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One Nation Conservatism from Disraeli to Johnson

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Introduction

1 Conservatism is a complex ideology that seems to take a variety of forms. To cope with this complexity, we can introduce the idea that there are several variants of conservatism. Rather than trying to isolate ideas and beliefs that all conservatives share, we can instead describe different conservative traditions that possess different beliefs.[1] At one level, this analytical move is profitable. It helps us to think about conservatism as a flexible ideology that is not bound to any substantive political ideals. But at another level, this strategy merely defers the task of understanding conservatism. For if we comfort ourselves with the idea that there are varieties of conservatism, we might postpone the task of identifying those distinctive features of conservative ideology.

2 This article explores conservative diversity by exploring the traditions of Conservatism that have co-existed in modern Britain. Some scholars have identified two such traditions: the more paternalistic 'one nation' or 'middle way' formation that is often associated with Disraeli's intellectual legacy, and a 'libertarian' strand that has been predominant in recent decades.[2] These writers do not deny that there are ideas and beliefs that cut across both traditions, but they also draw attention to their points of departure. Particular attention is devoted to the way each tradition thinks about equality. In Dorey's perceptive account, for instance, one nation conservatives and their 'neo-liberal' counterparts are respectively associated with 'bounded' and 'unlimited' conceptions of inequality.[3] Whereas one nation conservatives try to place

limits on inequality in the name of social unity, neoliberal conservatives, it is argued, are those that feel no compulsion to qualify disparities of wealth and opportunity.[4] This distinction informs a particular periodisation of Conservative history, whereby the post-war period is divided into two phases.[5] In the first, which lasted from 1945 until at least the mid-1970s, the 'one nation' strand of thought was predominant and informed the Conservative party's support for a Keynesian welfare state. This phase then gave way to a Thatcherite one, whereby the party adopted a 'two nations' political strategy that broke with the redistributive impetus of the post-war policy settlement.[6]

3 In what follows, this way of thinking about British Conservatism is brought under scrutiny. By exploring two representatives of the 'one nation' and 'libertarian' traditions - Harold Macmillan and Margaret Thatcher – the article offers an alternative explanation for British Conservatism's apparent diversity. Ostensibly, Macmillan and Thatcher seem to map onto Dorey's distinction. Macmillan, with his respect for the state and his commitment to 'middle way' policies, seems to be a proponent of the 'bounded' conception of inequality that Dorey sketches. By contrast, Thatcher, who had embraced Hayekian ideas over the course of the 1970s, disavowed the paternalism that had compelled one nation conservatives to endorse some forms of redistribution. Yet we should not assume that Macmillan and Thatcher's differences simply stemmed from their differing attitudes towards equality. If we situate British Conservatism within a broader conception of conservative reasoning, another way of explaining its ideological diversity emerges.

4 Conservatism, as many scholars have noted, is a philosophy of negation. Its advocates observe the bodies of thought associated with enlightenment rationalism and establish ideas to counter them.[7] In some accounts, this feature of conservatism is seen as one of many features of conservative thinking.[8] But we might go as far as to claim that it is the only distinguishing feature of conservative thought. And if we accept that conservatism is, in essence, dialectical in character, we have reason to reassess the status of claims that conservatives make about equality.

The Dialectical Nature of Conservatism

5 In a recent article, James Alexander has theorised conservatism's dialectical character. Alexander's central claim is that conservatism is empty of ideological content that is distinctly conservative. That is not to say that conservatives do not have values and beliefs. But those values and beliefs are inherited from their dialogue with other ideologies. Indeed, conservatism acquires its sense of value through negation.[9] Conservatives identify the ideas of their rationalist opponents and challenge them. When they encounter the egalitarianism of socialists, they tend to defend hierarchies of status and power and the concept of freedom. And when they encounter the individualism within liberal traditions of thought, they tend to celebrate the value of community and authority.[10]

