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TORY DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL REFORM

From Beaconsfield to Birkenhead

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Abstract. According to the prevailing Liberal view, conservatism and social reform are seen as essentially irreconcilable, thus making Tory Democracy appear as a myth. In the present essay, this inherently critical approach is challenged, and the reasons for its misunderstanding of the subject are outlined. It is argued that Tory Democracy is a real historical phenomenon and, additionally, that it is possible to grasp the essence of Tory Democracy as composed of certain logical, ideological and philosophical traits.

The aim of this essay is to shed light on the complex phenomenon of Tory Democracy as it appeared in mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century British politics.[1] The essay explores the historical context, the ideological and philosophical underpinnings, as well as some intricate personalities of the tradition; in short, the aspects, which have been essential in moulding the phenomenon.

It can be acknowledged that 'tradition' is not frequently used as a unit of study. Students of political theory would rather focus on the ideological phenomena, and historians would prefer to study political parties or individual thinkers. For their choice speaks the clearness of form. Traditions are rather of a vague character, and thus more difficult to analyse. However, sometimes a tradition seems to have had a greater importance in reality than a political party, conveying more meaning within it than a single thinker, or is simply more real (less abstract) than an ideology.

1 This essay is based on my University of Tartu MA thesis in Public Administration and Social Policy, which was defended in March 2000. I would like to express my gratitude, first and foremost, to my supervisor, Wolfgang Drechsler, but also to my Oxford tutors John Davis (Queen's College) and Ewen Green (Magdalen College); to the librarians of the Oxford Bodleian and the Queen's College libraries; to my defense opponents Rainer Kattel – to whom I am also indebted for later help with this essay version – and the Earl of Carlisle; to my friends Margit Tavits, Bruno Mölder, and Harri Altroff, and last but not least to my Mother, who have all helped me in various ways.

The crucial question is, of course, how to best understand the subject. And here one can only proceed from the careful consideration of the subject and, in the first place, the questions it has prompted. With Tory Democracy the central question (loosely defined) appears to be as follows: how did it come about that a group of thinkers and practitioners in British politics during the period in question, associated mainly with the Conservative party, who, though formally adverse to the 'progressive' developments in British society, developed ideas and advocated measures which later observers have seen as a harbinger of the unborn welfare state?

This question brings us to the fundamental question of the present study, namely: what is the nature of the phenomenon? Although Tory Democracy seems to have clear links with conservatism, it cannot be defined simply as a conservative ideology; though in part, it cannot be regarded as identical to the Conservative party and its politics. It would be equally shortsighted to restrict it only to a number of individuals. Against the purely theoretical construction of the problem speaks also the historical context, which plays an essential part in shaping the phenomenon.

Consisting of thought and practice, men and institutions, ideological aspects and historical context, Tory Democracy can be defined as a political tradition. And with a tradition it is history which is the crucial aspect that binds it together, and here the contents of the subject rather than the form proves to be the leading line of study.

The concept of Social Reform is meant to provide the study with a pivot around which the argument is developed, sometimes explicitly apparent, mostly, however, implicit. Social Reform was one of the most important questions in British politics in the period under consideration. And thus it helps us to arrive at a definition of the tradition: through a distinct approach to Social Reform, Tory Democrats offered their positive, though conservative, understanding of how to handle the social problems which Britain faced at the time under consideration.

This essay is designed in the form of five chapters, each composed of three parts and providing an aspect relevant to the understanding of the Tory Democratic tradition. The first chapter deals mainly with methodological and genealogical questions, focusing on the historical context of the emergence of Tory Democracy. The second chapter studies the heritage of conservative ideology to Tory Democracy. The third draws a parallel between the conservative disposition in politics and Tory Democracy. The last two chapters give an account of the philosophical assumptions of the tradition, the former focusing on a particular reading of the character of the state, and the latter on the Good State concept as a guideline of action for Tory Democrats. In the fourth chapter certain personal characteristics shared by prominent statesmen in the tradition are outlined.

This essay is oriented towards a concept of *Verstehen* (understanding) which asserts that if one seeks to understand a person or a phenomenon one cannot approach the subject with negative preliminary assumptions, for an adverse attitude towards the subject might not only narrow the student's perspective, and thus limit the scope of knowledge otherwise available, but also lead to the misunderstanding of the subject. The approach chosen here, however, does not exclude criticism or

scholarly detachment at all, it is rather a matter of perspective. (See Drechsler 1995:219)

1. Preliminary explorations

1.1. The Disraelian puzzle

In 1876, less than three years had passed since Gladstone[2] had left the Prime Minister's office. For the new government, however, this marked the end of two sessions of social reform which, among other areas, had covered the fields of public health, education, pollution, friendly societies, merchant shipping, and artisans' dwellings. There are two qualifying aspects concerning this fact which are of great importance here: as it has been observed retrospectively, the outcome of their work was to be "the largest crop of social legislation yielded by any British administration before that of 1906" (Smith 1967:202); and even more interestingly, it was a Conservative Cabinet, chaired by Benjamin Disraeli[3], which could claim its authorship.

It should be acknowledged that it was not the first time for the Conservatives to take their opponents by surprise as well as to confuse later commentators. In 1867 the Conservative Cabinet, led by Lord Derby[4], had carried through a Parliamentary Reform which, in its final form, almost doubled the electorate of England and Wales and gave the working classes a preponderance of votes in many boroughs (Jenkins 1996:78). That a minority Conservative government was able to implement Reform owes much to Disraeli who, as the Leader of the House of Commons[5] at the time, led this measure skillfully through Parliament.

And yet, neither the Reform Act of 1867, nor the social legislation of the 1870s, should appear incomprehensible in the light of Disraeli's famous novels of the 1840s[6], or seen in the context of his Manchester and Crystal Palace speeches.[7] From his early days in politics onwards, Disraeli had been consistent in pronouncing his belief in the "one nation" and the responsibility of the aristocracy, as the ruling class, for the "improvement of the condition of the people". (Disraeli *Sybil*, Bk IV, ch. xiv; see also Drechsler 1995, and Jenkins 1996: esp. 139–141)

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[2] William Ewart Gladstone, a leader of Liberals and Prime Minister in 1868–74, 1880–85, 1886, and 1892–94.

[3] After 1876 Lord Beaconsfield.

[4] Edward Geoffrey Stanley, since 1851 the 14th Earl of Derby, a leader of Conservatives and Prime Minister in 1858–59, and 1866–68.

[5] In fact, at this time Disraeli combined his role as the Leader of the House of Commons with that of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

[6] *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847), but especially the first two, powerfully discuss the 'social question'.

[7] Two important public addresses Disraeli delivered as the Conservative leader in 1872.

However, apart from the early biographers, Monypenny and Buckle,[8] as well as a few later ones (see Pearson 1974; Jenkins 1996), the overall tenor of scholarship is mainly negative towards both Disraeli's person and his politics. He has been accused of opportunism and lacking clear principles; of a quick transition from radicalism to Toryism; of his change from a protectionist to a free trader; or of how he searched for allies from among Peelites, the Whigs, the Radicals, and the Irish section. (See esp. Blake 1966; Smith 1967)

It is true that Disraeli appears as an ambivalent figure: as a Jew and a novelist, as a 'lonely wolf' in his party, in short – because of his highly untypical personality in Victorian British parliamentary life, but also because of his 'flirting' with the lower classes which has been taken either as improper for a Conservative or as insincere for a Radical.

However, Disraeli's Social Toryism,[9] the culmination of which has been sketched out in the very beginning of this chapter, has, apart from inspiring individual politicians of later generations, formed the basis of Tory Democracy, a political tradition this essay tries to understand. And, above all, this understanding seems to require an answer to the question of how these two concepts, Toryism and democracy, or maybe more accurately, Conservatism and social reform, go together.

