6

CONSERVATISM NOW

Modern conservatism began as a defence of tradition against the calls for popular sovereignty; it became an appeal on behalf of religion and high culture against the materialist doctrine of progress, before joining forces with the classical liberals in the fight against socialism. In its most recent attempt to define itself it has become the champion of Western civilisation against its enemies, and against two of those enemies in particular: political correctness (notably its constraints on freedom of expression and its emphasis in everything on Western guilt) and religious extremism, especially the militant Islamism promoted by the Wahhabi— Salafi sects. In all these transformations something has remained the same, namely the conviction that good things are more easily destroyed than created, and the determination to hold on to those good things in the face of politically engineered change.

British intellectual conservatism since the Second World War has existed only as a fragmentary force on the edge of intellectual life, with little or no connection to politics, and with virtually no support in the universities. John Stuart Mill's dismissal of the Tories as 'the stupid party' expresses a view that has remained orthodox among intellectuals, and even those who have most clearly understood and defended the conservative message have been reluctant to confess to the label. Particularly significant in this connection is George Orwell (Eric Blair) (1903—50), who described himself as a socialist and a partisan of the working class, while dissociating himself completely from the left intellectuals with their 'smelly little orthodoxies', and their refusal, in the great crisis of the twentieth century, to respond to the call of patriotic duty.

Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) is well known for its description of an imaginary form of totalitarianism, adding certain words to political language that have proved irreplaceable. These words satirise the acronyms of Bolshevism ('Cominform', 'Comintern', 'Proletkult', etc.) and include Newspeak (designed to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English socialism, and to make heretical thought — thoughtcrime — impossible); prolefeed (rubbishy entertainment and fictitious news for the m asses, or proles); unperson (one who has been carefully removed from history); and doublethink: 'the power of holding two contradictory propositions in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them'. Orwell also invented the 'thought police', as the last word in despotic efficiency, and wrote, in Animal Farm (1945), the most famous of all satires of communism, which he epitomised in the phrase 'all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others'.

In effect, Orwell's political fables contain an accurate and penetrating prophecy of the political correctness that has since invaded intellectual life in both Britain and America. The humourless and relentless policing of language, so as to prevent heretical thoughts from arising, the violence done to traditional categories and natural ways of describing things, the obliteration of memory and assiduous policing of the past — all these things, so disturbingly described in Nineteen Eighty Four, are now routinely to be observed on university campuses on both sides of the Atlantic, and those conservatives who draw attention to the phenomenon, as Allan Bloom did in his influential book 7he Closing of the American Mind (1987), are frequently marginalised or even demonised as representatives of one of the forbidden isms' or 'phobias' of the day — racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, etc. In a society devoted to 'inclusion' the only 'phobia' permitted is that of which conservatives are the target.

This situation, which puts conservatives at an enormous disadvantage in the intellectual world, has inevitably changed their way of defining themselves, and made the 'culture wars' central to their sense of what they are fighting for and why. Understanding political correctness and finding the ways to combat it have therefore become prominent among conservative causes. Is political correctness simply the final stage of liberal individualism — the stage at which all barriers to a self-chosen identity are to be removed? If so, which of those barriers can conservatives still defend against the onslaught, and how can they justify the attempt? Or is it rather a derogation from the great liberal tradition, a way in which equality has become so urgent and dominating a cause that nothing of liberty remains, and all social life is absorbed into a relentless witch-hunt against the defenders of social distinctions?

Orwell's essays, notably 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius' (1941), are classics of cultural conservatism, which find Weil's enracinement in the small-scale work and unassuming customs of the urban working class. Although in no way tempted by Christianity, the doctrine of which he felt had little appeal to the English, Orwell believed that the English working class was imbued with a Christian spirit, undemonstrative and straightforwardly compassionate, and he saw this reflected in all the habits and rituals that helped them survive the great hardships of the war.

Orwell owed his standing among post-war intellectuals to his self-identification as a man of the left. Few at the time were prepared to admit to being conservative and, as mentioned in the last chapter, Hayek, the most powerful intellect on the right, preferred to describe himself as a liberal. (Incidentally, Orwell published a largely favourable review of Hayek's Tie Road to Serfdom in Tie Observer, on 4 April 1944.) Nevertheless, there was and is a real conservative intellectual class in modern Britain. The conservative movement succeeded in putting down roots here and there in the academic world, and in particular in the department of government in the LSE[[1]](#footnote-1) under Michael Oakeshott. The circle in and around that department included the Iraqi Jew, Elie Kedourie, whose staunch defence of the Tory tradition in foreign policy against what he saw as the creeping culture of liberal guilt (Ihe Chatham House Version, and Other Middle Eastern Studies, 1970) sent a powerful message to those who had not yet lost their faith in the patriotic ideals and national sovereignty of Great Britain. Kedourie was a staunch critic of 'ideological nationalism' of the kind that had swept across Europe in the nineteenth century and which was, in his view, a threat to law and order all across the modern world (Nationalism in Asia and Africa, 1970). But he saw patriotism of the British kind as the phlegmatic opposite of the crowd emotions that had been stirred by modern mass politics.

