it is rooted in the individual. Human beings are thought to be *morally* imperfect. Conservatives hold a pessimistic, even Hobbesian, view of human nature. Humankind is innately selfish and greedy, anything but perfectible; as Hobbes put it, the desire for ‘power after power’ is the primary human urge. Some conservatives explain this by reference to the Old Testament doctrine of ‘original sin’. Crime is therefore not a product of inequality or social disadvantage, as socialists and modern liberals tend to believe; rather, it is a consequence of base human instincts and appetites. People can only be persuaded to behave in a civilized fashion if they are deterred from expressing their violent and anti-social impulses. And the only effective deterrent is law, backed up by the knowledge that it will be strictly enforced. This explains the conservative preference for strong government and for ‘tough’ criminal justice regimes, based, often, on long prison sentences and the use of corporal or even capital punishment. For conservatives, the role of law is not to uphold liberty, but to preserve order. The concepts of ‘law’ and ‘order’ are so closely related in the conservative mind that they have almost become a single, fused concept.

Humankind’s *intellectual* powers are also thought to be limited. Conservatives have traditionally believed that the world is simply too complicated for human reason to grasp fully. The political world, as Michael Oakshott (see p. 85) put it, is ‘boundless and bottomless’. Conservatives are therefore suspicious of abstract ideas and systems of thought that claim to understand what is, they argue, simply



## PERSPECTIVES ON... HUMAN NATURE

**LIBERALS** view human nature as a set of innate qualities intrinsic to the individual, placing little or no emphasis on social or historical conditioning. Humans are self-seeking and largely self-reliant creatures; but they are also governed by reason and are capable of personal development, particularly through education.

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**CONSERVATIVES** believe that human beings are essentially limited and security-seeking creatures, drawn to the known, the familiar, the tried and tested. Human rationality is unreliable, and moral corruption is implicit in each human individual. The New Right nevertheless embraces a form of self-seeking individualism (see p. 27).

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**SOCIALISTS** regard humans as essentially social creatures, their capacities and behaviour being shaped more by nurture than by nature, and particularly by creative labour. Their propensity for cooperation, sociability and rationality means that the prospects for personal growth and social development are considerable.

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**ANARCHISTS** advance a complex theory of human nature in which rival potentialities reside in the human soul. While the human 'core' may be morally and intellectually enlightened, a capacity for corruption lurks within each and every individual.

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**FASCISTS** believe that humans are ruled by the will and other non-rational drives, most particularly by a deep sense of social belonging focused on the nation or race. Although the masses are fitted only to serve and obey, elite members of the national community are capable of personal regeneration as 'new men' through dedication to the national or racial cause.

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**FEMINISTS** usually hold that men and women share a common human nature, gender differences being culturally or socially imposed. Separatist feminists nevertheless argue that men are genetically disposed to domination and cruelty, while women are naturally sympathetic, creative and peaceful.

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**GREENS**, particularly deep ecologists, see human nature as part of the broader ecosystem, even as part of nature itself. Materialism, greed and egoism therefore reflect the extent to which humans have become alienated from the oneness of life and thus from their own true nature. Human fulfilment requires a return to nature.

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incomprehensible. They prefer to ground their ideas in tradition, experience and history, adopting a cautious, moderate and above all pragmatic approach to the world, and avoiding, if at all possible, doctrinaire or dogmatic beliefs. High-sounding political principles such as the 'rights of man', 'equality' and 'social justice' are fraught with danger because they provide a blueprint for the reform

or remodelling of the world. Reform and revolution, conservatives warn, often lead to greater suffering rather than less. For a conservative, to do nothing may be preferable to doing something, and a conservative will always wish to ensure, in Oakeshott's words, that 'the cure is not worse than the disease'. Nevertheless, conservative support for both traditionalism and pragmatism has weakened as a result of the rise of the New Right. In the first place, the New Right is radical, in that it has sought to advance free-market reforms by dismantling inherited welfarist and interventionist structures. Second, the New Right's radicalism is based on rationalism (see p. 31) and a commitment to abstract theories and principles, notably those of economic liberalism.

## Organic society

Conservatives believe, as explained earlier, that human beings are dependent and security-seeking creatures. This implies that they do not, and cannot, exist outside society, but desperately need to belong, to have 'roots' in society. The individual cannot be separated from society, but is part of the social groups that nurture him or her: family, friends or peer group, workmates or colleagues, local community and even the nation. These groups provide individual life with security and meaning, a stance often called **social conservatism**. As a result, traditional conservatives are reluctant to understand freedom in 'negative' terms, in which the individual is 'left alone' and suffers, as the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1856–1917) put it, from **anomie**. Freedom is, rather, a willing acceptance of social obligations and ties by individuals who recognize their value. Freedom involves 'doing one's duty'. When, for example, parents instruct children how to behave, they are not constraining their liberty, but providing guidance for their children's

### SOCIAL CONSERVATISM

The belief that society is fashioned out of a fragile network of relationships which need to be upheld through duty, traditional values and established institutions.

### ANOMIE

A weakening of values and normative rules, associated with feelings of isolation, loneliness and meaninglessness.

### ORGANICISM

A belief that society operates like an organism or living entity, the whole being more than a collection of its individual parts.

benefit. To act as a dutiful son or daughter and conform to parental wishes is to act freely, out of a recognition of one's obligations. Conservatives believe that a society in which individuals know only their rights, and do not acknowledge their duties, would be rootless and atomistic. Indeed, it is the bonds of duty and obligation that hold society together.

Such ideas are based on a very particular view of society, sometimes called **organicism**. Conservatives have traditionally thought of society as a living thing, an organism, whose parts work together just as the brain, heart, lungs and liver do within a human organism. Organisms differ from artefacts or machines in two important respects. First, unlike machines, organisms are not simply a collection of individual parts that can be arranged or rearranged at will. Within an organism, the whole is more than a collection of its



individual parts; the whole is sustained by a fragile set of relationships between and among its parts, which, once damaged, can result in the organism's death. Thus, a human body cannot be stripped down and reassembled in the same way as, say, a bicycle. Second, organisms are shaped by 'natural' factors rather than human ingenuity. An organic society is fashioned, ultimately, by natural necessity. For example, the family has not been 'invented' by any social thinker or political theorist, but is a product of natural social impulses such as love, caring and responsibility. In no sense do children in a family agree to a 'contract' on joining the family – they simply grow up within it and are nurtured and guided by it.

The use of the 'organic metaphor' for understanding society has some profoundly conservative implications. A mechanical view of society, as adopted by liberals and most socialists, in which society is constructed by rational individuals for their own purposes, suggests that society can be tampered with and improved. This leads to a belief in progress, either in the shape of reform or revolution. If society is organic, its structures and institutions have been shaped by forces beyond human control and, possibly, human understanding. This implies that its delicate 'fabric' should be preserved and respected by the individuals who live within it. Organicism also shapes our attitude to particular institutions, society's 'parts'. These are viewed from a **functionalist** perspective: institutions develop and survive for a reason, and this reason is that they contribute to maintaining the larger social whole. In other words, by virtue of existing, institutions demonstrate they are worthwhile and desirable. Any attempt to reform or, worse, abolish an institution is thus fraught with dangers.

However, the rise of the New Right has weakened support within conservatism for organic ideas and theories. In line with the robust individualism (see p. 27) of classical liberalism, libertarian conservatives, including neoliberals, have held that society is a product of the actions of self-seeking and largely self-reliant individuals. This position was memorably expressed in Margaret Thatcher's assertion, paraphrasing Jeremy Bentham (see p. 52) that, 'There is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families'.

#### **FUNCTIONALISM**

The theory that social institutions and practices should be understood in terms of the functions they carry out in sustaining the larger social system.