Although, broadly speaking, it is a tradition which is a central unit in this essay, there are three levels of argument which go straight through the work: beside that of ideas which constitutes the main focus of the paper, a major partnership has been given to history, where these ideas have actualised, as well as to persons who have connected the ideas and history. Aside from that, there are two wider topics through which this essay tries to comprehend its subject's core: the (historical) world-view environment, and the main (philosophical) assumptions in Tory Democratic thought.

However, before exploring the world-view environment and the core of Tory Democracy, it is necessary to look at the socio-political context of the conditions underlying the emergence of Tory Democracy.

1.2. The conditions of emergence of Tory Democracy

The period of prime importance here is the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the time following the industrial revolution in England which, according to Blake, had "produced a class of confident, self-conscious, capitalist factory owners" (1998:13). However, the emerging 'middle class' did not find itself in acute conflict with the aristocracy until the end of Napoleonic Wars, for "the interests of the two classes were not markedly different, ... the aristocracy was

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[8] Monypenny, William and Buckle, George. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (1929).

[9] An illuminating essay, focusing especially on public health aspects of Disraeli's politics, is Drechsler (1995).

more than ready to meet the new ideology of competition and *laissez-faire* half way" (Blake 1998:14).

This made the transformation of the 'old' world to the 'new' one comparatively smooth in England, the capitalist 'character' of aristocracy being at the same time paradoxically the main source of its longevity (Lieven 1992: 7, 10, 13–14). Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that a part of the 'upper class', identifying themselves mainly as landowners, did not take these changes with as much patience.

The situation in England was not a clear one either when considering the political landscape. The historical lineage of party names was mostly symbolic since the problems of English (soon British) politics had been continuously altered. However, from the 1830s onwards, one can talk about a clearer division: if the Whigs came to represent the 'progressive' world (together with Liberals and Radicals), then most of the Tories were to stand for the 'old' world.[10]

Blake, while speaking of the possible developments in the Tory party after 1832, distinguishes between three options. First, they could remain "simply an aristocratic landed interest group obdurately opposing the winds of change," the supporters of which view he calls 'Ultras'. The second, Tory-Radical approach[11] followed the 'paternalistic' side of the aristocratic ideal, which, according to Blake, would appeal "particularly to idealists, romantics, escapists, all who harkened back to a largely imaginary pre-industrial golden age" (1998:21). As opposed to the first two, Blake sees only one positive alternative, to continue the liberal Toryism of the 1820s which, above all, "meant a libertarian fiscal policy" (1998:25).

Although this is not the place to criticise Blake for his biased view to favour the liberal approach as the right and *real* one for the Conservative party,[12] it is more than clear that his personal preferences prevail in his book.[13] However, even behind Blake's argument is it apparent that the supporters of the so-called Tory-Radical approach, the predecessors of Tory Democracy, came mainly from the 'landed areas', amongst the landowners and peasants, the bearers of the 'old' world.

In this perspective the 'Ultras' could indeed properly be called "an interest group", for the label did not mark any distinctive line of politics. Instead of calling them conservatives, as Blake does, they might more accurately be seen as

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[10] The 'liberal' Tories or Peelites were soon to depart from the rest of the party and to approach the Whig-Liberal-Radical wing of British politics.

[11] Their 'philosophy' challenged the dominant 'classical', *laissez-faire* doctrine and advocated many of the measures associated with the name of John Maynard Keynes a century later (Blake, 1998:22).

[12] For a critical treatment of a similar view in a couple of later works, see Green, "The Strange Death of Tory England" (1991); see also Herbert Butterfield *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931).

[13] It is probably fair to say that an analysis of specific world-view environments, which could explain the theoretical background of the traditions, appears to be missing in Blake's work.

'traditionalists' since they clung to what was familiar and merely reacted to the 'new'.[14] This also becomes obvious when considering the time after the separation of the 'Peelites' or the 'liberal-conservatives' from the Conservative party: there was no opposition, nor was there a partnership between the 'Ultras' and the 'Tory-Radicals' *in* the party. The 'Ultras' I rather see as the main electoral basis for the 'Tory-Radical' politics, *outside* active politics.

With the Tory-Radical, and later the Disraelian approach, since brought on a reflective level, one cannot talk any more of mere reactionism; instead, a conservative political *tradition* took shape. And therefore, it is the contention of the present work that only by understanding this distinctive conservative world-view is it possible to grasp the phenomenon of Tory Democracy.

2. The ideological inheritance

2.1. The emergence of conservatism: Karl Mannheim's approach

Conservatism[15] can be approached from a number of different angles. There are biographies,[16] party-histories,[17] studies focusing on conservatism as a tradition,[18] ideological approaches,[19] and also philosophical treatises.[20] Beside these formal categories there are also few of an essential nature and relevance to the subject under consideration. Perhaps the most decisive one is the ideological

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[14] Mannheim draws the attention to the difference between traditionalism and conservatism: if the former refers to a formal psychological attribute, then acting conservatively refers to action in accordance with a structural contexture (i.e. conservatism) which is objectively at hand (1986:72–73).

[15] The terms are used in the essay in the following way: "Conservative" refers here to the party, "conservative" to an ideology and a political philosophy.

[16] An excellent one is Sir Winston Churchill's biography of his father, *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906); see also John Campbell's *F. E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead* (1983), and Robert Blake's *Disraeli* (1966). See also Blake's *The Unknown Prime Minister: the life and times of Andrew Bonar Law* (1955). The one of most immediate value to this essay is Jenkins' *Disraeli and Victorian Conservatism* (1996), as it deals profoundly with Disraeli's Conservatism.

[17] A good example is Ewen Green's *The Crisis of Conservatism* (1995); see also Blake's *The Conservative Party* (1998), and Robert McDowell's *British Conservatism* (1959). Useful books are Hugh Cecil's *Conservatism* (1912), and Paul Smith's *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform* (1967), as far as historical facts are concerned. A rather bad example is Matthew Ffjorde's *Conservatism and Collectivism* (1990).

[18] A good example is Anthony Quinton's *The Politics of Imperfection* (1978); see also Russel Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* (1954), Neil O'Sullivan's *Conservatism* (1976), and Robert Nisbet's *Conservatism* (1986).

[19] The probably best example is Karl Mannheim's *Conservatism* (1986); see also Michael Freeden's *Ideologies and Political Theory* (1996).

[20] The best example is Michael Oakeshott's essay *On being conservative* (1956; in 1991).

divide,[21] according to which the scholars coming from an adverse world-view background are likely to take a thoroughly negative attitude towards their subject.[22]

Another substantial division within the scholarship[23] is marked by the difference in defining the core of conservatism. A widespread method is to bring out principles that are to cover the whole possible area of meaning of the utterances of the conservatives, by which the authors appear to try to draw the borders of the phenomenon.[24] The biggest weakness of this method is the vagueness in which it leaves the essence of the subject.[25]

Aside from being free of the two mentioned problems, an excellent source for exploring the conservative world-view and its morphological core is Mannheim's[26] *Conservatism* (1986), in which he focuses on the early conservatism in Germany (*Altkonservatismus*), and on the constellation of contextual circumstances that enabled that particular stream of thought to arise. Because of its great heuristic value, it will be used here as an inroad.

However, before outlining the most important features of the conservative morphology, it is instructive to take a brief look at the historical context of the emergence of conservatism.[27]

These were the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romanticism that have respectively provided liberal and conservative theories with their morphological cores (Mannheim 1986:55). However, as Mannheim says, the clear disjunction between liberal and conservative ways of thinking arose only at the turn of the nineteenth century in direct connection with the concrete political and philosophically self-reflective debate about the French Revolution (1986:34–35).[28]

If, according to Mannheim, the main conservative stimulus still came from England, then what "happens in Germany is ... a philosophical deepening of the

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[21] As Mannheim assures us, every single thinker comes from a world-view environment which determines the basic ideological preferences of his utterances (1986:50). On the phenomenon of necessary prejudices, see generally Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1990).

[22] Probably the latest example of a biased attitude towards conservatism is Freeden (1996).

[23] Biographies are left aside here.