6 Conservatives establish their beliefs through negation because they have no epistemological basis from which to establish the value of an arrangement or a practice. Whereas progressives, on the basis of their rational claims about the nature of the social world, claim that a particular arrangement or practice is good and will always be good, conservatives deny the value of such claims. Instead, they appeal to the virtues of tradition and claim that good arrangements will tend to endure. But these

kinds of claims are, in the last instance, empty. How, for instance, does the conservative decide what is and is not 'traditional'? After all, we may speak of a socialist tradition and so on. The conservative could, of course, claim that the status quo is good, no matter what form that status quo takes. In fact, some scholars claim that this is the only basis for a 'true' conservatism.[11] Yet this seems like an insufficient basis from which to establish a conservative philosophy. If the status quo happened to be a socialist order that was marked by constant change, the conservative could not defend it without contravening their hostility to change. And as Alexander notes, the actuality of the status quo does not supply its own justification.[12]

7 This way of thinking about conservatism has significant implications. Most importantly, it invites us to be cautious about the affirmative claims that conservatives make about the value of things. Conservatives do, of course, make such claims. But when they do so, they are establishing what Alexander calls 'shadow ideals'. These ideals are little more than intimations. They gesture towards particular objectives, but they never quite point to a desirable social order. For if they did, the conservative would be indistinguishable from the progressive rationalist who wants to create a more equal society. As Alexander puts it, the conservative's ideals are negative. They are 'intended to point back to the actuality which the rational, or argued, ideals will damage or destroy'.[13] But because this actuality could take any form, the conservative is rudderless in the sea of history, and their ideals are merely imitations that only exist as shadows of others.[14]

8 Alexander's argument is an abstract one, and his analysis is concerned with conservative philosophy rather than the conduct of its advocates. We might be suspicious, then, of using it to understand the thinking of political actors who are concerned with the cut and thrust of everyday life. But it is certainly the case that Conservatives, in their efforts to furnish their ideologies with meanings, have tended to work backwards from the claims of their opponents. When we explore the historical trajectory of British Conservatism, we can see ample evidence of this phenomenon. In the nineteenth-century, when they were confronted by *laissez-faire* liberalism, Tories defended the rights of the state. But when they encountered the egalitarian argument of socialists in the early twentieth century, they rehearsed the anti-state arguments made within Britain's liberal tradition. As Quintin Hogg once put it, Conservatives 'see nothing immoral or even eccentric in 'catching the Whigs bathing and walking away with their clothes''.[15]

9 If we want to trace the way that conservatism negates alternative ideologies, we need to carry Alexander's line of enquiry further. We need, that is, to think about negation itself. There is, of course, an extensive literature on the concept that cannot be explored here. But some general insights can be sketched that illuminate the implications of conservatism's negative character. First, we can note that negative propositions tell us much less than affirmative ones. When an individual says that they are a socialist, they are providing more clarity about their political views than someone who says that they are not a socialist. For that reason, negative propositions tend to defer meaning.[16] They are placeholders for a more explicit statement of values and beliefs.

10 It is also the case that negative statements tend to affirm the thing that they negate. Consider the tendency for conservatives to claim that the world is imperfect. When the conservative claims that 'human nature is not perfect', they must hold a conception of

a perfected human nature for the claim to obtain meaning.[17] They may not think that this can be realised, but they will prefer, in an abstract sense, its characteristics. What do these aspects of negation tell us about conservative discourses? They suggest that conservative negation generates a double movement in the conservative mind. Faced with the prospect of change to the social order, the conservative negates the source of change by denying its affirmative claims. But in negating these claims, the conservative inherits their own vision of change, whether they are conscious of it or not. This contradiction within conservative ideology might help us to explain why conservatives have tended to be ambivalent about distributive justice. Historically, conservatives have tended to defend inequality from the claims of egalitarians. Yet because they are reluctant to endorse any substantive ideological principles, the principle of inequality never quite becomes a normative objective. The Conservative journalist T. E. Utley alluded to this when he remarked that:

> My objection to distributive justice goes very deep indeed. It goes to the extent of not favouring systems of distributive justice which are extremely inegalitarian.[18]

11 Utley opposed egalitarianism. But because he was hostile to all principles of distributive justice, his defence of inequality existed as little more than an empty intimation.

12 Having cleared the ground for a particular conception of conservatism, we can now use it to understand the two intellectual traditions that have punctuated British politics since 1945. These two traditions are often distinguished on the basis of their attitudes towards equality. One nation/middle way Conservatism is described as a tradition of thought that places limits on inequality in the name of social consensus. By contrast, libertarian Conservatism is regarded as a tradition of thought that regards inequality as both natural and desirable. There is something in this distinction. But it perhaps overlooks a broader commonality within conservative thinking. We can expose that commonality by exploring the way that the two traditions negated the ideas of their progressive opponents.