## **Hierarchy and authority**

Conservatives have traditionally believed that society is naturally hierarchical, characterized by fixed or established social gradations. Social equality is therefore rejected as undesirable and unachievable; power, status and property are always unequally distributed. Conservatives agree with liberals in accepting natural inequality among individuals: some are born with talents and skills that are denied to others. For liberals, however, this leads to a belief in meritocracy, in which individuals rise or fall according to their abilities and willingness to work. Traditionally, conservatives have believed that inequality is more deep-rooted. Inequality is an inevitable feature of an organic society, not merely a consequence of individual differences. Pre-democratic conservatives such as Burke were, in this way, able to embrace the idea



## PERSPECTIVES ON... SOCIETY

**LIBERALS** regard society not as an entity in its own right but as a collection of individuals. To the extent that society exists, it is fashioned out of voluntary and contractual agreements made by self-interested human beings. Nevertheless, there is a general balance of interests in society that tends to promote harmony and equilibrium.

**CONSERVATIVES** believe that society should be viewed as an organism, a living entity. Society thus has an existence outside the individual, and in a sense is prior to the individual; it is held together by the bonds of tradition, authority and a common morality. Neoliberals nevertheless subscribe to a form of liberal atomism.

**SOCIALISTS** have traditionally understood society in terms of unequal class power, economic and property divisions being deeper and more genuine than any broader social bonds. Marxists believe that society is characterized by class struggle, and argue that the only stable and cohesive society is a classless one.

**ANARCHISTS** believe that society is characterized by unregulated and natural harmony, based on the natural human disposition towards cooperation and sociability. Social conflict and disharmony are thus clearly unnatural, a product of political rule and economic inequality.

**NATIONALISTS** view society in terms of cultural or ethnic distinctiveness. Society is thus characterized by shared values and beliefs, ultimately rooted in a common national identity. This implies that multinational or multicultural societies are inherently unstable.

**FASCISTS** regard society as a unified organic whole, implying that individual existence is meaningless unless it is dedicated to the common good rather than the private good. Nevertheless, membership of society is strictly restricted on national or racial grounds.

**FEMINISTS** have understood society in terms of patriarchy and an artificial division between the 'public' and 'private' spheres of life. Society may therefore be seen as an organized hypocrisy designed to routinize and uphold a system of male power.

**MULTICULTURALISTS** view society as a mosaic of cultural groups, defined by their distinctive ethnic, religious or historical identities. The basis for wider social bonds, cutting across cultural distinctiveness, is thus restricted, perhaps, to civic allegiance.

### NATURAL ARISTOCRACY

The idea that talent and leadership are innate or inbred qualities that cannot be acquired through effort or self-advancement.

of a 'natural aristocracy'. Just as the brain, the heart and the liver all perform very different functions within the body, the various classes and groups that make up society also have their own specific roles. There must be leaders and there must be followers; there must be

managers and there must be workers; for that matter, there must be those who go out to work and those who stay at home and bring up children. Genuine social equality is therefore a myth; in reality, there is a natural inequality of wealth and social position, justified by a corresponding inequality of social responsibilities. The working class might not enjoy the same living standards and life chances as their employers, but, at the same time, they do not have the livelihoods and security of many other people resting on their shoulders. Hierarchy and organicism have thus invested in traditional conservatism a pronounced tendency towards paternalism (see p. 76).

The belief in hierarchy is strengthened by the emphasis conservatives place on **authority**. Conservatives do not accept the liberal belief that authority arises out

#### **AUTHORITY**

The right to exert influence over others by virtue of an acknowledged obligation to obey.

of contracts made by free individuals. In liberal theory, authority is thought to be established by individuals for their own benefit. In contrast, conservatives believe that authority, like society, develops naturally. In this case, it arises from the need to ensure that children are cared for, kept away from danger, have a healthy

diet, go to bed at sensible times and so on. Such authority can only be imposed 'from above', quite simply because children do not know what is good for them. It does not and cannot arise 'from below': in no sense can children be said to have agreed to be governed. Authority is therefore rooted in the nature of society and all social institutions. In schools, authority should be exercised by the teacher; in the workplace, by the employer; and in society at large, by government. Conservatives believe that authority is necessary and beneficial as people need the guidance, support and security that comes from knowing 'where they stand' and what is expected of them. Authority thus counters rootlessness and anomie.

This has led conservatives to place special emphasis on leadership and discipline. Leadership is a vital ingredient in any society because it is the capacity to give direction and provide inspiration for others. Discipline is not just mindless obedience but a willing and healthy respect for authority. Authoritarian conservatives go further and portray authority as absolute and unquestionable. Most conservatives, however, believe that authority should be exercised within limits and that these limits are imposed not by an artificial contract but by the natural responsibilities that authority entails. Parents should have authority over their children, but this does not imply the right to treat them in any way they choose. The authority of a parent is intrinsically linked to the obligation to nurture, guide and, if necessary, punish their children. Thus it does not empower a parent to abuse a child or, for instance, sell the child into slavery.

## **Property**

#### **PROPERTY**

The ownership of physical goods or wealth, whether by private individuals, groups of people or the state.

**Property** is an asset that possesses a deep and, at times, almost mystical significance for conservatives. Liberals believe that property reflects merit: those who work hard and possess talent will, and should, acquire wealth. Property, therefore, is 'earned'. This doctrine has

an attraction for those conservatives who regard the ability to accumulate wealth as an important economic incentive. Nevertheless, conservatives also hold that property has a range of psychological and social advantages. For example, it provides security. In an uncertain and unpredictable world, property ownership gives people a sense of confidence and assurance, something to ‘fall back on’. Property, whether the ownership of a house or savings in the bank, provides individuals with a source of protection. Conservatives therefore believe that thrift – caution in the management of money – is a virtue in itself and have sought to encourage private savings and investment in property. Property ownership also promotes a range of important social values. Those who possess and enjoy their own property are more likely to respect the property of others. They will also be aware that property must be safeguarded from disorder and lawlessness. Property owners therefore have a ‘stake’ in society; they have an interest, in particular, in maintaining law and order. In this sense, property ownership can promote what can be thought of as the ‘conservative’ values of respect for law, authority and social order.

However, a deeper and more personal reason why conservatives support property ownership is that it can be regarded as an extension of an individual’s personality. People ‘realize’ themselves, even see themselves, in what they own. Possessions are not merely external objects, valued because they are useful – a house to keep us warm and dry, a car to provide transport and so on – but also reflect something of the owner’s personality and character. This is why, conservatives point out, burglary is a particularly unpleasant crime: its victims suffer not only the loss of, or damage to, their possessions, but also the sense that they have been personally violated. A home is the most personal and intimate of possessions, it is decorated and organized according to the tastes and needs of its owner and therefore reflects his or her personality. The proposal of traditional socialists that property should be ‘socialized’, owned in common rather than by private individuals, thus strikes conservatives as particularly appalling because it threatens to create a soulless and depersonalized society.

Conservatives, however, have seldom been prepared to go as far as classical liberals in believing that individuals have an *absolute* right to use their property however they may choose. While libertarian conservatives, and therefore the neoliberals, support an essentially liberal view of property, conservatives have traditionally argued that all rights, including property rights, entail obligations. Property is not an issue for the individual alone, but is also of importance to society. This can be seen, for example, in the social bonds that cut across generations. Property is not merely the creation of the present generation. Much of it – land, houses, works of art – has been passed down from earlier generations. The present generation is, in that sense, the custodian of the wealth

#### PRIVATIZATION

The transfer of state assets from the public to the private sector, reflecting a contraction of the state’s responsibilities.

of the nation and has a duty to preserve and protect it for the benefit of future generations. Harold Macmillan, the UK Conservative prime minister 1957–63, expressed just such a position in the 1980s when he objected to the Thatcher government’s policy of **privatization**, describing it as ‘selling off the family silver’.