[24] The earliest example is probably Cecil (1912). See also Kirk (1960), Muller (1997), and Nisbet (1986).

[25] A critique of this is outlined in O'Sullivan (1976: esp. 13–14).

[26] On Mannheim in general, see most recently David Kettler and Volker Meja, "Karl Mannheim (1893–1947)" (1991).

[27] For Mannheim's treatment of ideologies in general, see his *Ideology and Utopia* (1972). See also Jorge Larrain (1979).

[28] Mannheim's inquiry is principally directed towards the formal determinations of the conservative way of thinking, rather than towards the contents of conservatism.

points which Burke[29] initially posed[30] ... In a word, Germany achieved for the ideology of conservatism what France did for progressive Enlightenment – she worked it out most fully to its logical conclusions"[31] (Mannheim 1986:47).

Here lies the reason for Mannheim to study the morphological core of conservatism by the example of Germany – the basic tendencies of conservative thinking can be grasped there in their purest state.

2.2. The morphological core of conservatism: continuing with Mannheim

Although the present segment will outline also the theoretical core of conservative thought which integrates the style of thought as a unified whole, it begins by trying to grasp the pre-theoretical, experiential element, the fundamental style out of which a style of thought grows.[32]

One of the most essential characteristics of the "conservative way of experiencing and thinking" seems to be its clinging to what is immediate and *concrete* in a practical way. "To experience and to think *concretely* now comes to signify a specific mode of conduct, a desire to be effective only within the particular immediate environment in which one is placed" (Mannheim 1986:88). All progressive action, in contrast, is increasingly animated by a *consciousness of the possible*; it transcends the given immediacy by recourse to a *systematic possibility*, and it fights against the concrete not by seeking to put a *different concreteness* in its place, but by wanting *a different systematic starting-point*. (See Mannheim 1986:88)

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[29] Edmund Burke, the 'father' of Anglo-American (contemporary) conservatism, has been left aside from the focus of this essay since in the context of English/British conservatism he rather belongs to the tradition of 'liberal-conservatism'. Mannheim also asserts that "Burke, even if he becomes increasingly conservative as he got older, retained so many liberal elements" (1986:47). On Burke's most influential work, see "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790) in Paul Langford and Leslie Mitchell (eds.) *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (1989), vol. 3. Oxford: Clarendon Press. See also Muller (1997), esp.: 63–65, 78–82; and Quinton (1978: 56–62).

[30] If in Germany "conservative ideology had about half a century of undisturbed intellectual development ... to refine itself and to achieve philosophical sophistication," then English conservatism had to cope with the demands of a parliamentary life which, as a result of its inevitable practical conflicts, compromised its purity and ideological consistency (Mannheim 1986:46).

[31] According to Mannheim, the Enlightenment had its start in England, the most progressive place of capitalist development, and then moved over to France, to achieve only there its most radically abstract and atheistically materialist form. The counter-revolutionary critique of the French Revolution similarly originated in England, and achieved its most consistent exposition on German soil (1986:47).

[32] This segment continues to be based on Mannheim's analysis which draws its conclusions mainly from the early nineteenth century German conservative style of thinking for the reasons mentioned in the first segment of this chapter.

This difference can most plainly be shown in the particular way of experiencing of property by conservatives: there existed "a non-fungible reciprocity" between a particular property and particular owner, it was "closely bound up with the proprietor's personal honour" and in this sense inalienable.

Closely related to the contrast between *concrete* and *abstract* is the contrast which arises from the fact that progressive thinking not only sees the actual in terms of its potentialities, but also in the terms of the *norm*. "The conservative, on the other hand, tries to comprehend the actual in its contingency or attempts to understand the normative in terms of the existent"[33] (Mannheim 1986:95).

According to Mannheim, the conservative way of experiencing things and thinking about them includes its experience of the qualitative, its concrete rather than abstract ways of experiencing, its experiencing on the grounds of what is and not of what ought to be, its imaginary spatial relationships, its substitution of landed property for the individual as the substratum of history and its preferences for 'organic' associations over 'classes'.

Next, Mannheim tries to identify a central problem on the basis of which the leading methodological ideas of conservative thought can best be organically grasped, in a word, the theoretical core of conservatism. As he claims, "conservative thought emerged as a distinguishable entity and dynamic structural configuration when it placed itself into conscious opposition to the bourgeoisie-revolutionary style of thought, to *the natural-law mode of thinking*" (1986:102).[34]

As he claims, the most important contents of natural-law thinking – the doctrines of the 'state of nature', the social contract, popular sovereignty, and the inalienable Rights of Man – were all questioned by conservatives. (1986:107)

Along the same lines, conservatives turned against the characteristics of natural-law thinking. *Conservatives with the ideas of history, life and nation countered rationalism, as the mode of establishing the results of any inquiry on the basis of reason.* Conservatives opposed the method of deducing the particular from a general principle with the many-sided *irrationality of reality*. Conservatives countered a presupposition of universal validity, binding all individuals, by the problem of *individuality*. Against the claim of *universal*

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[33] The conservative method of "attribution of meaning" is characterised by the fact that it approaches the particular in some way from *behind*, from the past; for a progressive, every individual thing gains its ultimate meaning from something either above or beyond itself, from a utopia of the future or a norm transcending existence (Mannheim 1986:95). Thus it would not be incorrect to claim that in the conservative case of "attribution of meaning" it is the past that transcends existence. The "difference in direction" between the two experiences of expanding upon the particular itself contains a further radical difference in experiencing time. Schematically showing, Mannheim claims that the progressive always experiences the present as the beginning of the future, while the conservative regards it simply as the latest stage reached by the past; the latter can be described also as *a spatial experience of history*. (Mannheim 1986:96–97)

[34] According to Mannheim, the conservative attack on natural-law-grounded thinking did not happen all at once, but appeared scattered in the writings of various authors; however, it was animated by a fundamental design different from that of the revolutionary theorists. (1986:107).

applicability the conservatives put forward the idea of the social *organism. Atomism and mechanism*, as the basis on which the collective formations (the state, the law, etc.) were construed from the standpoint of the individual, were opposed by conservatives with the mode of thinking which starts from the standpoint of *totality. Conservatives with the dynamic conception of reason – reason itself opposed static thinking*, and rational norms were conceived as changing and moving (1986:107–109).

In conclusion Mannheim does acknowledge that in none of the conservative thinkers one can find an "all-out attack" upon the natural-law way of thinking, but this is precisely why such a theoretical framework is necessary to see the things with "reasonable clarity." (1986:109)

2.3. Benjamin Disraeli: the politics of imagination

This segment tries to show that there exists an essential connection between Tory Democracy and conservatism by exploring the personality of Disraeli in the context of the morphological features of conservatism outlined above.

It is hardly possible to find someone as fascinating a figure as Benjamin Disraeli in the deeply traditionalist context of British politics. "As a Jew who ruled a nineteenth century European Empire, as the transformer of politics into party politics, as a man who was equally successful as a novelist and as a politician, and as a master of foreign policy," (Drechsler 1995:217) Disraeli has rightly deserved a highly outstanding position in British history.[35]

It has been implied at the very beginning of the work that the attitude of modern scholarship towards Disraeli is rather negative. Blake has claimed that Disraeli was never a grave statesman. (1966:766) "A Jew, a quasi-intellectual, and a *litterateur*, standing by background and temperament outside the customary frame of British political life, he set himself not to assert a principle or attain an ideal, but to play a role of the romantic hero", echoes Paul Smith the very feeling of Blake. (1967:12)

As we see here, seriousness in politics is bound to an assertion of *principle* or *ideal*. And although Smith has to acknowledge that "Disraeli's concept of Toryism in essentials never changed," he nevertheless immediately adds that "whether, or in what sense, he believed them has always been a matter of controversy." This doubt has its basis in an understanding that "it is a convention in England to regard politics as a matter of principle and conviction." (1967: 11–12) As it is explicitly given then, for Smith the *principles* and ideals need a special reading, i.e. *conviction* in order to be accepted as real. This points to the progressivist understanding of the *universal validity* of ideas.