Harold Macmillan's Triadic Conservatism

13 Harold Macmillan was not especially preoccupied with philosophical questions. Nor did he think particularly deeply about the nature of conservatism. He did, however, make important contributions to the intellectual development of the Conservative party. Ironically, he made his most important intervention when his status within the parliamentary party was at a low ebb. In 1938, after becoming increasingly disillusioned with the government's economic and foreign policy, he published *The Middle Way*, a book that set out a broadly Keynesian agenda for economic reconstruction. This book is often employed as a point of reference in discussions of inter-war economic thinking, and it is also seen as an early statement of what would come to be known as one nation conservatism.[19] Yet its full significance as a statement of Conservative thinking has not been acknowledged. One of the distinctive characteristics of the book is the way it conceives of conservatism in spatial terms. Put simply, Macmillan constructed a triadic conception of politics, whereby conservatism was situated in relation to two opposing bodies of ideas: collectivism and individualism. Reflecting on *The Middle Way* in the 1960s, he stated that:

> We do not stand and have never stood for collectivism or the destruction of private rights. We do not stand and have never stood for *laissez-faire* individualism or for putting the rights of the individual above his duty to his fellow men [*sic*]. We stand today, as we have always stood, to block the way to both these extremes and to all such extremes, and to point the path towards moderate and balanced views.

14 Two points can be made about this passage. First, we can draw attention to the binary distinction that is made between collectivism and individualism. The logical coherence of the statement is entirely dependent on this distinction. For conservatism to be a 'middle way' philosophy, there needs to be some polarities that the conservative can position their values in relation to. Second, we can note the way Macmillan tries to reconcile a commitment to flexible pragmatism with the idea that conservatism possesses some kind of universal ideological content. Conservatism, it seems, will always be situated in the middle of opposed extremes. But the passage also alludes to the notion that those extremes might differ over time. And this idea introduces an important tension in conservative thinking. What criteria does the conservative employ to determine whether or not a particular body of ideas is 'extreme'? And what criteria do they employ to determine what is moderate? We can consider these questions by drawing attention to a feature of the status quo that Macmillan was seeking to defend.

15 In the final section of *The Middle Way*, Macmillan devoted considerable attention to the fate of democracy. In his view, the only way to preserve democratic institutions and civil liberties was to resist the competing claims of socialism and capitalism:

> It is only by the adoption of this middle course that we can avoid resorting to measures of political discipline and dictatorship. Such methods, whether exercised by the 'right' or by the 'left', are the very opposite of that liberation and freedom which mankind should be striving to achieve.[20]

16 Yet democracy was, of course, a pillar of the revolutionary order that Conservative predecessors like Burke had sought to reverse.[21] In a sense, the conservative is a victim of history. They oppose change, but once change happens, they are compelled to accept it. And they cannot defend the status quo without making rationalist arguments about its value.

17 Macmillan's conception of conservatism was thus dependent on a sleight of hand. In his efforts to distinguish the conservative disposition, he situated conservatism between two rival ideologies. But it was those ideologies which, in the last instance, determined the conceptual content of the conservative 'synthesis'. The value of 'middle way' ideas and policies principally stemmed from their relationship with 'extreme' ones. We could, of course, claim that conservatism centrism follows from a positive claim about the virtues of centrism itself. In some conservative discourses, this takes the form of a sociological claim, whereby conservatism is defined as an antidote to class conflict. But because the centre will always be determined by the polarities, there is, in the last instance, no reason why it could not accommodate all manner of arrangements.

Fig. 1. Harold Macmillan's triadic Conservatism

Socialism	**Conservatism**	**Liberal Individualism**
Statist	Welfare capitalism	Free markets

Egalitarian	Equality of sacrifice	Anti-egalitarian
Authoritarian	Ordered liberty	*Laissez-faire*

18 Macmillan was not the only mid-century Conservative to endorse this conception of Conservatism. A similar description was offered by Quintin Hogg. In a draft of *The Case for Conservatism* (1947), Hogg seized upon Hegelian concepts to describe conservatism as a synthetic philosophy:

> The function of Conservatism is to present a synthesis, that is to say, not a compromise between two conflicting purposes and principles, since political compromise means a bargain struck in which each side for the sake of peace abandons part of what they logically claim, but a genuine reconciliation of the two conflicting principles based on a more profound analysis and a higher level of thought.[22]