## Authoritarian conservatism

Whereas all conservatives would claim to respect the concept of authority, few modern conservatives would accept that their views are authoritarian. Nevertheless, while contemporary conservatives are keen to demonstrate their commitment to democratic, particularly liberal-democratic, principles, there is a tradition within conservatism that has favoured authoritarian rule, especially in continental Europe. At the time of the French Revolution, the principal defender of autocratic rule was the French political thinker Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). De Maistre was a fierce critic of the French Revolution, but, in contrast to Burke, he wished to restore absolute power to the hereditary monarchy. He was a reactionary and was quite unprepared to accept any reform of the *ancien régime*, which had been overthrown in 1789. His political philosophy was based on willing and complete subordination to ‘the master’. In *Du Pape* ([1817] 1971) de Maistre went further and argued that above the earthly monarchies a supreme spiritual power should rule in the person of the pope. His central concern was the preservation of order, which alone, he believed, could provide people with safety and security. Revolution, and even reform, would weaken the chains that bind people together and lead to a descent into chaos and oppression.

Throughout the nineteenth century, conservatives in continental Europe remained faithful to the rigid and hierarchical values of autocratic rule, and stood unbending in the face of rising liberal, nationalist and socialist protest. Nowhere was authoritarianism more entrenched than in Russia, where Tsar Nicholas I (1825–55), proclaimed the principles of ‘orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality’, in contrast to the values that had inspired the French Revolution: ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. Nicholas’s successors stubbornly refused to allow their power to be constrained by constitutions or the development of parliamentary institutions. In Germany, constitutional government did develop, but Otto von Bismarck, the imperial chancellor, 1871–90, ensured that it remained a sham. Elsewhere, authoritarianism remained particularly strong in Catholic countries. The papacy suffered not only the loss of its

### Key concept

## Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is belief in or the practice of government ‘from above’, in which authority is exercised over a population with or without its consent. Authoritarianism thus differs from authority. The latter rests on legitimacy, and in that sense arises ‘from below’. Authoritarian thinkers typically base their views on either a belief in the

wisdom of established leaders or the idea that social order can only be maintained by unquestioning obedience. However, authoritarianism is usually distinguished from totalitarianism (see p. 207). The practice of government ‘from above’, which is associated with monarchical absolutism, traditional dictatorships and most forms of military rule, is concerned with the repression of opposition and political liberty, rather than the more radical goal of obliterating the distinction between the state and civil society.

temporal authority with the achievement of Italian unification, which led Pope Pius IX to declare himself a ‘prisoner of the Vatican’, but also an assault on its doctrines with the rise of secular political ideologies. In 1864, Pius IX condemned all radical or progressive ideas, including those of nationalism, liberalism and socialism, as ‘false doctrines of our most unhappy age’, and when confronted with the loss of the papal states and Rome, he proclaimed in 1870 the edict of papal infallibility. The unwillingness of continental conservatives to come to terms with reform and democratic government extended well into the twentieth century. For example, conservative elites in Italy and Germany helped to overthrow parliamentary democracy and bring Benito Mussolini (see p. 213) and Adolf Hitler (see p. 213) to power by providing support for, and giving respectability to, rising fascist movements.

In other cases, conservative-authoritarian regimes have looked to the newly enfranchised masses for political support. This happened in nineteenth-century France, where Louis Napoleon succeeded in being elected president, and later in establishing himself as Emperor Napoleon III, by appealing to the smallholding peasantry, the largest element of the French electorate. The Napoleonic regime fused authoritarianism with the promise of economic prosperity and social reform in the kind of plebiscitary dictatorship more commonly found in the twentieth century. Bonapartism has parallels with twentieth-century Perónism. Juan Perón was dictator of Argentina 1946–55, and proclaimed the familiar authoritarian themes of obedience, order and national unity. However, he based his political support not on the interests of traditional elites, but on an appeal to the impoverished masses, the ‘shirtless ones’, as Perón called them. The Perónist regime was **populist** in that it moulded its policies according to the instincts and wishes of the common people, in this case popular resentment against ‘Yankee imperialism’, and a widespread desire for economic and social progress. Similar regimes have developed in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. However, although such regimes have tended to consolidate the position of conservative elites, and often embrace a distinctively conservative form of nationalism, authoritarian-populist regimes such as Perón’s perhaps exhibit features that are associated more closely with fascism than conservatism.

#### POPULISM

A belief that popular instincts and wishes are the principal legitimate guide to political action, often reflecting distrust of or hostility towards political elites (see p. 291).

## Paternalistic conservatism

While continental conservatives adopted an attitude of uncompromising resistance to change, a more flexible and ultimately more successful Anglo-American tradition can be traced back to Edmund Burke. The lesson that Burke drew from the French Revolution was that change can be natural or inevitable, in which case it should not be resisted. ‘A state without the means of some change,’ he suggested, ‘is without the means of its conservation’ (Burke [1790] 1968). The characteristic style

of Burkean conservatism is cautious, modest and pragmatic; it reflects a suspicion of fixed principles, whether revolutionary or reactionary. As Ian Gilmour (1978) put it, ‘the wise Conservative travels light’. The values that conservatives hold most dear – tradition, order, authority, property and so on – will be safe only if policy is developed in the light of practical circumstances and experience. Such a position will rarely justify dramatic or radical change, but accepts a prudent willingness to ‘change in order to conserve’. Pragmatic conservatives support neither the individual nor the state in principle, but are prepared to support either, or, more frequently, recommend a balance between the two, depending on ‘what works’. In practice, the reforming impulse in conservatism has also been associated closely with the survival into the modern period of neo-feudal paternalistic values, as represented in particular by One Nation conservatism.

## One Nation conservatism

The Anglo-American paternalistic tradition is often traced back to Benjamin Disraeli (1804–81), UK prime minister in 1868 and again 1874–80. Disraeli developed his political philosophy in two novels, *Sybil* (1845) and *Coningsby* (1844), written before he assumed ministerial responsibilities. These novels emphasized the principle of social obligation, in stark contrast to the extreme individualism then dominant within the political establishment. Disraeli wrote against a background of growing industrialization, economic inequality and, in continental Europe at least, revolutionary upheaval. He tried to draw attention to the danger of Britain being divided into ‘two nations: the Rich and the Poor’. In the best conservative tradition, Disraeli’s argument was based on a combination of prudence and principle.

On the one hand, growing social inequality contains the seeds of revolution. A poor and oppressed working class, Disraeli feared, would not simply accept its misery. The revolutions that had broken out in Europe in 1830 and 1848 seemed to bear out this belief. Reform would therefore be sensible, because, in stemming the tide of revolution, it would ultimately be in the interests of the rich. On the other hand, Disraeli appealed to moral values. He suggested that wealth and privilege brought with them social obligations, in particular a responsibility for the poor

### Key concept

## Paternalism

Paternalism literally means to act in a fatherly fashion. As a political principle, it refers to power or authority being exercised over others with the intention of conferring benefit or preventing harm. Social welfare and laws such as the compulsory wearing of seat belts in cars are examples of paternalism.

‘Soft’ paternalism is characterized by broad consent on the part of those subject to paternalism. ‘Hard’ paternalism operates regardless of consent, and thus overlaps with authoritarianism. The basis for paternalism is that wisdom and experience are unequally distributed in society; and those in authority ‘know best’. Opponents argue that authority is not to be trusted and that paternalism restricts liberty and contributes to the ‘infantilization’ of society.

or less well-off. In so doing, Disraeli drew on the organic conservative belief that society is held together by an acceptance of duty and obligations. He believed that society is naturally hierarchical, but also held that inequalities of wealth or social privilege give rise to an inequality of responsibilities. The wealthy and powerful must shoulder the burden of social responsibility, which, in effect, is the price of privilege. These ideas were based on the feudal principle of *noblesse oblige*, the obligation of the aristocracy to be honourable and generous. For example, the landed nobility claimed to exercise a paternal responsibility for their peasants, as the king did in relation to the nation. Disraeli recommended that these obligations should not be abandoned, but should be expressed, in an increasingly industrialized world, in social reform. Such ideas came to be represented by the slogan ‘One Nation’. In office, Disraeli was responsible both for the Second Reform Act of 1867, which for the first time extended the right to vote to the working class, and for the social reforms that improved housing conditions and hygiene.