Another LSE-based exile, the Hungarian-born Peter Bauer (1915—2002), mounted in a series of publications the conservative case against foreign aid — the practice, as he put it, of 'rewarding governments for the impoverishment of their people' (Dissent on Development, 1972). And yet another LSE don, Kenneth Minogue (1930—2013), an immigrant from New Zealand, devoted his life to the intellectual defence of the English inheritance and the unwritten constitution of liberty. In his later writings (The Servile Mind: How Democracy Erodes the Moral Life, 2010) Minogue gave sharp expression to the anti-democratic tendency in conservatism, a tendency that I have already noted in Ortega. Minogue argued that the proliferation of democratic values will always, in the end, undermine the culture of distinction and emulation on which a lasting civil society depends. His was one of several attacks on the welfare system inspired by the work of the American social scientist Charles Murray (Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980, 1984).

It is perhaps no accident that recent British conservatism has included so many immigrant voices. For it is the privilege of the immigré to speak without irony of the British Empire and of the unique culture, institutions and laws that have made Britain the safe place of refuge for so many in a smouldering world. Natives are more reluctant to speak out, for fear of the political correctness that sees conservatism, in all its forms, as the enemy. Not censorship only but a culture of repudiation reigns in the media and the universities, and to become known as someone who speaks out for the institutions and hierarchies of Old England is to court ridicule and ostracism from the left establishment.

Nevertheless, cells of dissidents existed, and their influence has been out of proportion to their size. Typical of the phenomenon is the school of historians that arose around Maurice Cowling (1926—2005), in the Cambridge College of Peterhouse. Without exaggerating the importance of Cowling, I shall quote here from the obituary that I published on the site of Open Democracy in 2005, since it gives some of the flavour of the flamboyant dissident culture that has flourished in a few redoubts during my lifetime:

Maurice's intellect was an immense negative force, which could undermine any conviction and pour scorn on any emotional attachment. He regarded conservative beliefs in the same light as he regarded all beliefs other than those of the Christian faith — as self-serving expedients, whereby individuals sought the good opinion of their fellows and closed their minds to uncomfortable realities. He himself lived with uncomfortable realities on easy-going terms, demanding only intelligent pupils, the company of seedy journalists and a supply of whisky in order to continue impishly smiling at the unremitting spectacle of human folly.

Maurice's iconoclastic approach to the world of ideas was in part inspired by his forays into the world of journalism. These culminated in 1971, when his life-long friend George Gale, being appointed editor of The Spectator, invited Maurice to edit the book pages. Under the guidance of Gale and Cowling The Spectator became a serious vehicle of ideas, and an articulate conservative voice. The venture came to a premature end when lhe Spectator changed hands in 1974. Maurice returned to his rooms in Peterhouse, to continue work on his magnum opus, Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England, the third and longest volume of which appeared in 2001. The purpose of this work was twofold: first to show the commanding influence of ideas on the development of modern British society, and secondly to point to the enduring relevance of religion in determining just what those ideas have amounted to.

Maurice's method was the very opposite of that advocated by the Annales school of historiography. Parish registers, hospital statistics, demographic trends and socio-economic surveys had little significance, in his writing, in comparison with pamphlets by obscure Anglican clergymen, exchanges of letters between members of the House of Lords, and the quarrels and crises of Oxbridge dons. The argument over Anglicanism that began with Keble and the Oxford movement [an early manifestation of cultural conservatism] was carried over, in Maurice's view, into all the subsequent intellectual movements that affected the course of English history: the partisanship of culture against science in Coleridge, Arnold, Ruskin and Leavis; the debates over the constitution in Mill, Acton, Dicey and Maitland; the conflict between liberalism and conservatism in Parliament and out of it; the whole tendency of modern English culture as the chill winds of secularism swept across it and a sense of the fragility and uniqueness of England replaced the old religious certainty of the Book of Common Prayer.