This bias in understanding the nature of ideas is further revealed in the following passage. Smith claims that Disraeli's "own ideas came less from the

[35] Regarding Disraeli's political writings, see his *Whigs and Whiggism* (1913).

logical processes of the intellect than from the imagination; their status was not so much that of rational propositions, which might be true or untrue, as that of mental images, loosely related to reality, and designed for inspiration and for use, not for resistance to criticism." (1967:12) Thus Smith comes to state that "given their essentially non-rational character, it is not surprising that Disraeli's ideas should have been formulated with small regard for precision, coherence, and literal truth; ... they are a personal extravaganza, not an intellectual system, ... their author 'believed' in them as an artist in the artifact, not as a mathematician in the theorem." (1967:12–13)

The views expressed above can be said to reveal the typical *progressivist* criticism towards a *conservative* personality (this being the reason for citing them here). And even more so, one could claim this even as archetypal, if we take, as Mannheim does, *rationalism* to be quintessential for progressivism.[36] For the Smithian statements echo a characteristically rationalist understanding of the nature of knowledge as comparable to *mathematical* or *technical* knowledge which can and should be *universally* demonstrated and proved. (See Oakeshott 1991:16–17) To look for an *intellectual system* goes well along with the overall tendency of progressivist thinking to understand everything on *systematic* basis. If one adds here Smith's statement that Disraeli "was a detached and deeply sceptical man, who did not believe in much", actually a typical *conservative* feature is discovered which serves to balance *rationalist* optimism in its power to "determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action" by judging it "by what he calls his 'reason'." (Oakeshott 1996:6) Finally, Smith himself reveals his own bias by claiming Disraeli's ideas to be untrustworthy because of their "*essentially non-rational* character".

An important insight, besides that of establishing a strong tie between Tory Democracy and conservatism, tells us how clear a link might exist between a world-view environment and a personal character. To a rationalist, a non-rational character appears as "sceptical" and "detached", and what is most important, the latter seems not to have clear *principles* in which he could *believe as a mathematician in the theorem*. It is exactly the matter of conviction, as Smith's quote reads above, which seems to be the key to understanding the basic difference between a progressive and a conservative character. If a non-rationalist politician regards the field of politics as merely practical and thus detaches

[36] Oakeshott sees 'modern rationalism' as the most remarkable intellectual fashion of post-Renaissance Europe. According to him, the pre-eminent source of its endurance is a doctrine about human knowledge. He distinguishes between two sorts of knowledge which every practical activity requiring skill of any sort involves; technical knowledge (which can be formulated into rules which are, or may be, deliberately learned, remembered, and put into practice), and practical knowledge (which exists only in use, is not reflective and cannot be formulated in rules). As he says, they are distinguishable but inseparable, the twin components of the knowledge involved in every concrete human activity. And, as he understands it, Rationalism asserts that practical knowledge is not knowledge at all, that there is no knowledge, which is not technical knowledge (1991:11–15).

himself from abstractions, he also avoids clear (abstract) principles; as he does not have clear principles (theorems), he cannot believe in them as a mathematician does. He understands politics as the pursuit of an intimation rather than of a dream, or of a general principle. (Oakeshott 1991:57) So, even Blake has to claim that "the charge of insincerity and lack of principle has ... little justification for it." "The truth is that Disraeli had principles ... and believed in them sincerely, but they were not the 'principles', if that word can be used at all, of Young England." (1996:762–763) Blake admits here the essential difference between *progressive* principles and *conservative* principles (or rather 'ideas'). Disraeli's novels were not a political programme. As Drechsler has put it: Disraeli "simply could not translate his utopia directly into politics." (1995:225)

As it will be argued, the other two prominent statesmen in the tradition were, and can be, categorised along the same lines. But this is already part of the argument of the following chapters.

3. The conservative essence

3.1. The conservative disposition: Michael Oakeshott's insights

The last chapter has demonstrated that there exists a strong tie between the conservative world-view and Tory Democracy, i.e. the conservative fundamental design appears to shape the way a Tory Democrat thinks about politics. However, this is not to say that Tory Democracy is but a pure *realisation* of the conservative ideology.

The way people think about politics is never totally ideological, it is also simply logical. To be sure, these two are intertwined, but though in reality probably hardly separable, they are still distinguishable. In a way, of course, this logic, or the *conservative disposition* in politics, can be said to come along with the conservative world-view. However, the tie is far from absolute, and there might be said to be remarkable differences between the two. (See Oakeshott 1991:435) The most clear and basic difference comes from the fact that if the conservative *fundamental design* signifies a determining factor for thinking about all things, then a conservative *disposition* in politics marks only a certain understanding about politics.

Therefore, the weaker link with history might give to the *conservative disposition* even a better position to serve as the core of a political tradition: this way the contents is 'purified' from the confusing multitude of (historical) form that is otherwise attached to the conservative ideology. Along these lines, the task of the present chapter is to try to grasp the role the conservative disposition has played in the practical politics of prominent Tory Democrats.

According to Oakeshott, to be conservative is to prefer certain kinds of conduct and certain conditions of human circumstances to others – it is to be *disposed* to make certain kinds of choices (1991:407). And the general

characteristics of this disposition can be described as to centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for something else.[37]

Therefore the person of conservative temperament has a particular attitude towards innovation which is not a mere aversion to it: first, innovation entails certain loss and possible gain, therefore the onus of proof rests with the would-be innovator; secondly, he believes that the more closely an innovation resembles growth (that is, the more clearly it is intimated in the situation) the less likely it is to result in a preponderance of loss; thirdly, he thinks that an innovation which is a response to some specific defect is more desirable than the one which springs from a notion of a generally improved condition of human circumstances; fourthly, he favours a slow rather than a rapid pace; and lastly, he considers the most favourable occasion for innovation to be when the projected change is most likely to be limited to what is intended (1991:411–412).

As Oakeshott argues, the disposition to be conservative *in politics* has nothing to do with "beliefs about the world in general, about human beings in general, about associations in general and even about the universe," but it is rather tied to certain beliefs about the activity of governing and the instruments of government;

> *what makes a conservative disposition in politics intelligible is nothing to do with a natural law or a providential order, nothing to do with morals or religion, it is the observation of our current manner of living combined with the belief ... that governing is a specific and limited activity, namely the provision and custody of general rules of conduct, which are understood, not as plans for imposing substantive activities, but as instruments enabling people to pursue the activities of their own choice with the minimum frustration, and therefore something which it is appropriate to be conservative about* (Oakeshott 1991:422–424).

Government, therefore, as the conservative understands it, does not begin with a vision of another, different and better world; and the intimations of government are rather to be found "in ritual, not in religion or philosophy; in the enjoyment of orderly and peaceful behaviour, not in the search for truth or perfection"[38] (Oakeshott 1991:428).

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[37] As Oakeshott claims, what is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed "not on account of its connections with a remote antiquity, nor because it is recognised to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on account of its *familiarity*: to be conservative is to prefer the familiar to the unfamiliar, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the convenient to the perfect; to acquire and to enlarge will be less important than to keep, to cultivate and to enjoy; it is to be equal to one's own fortune, to live at the level of one's own means" (1991:408–409).

[38] However, according to Oakeshott, it is not at all inconsistent to be conservative in respect of government and radical in respect of almost every other activity; in his opinion, "there is more to be learnt about this disposition from Montaigne, Pascal, Hobbes and Hume than from Burke or Bentham" (1991:435).