Disraeli’s ideas had a considerable impact on conservatism and contributed to a radical and reforming tradition that appeals both to the pragmatic instincts of conservatives and to their sense of social duty. In the UK, these ideas provide the basis of so-called ‘One Nation conservatism’, whose supporters sometimes style themselves as ‘Tories’ to denote their commitment to pre-industrial, hierarchic and paternal values. Disraeli’s ideas were subsequently taken up in the late nineteenth century by Randolph Churchill in the form of ‘Tory democracy’. In an age of widening political democracy, Churchill stressed the need for traditional institutions – for example, the monarchy, the House of Lords and the church – to enjoy a wider base of social support. This could be achieved by winning working-class votes for the Conservative Party by continuing Disraeli’s policy of social reform. One Nation conservatism can thus be seen as a form of Tory welfarism.

The high point of the One Nation tradition was reached in the 1950s and 1960s, when conservative governments in the UK and elsewhere came to practise a version of Keynesian social democracy, managing the economy in line with the goal of full employment and supporting enlarged welfare provision. This stance was based

## Key concept

### Toryism

‘Tory’ was used in eighteenth-century Britain to refer to a parliamentary faction that (as opposed to the Whigs) supported monarchical power and the Church of England, and represented the landed gentry; in the USA, it implied loyalty to the British crown. Although in the mid-nineteenth century the British Conservative Party emerged out of the

Tories, and in the UK ‘Tory’ is still widely (but unhelpfully) used as a synonym for Conservative, Toryism is best understood as a distinctive ideological stance within broader conservatism. Its characteristic features are a belief in hierarchy, tradition, duty and organicism. While ‘high’ Toryism articulates a neo-feudal belief in a ruling class and a pre-democratic faith in established institutions, the Tory tradition is also hospitable to welfarist and reformist ideas, provided these serve the cause of social continuity.



on the need for a non-ideological, ‘middle way’ between the extremes of *laissez-faire* liberalism and socialist state planning. Conservatism was therefore the way of moderation, and sought to draw a balance between rampant individualism and overbearing collectivism (see p. 99). In the UK, this idea was most clearly expressed in Harold Macmillan’s *The Middle Way* ([1938] 1966). Macmillan, who was to be prime minister from 1957 to 1963, advocated what he called ‘planned capitalism’, which he described as ‘a mixed system which combines state ownership, regulation or control of certain aspects of economic activity with the drive and initiative of private enterprise’. Such ideas later resurfaced, in the USA and the UK, in the notions of ‘compassionate conservatism’. However, paternalist conservatism only provides a qualified basis for social and economic intervention. The purpose of One Nationism, for instance, is to consolidate hierarchy rather than to remove it, and its wish to improve the conditions of the less well-off is limited to the desire to ensure that the poor no longer pose a threat to the established order.

## Libertarian conservatism











Although conservatism draws heavily on pre-industrial ideas such as organicism, hierarchy and obligation, the ideology has also been much influenced by liberal ideas, especially classical liberal ideas. This is sometimes seen as a late-twentieth-century development, neoliberals having in some way ‘hijacked’ conservatism in the interests of classical liberalism. Nevertheless, liberal doctrines, especially those concerning the free market, have been advanced by conservatives since the late eighteenth century, and can be said to constitute a rival tradition to conservative paternalism. These ideas are libertarian in that they advocate the greatest possible economic liberty and the least possible government regulation of social life. Libertarian conservatives have not simply converted to liberalism, but believe that liberal economics is compatible with a more traditional, conservative social philosophy, based on values such as authority and duty. This is evident in the work

### Key concept

## Libertarianism

Libertarianism refers to a range of theories that give strict priority to liberty (understood in negative terms) over other values, such as authority, tradition and equality. Libertarians thus seek to maximize the realm of individual freedom and minimize the scope of public authority, typically seeing the state as the principal threat to liberty. The two best-known

libertarian traditions are rooted in the idea of individual rights (as with Robert Nozick, see p. 85) and in *laissez-faire* economic doctrines (as with Friedrich von Hayek, see p. 84), although socialists have also embraced libertarianism. Libertarianism is sometimes distinguished from liberalism on the grounds that the latter, even in its classical form, refuses to give priority to liberty over order. However, it differs from anarchism in that libertarians generally recognize the need for a minimal state, sometimes styling themselves as ‘minarchists’.

 <b>TENSIONS WITHIN... CONSERVATISM (1)</b>		
<b>Paternalist conservatism</b>	<b>VS</b>	<b>Libertarian conservatism</b>
pragmatism		principle
traditionalism		radicalism
social duty		egoism
organic society		atomistic individualism
hierarchy		meritocracy
social responsibility		individual responsibility
natural order		market order
'middle way' economics		laissez-faire economics
qualified welfarism		anti-welfarism

of Edmund Burke, in many ways the founder of traditional conservatism, but also a keen supporter of the **economic liberalism** of Adam Smith.

The libertarian tradition has been strongest in those countries where classical liberal ideas have had the greatest impact, once again the UK and the USA. As early as the late eighteenth century, Burke expressed a strong preference for free trade in commercial affairs and a competitive, self-regulating market economy in domestic affairs. The free market is efficient and fair, but it is also, Burke believed, natural and necessary. It is 'natural' in that it reflects a desire for wealth, a 'love of lucre', that is part of human nature. The laws of the market are therefore 'natural laws'. He accepted that working conditions dictated by the market are, for many, 'degrading, unseemly, unmanly and often most unwholesome', but insisted that they would suffer further if the 'natural course of things' were to be disturbed. The capitalist free market could thus be defended on the grounds of tradition, just like the monarchy and the church.

Libertarian conservatives are not, however, consistent liberals. They believe in economic individualism and 'getting government off the back of business', but are less prepared to extend this principle of individual liberty to other aspects of social life. Conservatives, even libertarian conservatives, have a more pessimistic view of human nature. A strong state is required to maintain public order and ensure that authority is respected. Indeed, in some respects libertarian conservatives are attracted to free-market theories precisely because they

**ECONOMIC LIBERALISM**

A belief in the market as a self-regulating mechanism that tends naturally to deliver general prosperity and opportunities for all (see p. 42).

promise to secure social order. Whereas liberals have believed that the market economy preserves individual liberty and freedom of choice, conservatives have at times been attracted to the market as an instrument of social discipline. Market forces regulate and control economic and social activity. For example, they may deter workers from pushing for wage increases by threatening them with unemployment. As such, the market can be seen as an instrument that maintains social stability and works alongside the more evident forces of coercion: the police and the courts. While some conservatives have feared that market capitalism will lead to endless innovation and restless competition, upsetting social cohesion, others have been attracted to it in the belief that it can establish a 'market order', sustained by impersonal 'natural laws' rather than the guiding hand of political authority.