Maurice's critics regarded his choice of topics as eccentric and his historical method as unfounded. Others, however, have found inspiration and illumination in his meticulous attention to the mental and spiritual makeup of public figures. If ideas are as important as he makes them out to be, then a life spent like Maurice's, in examining, mocking and refuting them, has not been spent in vain. And the immense breadth of his learning meant that everything he wrote brings new information and a new perspective on its subject. He was a trenchant critic of liberalism, and his book on Mill was the first major attempt since that of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, 1873—4) to identify Mill's liberal outlook as a threat to ordinary human decencies. But, while Maurice inoculated several generations of undergraduates against liberal orthodoxy, his own positive opinions were hard to discern through the smokescreen of irony.

The irony that I felt to be central to Maurice Cowling's world view was, in fact, a distinguishing feature of British, and specifically English, conservatism in recent times. Conservative commentators, in their attempt to rise above the censoriousness of their critics, would simultaneously express their views and ironically withdraw from them, as though not wishing to be accused of the naive habit of believing in what could no longer be accepted as the literal truth. This was especially true of the group of sceptical writers around The Spectator and Il-ze Daily Telegraph, who met and drank in the Kings and Keys pub in Fleet Street (above which, at the time, the Telegraph was edited), and in the nearby wine bar El Vino, which served both the journalists and the lawyers of the inns of court. These writers included T. E. Utley, the blind leader-writer of the Telegraph who did much to shape the intellectual agenda of Margaret Thatcher's governments, the journalists Colin Welch and Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, the novelist Kingsley Amis and the historian Paul Johnson, a defector from the left whose comprehensive vision of world history has been an important resource for those who see the defence of Western civilisation as the true conservative cause.

Johnson belongs to another category of British dissident — the class of freelance historians, who break free from the constraints of academic history and devote themselves to the big questions of modern government. Ihe younger generation of British conservatives contains many such historians, including Andrew Roberts, Niall Ferguson and Jane Ridley. And many of them, like Maurice Cowling, draw inspiration from one of the great English thinkers of the nineteenth century, F. W. Maitland (1850—1906), who, in his posthumously published lectures, The Constitutional History of England (1908), gave the classic proof that the constitution of the UK is a definite entity, even though tacit and procedural, to be deduced from custom rather than from any written document.

Maitland initiated a century-long attempt to reclaim English history for the conservative cause, by arguing that it is not the Enlightenment that had made individual liberty into the foundation of our political order, but the common law and parliamentary representation. Maitland argued that limited government had been the rule rather than the exception in England, that the rights claimed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theorists had always been implied in the common law, and that the process of political conciliation had been the principal organ of constitutional change from medieval times. The Marxist theory ofhistory, which sees these things as developing in response to economic forces, rather than to innate principles of their own, does not easily survive Maitland's detailed account of English constitutional history.

Maitland also developed a theory of corporate personality, inspired partly by the German conservative jurist Otto von Gierke (1841—1921) and partly by the English law. He emphasised equity and the law of trusts as singular achievements of the English genius — ways in which people combined for a common purpose without threat to, or permission from, the state. Those institutions caused the early emergence in England of a society in which free association and autonomous institutions limited the powers of central government. In the end it has been Maitland's vision of English uniqueness that has been the inspiration for British conservatism in our time, and the real reason why it is historians, rather than economists or philosophers, who have adapted that vision to the needs of the moment.

American intellectual conservatism has followed a slightly different trajectory. Notwithstanding its liberal constitution, the United States of America is in many ways the place where conservatism, as a social and political philosophy, has been most influential, both in the intellectual life of the nation and in the practice of government. It is also a place where you can confess to being a conservative without being socially ostracised.

There are two main reasons for this. The first is that the Constitution was designed as a federal constitution, whose purpose was to unite the States while imposing the minimum number of conditions on the diverse people of the Union. A great many matters pertinent to the government of modern communities were left to the individual state legislatures, and it is in the attempt to recapture powers from the federal constitution, so as to maintain existing customs and traditions, that conservative sentiment has been most forceful.

The second reason is connected, namely that many of the institutions and customs on which American society depends are the product of civil association and not governed either by federal bodies or by the legal structures of the states. Throughout its growth as a modern nation America has been built from below, through the free association of its citizens — a point noted and praised by Tocqueville in Democracy in America. This has offered scope for conservatism as a philosophy of civil society — a philosophy that outlines and justifies the intrinsic forms of civil order, against the attempt to control and amend them through the institutions of the state.