19 In one sense, this passage articulates a progressive ethos. By referring to a 'higher level of thought', Hogg was suggesting that conservatism had the capacity to turn the wheels of progress. Yet progress is a difficult idea for the conservative. If the conservative accepts the notion that the world can be better than it is, they threaten to adopt the kinds of ideals that they claim to denounce. So 'middle way' conservatism does not evade the contradiction that Alexander has drawn attention to. Its triadic logic might mean that the identity of conservative beliefs is contingent and relative. But the synthesis that its advocates endorse does not follow from conservative ideas about change and history. Instead, it emerges from a negation of alternative ideas that are perceived as a threat to the social order. By opposing these ideas, the conservative inherits a vision of a better order.

Margaret Thatcher's Dyadic Conservatism

20 Like Macmillan, Thatcher constructed her conservatism through negation. But while Macmillan sought to transcend the extremes of left and right by synthesising their respective logics, Thatcher adopted a dyadic frame of reference. For her, the destructive force within modern politics was socialism. Having witnessed the growth of the redistributive state in the post-war period, she arrived at the view that the greatest threat to Conservative values was egalitarianism. And if statist socialism was the disease, it followed that its opposite was the cure. In her 1976 conference speech, Thatcher announced this prescription with characteristic force:

> I call the Conservative Party now to a crusade. Not only the Conservative Party. I appeal to all those men and women of goodwill who do not want a Marxist future for themselves or their children or their children's children. This is not just a fight about national solvency. It is a fight about the very foundations of the social order. It is a crusade not merely to put a temporary brake on Socialism, but to stop its onward march once and for all.[23]

21 A year later, in her 1977 conference speech, Thatcher went as far as to embrace the idea that she was leading a reactionary project:

> They say that a Thatcher Government—and I must say that I like the sound of that a little more each time I hear it—would be reactionary.
>
> If to react against the politics of the last few years, which undermined our way of

> life and devastated our economy—if that's reactionary then we are reactionary—and so are the vast majority of the British people.
>
> They believe, as we do, that Government is far too big; that it does not know all the answers; that it has downgraded the individual and upgraded the State. [...]
>
> So if you ask whether the next Conservative Government will cut controls and regulations and keep interference in people's lives to a minimum, my answer is 'Yes, that is exactly what we shall do'. The best reply to full-blooded Socialism is not milk and water Socialism; it is genuine Conservatism.[24]

22 Thatcher's 'genuine Conservatism' followed from a particular reading of Britain's post-war history. It was advanced with particular force by Keith Joseph, who famously referred to the 'ratchet effect' of socialism. Writing in the mid-1970s, Joseph claimed that Conservatives had, in the post-war period, situated themselves in a middle ground that had periodically shifted to the left. What was needed, he argued, was a renewed defence of 'common ground' principles. One such principle was that of inequality. Because equality and freedom were incommensurable, 'inequality of income', he wrote, 'can only be eliminated at the cost of freedom'.[25] The value of inequality, then, emerged from a critique of what was perceived to be the authoritarianism of socialism.

23 Thatcherism was thus a philosophy of negation.[26] Its architects identified socialism as the principal threat to the social order and constructed a mirror-image from its conceptual repertoire. In other words, she offered an antithesis in place of the 'middle way' synthesis.[27]

Fig. 2. Thatcher's dyadic conception of conservatism

Conservatism	**Socialism**
Inequality	Equality
Market	State
Traditional	'Permissive'

24 In a sense, Thatcherism's political logic stemmed from an awareness of the very contradiction. Thatcher and her colleagues acknowledged that if conservatism did not possess any independent means of establishing the value of a policy or arrangement, it could sanction anything. So, in their efforts to establish a clear sense of ideological value, they constructed the kinds of 'shadow ideals' that Alexander conceptualises. We can see the desire for such ideals in Nigel Lawson's defence of the 'new Conservatism':

> When Conservative critics of the new Conservatism propound the paradox that the traditional thinking of Conservative theory is that there is no theory and that the only political rule is that there are no political rules, I assume that the underlying message is that problems should be judged on their merits. But this doesn't help us to decide what their merits are – instead, it leaves it to other political creeds to determine them.[28]