## Christian democracy

**Christian democracy** is a political and ideological movement which has been prominent in western and central Europe and, to a lesser extent, Latin America. It has usually been classified as a moderate or progressive form of conservatism, albeit one that typically resists precise doctrinal expression. In the aftermath of World War II, Christian democratic parties emerged in Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and Italy, the most significant ones being the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union in then-West Germany and, until its collapse in 1993, the Christian Democratic Party (DC) in Italy. Christian democratic thinking has nevertheless had a wider impact, affecting centre-right parties in France, the Benelux countries, much of Scandinavia and parts of post-communist Europe which are not 'confessional' parties or formally aligned to the Christian democratic movement. This certainly applies in the case of the European People's Party (EPP), the major centre-right group in the European Parliament and the Parliament's largest political group since 1999. In Latin America, significant Christian democratic parties have developed in countries such as Chile, Venezuela, Ecuador, Guatemala and El Salvador.

However, the ideological origins of Christian democracy can be traced back to well before 1945 and the break between continental European conservatism and authoritarianism in the early post-fascist period. Christian democratic thinking gradually took shape during the nineteenth century as the Catholic Church attempted to come to terms with the ramifications of industrialization and, in particular, the emergence of liberal capitalism. Indeed, in some respects, this process originated with the French Revolution and the explicit challenge that

it posed to Church authority. The Catholic Church came, over time, to accept democratic political forms and to evince growing concern about the threats posed by unrestrained capitalism. The Centre party (*Zentrum*) in Germany, founded in 1870, was thus set up to defend the interests of the Catholic Church but also campaigned for a strengthening welfare provision.

### CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

An ideological movement within European conservatism that is characterized by a commitment to the social market and qualified state intervention.

Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) underlined the Vatican's openness to new thinking, in that it lamented the material suffering of the working class and emphasized the reciprocal duties of labour and capital.

Such developments are often seen to have been based on a distinctively Catholic social theory. In this view, as Protestantism is associated with the idea of spiritual salvation through individual effort, its social theory typically endorses individualism and extols the value of hard work, competition and personal responsibility. The 'Protestant ethic' has thus sometimes been treated as a form of capitalist ideology (Weber, [1904–5] 2011). Catholic social theory, by contrast, focuses on the social group rather than the individual, and has stressed balance or organic harmony rather than competition. In the writings of the French philosopher and political thinker Jacques Maritain (1884–1973), the leading figure in the attempt to develop an ideology of Christian democracy, this was expressed through the notion of 'integral humanism' (Maritain, [1936] 1996). Integral humanism underlines the role of cooperation in the achievement of shared practical goals, and thereby implies that unrestrained capitalism fails to serve the 'common good'.

## Social market economy

Although Christian democracy is typically critical of *laissez-faire* capitalism, it certainly does not reject capitalism altogether. Rather, it advocates a 'third way' between market capitalism and socialism, often termed social capitalism. As such, clear parallels exist between Christian democracy and the neo-revisionist tradition within social democracy, examined in Chapter 4. The idea of social capitalism draws more heavily on the flexible and pragmatic ideas of economists such as Friedrich List (1789–1846) than on the strict market principles of classical political economy, as formulated by Adam Smith (see p. 52) and David Ricardo (1772–1823). A leading advocate of the *Zollverein* (the German customs union), List emphasized the economic importance of politics and political power, arguing, for instance, that state intervention should be used to protect infant industries from the rigours of foreign competition. The central theme in this model is the idea of a **social market**; that is, an attempt to marry the disciplines of market competition with the need for social cohesion and solidarity. The market is thus viewed not as an end in itself but rather as a means of generating wealth in order to achieve broader social ends.

In Germany, often seen as the natural home of social-market capitalism, this system is founded on a link between industrial and financial capital, in the form of a close relationship between business corporations and regionally-based banks, which are often also major shareholders in the corporations. This has been the pivot around which Germany's economy has revolved since World War II, and it has orientated the economy towards long-term investment, rather than short-term profitability. Business organization in what has been called Rhine–Alpine capitalism also differs

### **SOCIAL MARKET**

An economy that is structured by market principles and is relatively free from state interference, but which operates alongside comprehensive welfare provision and effective social services.

from Anglo–American capitalism in that it is based on ‘social partnership’, creating a form of democratic corporatism (see p. 208). Trade unions enjoy representation through works councils, and participate in annual rounds of wage negotiation that are usually industry–wide. This relationship is underpinned by comprehensive and well–funded welfare provisions that provide workers and other vulnerable groups with social guarantees. In this way, a form of ‘stakeholder capitalism’ has developed that takes into account the interests of workers and those of the wider community. This contrasts with the ‘shareholder capitalism’ found in the USA and the UK (Hutton, 1995).

## Federalism

Finally, Christian democracy is characterized by a distrust of conventional forms of nationalism and an emphasis instead on the principles of federalism (see p. 39) and **subsidiarity**. This can be explained both ideologically and historically. Ideologically, federalism can be seen to apply ideas such as cooperation and partnership to the internal organization of the state, so bringing Christian democratic thinking on constitutional matters into line with its thinking on the economy and society. However, powerful historical forces also encouraged Christian democracy to move in this direction, not least the widespread destruction wreaked across continental Europe by World War II, allied to the belief that rampant nationalism and over-strong central government had been major causes of the war. Christian democratic parties have therefore often favoured the establishment of federalism at the state level, as has occurred in Austria, Belgium and Germany, but have also advocated political union,

### SUBSIDIARITY

The principle that decisions should be made at the lowest appropriate level.

and not merely economic union, within the European Union. Influenced by Christian democratic thinking, the European People’s Party has therefore been one of the keenest supporters of ‘pooled’ sovereignty and European federalism.

## New Right

During the early post-1945 period, pragmatic and paternalistic ideas dominated conservatism through much of the western world. The remnants of authoritarian conservatism collapsed with the overthrow of the Portuguese and Spanish dictatorships in the 1970s. Just as conservatives had come to accept political democracy during the nineteenth century, after 1945 they came to accept a qualified form of social democracy. This tendency was confirmed by the rapid and sustained economic growth of the post-war years, the ‘long boom’, which appeared to bear out the success of ‘managed capitalism’. During the 1970s, however, a set of more radical ideas developed within conservatism, challenging directly the Keynesian-welfarist orthodoxy. These ‘New Right’ ideas had their greatest initial impact in the USA and the UK, but they also came to be

influential in parts of continental Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and had some kind of effect on western states across the globe.

The New Right is a broad term and has been used to describe ideas that range from the demand for tax cuts to calls for greater censorship of television and films, and even campaigns against immigration or in favour of repatriation. In essence, the New Right is a marriage between two apparently contrasting ideological traditions:

- The first of these is classical liberal economics, particularly the free-market theories of Adam Smith, which were revived in the second half of the twentieth century as a critique of ‘big’ government and economic and social intervention. This is called the liberal New Right, or neoliberalism (see p. 83).
- The second element in the New Right is traditional conservative – and notably pre-Disraelian – social theory, especially its defence of order, authority and discipline. This is called the conservative New Right, or neoconservatism (see p. 88).

The New Right thus attempts to fuse economic libertarianism with state and social authoritarianism. As such, it is a blend of radical, reactionary and traditional features. Its radicalism is evident in its robust efforts to dismantle or ‘roll back’ interventionist government and liberal or permissive social values. This radicalism is clearest in relation to neoliberalism, which draws on rational theories and abstract principles, and so dismisses tradition. New Right radicalism is nevertheless reactionary, in that both neoliberalism and neoconservatism usually hark back to a nineteenth-century ‘golden age’ of supposed economic vigour and moral fortitude. However, the New Right also makes an appeal to tradition, particularly through the emphasis neoconservatives place on so-called ‘traditional values’.

## Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism was a product of the end of the ‘long boom’ of the post-1945 period, which shifted economic thinking away from Keynesianism (see p. 55) and reawakened interest in earlier, free-market thinking. In this, it has operated at a national

### Key concept

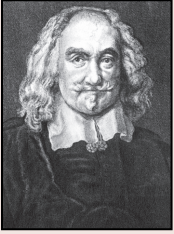
## Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism (sometimes called ‘neoclassical liberalism’) is widely seen as an updated version of classical liberalism, particularly classical political economy. Its central theme is that the economy works best when left alone by government, reflecting a belief in free market economics and atomistic individualism. While unregulated market

capitalism delivers efficiency, growth and widespread prosperity, the ‘dead hand’ of the state saps initiative and discourages enterprise. In short, the neoliberal philosophy is: ‘market: good; state: bad’. Key neoliberal policies include privatization, spending cuts (especially in social welfare), tax cuts (particularly corporate and direct taxes) and deregulation. Neoliberalism is often equated with a belief in market fundamentalism; that is, an absolute faith in the capacity of the market mechanism to solve all economic and social problems.

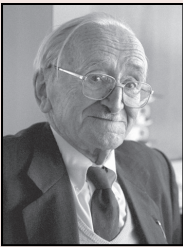
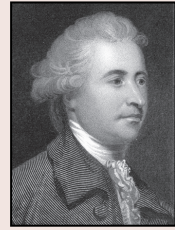


## KEY FIGURES IN... CONSERVATISM



**Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)** An English political philosopher, Hobbes, in his classic work *Leviathan* (1651), used social contract theory to defend absolute government as the only alternative to anarchy and disorder, and proposed that citizens have an unqualified obligation towards their state. Though his view of human nature and his defence of authoritarian order have a conservative character, Hobbes' rationalist and individualist methodology prefigured early liberalism. His emphasis on power-seeking as the primary human urge has also been used to explain the behaviour of states in the international system.

**Edmund Burke (1729–97)** A Dublin-born British statesman and political theorist, Burke was the father of the Anglo-American conservative political tradition. In his major work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke deeply opposed the attempt to recast French politics in accordance with abstract principles such as 'the universal rights of man', arguing that wisdom resides largely in experience, tradition and history. Burke is associated with a pragmatic willingness to 'change in order to conserve', reflected, in his view, in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688.

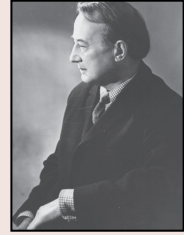


**Friedrich von Hayek (1899–1992)** An Austrian economist and political philosopher, Hayek was a firm believer in individualism and market order, and an implacable critic of socialism. His pioneering work, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) developed a then deeply unfashionable defence of *laissez-faire* and attacked economic intervention as implicitly totalitarian. In later works, such as *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1979), Hayek supported a modified form of traditionalism and upheld an Anglo-American version of constitutionalism that emphasized limited government.

level but also at an international level, through what is called neoliberal globalization (see p. 86). Neoliberal thinking is most definitely drawn from classical rather than modern liberalism. It amounts to a restatement of the case for a minimal state. This has been summed up as 'private, good; public, bad'. Neoliberalism is anti-statist. The state is regarded as a realm of coercion and unfreedom: collectivism restricts individual initiative and saps self-respect. Government, however benignly disposed, invariably has a damaging effect on human affairs. Instead, faith is placed in the individual and the market. Individuals should be encouraged to be self-reliant and to make rational choices in their own interests. The market is respected as a mechanism through which the sum of individual choices will lead to progress and general benefit. As such, neoliberalism has attempted to establish the dominance of libertarian ideas over paternalistic ones within conservative ideology.

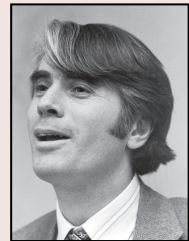
The dominant theme within this anti-statist doctrine is an ideological commitment to the free market, particularly as revived in the work of economists such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman (1912–2006). Free-market ideas gained

**Michael Oakeshott (1901–90)** A British political philosopher, Oakeshott advanced a powerful defence of a non-ideological style of politics that supported a cautious and piecemeal approach to change. Distrusting rationalism, he argued in favour of traditional values and established customs on the grounds that the conservative disposition is ‘to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible’. Oakeshott’s best-known works include *Rationalism in Politics* (1962) and *On Human Conduct* (1975).



**Irving Kristol (1920–2009)** A US journalist and social critic, Kristol was one of the leading exponents of American neoconservatism. He abandoned liberalism in the 1970s and became increasingly critical of the spread of welfarism and the ‘counterculture’. While accepting the need for a predominantly market-based economy and fiercely rejecting socialism, Kristol criticized libertarianism in the marketplace as well as in morality. His best-known writings include *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (1978) and *Reflections of a Neo-Conservative* (1983).

**Robert Nozick (1938–2002)** A US political philosopher, Nozick developed a form of rights-based libertarianism in response to the ideas of John Rawls (see p. 53). Drawing on Locke (see p. 52) and nineteenth-century US individualists, he argued that property rights should be strictly upheld, provided that property was justly purchased or justly transferred from one person to another. His major work, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974), rejects welfare and redistribution, and advances the case for minimal government and minimal taxation. In later life, Nozick modified his extreme libertarianism.



renewed credibility during the 1970s as governments experienced increasing difficulty in delivering economic stability and sustained growth. Doubts consequently developed about whether it was in the power of government at all to solve economic problems. Hayek and Friedman, for example, challenged the very idea of a ‘managed’ or ‘planned’ economy. They argued that the task of allocating resources in a complex, industrialized economy was simply too difficult for any set of state bureaucrats to achieve successfully. The virtue of the market, on the other hand, is that it acts as the central nervous system of the economy, reconciling the supply of goods and services with the demand for them. It allocates resources to their most profitable use and thereby ensures that consumer needs are satisfied. In the light of the re-emergence of unemployment and inflation in the 1970s, Hayek and Friedman argued that government was invariably the cause of economic problems, rather than the cure.

The ideas of Keynesianism were one of the chief targets of neoliberal criticism. Keynes had argued that capitalist economies were not self-regulating. He placed particular emphasis on the ‘demand side’ of the economy, believing that the level of



## POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN ACTION . . .

**Rise of neoliberal globalization**

**EVENTS:** Since the 1980s, economic development has, to a greater or lesser extent in different parts of the world, taken on a neoliberal guise. The wider, and seemingly irresistible, advance of neoliberalism has occurred, in part, through the influence of the institutions of global economic governance and the growing impact of globalization (see p. 20). In a process that began in the early 1970s, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were converted to the ideas of what later became known as the ‘Washington consensus’, which was aligned to the economic agenda of Reagan and Thatcher and focused on policies such as free trade, the liberalization of capital markets, flexible exchange rates, balanced budgets and so on. Neoliberalism and globalization thus became a single, fused process, widely dubbed ‘neoliberal globalization’.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** From an economic liberal perspective, the emergence of neoliberal globalization was both an inevitable and a welcome development. It was inevitable because economic development is intrinsically linked to the advance of market principles, the market being the only reliable means of generating wealth, and the surest guarantee of prosperity and economic opportunity. Market competition and the profit motive provide incentives for work and enterprise, and also allocate resources to their most profitable use. Just as national economies have been restructured on market lines, and often on free-market lines, so the world economy was sure to follow suit. This was especially the case because neoliberal globalization reflects the interests of all countries in all parts of the world. Although it makes the rich richer, it also makes the poor less poor, implying that the only countries that do not benefit from neoliberal globalization are the ones that – foolishly – do not participate in it.