3.2. Tory Democracy in practice: Disraeli's actions

The task of the present segment is to take into a closer consideration the social reform legislation of the Conservative government in the mid-1870s in order to grasp Tory Democracy as it appeared in practice.[39] The context for such an analysis has been laid down above – by the description of the *conservative disposition*, which should provide a theoretical basis for understanding the tradition.[40]

The treatment taken into closer consideration is Paul Smith's *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform* (1967).[41] The main reason to use Smith here is, as was the case in the last chapter, his apparent opposition to Disraeli's politics, and not so much with the outcome as with the *motives*. His disposition might even be said to be in diametrical contradistinction to that of conservative – namely progressive. Though certainly unconsciously so, this disposition of his makes his thorough critique highly valuable.

However, to come to the topic, let us start with the first measure the Disraeli's government came to deal with, the Intoxicating Liquors Bill, which were to (de)regulate the activities of public houses. Smith stresses here the indebtedness of the Conservatives to the publicans as the main spring for legislative activity. (1967:208) Without underestimating the influence of the licensed victuallers to the government, it is nevertheless relevant to remark that Conservatives advocated the measure in suggesting that "sobriety would be better advanced by improving the material conditions of life (especially housing) than by restricting the sale of drink." (Smith 1967:209) Cross,[42] the Home Secretary, "looked to enlightenment and self-help, rather than repressive legislation", and even Smith had to acknowledge that "he was right to stress what temperance reformers too readily forgot, that drink as such was not the cause of drunkenness" (1967:209). Even if having gained some impetus from the publicans, the measure and the advocacy did not go against conservative understandings: drunkenness could not be dealt with by imposing restrictions on the trade; the state could only indirectly remedy some social causes of the problem; if there was to be found a real solution to the drinking problem, it must come from society itself.

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[39] An interesting treatment of 'popular Toryism' in the period from 1880 to 1935 is provided in Martin Pugh's *The Tories and the People* (1985). An analysis of the electoral support of the Tories is Eric Nordlinger's *The Working-Class Tories* (1967).

[40] For a general historical overview of that period in British politics, see Malcolm Pearce and Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History* (1996:1–108); see also Brian Harrison, *The Transformation of British Politics* (1996).

[41] In "examining the place of social reform in the strategy of the parliamentary Conservative party" from 1886 to 1880, Smith tries to ascertain "how far Conservatism was moving in a 'Disraelian' direction" (1967:5).

[42] Richard Asheton Cross, coming from an old Lancastrian banking family, was to prove an outstanding Conservative Cabinet minister (Jenkins 1996:102–103).

To deal with organised labour, the Home Office introduced two measures in 1875, the Employers and Workmen Bill and the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Bill. The first measure, which replaced the Master and Servant Act, removed breaches of contract from the purview of the criminal law, the second altered the law of conspiracy so as to free the activities of trade unions from its operation, where the acts involved were not in themselves criminal. (See Jenkins:116) A sharp rise in the number of industrial disputes in the early 1870s had made this an issue of pressing importance. Cross had decided to go even further than the recommendations of a recent Royal Commission, and with the crucial support of Disraeli, he overcame opposition in the Cabinet (Jenkins:116). As Smith says, "the unionists themselves were pleased with proposals far more generous than they had expected", and continues: "The labour legislation of 1875 was a remarkable stroke, and easily the most important of the government's social reforms." These measures can be seen as essentially *conservative* (although deserving negative comments from Smith): for "the recognition of the new status of working men and their unions within British society could be seen as an acknowledgement of established fact ..., rather than as a free act of grace"; and the disappearance of "the main cause of the tension between the working classes and their traditional Liberal allies in 1871–4 ... tended to facilitate the return of organised labour to the Liberal fold" (1967:217–218). This speaks strongly for the non-partisan position taken by the Conservative government.

According to Jenkins, much of the government's legislation was of the 'permissive' kind, designed to facilitate, but not compel, activity at local level (1996:113). The best example was the Artisans Dwellings Bill. The report of a committee of the Charity Organisation Society, which included also several prominent Conservative politicians, concluded that "it was essential to provide the poorer classes with adequate housing near to their work, and that this could be done by municipal government." (Smith 1967:218–219) Smith claims it to be "the first major attempt to tackle the problem of working-class housing in the great towns ... and it asserted the principle that in the last resort the right of property must give way before the need of social improvement." He nevertheless criticises the measure for its tentativeness, relying entirely upon an "uncertain local initiative"; it seems to Smith "neither collectivist nor really paternal", although "irreconcilable with principles of non-intervention". He concludes by saying that "there is no better illustration of the confused and nervous empiricism which lay at the heart of Disraelian social reform" (1967:223). Here it is apparent that these were rather the conservative *motives* and not deeds, which are condemned by Smith; he appears to have rather expected *progressive* measures from the Disraeli's ministry. Smith misunderstands here *conservative*, and especially Disraelian, preference for self-help instead of strong state action. And, "the subsidiarity principle, for especially local autonomy" has been listed by Wolfgang Drechsler as one of the most important characteristics of Disraeli's Social Toryism (1995:235). Smith is also apt to overlook the actual political context,

which in no way favoured strong action by the central government. (See Jenkins:111–112)

3.3. Disraeli's politics in conservative perspective

Aside from a few positive comments, Smith claims that the measures of Disraeli's government

> *in no sense constituted a 'programme' or embodied a 'policy': each was an empirical response to a more or less pressing problem, undertaken out of necessity, or because investigation and discussion had made the time ripe for action; and though all aimed at the amelioration of social life, it is difficult to regard them as the expression of any common underlying philosophy* (1967:218).

This paragraph outlines the most important Smithian criticism towards Disraeli's Social Toryism. To respond to problems out of necessity, and to act only after discussion and investigation had suggested it, is an essentially *conservative* approach (state action is preferred only if clearly needed; see also pp. 14–16 above); as well as it is to put forward measures without referring to any philosophical doctrine (the distinction between theory and practice). To look for a 'programme' or 'policy' is equally shortsighted, for neither the particular time nor a *conservative* approach favoured any social 'programme' to be undertaken. It appears again that Smith has mistaken the Disraelian approach for a *progressive* one, for only progressive politics could have been expected to create any political 'programme'.[43]

"Their main emphasis, as Disraeli saw clearly, had to be on the idea of the 'national' party, demonstrating the community of class interests in the maintenance of existing institutions" (Smith 1967:320). Presented here as a weakness by Smith, it can be read as a *conservative* attitude. Smith is also revealing a typical characteristic of the Disraelian approach when claiming that "the Conservative attitude had an engrained bias against the extension of central intervention and control unless a very good case could be shown." And, along the same lines, "such paternalism as the Conservative party possessed could not be transposed into support for the collectivism", and continuing, "there was no possibility of the party's going far along the 'Disraelian' road of popular appeal and social reform" (1967:321).

This was exactly the case: Disraeli had no intention of 'going far' along the path of "popular appeal and social reform". As Smith himself claims a few paragraphs later, Disraeli "knew that the emphasis of the Conservative platform must lie rather on the furtherance of the common cause of all classes than on the special promotion of the welfare of one." Smith also has to acknowledge that Disraeli could not

[43] Most unfortunately, then, Smith seems to anachronistically apply his contemporary standards to the politics of a previous century. Or, to put it another way, he mixes practical and historical interests: a historian cannot expect from conservatives a progressive approach.

transform the character of the Conservative party or reshape its thinking. In the end he has to admit that "even in the short ministry of 1866–8 something was done for factory reform, the sick, the poor, and the merchant seamen, and the government of 1874–80 was responsible for one of the most notable instalments of social reform of the century, conspicuously shaming its Liberal predecessors" (1967:322).

The fact that Disraeli's ministry appeared to Smith as extremely "cautious" in its attempt to improve the welfare of the people is understandable if one considers Smith's expectations to see there *progressivist* measures.[44] As Jenkins claims, Disraeli was actually faithful to his stated view that "useful, non-contentious social reform measures were an appropriate form of action for the Conservatives as an antidote to the Liberal Party's obsession with attacking national institutions like the Church or the House of Lords" (1996:115–116).

The task of the present chapter has been to show that there is a logic behind the politics of Disraeli's government, one that corresponds to a large extent to the traits of the above-outlined *conservative* disposition. As it will be argued in the next chapter of the work, the disposition provides also another important insight; however, this time into the theoretical core of Tory Democracy.