25 Thatcherites never quite grasped the implications of this logic. For once the conservative accepts the need to have ideals, it follows that conservatism is an ideology like any other. In short, conservatism ceases to be a disposition about change and

history and becomes an ideology that possesses distinct ideals and, in turn, a vision of a better future.[29] Thatcher and her colleagues did, of course, make efforts to introduce ideas and themes that were distinctly conservative. They appealed, for instance, to the virtues of tradition. But when they did so, they only exposed the contradiction outlined above. Take the following statement by Thatcher:

> All this meant that when Keith [Joseph] and I were struggling to shift Britain back from the Socialist State, we were also acting as conservatives, with a small 'c'. We were seeking to re-establish an understanding of the fundamental truths which had made Western life, British life, and the life of the English-speaking peoples what they were. This was the foundation of our Conservative revolution. It remains the foundation for any successful Conservative programme of government.[30]

26 Thatcher's argument runs into something of a logical dead end. It may be that she was seeking to restore a lost 'traditional' order. But that order was itself a product of rationalist political action that, in another historical moment, would have undermined the status quo. A reason was also needed for preferring that past order to the status quo, and that reason could only be found by appealing to ideals and making judgements about the value of certain arrangements. In making those judgements, the conservative opens up the possibility of radical action in defence of particular arrangements and beliefs. In pursuing such radical action, Thatcher and her colleagues exposed the contradiction of conservatism. For they showed that conservatism is, in the last instance, reactionary.[31]

Dialectic Conservatism and the Politics of Equality

27 As the above discussion has suggested, both the 'middle way' and 'libertarian' traditions claimed to be the authentic voice of British Conservatism. On their part, middle way Conservatives argued that Conservatism must necessarily be centrist and, in turn, they regarded figures like Thatcher as unconservative reactionaries.[32] In response, libertarians like Thatcher claimed that the 'wets' had capitulated to the left and, in doing so, had allowed egalitarianism to erode the entrepreneurial values that had fostered progress. We might be inclined to adjudicate between these different claims, but to do so would be futile. For there is no definitive or 'authentic' mode of Conservative negation.

28 Macmillan's triadic formulation is more recognisably conservative than Thatcher's dyadic one, but that is only because we can observe a long tradition of conservatives trying to synthesise the ideas of the left and the right in the name of moderation and consensus.[33] It is not because the 'middle way' tradition can lay claim to a distinctive way of thinking about politics that is authentically conservative. Like their libertarian counterparts, they identify ideologies that they oppose, and in doing so, they inherit 'shadow ideals' that provide them with a way of navigating the world. But these shadow ideals do not provide the conservative with conservative arguments. For if the conservative has proper arguments about what the world should look like, there is nothing to distinguish them from the rationalist ideologue that they oppose. They could take those arguments and construct an image of a perfect social order that they wish to realise.

29 Critics of the above argument might contend that the middle way conservative, unlike their Thatcherite counterpart, avoids the contradiction that Alexander describes.

Because they are willing to synthesise whatever ideas are competing for authority at a particular time, the middle way conservative, they might claim, has a distinctly conservative justification for their beliefs. Their synthesis can be defended on the basis of its synthetic quality without making any reference to its character or consequences. Indeed we might claim that for a middle way conservative, a synthesis is good precisely because it is a synthesis. But this claim only holds if we ignore the contingent form of the synthesis. If a synthesis can take any form at all, it cannot be reconciled with the conservative suspicion of change. The middle way conservative could justify anything at all, regardless of its relationship with the status quo.

30 This point can be made by drawing attention to an interesting episode in Thatcherism's intellectual history. Less than two weeks after she delivered her 1977 conference speech, Alfred Sherman, the director of the Centre for Policy Studies, suggested an alternative ideological approach that had echoes of the 'middle way' strategy that Macmillan had sketched four decades earlier:

> The time may be ripe for a new initiative in the evolution of our political philosophy, which could open up far-reaching scope for our political strategy. I propose that we differentiate sharply between social democracy and socialism, recognising social democracy as a legitimate element in the British political heritage.
>
> Now that the Labour Party is increasingly reneguing on this heritage in favour of Marxist or Marxoid socialism, the burden of incorporating its best features into a synthesis suited to our times and circumstances falls on the Conservative Party. In the past, the Party came to incorporate much of the best in Whig philosophy, and later when Lloyd George corrupted and ruined the Liberal Party, our Party became in fact the Conservative-Liberal (Unionist) Party.