Both libertarians and conservatives in America emphasise the need to free society from the grip of the state. But while the libertarian argues that political thought and practice should refrain from requiring any kind of conformity to law or principle other than the bare minimum necessary for the maintenance of individual freedom, the conservative believes — for the reasons just hinted at — that there is something more at stake. Society depends for its health and continuity on customs and traditions that are at risk from individual freedom, even if they are also expressions of it. The philosophical burden of American conservatism has been to define those customs and traditions and to show how they might endure and flourish from their own inner dynamic, outside the control of the state.

One effect of the American genius for civil association is of particular importance in this connection: the liberal arts college. This has created an extensive system of higher education, in which schools can choose their curriculum, their values and their aims without reference to political factors and, if necessary, in defiance of political correctness. And the vastness of America, its great wealth and opportunities, mean that other such initiatives are always occurring and new things are always growing, so that the conservative virus, notwithstanding the most vigorous fumigation from the left, will always be taking root again in some dank and life-infested corner. It is impossible in the space of this chapter to mention all relevant personalities, but two in particular will serve as illustrations: William F. Buckley and Russell Kirk.

William F. Buckley Jr (1925—2008) has been described by George H. Nash as, for his generation, 'the pre-eminent voice of American conservatism, and its first great ecumenical figure',8 'ecumenical' because Buckley attempted to synthesise in his writings and his life the three principal aspects of the American conservative movement: cultural conservatism, economic liberalism and anti-communism. Buckley's first book, the highly influential God and Man at Yale (1951), set the tone for his life and work, in attacking the university that he attended for its blatantly atheist, and incipiently anti-American, culture. From the beginning Buckley, a devout Roman Catholic, was a dissident, a witty critic of establishments, and an evangelist for lost causes. In 1955 he established National Review, which became and

8 National Review Online, 28 February 2008.

remains the most convinced and convincing of the many conservative journals that have arisen in America since the war. Through the pages of the Review, through his many books and articles, and his TV series of interviews, Firing Line, Buckley tirelessly sought to define conservatism as a political movement, in which ideas have a leading role, and the religious and social heritage of America finds a voice adapted to the times.

Buckley's defence of economic liberalism put him in the same camp as the radical individualist, Ayn Rand (1905— 82), whose philosophy has influenced several generations of Americans, being expressly presented as an aggressive response to communism and a defence ofthe entrepreneurial culture of America. Influenced equally by Nietzsche and Darwin, Rand saw in capitalism the mechanism whereby societies create the elites needed to govern them, by hardening both will and wit in the flame of competition. She described her philosophy as 'objectivism', believing that it shows people as they are, rather than as we should, in our sentimental moments, like them to be. She believed that her vision had the backing of science and was as dismissive of religion as the Marxists against whom she waged her lifelong intellectual battle.

Rand argued that it is a mere illusion to believe that the poorer specimens of mankind will benefit from socialism, since socialist policies merely prevent the best and most useful people from exercising their skills and talents. But we all depend upon the success of these people, who create the material and moral space in which lesser beings can find their niche (The Virtue of Selfishness, 1964). In her novels, Rand several times attempted to paint the portrait of the Nietzschean Übermensch, and, although the result does not appeal to everyone, it clearly appealed to her many followers, whose fervent support ensured that she became one of the most successful writers of her time, and one prepared ostentatiously to live the life of the Übermensch herself.

Buckley was one of those to whom Rand did not appeal. He found her atheism repugnant, and her peculiar brand of radical individualism, detached from all traditions and all normal forms of accommodation with human weakness and imperfection, completely alien to what he saw as the essential kindness of the American inheritance. It was important, he believed, to detach American conservatism from Rand's Nietzschean supremacism, which was an alien import, imbued with the exorbitant spirit of the Russian Revolution, from the aftermath of which Rand herself had fled into American exile. In 1964, he wrote of 'her desiccated philosophy's conclusive incompatibility with the conservative's emphasis on transcendence, intellectual and moral,' as well as 'the incongruity of tone, that hard, schematic, implacable, unyielding, dogmatism that is in itself intrinsically objectionable, whether it comes from the mouth of Ehrenburg, Savonarola or Ayn Rand.'9

In a similar way Buckley used the pages of the National Review to distance conservatism from anti-Semitism, and from any other kind of racial stereotyping. The important goal, for him, was to establish a believable stance towards