Neo-Marxists and radical theorists nevertheless cast neoliberal globalization in a very different light, arguing that it has resulted in new and deeply entrenched patterns of poverty and inequality. In this view, neoliberal globalization is driven not by the magic of the market and the universal desire for material progress, but by the interests of transnational corporations and industrially advanced states generally, and particularly by the USA’s determination to maintain its global economic hegemony. The losers in this global struggle are invariably in the developing world, where wages are low, regulation is weak or non-existent, and where production is increasingly orientated around global markets rather than local needs. Neoliberal globalization has thus been portrayed as a form of neo-imperialism.

economic activity and employment were dictated by the level of ‘aggregate demand’ in the economy. Milton Friedman, on the other hand, argued that there is a ‘natural rate of unemployment’, which is beyond the ability of government to influence. He also argued that attempts to eradicate unemployment by applying Keynesian techniques merely cause other, more damaging, economic problems, notably **inflation**. Inflation, neoliberals believe, threatens the entire basis of a market economy because, in reducing faith in money, the means of exchange, it discourages people from undertaking commercial or economic activity. However, Keynesianism had, in effect, encouraged governments to ‘print money’, albeit in a well-meaning attempt to create jobs. The free-market solution to inflation is to control the supply of money by cutting public spending, a policy practised by both the Reagan and the Thatcher administrations during the 1980s. Both administrations also allowed unemployment to rise sharply, in the belief that only the market could solve the problem.

Neoliberalism is also opposed to the mixed economy and public ownership, and practised so-called supply-side economics. Starting under Thatcher in the UK in the 1980s but later extending to many other western states, and most aggressively pursued in postcommunist states in the 1990s, a policy of privatization has effectively dismantled both mixed and collectivized economies by transferring industries from public to private ownership. Nationalized industries were criticized for being inherently inefficient, because, unlike private firms and industries, they are not disciplined by the profit motive. Neoliberalism’s emphasis on the ‘supply-side’ of the economy was reflected in the belief that governments should foster growth by providing conditions that encourage producers to produce, rather than consumers to consume. The main block to the creation of an entrepreneurial, supply-side culture is high taxes. Taxes, in this view, discourage enterprise and infringe property rights, a stance sometimes called ‘**fiscal conservatism**’.

Neoliberalism is not only anti-statist on the grounds of economic efficiency and responsiveness, but also because of its political principles, notably its commitment to individual liberty. Neoliberals claim to be defending freedom against ‘creeping collectivism’. At the extreme, these ideas lead in the direction of anarcho-capitalism (discussed in Chapter 5) and the belief that all goods and services, including the courts and public order, should be delivered by the market. The freedom defended by neoliberals is negative freedom: the removal of external restrictions on the individual. As the collective power of government is seen as the principal threat to the individual,

freedom can only be ensured by ‘rolling back’ the state. This, in particular, means rolling back social welfare. In addition to economic arguments against welfare – for example, that increased social expenditure pushes up taxes, and that public services are inherently inefficient – neoliberals object to welfare on moral grounds. In the first place, the welfare state is criticized for having created a ‘culture of dependency’: it saps initiative and enterprise, and robs people of dignity and self-

#### **INFLATION**

A rise in the general price level, leading to a decline in the value of money.

#### **FISCAL CONSERVATISM**

A political-economic stance that prioritizes the lowering of taxes, cuts in public spending and reduced government debt.

respect. Welfare is thus the *cause* of disadvantage, not its cure. Such a theory resurrects the notion of the ‘undeserving poor’. Charles Murray (1984) also argued that, as welfare relieves women of dependency on ‘breadwinning’ men, it is a major cause of family breakdown, creating an underclass largely composed of single mothers and fatherless children. A further neoliberal argument against welfare is based on a commitment to individual rights. Robert Nozick (1974) advanced this most forcefully in condemning all policies of welfare and redistribution as a violation of property rights. In this view, so long as property has been acquired justly, to transfer it, without consent, from one person to another amounts to ‘legalized theft’. Underpinning this view is egoistical individualism, the idea that people owe nothing to society and are, in turn, owed nothing by society, a stance that calls the very notion of society into question.

## Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism emerged in the USA in the 1970s as a backlash against the ideas and values of the 1960s. It was defined by a fear of social fragmentation or breakdown, which was seen as a product of liberal reform and the spread of ‘permissiveness’. In sharp contrast to neoliberalism, neoconservatives stress the primacy of politics and seek to strengthen leadership and authority in society. This emphasis on authority, allied to a heightened sensitivity to the fragility of society, demonstrates that neoconservatism has its roots in traditional or organic conservatism. However, it differs markedly from paternalistic conservatism, which also draws heavily on organic ideas. Whereas paternalistic conservatives believe, for instance, that community is best maintained by social reform and the reduction of poverty, neoconservatives look to strengthen community by restoring authority and imposing social discipline. Neoconservative authoritarianism is, to this extent, consistent with neoliberal libertarianism. Both of them accept the rolling back of the state’s economic responsibilities.

### PERMISSIVENESS












The willingness to allow people to make their own moral choices; permissiveness suggests that there are no authoritative values.

## Key concept

### Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism refers to developments within conservative ideology that relate to both domestic policy and foreign policy. In domestic policy, neoconservatism is defined by support for a minimal but strong state, fusing themes associated with traditional or organic conservatism with an acceptance of economic individualism

and qualified support for the free market. Neoconservatives have typically sought to restore public order, strengthen ‘family’ or ‘religious’ values, and bolster national identity. In foreign policy, neoconservatism was closely associated with the Bush administration in the USA in the years following 9/11. Its central aim was to preserve and reinforce what was seen as the USA’s ‘benevolent global hegemony’ by building up US military power and pursuing a policy of worldwide ‘democracy promotion’.

 <b>TENSIONS WITHIN... CONSERVATISM (2)</b>		
Neoliberalism	VS	Neoconservatism
classical liberalism		traditional conservatism
atomism		organicism
radicalism		traditionalism
libertarianism		authoritarianism
economic dynamism		social order
self-interest/enterprise		traditional values
equality of opportunity		natural hierarchy
minimal state		strong state
internationalism		insular nationalism
pro-globalization		anti-globalization

Neoconservatives have developed distinctive views about both domestic policy and foreign policy. The two principal domestic concerns of neoconservatism have been with social order and public morality. Neoconservatives believe that rising crime, delinquency and anti-social behaviour are generally a consequence of a larger decline of authority that has affected most western societies since the 1960s. They have therefore called for a strengthening of social disciplines and authority at every level. This can be seen in relation to the family. For neoconservatives, the family is an authority system: it is both naturally hierarchical – children should listen to, respect and obey their parents – and naturally patriarchal. The husband is the provider and the wife the home-maker. This social authoritarianism is matched by state authoritarianism, the desire for a strong state reflected in a ‘tough’ stance on law and order. This led, in the USA and the UK in particular, to a greater emphasis on custodial sentences and to longer prison sentences, reflecting the belief that ‘prison works’.

Neoconservatism’s concern about public morality is based on a desire to reassert the moral foundations of politics. A particular target of neoconservative criticism has been the ‘permissive 1960s’ and the growing culture of ‘doing your own thing’. In the face of this, Thatcher in the UK proclaimed her support for ‘Victorian values’, and in the USA organizations such as Moral Majority campaigned for a return to ‘traditional’ or ‘family’ values. Neoconservatives see two dangers in a permissive society. In the first place, the freedom to choose one’s own morals or life-style could lead to the choice of immoral or ‘evil’ views. There is, for instance, a significant religious element in neoconservatism, especially in the USA. The second danger is

not so much that people may adopt the *wrong* morals or lifestyles, but may simply choose *different* moral positions. In the neoconservative view, moral pluralism is threatening because it undermines the cohesion of society. A permissive society is a society that lacks ethical norms and unifying moral standards. It is a 'pathless desert', which provides neither guidance nor support for individuals and their families. If individuals merely do as they please, civilized standards of behaviour will be impossible to maintain.