31 Thatcher did not take Sherman's advice; her rhetoric continued to be marked by binary distinctions between socialism and conservatism, and she tended to collapse social democracy and socialism together. But Sherman's remarks do illuminate a peculiar commonality between the 'middle way' and 'Thatcherite' modes of thought. Indeed they expose the conceptual absence at the core of all Conservative thinking. Social democracy was a political tradition that sought to achieve particular objectives. Sherman might have regarded it as a 'legitimate tradition', but it was not a philosophy of traditionalism. And by accepting its validity, Sherman was threatening to endorse political objectives that conservatives had often opposed.

32 An important conclusion follows. There is no reason why the criterion that the middle way conservative employs to evaluate change has a different status than the one employed by a Thatcherite. Nor can either tradition lay claim to what we might call a status quo bias. Of course Thatcher and her colleagues made no claim to such a bias. For them, they central task of Conservatism was to unwind the historical process to restore an imagined social order. But the 'one nation/middle way' tradition, which saw something recognisably Conservative in the post-war political settlement, were not defenders of the status quo either. Macmillan and Hogg's 'middle way' thesis was, in essence, progressive. It aimed to achieve a better future by moving past the perceived limitations of the status quo. In some circumstances, the middle way conservative can defend the status quo against the extremes of left and right. But if those 'extremes' are shaping that status quo, the middle way conservative can be forced into a reactionary mode. It is perhaps unsurprising that Macmillan shifted into such a position after the Second World War. In response to the reforms of the Attlee governments, he wrote that

'[i]n reaction to one extreme, we are in danger of rushing, or of being rushed, towards the other'.[34]

33 Given that middle way conservatism is capable of adopting a reactionary position, it is also unsurprising that some of its advocates were able to reconcile themselves with the Thatcherite agenda. On his part, Hogg, then Lord Hailsham, saw no significant discontinuity between the Conservative response to 1945 and Thatcher's reaction to the crises of the 1970s:

> Then we were concerned to provide a safety net of social security adequate to prevent a recurrence of pre-war unemployment and poverty. Today we are concerned to secure adequate rewards and investments to make any kind of plural society possible. The enemy then was insecurity. The enemy today is uniformity, which has grown to the extent of becoming altogether incompatible with freedom.[35]

34 What Hogg did not reveal, of course, was the criterion that the conservative employs to define the 'enemy'. We might assume that, for Hogg, a concern for social unity or a preference for tradition was the basis for his seemingly consistent conservative logic. Or, more generally, we might claim that authentic conservative will always prefer 'organic' change. But such criteria are, in a sense, empty. For they cannot supply their own justification. One conservative might claim that a change is organic if it is slow. Another, by contrast, might claim that it is organic if it binds different social groups together. Perhaps Michael Bentley was correct when he wrote that, in the British Tory tradition, 'the ideas of organicism and individualism offer nothing stronger than a collage of moods and intimations'.[36] When we try to identify the criterion that the conservative uses to evaluate change, we find little more than Alexander's shadow ideals.

35 In a sense, the Conservative party's divisions in the late-1970s reflected Conservatism's emptiness. The one nation 'wets' and the Thatcherite 'dries' disagreed about whether or not the status quo was worth preserving, and neither camp could cite a criterion to render their argument more authentically conservative than their opponent's. Instead, they simply offered different modes of negation. The likes of Gilmour and Francis Pym negated free market liberalism that they saw in Thatcherism. Thatcher, on the other hand, negated the socialism that she saw on the opposition benches.

Conclusion

36 The above analysis does not trivialise the divisions between 'middle way' conservatives and their Thatcherite opponents. Ian Gilmour was indeed a firm opponent of Thatcher's agenda. And Macmillan did think about politics in terms that Thatcher opposed. But if we accept the claims that this article has made, we see these divisions in particular terms. We see them, that is, as a product of Conservatism's dialectical nature. What separated Macmillan and Thatcher was their modes of negation. While the former sought to construct a 'middle way' out of competing 'extremes', Thatcher saw such a strategy as a capitulation to the threat of socialism. Their differing frames of reference certainly led them to arrive at different positions regarding distributive questions. Yet their views about equality were contingent features of their thinking. And because conservatism is essentially reactionary, it is possible to see how Macmillan's conception of Conservatism could lead to Thatcher's. They are, in conceptual terms, two sides of the same ideological coin.