9 William F. Buckley Jr, 'Notes toward an Empirical Definition of Conservatism,' in What is Conservatism?, edited by Frank S. Meyer, 1964,

p. 214

the modern world, in which all Americans, whatever their race or background, could be included, and which would uphold the religious and social traditions of the American people, as well as the institutions of government as the Founders had conceived them. He came to admire Martin Luther King, and believed that conservatives had made a great error in opposing the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Buckley engaged actively in the 'culture wars', with a twice-weekly column, On the Right, syndicated to 320 newspapers across America. He saw in the 1964 presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater, the hope for a revitalisation of the American way of life, with religion, family and Constitution restored to their central place in the affections of the people, and the country taking a firm stance against the communist and socialist threat both at home and abroad. Ayn Rand was also, at the time, an ardent supporter of Goldwater, who captured the imagination of many intellectual dissidents, at the moment when America was wobbling towards a soft kind of quasi-socialism. Goldwater's defeat and disappearance from the political scene fundamentally changed the emphasis of American conservatism, which has been fighting rear-guard actions ever since.

One of those rear-guard actions concerns the Constitution and the role of the Supreme Court in defining it. In a series of judgments, egged on by campus liberals such as Ronald Dworkin, and responding to cultural shifts which go well beyond the universities in their reach, the Supreme Court has acquired the habit of reading into the Constitution rights and freedoms that would never have

# CONSERVATISM

occurred to the Founding Fathers, or which would have been regarded by them with repugnance. In particular, to take two developments that Buckley fought unsuccessfully to oppose, the Supreme Court has 'discovered' in the US Constitution both a right to abortion (part of an undefined 'right of privacy'), and a right to same-sex marriage.

One of the most important battles of the conservative movement in recent years has therefore been on behalf of the American Constitution, against those who would read into that brief document the rights and freedoms that appeal to modern liberals, but not, on the whole, those that appeal to conservatives (such as the right to life of the unborn child). Important in this battle has been Robert H. Bork (1927—2012), solicitor general and jurist, who argued that the duty of the judge is to construe the original intention of the Founders strictly, and not to import interpretations that reflect the judge's own desires and prejudices while being at variance with the letter and the spirit of the original document (The Tempting ofAmerica, 1990). Although there is latitude for disagreement, and the Constitution can be extrapolated to deal with circumstances that the Founders did not or could not foresee, all such extrapolation must be guided by respect for the overall intentions of the Constitution.

The habit of importing interpretations of constitutional clauses in order to satisfy this or that (usually liberal) prejudice is in fact tantamount to repudiating the Constitution entirely, and refusing to recognise it as setting limits to legislative and judicial powers. Moreover, it authorises judicial legislation in defiance of the will of Congress and the elected representatives of the people. Therefore it is a violation of the democratic traditions of the American people. Bork was a particularly trenchant critic of the decision in Roe v. Wade (1973), legalising abortion. His more philosophical writings, in which he defended the spiritual and moral inheritance of America against modern corruption, placed him firmly in the conservative camp, a strong ally of Buckley and National Review. As a result, Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court by President Reagan in 1987 was so vehemently opposed by the liberal establishment that the appointment could not be confirmed by the Senate.

One other leading figure of the post-war conservative movement deserves mention here and that is Russell Kirk (1918—94), whose book 7he Conservative Mind (1953) was the first, and continuingly influential, attempt to define the conservative position as a comprehensive intellectual posture. Kirk assisted William Buckley in the founding of National Review, going on to establish his own journal, Modern Age, in 1957. Kirk attempts, in 7he Conservative Mind, to describe a unified movement — intellectual, political and cultural — in which the many conservative thinkers and politicians participate. Strongly influenced by Eliot, and also by Christian cultural conservatives such as C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton, Kirk argued that both the ideas and the policies of the many who had reacted against liberal—socialist ideas in his time were anticipated by Burke, and also articulated by him in a way from which we could all learn. According to Gerald Russello, whose writings about Kirk are far clearer in this matter than Kirk himself, Kirk's philosophy is founded in the following 'canons' or states of mind:

1. A belief in a transcendent order, which Kirk described variously as based in tradition, divine revelation or natural law;
2. An affection for the 'variety and mystery' of human existence;
3. A conviction that society requires orders and classes that emphasise 'natural' distinctions;
4. A belief that property and freedom are closely linked;
5. A faith in custom, convention, and prescription, and a recognition that innovation must be tied to existing traditions and customs, which entails a respect for the political value of prudence.