4. The idea of *societas* and 'a certain human character' in Tory Democracy

4.1. A state understood as societas

The present chapter focuses on a certain reading of the character of the state and on a parallel type of personality in the context of Tory Democracy.[45] This theme may also be said to grow out from the argument of the last chapter where the conservative disposition was under consideration.[46]

In his *On Human Conduct*, Michael Oakeshott[47] differentiates between two exclusive understandings of the state, prominent in European thought and practice since the Middle Ages, namely a state understood in the terms of *societas*, and a state understood in the terms of *universitas*. The former he takes as a *civitas* and its government as a nomocracy whose laws are understood as conditions of conduct; the latter is an association of intelligent agents who recognise themselves

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[44] A progressivist tradition of Social Reform is outlined in Freeden's *The New Liberalism* (1978).

[45] As will be argued, the main thinkers in the tradition of Tory Democracy, Benjamin Disraeli and Frederick E. Smith, both understood the character of a state to be that of *societas*, and this understanding I see as a basic feature of the tradition. It is also closely related to a certain human character, the so-called *self-directed man*, which in turn can be seen as the determinate trait of a *non-leader type statesman*, the common character of conspicuous figures in Tory Democracy.

[46] The two traits mentioned are implicit also in the conservative disposition as dealt with in the third chapter.

[47] On Oakeshott as a philosopher, see the interesting collection of essays, Jesse Norman (ed.) *The Achievement of Michael Oakeshott* (1993).

to be engaged in the joint enterprise of seeking the satisfaction of some common substantive want. (See Oakeshott 1996:203–205) Oakeshott does not see these two alternative readings of the character of a state as mere directions of theoretical inquiry, but rather as *the* components of the *polarised* political consciousness of modern Europe, and all other tensions (such as those indicated in the words 'right' or 'left' or in the alignments of political parties) he sees as insignificant compared with this. (1996:319–320)

For Oakeshott, there are mainly two idioms of the understanding of the state as a corporate enterprise in the history of modern Europe: a state recognised as a moral and religious *collegium*, and one understood as a *civitas cupiditatis* (a corporate productive enterprise). These two came together in a version of corporate association which might be called an 'enlightened' government, and which "now constitutes the strongest strand of teleocratic belief in modern European thought."[48]

The understanding of a state in the terms of *societas* is, for Oakeshott, capable of a variety of idioms and it does not entail any particular constitution of government. It reflects much that had been brought to the surface in the character of a medieval realm and also many of the contingent circumstances of the emerging states of modern Europe, but to emphasise its chief theoretical postulate Oakeshott calls it the *civitas peregrina*: "an association, not of pilgrims travelling to a common destination, but of adventurers each responding as best he can to the ordeal of consciousness in a world composed of others of his kind, each the inheritor of the imaginative achievements (moral and intellectual) of those who have gone before" (1996:243).

The idea of *societas* then denotes agents (*socii*) who, each pursuing their own interests or even joined with some others in seeking common satisfactions, are related to one another in the continuous acknowledgement of the authority of rules of conduct indifferent to the pursuit or the achievement of any purpose. (1996:201)

The Tory thinker whose thoughts are taken under a closer consideration in this context is Frederick E. Smith[49] (called F. E. by his contemporaries, the tradition I intend to follow in this essay). His *Unionist Policy*, published in 1913, is a collection of essays where he argues also at length on the topics this essay is interested in. F. E. outlines one of the basic problems of his time in claiming that "we are living in a period of incalculable industrial unrest, to the development of which no prudent person is prepared to assign limits, and the ultimate consequences of which may easily, if it is neither controlled or directed, submerge the very

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[48] As Oakeshott claims, the idea of a state as an association incorporated in terms of 'enlightened' conduct was prefigured in much that went before: "In the *respublica Christi*, and in the *administration de la parole de Dieu* of the Calvinist, in the sixteenth-century revival and corruption of Stoic beliefs about the connection between 'wisdom' and ruling, in the Baconian vision of a state as a technological enterprise and notably in the Puritan conception of governing as the imposition of Grace upon Nature." (1996:286–297).

[49] Lord Birkenhead from 1919. See also my BA thesis (1997), where I have dealt with Lord Birkenhead's Tory Democracy. Some of its ideas have been used in this essay as well.

landmarks of our civilisation." Strongly pointing to the need for government action, he concludes that "the wrongs under which many poor persons labour are so cruel and so undeniable that it is astounding that any school of political thought should conceive a policy of inactivity to be possible" (1913a:15–16).

F. E. attacks here the Whig 'philosophy', in the background of which he finds Rousseau, Bentham, and Darwin and which, as he says, has agreed that "out of (the) free state of competition the fittest natural man would survive, and that his survival must conduce to the greatest good of the greatest number because he would be more intelligent and thrifty and hard-working than his rivals, and so would do more work and produce a larger economic output" (1913b:26). By opposing this stream of thought he opposes "social anarchy" which would be an ultimate result if a state would act according to Whig principles.

However, according to F. E., "the doctrines of the principal opponents of Toryism" are those of a (Radical) Socialist. The 'purest milk' he finds among "those Fabians who desire ... to graft the doctrines of the Platonic Republic on the English social system." Comparing it to "the Republic" Smith concludes that "it is a vast theoretic dream" and that "Plato himself supplies the best comment on it in his final admission that his whole system would collapse through lack of some kind of inherent vitality and driving power" (1913b:28–29). The so-called Fabian ideal would have denied the individuality of men (as free agents) in imposing upon them a corporate enterprise (*civitas cupiditatis*).[50]

The question one has to ask now is whether the brief reflection above refers indeed to a reading of the character of the state in terms of *societas*. If the problem of "the poor" was an outcome of Individualist politics, and thus a threat to civil society, and if the Socialist politics were to 'cure' this problem by imposing a *civitas cupiditatis* upon the state, then, in order to overcome these threats to civil life, were not the politics of Tory Social Reform a half-way acceptance of Socialist ideals and an approach towards a peculiar idiom of a corporate enterprise which Oakeshott has called a *therapeutic association*?[51]

According to Oakeshott, "the poor" was also a problem for those who understood the state in terms of *societas*. They were recognised to be a threat to civil association because their "erroneous belief that they had nothing to lose but their poverty made their willing instruments of an ambitious man bent upon subversion: 'all who have deprived their own country of liberty have made use of the poor'", he quotes Gulio Botero's *The Reason of State* of 1589. (1996:304) The only remedy suggested by the

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[50] For Oakeshott, this Baconian "*régime administratif* differs from the ... *régime gouvernemental* not only in being an engagement to compose a *plan général de travaux* and to make substantive decisions about how the enterprise should be pursued in contingent circumstances, but also in being a 'scientific' engagement, the concern of *lumières* equipped with reliable knowledge" (1996:292).

[51] In this case, according to Oakeshott, a "state is understood to be an association of invalides, all victims of the same disease and incorporated in seeking relief from their common ailment." (1996:308)

early thinkers was to be "relentless with such conspirators and indulgent with their unfortunate dupes." However, Oakeshott finds Hegel to be "an unequivocal modernist" who took a more sophisticated view of the matter, and this helps us also to understand the disposition of the Tories in their Social Reform policy. According to this understanding, modern poverty was a relative, not an absolute condition, and it was the counterpart of modern wealth rather than a sign of personal inadequacy. In the circumstances of modern industrial enterprise, the poor could be expected to dislike their poverty more than anything else, and they constituted a danger to civil association on account of their disposition to be persuaded that poverty would be abolished if a state were itself transformed into an industrial *universitas* in which equal rations for all would replace varying success in procuring the satisfaction of wants; that is, in the exchange of *their* indigence for a common servility. But, apart from this, and this seems to be especially relevant to Tory Democracy, great disparities of wealth were an impediment to the enjoyment of civil association; and this hindrance could and should be reduced by imposing civil conditions upon the industrial enterprise, and where necessary by the exercise of a judicious 'lordship' for the relief of the destitute. (Oakeshott 1996:305)

This explanation is appropriate to make Tory Social Reform more understandable. It is inherent in F. E.'s following statement: "Democracy is an attempt to weld civil society into a whole." (1913c:128) This idea is also strongly stressed by Lord Kilmuir when, in speaking about "the Shaftesbury tradition in Conservative politics", he claims that Tory Social Reform measures (referring especially to the Disraelian times) were "not intended as state interference in private lives but as part of that necessary framework of order and security without which freedom is a mockery" (1960:72). As Kilmuir says, Disraeli's social reform policy means essentially setting people up not propping them up, "it means help and encouragement, not indiscriminate state largesse; ... it means a strengthening, not a weakening, of personal and family responsibility; ... it means a right balance and real partnership between state and corporate or individual action; ... it means enlarging the area of freedom and creating the favourable conditions for individual effort" (1960:74).