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NOTES

1. Roger Eatwell, 'The Right as a Variety of "Styles of Thought"', in Roger Eatwell and Noël O'Sullivan (eds.), *The Nature of the Right* (London, Pinters, 1989), pp. 62-76.
2. W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Vol. II* (London, Methuen, 1983), pp. 189-95; Peter Dorey, *British Conservatism: The Politics and Philosophy of Inequality* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2010); Kevin Hickson, *Britain's Conservative Right since 1945: Traditional Toryism in a Cold Climate* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 4. For a critique of this distinction, see Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1996), pp. 349-383.
3. We can perhaps assume that Dorey's neo-liberal' formation is in the libertarian tradition that Greenleaf described.
4. Dorey, *British Conservatism*, p. 47.
5. In what follows, 'conservatism' refers to the general tradition of thought, while 'Conservatism' refers to the ideas and beliefs of the British Conservative party.
6. Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bradley and Tom Ling, *Thatcherism* (London, Polity, 1988), pp. 87-88. Michael Bentley, 'Liberal Toryism in the Twentieth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 4 (1994), pp. 177-78.
7. Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, Routledge, 1999), pp. 102-103.
8. Noël O'Sullivan, *Conservatism* (London, J.K. Dent, 1976), p. 30.
9. James Alexander, 'A Dialectical Definition of Conservatism', *Philosophy*, Vol. 91 (2016), pp. 215-232.
Also see Michael Freeden, *Ideology and Political Theory* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1996), pp. 335-358.

10. Some conservatives have defined conservatism in relation to what it is not. See, for instance, Ian Gilmour, *Inside Right: A Study of Conservatism* (1978), pp. 121-171.

11. Martin Beckstein, 'What Does It Take to be a True Conservative?', *Global Discourse*, Vol. 5 (2015), pp. 4-21.

12. James Alexander, 'The Contradictions of Conservatism', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2013), p. 610.

13. Alexander, 'The Contradictions of Conservatism', p. 604. For a critique of Alexander's argument, see Christopher Fear, 'The "dialectical" theory of conservatism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2020), pp. 197-211.

14. Oakeshott famously claimed that '[i]n political activity, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination.' In a sense, this statement captures the emptiness of conservatism. If the conservative has no preferred destination, they could arrive at all manner of places without having reason to complain.

15. Quintin Hogg, *The Case for Conservatism* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1947), p. 13.

16. John King and Desmond King (eds.), *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge, 1930-32* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 55.

17. Alexander, 'The Contradictions of Conservatism', pp. 609-10.

18. John Vaizey (ed.), *Whatever Happened to Equality?* (London, BBC, 1975), p. 24.

19. Daniel Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning: The Debate on Economic Planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1997), pp. 325-327. Alistair Horne, *Harold Macmillan: Volume I: 1894-1956* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1989), pp. 106-109. Also see Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, *Conservative Thinkers* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 8-21.

20. Macmillan, *Middle Way*, p. 186.

21. Daniel I. O'Neill, 'Burke on Democracy as the Death of Western Civilization', *Polity*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2004), pp. 201-225. In his expansive study, Fawcett suggests that conservatives 'found themselves in command of a modern world they could not love in their hearts'. Edmund Fawcett, *Conservatism: The Fight for a Tradition* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 62. Also see Brian Girvin, *The Right in the Twentieth Century: Conservatism and Democracy* (London, Pinter, 1994), pp. 3-5.

22. Annotated typescript, The Papers of Lord Hailsham, Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge. GBR/0014/HLSM 4/1/1/1.

23. Margaret Thatcher, speech to Conservative party conference, 8 October 1976. MTF/103105.

24. Margaret Thatcher, speech to Conservative party conference, 14 October 1977. MTF/103443.

25. Keith Joseph, *Stranded on the Middle Ground: Reflections on Circumstances and Policies* (London, Centre for Policy Studies, 1976), p. 81.

26. Robert Saunders, '"Crisis? What Crisis?" Thatcherism and the seventies' in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 40. Peter Dorey, 'The Oratory of Margaret Thatcher' in Andrew Crines and Richard Hayton (eds.), *Conservative Orators: From Baldwin to Cameron* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 114.