Those canons are not developed in any systematic way by Kirk, who preferred to range across the field of existing intellects, picking the flowers that attracted him. Indeed the Kirkean canons, detached from the philosophical arguments that might be used to justify them, have a somewhat commonplace air, and seem more like a wish list than a philosophy. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Kirk set an example to generations of post-war Americans, young people especially, in presenting the conservative position as a common heritage, believable as a political doctrine, and also the inspiration for the highest artistic endeavours, as in the poetry of T. S. Eliot.

This is not to say that the philosophical heritage of conservatism has been ignored. The dispute over 'social justice', in which Hayek mapped out the territory, has broken out more recently in the American academy, following the magisterial work by the liberal John Rawls, A 7heory of Justice (1970). Rawls's broad defence of a soft socialist position, according to which justice resides in the distribution of goods and advantages, rather than the actions of individuals, is backed up with elaborate arguments, drawing on game theory, moral philosophy and analytical metaphysics. The effect, if not the goal, has been to dazzle the ordinary conservative conscience. Conservatives have therefore left it to the libertarians to frame the response — notably the philosopher Robert Nozick who, in Anarchy, State and Utopia (1974), argues that theories of justice like that of Rawls, which define justice in terms of a pattern of distribution, will always infringe on freedom, and also run counter to the 'justice preserving transfers' which inform our everyday relations. The arguments here are complex, and continuing. But it is fair to say that American conservatives, in so far as they have noticed them, have nodded assent to the libertarian case.

this melding of the conservative and the libertarian standpoint can be witnessed in the multifaceted movement that arose in both Britain and America in the 1970s, and which has sometimes been referred to as the 'New Right', partly because it was, at the intellectual level at least, a response to the 'New Left' movement of the 1960s. The New Right movement was an intellectual companion to the Reagan—Thatcher alliance in politics, an attempt to reaffirm Western civic values in the face of Soviet aggression, and an unsystematic response to the Marxist and neo-Marxist

attempts to take over the academy. It was not so much ecumenical in the style of Bucldey as diverse, being largely a reaction, in Britain, to three decades of soft-socialist orthodoxy by a new generation of its exasperated victims.

One aspect, the defence of 'market solutions' to social and political problems, grew into the approach to political decision-making known now as 'neo-liberalism', and associated at first with the Chicago school of economic theory and the 'public choice' theories developed in the University of Virginia. Both schools pre-date the New Right movement, while providing it with a central core of economic arguments. Important thinkers include Milton Friedman in Chicago, whose Capitalism and Freedom (1962) became a bible to American conservative think tanks during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan, and James M. Buchanan in Virginia, whose book, The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy (1962), coauthored with Gordon Tullock, attempts to give an explanation of the workings of democracy in purely economic terms. Buchanan and others developed the theories of that book into an account of the 'rent-seeking' behaviour of bureaucracies, thereby debunking many of the exaggerated claims made for the 'social justice' of the welfare state, and providing a powerful response to the view that the market is less compassionate than a socialist bureaucracy.

For a while neo-liberalism looked as though it was taking off as a comprehensive political philosophy, endorsing the famous thesis of Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1882— 1950) in Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1942), that the capitalist entrepreneur is the true instrument ofpositive adaptation, sweeping aside all moribund habits and institutions in a storm of 'creative destruction'. However, the new economy, in which everything — marriage, family, art, faith and nation — was being marked up for sale in the global auction, caused widespread alarm as much on the right as on the left, with the result that today neo-liberalism is more often regarded as a threat to our inheritance than an important part of it.

Within the New Right, therefore, there has arisen another and countervailing tendency, which is the attempt to protect what matters, both from subversion by the socialist cult of equality and from dissolution under the impact of global forces, market forces included. This movement took off in Britain with the foundation of the Salisbury Review, under my editorship, in 1982. Named for the prime minister, the third Marquess of Salisbury (1830—1902), about whom little today is publicly known precisely because he wished to make only unnoticeable changes, the Review has taken a stance on behalf of national identity and traditional attachments against the emerging orthodoxy of 'multiculturalism'. It was also an important link during the 1980s between the New Right and the dissident movements in Eastern Europe, publishing letters and articles from the Czech, Polish and Hungarian underground, and emphasising that totalitarian communism was not an aberration within Marxism, but the condition towards which New Left ways of thinking were inevitably tending. However, its importance lay less in its confrontation with the neo-Marxist left than in its defence of British culture and institutions in the face of the challenge presented by mass migration.