4.2. The self-directed man *and the conservative disposition*

The first segment of the present chapter has argued that in the thoughts of a prominent Tory Democrat there might be said to be existent (in the form of assumption) the idea of *societas*. However, though the link between these two is direct, it is nevertheless not an elaborate one. The present segment tries to establish a basis to look for a stronger, albeit an indirect, tie.

This has been laid down by Oakeshott himself when, in speaking *On the Character of a modern European State*, he draws a parallel between the appearance of the idea of *societas* and a certain human disposition – to be 'self-employed' – in which a person recognises oneself and others in terms of self-determination. Oakeshott finds that "the contingencies of human character" might serve as "postulates in terms of which to understand a modern European state as

an association of human beings." However, the value of this parallel "depends upon the identification of these dispositions as historic self-understandings and not universal so-called psychological types" (1996:325).

According to Oakeshott, if "this sentiment of individuality" appeared in modern Europe as "a modification of the conditions of medieval life and thought," it accomplished its "noisy proclamation" in fifteenth-century Italy.[52] And although later it was "confused with trivial liberations, romanticised, mistaken for the exercise of 'subjective will', confounded with a 'sacred inner light' and with a banal individualism, and finally corrupted in being confused with 'sentience' ..., it has remained the strongest strand in the moral convictions of the inhabitants of modern Europe" (1996:241–242).

The reading of the character of the state in terms of *societas* can be supposed to entail certain traits on personalities in politics. It is, of course, legitimate to ask whether there is any explicit sign which points to this direction. It seems indeed to be the case if one recalls the talk over conservative disposition in the last chapter. The office of government, as understood there, is a specific and limited activity, it is not to "impose other beliefs and activities upon its subjects, not to tutor or to educate them, not ... to lead them or to coordinate their activities so that no occasion of conflict shall occur; the office of government is merely to rule" (Oakeshott 1991:427).

As Oakeshott says, if there is any general idea attached to the conservative disposition,

> *it is, perhaps, that a government which does not sustain loyalty of its subjects is worthless; and that while one which ... 'commands for truth' is incapable of doing so (because some of its subjects will believe its 'truth' to be error), one which is indifferent to 'truth' and 'error' alike, and merely pursues peace, presents no obstacle to the necessary loyalty* (1991:430).

A conservative in politics can therefore be supposed to reflect this understanding of the office of government through his person. And, as will be argued, such a typical personality is detectable in the case of prominent Tory Democrats.

4.3. The non-leader type of statesman

One of the most important general features shared by the three prominent Tory Democrats considered here – Benjamin Disraeli, Randolph Churchill, and Frederick E. Smith – is their obvious liking for the style of personal politics as opposed to its successful competitor, party-politics.

In the case of Disraeli, it is perhaps sufficient at the moment to refer to the last chapter where the outlined critique rested heavily on his obvious dislike of a (party-) political programme. Turning to Lord Randolph, Rhodes James has

[52] As Oakeshott claims, "with Luther it had been a pretext for a protest against go-betweens in the relations of men and God; Cervantes created a character in whom the disaster of each encounter with the world was powerless to impugn it as self-enactment" (1996:241).

correctly argued that he never belonged to any party. Lord Randolph belonged rather to the decaying era of personal politics, the era of 'old', conservative, politics. "It was the impact of his personality which was the great factor; ... he brought a gust of fresh air into the dusty confines of English public life" (1969:373). And his political skill was 'intuitive'. It has been therefore duly claimed that Lord Randolph contributed to British politics through his fascinating personality rather than by offering a political programme (Rhodes James:372).

F. E. was also an epitome of that mode of politics in which it was the personal style and fluidum that counted most.[53] Together with his friend and later colleague, Winston Churchill, although frequently at different sides regarding specific political questions, they shared a similar view on politics as such: it was also well manifested in their attempts to establish a so-called national coalition party (an institution which could supersede the factional interests of the traditional parties) in 1912.[54]

With Disraeli, one can easily observe the implication this personal style had on his career. If one follows Disraeli's ascendancy to the premiership, it is possible to see that as much as it was assisted by his fellow party-men, it rested on their acceptance of Disraeli's extraordinary capacities as a spokesman for the party; and importantly, Disraeli's own style of politics in no way encouraged anybody to follow him as a disciple. (See Jenkins, esp.: 61–64) This does not mean that Disraeli was acknowledged only because of pragmatic or opportunistic reasons, i.e. to advance party positions.

The same can be said about F. E., whose rise to the front bench was merely a sign of the Tories' acknowledgement of his extraordinary gifts as a speaker and debater, which were accompanied by unquestionable intellectual powers.[55] As much as one can say it in connection with the other two Tory statesmen, F. E. showed loyalty to his fellow Conservatives, but this term does not stand here for high feelings to some common cause, it denotes rather a respect towards men of equal quality, sharing a common outlook.

This was also the case with Lord Randolph who, although in the course of his meteoric rise "trampling recklessly on many dignified and sensitive toes," and

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[53] Probably the best account of F. E.'s personality is given in Campbell's biography (1991); see also the Earl of Birkenhead's (his son's) biography (1933, 2 vols.); on F. E.'s personality and role in the context of other Conservative leaders, see David Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain* (1985), and Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister* (1955).

[54] See The Earl of Birkenhead, (1933:I-209 and II-105); on F. E.'s and Winston Churchill's role in the Lloyd George Coalition Government of 1918–20, see Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity* (1978); for a social and cultural background of that time, see Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (1998).

[55] F. E. rose quickly into prominence in his party, and was appointed as one of the youngest and, what is more important, as it later appeared, most successful Lord Chancellor in the history of the Kingdom. In this post he showed unusual abilities and capacity to do equally well in three areas bound together to this office: as the leader of the House of Lords, as a top judge presiding over the supreme tribunal, and as a Cabinet Minister responsible for the administration of justice (See Campbell, 1991).

after only ten years of parliamentary experience, at the age of only thirty-six, was given a senior Cabinet position as the Secretary of State for India. (See Rhodes James 1969:193) As an outstanding public speaker, he was very much admired and respected by the entire House of Commons, and while yet in his thirties, he acquired a position in a way superior even to such a master of parliamentary speech as Gladstone. However, with Lord Randolph, the most important fact is probably that even a personality without a political thought proper could be unambiguously related to a political tradition.