27. Dorey makes this point very effectively in his study of Thatcher's rhetoric. Dorey, 'The Oratory of Margaret Thatcher', p. 114.

28. Nigel Lawson, *The New Conservatism* (London, Centre for Policy Studies, 1980), p. 17.

29. Francis Pym, a leading 'one nation' Tory, threatened to expose this fact when he wrote that "One consequences of Socialism has been to encourage Conservatives to see themselves primarily as anti-socialists. This can lead to a mistaken tendency to substitute one ideology for another". Francis Pym, *The Politics of Consent* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 172.

30. Margaret Thatcher, 'Liberty and Limited Government', Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture, 11 January 1996.

31. Aughey and Norton captured this feature of the conservative tradition when they referred to 'combative conservatism'. Arthur Aughey and Philip Norton, *Conservatives and Conservatism* (Michigan, Temple Smith, 1981), pp. 80--83.
32. Ian Gilmour, *Dancing with Dogma: Britain Under Thatcherism* (London, Pocket, 1993), p. 336.
33. Bentley, 'Liberal Toryism', p. 184.
34. Cited in E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 173.
35. Lord Hailsham, 'Foreword' in Lord Blake and John Patten (eds.), *The Conservative Opportunity* (London, Macmillan, 1976), p. vii.
36. Bentley, 'Liberal Toryism', p. 195.

ABSTRACTS

A distinction is often made between two traditions of British Conservative thought: the paternalist "one nation/middle way" tradition, and the more libertarian one that is associated with Margaret Thatcher. Typically, this distinction is mapped onto the ideas that Conservatives hold about equality. While "one nation" Conservatives condone some forms of redistribution, their libertarian counterparts, it is argued, do not. This article reassesses this distinction by comparing the political thinking of two representatives of the two traditions: Harold Macmillan and Margaret Thatcher. Comparing Macmillan and Thatcher's views on equality, it is argued, is inappropriate as a way of distinguishing between their respective ideologies. Instead, we should draw a distinction between the way that Macmillan and Thatcher arrived at their views about equality. On his part, Macmillan adopted a triadic logic. By conceiving of a "middle way", he defined his conservatism in relation to the dangerous "extremes" of free market capitalism and state socialism. Thatcher, by contrast, adopted a dyadic logic. Instead of locating herself between two "extremes", she employed a series of binary distinctions to establish her conception of conservatism. Freedom was preferred to equality; the market was preferred to the state, and so on. The article explores the implications of these differing logics, and it concludes if we are to identify different variants of conservatism, we should be just as concerned with their modes of negation as we are with the affirmative claims they make about concepts like equality.

Une distinction est souvent faite entre deux traditions de la pensée conservatrice britannique : la tradition paternaliste One nation/voie médiane et la tradition plus libertarienne associée à Margaret Thatcher. Généralement, cette distinction est mise en correspondance avec les idées que les conservateurs se font de l'égalité. Alors que les conservateurs One Nation tolèrent certaines formes de redistribution, leurs homologues libertariens – ainsi qu'il sera démontré – ne partagent pas cet avis. Le présent article réévalue cette distinction en comparant la pensée politique de deux représentants des deux traditions : Harold Macmillan et Margaret Thatcher. La comparaison des points de vue de Macmillan et de Thatcher sur l'égalité est inappropriée pour distinguer leurs idéologies respectives. Nous devrions plutôt établir une distinction entre la manière dont Macmillan et Thatcher sont parvenus à leurs opinions concernant ce qui relève de l'égalité. Pour sa part, Macmillan a adopté une logique triadique. En concevant une « voie médiane », il a défini son conservatisme par rapport aux dangereux « extrêmes » du capitalisme de libre marché et du socialisme d'État. Thatcher, en revanche, a adopté une logique dyadique. Au lieu de se situer entre deux « extrêmes », elle a utilisé une série de distinctions binaires pour établir sa conception du conservatisme. Elle préfère la liberté à l'égalité, le marché à l'État, et

ainsi de suite. L'article explore les implications de ces différentes logiques et conclut que si nous devons identifier différentes variantes du conservatisme, nous devrions être tout aussi préoccupés par leurs modes de négation que par les affirmations faites au sujet de concepts tels que l'égalité.

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