Britain has seen the growth of Islamic communities that reject crucial aspects of the nation state. British schools have acquired the thankless task of integrating the children of these communities into a secular order that their parents denounce as blasphemous. And the left—liberal establishment has rushed forward to condemn as 'racist' any person — be it schoolteacher, social worker or journalist — who discusses in plain and truthful language what is happening to the social fabric of the country. Ihese facts have defined a new agenda for conservatism, and one that the Salisbury Review adopted as its own in the 1980s, with adverse effects on the careers of its writers and its editor.

Indeed, all the old currents of opinion are apt to seem beside the point in our situation today, when the defence of Western civilisation is less a matter of confronting domestic resentment and socialist schemes for distributive justice, than of standing up to an armed and doctrinaire enemy, in the form of radical Islam. Once again conservatives and liberals stand side by side in defence of their shared goal, which is a society of free individuals, under a government that they themselves have chosen. But they live, now, in a world where free speech and free opinion are comprehensively threatened, where laughter is dangerous and where the fundamental assumptions of secular government are no longer shared by all those who enjoy its benefits.

Conservatives have therefore turned in a new direction, exploring the roots of secular government in the Christian inheritance, and the place of religion in a society which has made freedom of conscience into one of its ruling principles. The invention of the 'neo-conservative' label, to denote the political advisors and think tanks which have tried to turn American foreign policy towards a direct confrontation with despotic and Islamist movements in the wider world, is in part a recognition that conservatism, in so far as it now exists, is no longer about market economics and free trade, but about the wider global agenda.

Three thinkers typify the new movement of ideas: Samuel Huntington in America, Pierre Manent in France, and myself in Britain. We begin from very different premises. But we coincide in our belief that Muslim immigration poses a challenge to Western civilisation, and that the offlcial policy of 'multiculturalism' is not a solution but part of the problem.

Samuel Huntington (1927—2008) was a political scientist known for his work on democratisation, who in later life addressed the new international situation following the collapse of communism. In 7he Clash of Civilisations and the Making of World Order (1996), he argued that the conflict of the cold war would be replaced by a violent and disorderly conflict between civilisations, as the Islamic world reacts to the global transfer of Western attitudes, Western technology and Western secularisation. This led him to raise, in Who Are We? (2002), the question of American identity. Written in the wake of the terrorist atrocities of 11 September 2001 (the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington DC), the book argues that it will be impossible to respond in a coherent way to the Islamist threat without regaining confidence in our own identity. This means confidence not in our political institutions only, but in the spiritual inheritance on which they ultimately rest. The correct response to Islamist

belligerence is, therefore, not simply the reaffrmation ofthe liberal order and the secular state. It is the rediscovery of ourselves, in a systematic policy of cultural conservatism.

Huntington's argument centres on what he calls the American Creed, which he believes to derive from the 'Anglo-Protestant' culture of the original settlers. And he marshals the evidence of recent historical scholarship, which sees the development of American political institutions, and the forging of the American national idea, as continuous with the Protestant 'Awakenings' that repeatedly swept across the continent. To separate this religious inheritance from the idea of America, to reconstitute as a purely secular body politic what began life as a sacred pledge, would be to deny the most vigorous input into the American experience.

The point, as Huntington sees it, is that civilisations cannot be defended merely by offering freedom and toleration. To offer toleration to those gripped by animosity to your way of life is to open the door to destruction. We must rediscover what we are and what we stand for, and having rediscovered it, be prepared to fight for it. That is now, as it has ever been, the conservative message. And what we stand for is a religious as much as a political inheritance.

Similar points are made by Pierre Manent in La Situation de la France (2015), a book also written in response to Islamist terrorism, in this case the murder of the editorial staff of the weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. Manent (b. 1949) is a professor of political philosophy at the Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and a co-founder of the quarterly journal Commentaire, which has been a major source of conservative thinking during the last three decades. Influenced by a reading of Leo Strauss (see Chapter 4), Manent has written extensively on the deeper meaning of Western civilisation, which he sees as continuous with the ancient city, defining and extending the condition of citizenship against both religious submission and imperial domination. In the modern context, Manent argues, we cannot expect Muslim citizens to submit wholeheartedly to the doctrine of 'human rights', as expounded by the original Declaration of the French revolutionaries. But we must, nevertheless, find a place for them in our society, which will respect their religious way of life. Hence we must offer them an object of loyalty that they can share with their fellow citizens. For Manent, this object of a shared loyalty can only be the nation, conceived as a spiritual inheritance under a rule of law. The transnational alternatives — Europe, the UN, the law of human rights, maybe the Islamic ummah itself - are either unappealing or run counter to the immediate and urgent need for the integration of the Muslim minority. Yet the governing elite has connived at the deliberate enfeeblement of the nation, adopting globalisation and the European project as the sole guides to the future, and believing that all Frenchmen could live as radical individuals, bound together by nothing more than the impartial law of the secular Republic.