The issue that links the domestic and foreign policy aspects of neoconservative thinking is a concern about the nation and the desire to strengthen national identity in the face of threats from within and without. The value of the nation, from the neoconservative perspective, is that it binds society together, giving it a common culture and civic identity, which is all the stronger for being rooted in history and tradition. National patriotism (see p. 164) thus strengthens people's political will. The most significant threat to the nation 'from within' is the growth of multiculturalism, which weakens the bonds of nationhood by threatening political community and creating the spectre of ethnic and racial conflict. Neoconservatives have therefore often been in the forefront of campaigns for stronger controls on immigration and, sometimes, for a privileged status to be granted to the 'host' community's culture (as discussed in Chapter 10). Such concerns have widened and deepened as a result of the advance of globalization, as discussed in the next section. The threats to the nation 'from without' are many and various. In the UK, the main perceived threat has come from the process of European integration; indeed, since the 1990s, UK conservatism has at times appeared to be defined by '**Euro scepticism**'.

However, the nationalist dimension of neoconservative thinking also gave rise to a distinctive stance on foreign policy, particularly in the USA. Neoconservatism, in this form, was an approach to foreign policy-making that sought to enable the USA to take advantage of its unprecedented position of power and influence in the post-Cold War era. It consisted of a fusion of neo-Reaganism and 'hard' Wilsonianism (after Woodrow Wilson, see p. 184). Neo-Reaganism took the form of a Manichaeian world-view, in which 'good' (represented by the USA) confronted 'evil' (represented by 'rogue' states and terrorist groups that possess or seek to possess, weapons of mass destruction). This implied that the USA should deter rivals and extend its global reach by achieving a position of 'strength beyond challenge' in military terms. 'Hard' Wilsonianism was expressed through the desire to spread US-style democracy throughout the world by a process of 'regime change', achieved by military means if necessary. Such 'neocon' thinking dominated US strategic thinking in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, particularly through the establishment of the 'war on terror' and the attacks on Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Neoconservative foreign-policy thinking nevertheless declined in significance from about 2005 onwards, as

#### **EUROSEPTICISM**

Hostility to European integration based on the belief that it is a threat to national sovereignty and/or national identity.

the USA recognized the limitations of achieving strategic objectives through military means alone, as well as the drawbacks of adopting a unilateral foreign-policy stance.

## Conservatism in a global age

The changing character and political fortunes of conservatism since the 1980s can, to a large extent, be understood in terms of the impact of 'accelerated' globalization. For example, the rise of the New Right, particularly in its liberal, pro-market incarnation, occurred in the context of the collapse in the early 1970s of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, which contributed to a remodelling of the world economy on neoliberal lines. Conservative parties and movements were often able to respond more quickly and more successfully to globalizing tendencies than their socialist and liberal counterparts, both because of their traditional pragmatism and because they were less deeply wedded to Keynesian-welfarist orthodoxies. Libertarian tendencies within conservatism therefore flourished at the expense of paternalist tendencies, although, as discussed earlier, this process occurred more rapidly, and was pursued with greater enthusiasm, in some countries more than others, with, for instance, Christian democratic parties being particularly resistant to the lure of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, while the 'heroic' phase of New Right politics, associated with figures such as Thatcher and Reagan, and the battle against 'big government' may have passed and given way to a more 'managerial' phase, this should not disguise the fact that market values had come to be accepted across the spectrum of conservative beliefs.

However, these shifts also confronted conservative ideology with a number of challenges. One of these was that the seeming collapse of the 'pro-state' or 'socialist' tendency that had dominated much of the post-1945 period, brought problems in its wake. To the extent that conservatism had come to be defined by its antipathy towards state control and economic management, the 'death of socialism' threatened to rob it of its unifying focus and ideological resolve. A further problem stemmed from concerns about the long-term viability of the free-market philosophy. Faith in the free market has always been limited, historically and culturally. Enthusiasm for unregulated capitalism has been a largely Anglo-American phenomenon that peaked during the nineteenth century in association with classical liberalism, and was revived in the late twentieth century through the advent of neoliberalism. 'Rolling back' the state in economic life may sharpen incentives, intensify competition and promote entrepreneurialism, but sooner or later its disadvantages become apparent, notably short-termism, low investment, widening inequality and increased social exclusion.

Nevertheless, the global financial crisis, which peaked in the autumn of 2008 with the world economy seemingly hovering on the brink of systemic collapse, precipitated developments that have had major ideological ramifications. The most significant of these developments was the steepest decline in global output since

## Key concept

# Populism

Populism (from the Latin *populus*, meaning ‘the people’) has been used to describe both distinctive political movements and a particular tradition of political thought. Movements or parties described as populist have been characterized by their claim to support the common people in the face of ‘corrupt’ economic or political elites. As a

political tradition, populism reflects the belief that the instincts and wishes of the people provide the principal legitimate guide to political action. Populist politicians therefore make a direct appeal to the people and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears, all intermediary institutions being distrusted. Although populism may be linked to any cause or ideology, it is often seen as implicitly authoritarian, ‘populist’ democracy being the enemy of ‘pluralist’ democracy.

the 1930s, causing tax revenues to plummet and government debt to soar, and even bringing the creditworthiness of some countries into question. Although the initial response to the financial crisis was a return to Keynesianism, in the form of a US-led coordinated policy of ‘**fiscal stimulus**’, the crisis also provided new opportunities from neoliberalism. From a neoliberal perspective, soaring government debt is essentially a consequence of a failure to control state spending, implying that the solution to indebtedness is ‘fiscal retrenchment’, or ‘**austerity**’. For example, in the UK the election of a Conservative-led coalition government in 2010 led to a swift break with Keynesianism and the introduction of a programme of spending cuts more severe than those put in place under Thatcher in the 1980s. Whereas the adoption of austerity was essentially a political choice in the UK, in the case of Greece,

Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus, a reordering of the economy along neoliberal lines was a condition of bail-outs imposed during 2010–13 by the EU, the IMF and the European Central Bank.

Finally, conservatism has not only contributed to struggles over the nature and direction of globalization, favouring the construction of a market-based world economy as opposed to a regulated or ‘managed’ one, but it has also served as a counter-globalization force, a mechanism of resistance. This has been most apparent in the rise of far-right and anti-immigration parties, which have drawn on **national conservatism** in adopting a ‘backward-looking’ and culturally, and perhaps ethnically, ‘pure’ model of national identity. In many ways, this development has been part of the wider revival of populism, which has seen growing disenchantment with conventional politics and the emergence of anti-establishment leaders and movements in many mature democracies, a phenomenon often called ‘anti-politics’

### FISCAL STIMULUS

An economic strategy designed to promote growth by either, or both, lowering taxes or increasing government spending.

### AUSTERITY

Sternness or severity; as an economic strategy, austerity refers to public spending cuts designed to eradicate a budget deficit, underpinned by faith in market forces.

### NATIONAL CONSERVATISM

A form of conservatism that prioritises the defence of national, cultural and, sometimes, ethnic identity over other concerns, often based on parallels between the family and the nation.

(see p. 135). Right-wing, populist parties, articulating concerns about immigration and multiculturalism, have become a feature of politics in many European states, a trend fuelled by the combination of EU enlargement and freedom of movement within the Union and, since 2015, by the migrant crisis in Europe.

The *Front National* in France, led by Marine Le Pen, the daughter of the founder of the party, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has attracted growing electoral support since the 1980s for a platform largely based on resistance to immigration. In 2012, Le Pen gained 6.4 million votes (18 per cent) in the first round of the presidential election. Other anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalist parties include the Freedom Party in Austria, the UK Independence Party, the Northern League in Italy, the *Vlaams Blok* in Belgium, the two Progress Parties in Norway and Denmark, and the Danish People's Party, which broke away from the Progress Party in 1995. Such national conservative parties and movements tend to prosper in conditions of fear, insecurity and social dislocation, their strength being their capacity to represent unity and certainty, binding national identity to tradition and established values. The link between conservatism and nationalism is examined in greater depth in Chapter 6.