Worse, there has been in official circles a deliberate silencing of discussion, a refusal to describe things by their proper names, and the adoption of the propaganda-word 'Islamophobia' to create a wholly imaginary enemy. As far as the official version of events is concerned, Islamist terrorism is a response to a continuous crime against the Muslim community — a crime committed by everyone who notices that Muslim customs are in friction with the traditional social order of France. The offcial propaganda passes over the fact that the Muslim community in France is financed and guided from outside — by the wealthy Wahhabite mission from Saudi Arabia, for example — and has no motive to regard France as the source and the object of its communal life. The European project only exacerbates the problem, since the integration of the Muslim community can only occur at the national level, where Muslims are represented by their vote, and not at the European level, where the people do not count.

Manent's subtle response to the question of Islam in France is also a deeply pondered examination of the French political and cultural inheritance, and a vindication of the national idea that had inspired the renouveau catholique described in Chapter 4. My own reflections, published in 2002 as The West and Ihe Rest, and conceived following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, are an attempt to show the tension between traditional Sunni Islam and a man-made rule of law. I argue that there is a profound divide between a religious community, shaped by holy law and submission to a God who recognises neither national boundaries nor the rights of his opponents, and a political community, such as ours, in which there is legal opposition, man-made law, secular government, freedom of opinion, and representative institutions. The political community depends upon a pre-political loyalty, and I agree with Manent that this loyalty must be defined in national terms.



National loyalty means attachment to the territory that we share with our neighbours. It is the ground of the freedoms that we enjoy and which were announced and protected by the US Constitution. The political form of coexistence is a precious achievement and something to which conservatives, liberals and socialists ought all to be committed, and for which they should be prepared to pay the price. It is threatened both by Islamist intransigence, and by the culture of repudiation that prevails on the left, and which denounces every attempt to defend our inheritance as 'racist' or 'xenophobic'.

What is at stake, I argue, for both liberals and conservatives — and for socialists too, if they could permit themselves to think it — is the Western inheritance of citizenship, and the identity that goes with it. Here is how I put the point:

Citizens enjoy rights — both the 'human rights' or 'natural rights' that are the pre-condition of their consent to be governed, and the right of participation in the political process. Ihey are also bound by duties to their fellow citizens, and these duties spring from a peculiar experience of membership. Citizens are first and foremost members of a society of strangers, committed to the defence of their common territory and to the maintenance of the law that applies there. Citizenship therefore depends on pre-political loyalties of a territorial kind — loyalties rooted in a sense of the common home and of the trans-generational society that resides there. In short, citizenship as we know it depends on the nation, defined as a self-renewing organism clothed in the mantle of a law-governed state. (pp. 60—61)

Islam, by contrast, offers a pre-political loyalty that is defined without reference to territory, which denies religious freedom, and sees God, not politics, as the ultimate source of law. The confrontation with Islamic extremism, I conclude, 'requires a credible alternative to the absolutes with which the extremist conjures. It requires us not merely to believe in something, but to study how to put our beliefs into practice.' Like Manent, I look back to the spiritual inheritance of Christianity, and to the two great laws of Christ, who commanded us to love God entirely and to love our neighbour as ourselves. As he showed through his example and his parables, the neighbour is not the fellow believer, the family member, the fellow militant, but the one whom you come across: the one who, for whatever reason, is nearby. The nation state elevates neighbourhood and territory into the thing to which you belong. It is the means to reconcile people of different faiths and lifestyles, as they have been reconciled in America and would be reconciled in Europe too, were the elites to acknowledge that political representation is the solution to our current problems, and that representation is possible only on the assumption of a shared national identity. Our hope is that a form of Islam will emerge that accepts those truths, and which takes seriously the saying among Middle Eastern Muslims, sabaHan man jama'naa - all praise to the one we come across.

That position is a direct challenge to the habits of censorship and self-castigation that inform our public life. Now, as always, conservatives suffer under a burden of disapproval, which they believe comes from their habit of telling the truth, but which their opponents ascribe either to 'nostalgia' for an old and misremembered way of life or to a failure of compassion towards the new ways of life that are emerging to replace it. My own view is that conservatism will be a necessary ingredient in any solution to the emerging problems of today, and that the tradition of thinking that I have outlined in this book should therefore be part of the education of all politicians everywhere.

1. London School of Economics [↑](#footnote-ref-1)