If a conservative makes remarkable use of ideas and principles, as it was with Disraeli, then due to the non-rationalist essence of his thought he is accused of holding them anti-systematically, with "a small regard to precision and literal truth" (Smith 1967:12); if a conservative avoids theorising – playing with ideas and concepts – and if he still acquires a prominent position, he is automatically labelled as an opportunist. This label was stuck on Lord Randolph whose mainly emotional cry for 'Tory Democracy' sounded hollow to many contemporary commentators. But emotions are also real and can be honest, and a purely practical politics may be fruitful if it is based on enduring traditions.[56] What is important to understand here is that a politician might be taken seriously, and even more, a conservative politician might *be* serious, without a large and systematic weaponry of ideas and principles.[57]

Due to his non-systematic approach towards politics, such a non-rationalist politician cannot have political disciples proper to follow him, because he does not utter clear principles, which could be echoed by the followers. He does not reveal a general plan or a scheme to be followed by others, he only answers to the immediate political problems as they appear and the answers he gives differ in respect to the concrete circumstances. To a *rationalist* politician, however, not to assert a principle seems to be opportunism, for only through clear principles and ideals is it possible to go for progress.[58] To have disciples might also appear to such a politician as confirming his principles' respectability; however, if he has followers, there is also a danger of considering himself as a leader, a man to guide others. In contrast, outstanding conservative politicians appear essentially as *non-*

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[56] The Conservative party during Lord Randolph's times saw a large influx of the 'old' liberals to its ranks, and there was a danger to the party that it would be transformed into a mere defender of the propertied interests. This was something that Lord Randolph understood to be wrong, and he picked up the Disraelian tradition to appeal to the nation as a whole. "To rally the people round the Throne, to unite the Throne with the people, a loyal Throne and a patriotic people – that is our policy and that is our faith." Quoted in Winston Churchill's *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906:301).

[57] To Lord Randolph, to be a good Tory meant to stand for the maintenance of the 'ancient institutions', to appeal to the nation as a whole, and to 'improve the condition of the people'. The rest was the practical politics where a participant had to make best use of his personal abilities. (Churchill 1906:301)

[58] It is also much easier to follow a progressive politician as a disciple since it is possible to adopt a clear system of ideas without making a fool of oneself, which is not the case with imitating a peculiar personal style.

leaders: they can only be respected for their personal attributes, which cannot be copied. A conspicuous conservative is therefore rather like a chairman in a collective of equals.[59]

So does F. E.'s personality, which revealed itself through a fascinating career, help to further understand this particular character that seems to accompany conservatives in politics. One can, perhaps, describe its main component also as a 'free mind' which does not bind itself to rigid principles in the practical field of politics, enabling thus to develop a flexible and nuanced political intuition. Nevertheless, one cannot claim this character to be the only, or even the most relevant, assumption to the shaping of a conservative world-view, and vice versa.

However, to generalise that character, or the type of statesman: he is a free agent, who does not aim at leading others, nor does he want to be led by others; he is the antidote to the "individual *manqué*" about whose emergence in modern Europe Oakeshott also talks (1996:185–326); he cannot become a leader for he cannot have disciples; in practical life there is no truth as such for him, in practice there are only good or bad (better and worse) decisions and solutions to be reached; this kind of human character is not a good material for a missionary, he does not have convictions (principles) about practical life; what he has got are ideas and an understanding that can never be absolute;[60] the bearers of that character might even be acknowledged as chairmen in the sense of 'rulers' or 'judges', but this acknowledgement from the formal equals rests rather on the person's abilities; others can never be 'tools' for such a man for only through self-respect can they (others) find such a 'ruler'; as soon as the latter fails to recognise himself as a formal equal, he will lose his authority. (See also Oakeshott 1996:238–242)[61]

It is rather astonishing how similar a critique all three Tory statesmen have 'earned' in respect of their 'seriousness' in politics. All three of them were considered as masters of parliamentary and public speech, but their frequent use of irony and sarcasm made them appear to the public audience as clever, but not so serious.[62] Along the same lines, Robert Blake has claimed that Disraeli never

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[59] This is not to say that his position is thereafter more or less secure, it only means that the relationship between the first man and the others is essentially different in both cases.

[60] While 'principles' are taken as universal, 'ideas' appear to be rather of a temporary nature.

[61] The common traits in the understandings and personalities of the three Tory statesmen considered can also be traced to the above-mentioned concepts of rationalism (see note 42 above) and truth (see pp. 9–11 above). On the theoretical level, knowledge is understood as made up not only of technical knowledge, but as essentially partnered by practical knowledge. On the historical level, Tories appear to oppose the *progressivist* attempt to "exclude from the results of cognition anything which is tied to a particular experiential community." (Mannheim:61) Contrary to the *progressivist* tendency to seek knowledge about things "only to the extent that the findings about them are universally valid and universally understandable" (Mannheim:61), the Tories seem to bear the 'old' ways of thinking and experiencing which allow something to be 'true' also if not universally demonstrable.

[62] On F. E.'s speaking style, see for instance Campbell (1991:72–3, 153, 256–8); on Churchill's, see James (1969:115–18, 134–141); on Disraeli, see Blake (1966:153, 567–568).

was a grave statesman (1966:766). Drechsler admits that Disraeli is probably "hard to swallow for serious people". However, as he argues, if irony is important in his novels, it does not become dominating. (1995:223) The same is true when considering Disraeli's, F. E.'s and Lord Randolph's politics. Drechsler finds this ironic element rather an advantage: "a politician who knows about the ambiguity of his or her politics might find it harder to please the more naive; he or she is, however, generally not worse morally than someone acting by conviction." And, even more importantly, Drechsler claims that "he or she is also much less dangerous if one accepts the proposition that in human history the great catastrophes were caused by fanatic leaders, not by cynical ones" (1995:224).

It is, however, Oakeshott who gives a proper conclusion to the whole chapter in seeing irony as an essential element in the *conservative* style of politics:

> *Into the heat of our engagements, into the passionate clash of beliefs, into our enthusiasm for saving the souls of our neighbours or of all mankind, a government of this sort injects an ingredient, not of reason (how should we expect that?) but of the irony that is prepared to counteract one vice by another, of the raillery that deflates extravagance without itself pretending to wisdom, of the mockery that disperses tension, of inertia and of scepticism* (1991:433–434).

5. The Good State concept and its appearance in Tory Democracy

5.1. The ideas of the Good State and the Good Life

If the previous chapter attempted to study the limits of the possible area of action for Tory Democrats, then the present one tries to bring out its contents. And, as it seems, the reason why Tory Democracy has not sometimes been grasped in its full nature has largely come from the misunderstanding of this particular combination of features.[63]

Indeed, the fact that the status of the idea of *societas* as an assumption in Tory Democracy seems rather ambiguous at first glance has much to do with the prominence of the concepts of the Good State and the Good Life in this tradition. The Tory Social Reform was not merely an attempt to lessen the danger that "the poor" constituted to civil association, it was also, and maybe even more importantly, an endeavour to make it possible for *cives* to enjoy their membership of civil association.

However, it is fully legitimate to ask again here whether the idea of *societas* and that of the Good State are not essentially exclusive: does not the aim of the Good Life render the Tory cause one which leads towards *universitas*, a corporate association, united by a common interest? An answer to this question necessitates, first and foremost, an understanding of the meaning attached to this concept by its author, Aristotle. (See Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, esp. 1252b) According to Oake-

[63] I consider here especially Paul Smith (1967), Freeden (1996), and Blake (1966).

shott, while Aristotle speaks of *polis* association as having an "end" and as having the same "end" as human conduct in general, namely "the good life" or "human excellence", then this is not for him a substantial purpose but a formal condition. Aristotle appears to have thought that *eudaimonia* was difficult if not impossible to achieve in the absence of certain substantive conditions (e.g. good health and adequate material means), but that it is not itself a substantive condition of things.[64]

This was precisely the concern of Tory Democrats: to make it possible for the people of their country to be able to aim at "human excellence". Thus, as Tory Democracy focuses "on the neo-Aristotelian search for the Good Life and the Good State", it is, according to Drechsler, not surprising that social legislation comes from conservatives: "to 'interfere' can in many cases be seen by them as necessary, possible, and good" (1995:232).[65]

It is even possible to detect the prominence of the concept of Good Life in the Conservative party before Disraeli. According to Lord Kilmuir, it was the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885) who brought this – "rule for the good life" – out and "carried it into effect in his outstanding work in the cause of social reform" (1960:70). In this way, Lord Shaftesbury paved the way for Tory Democracy. However, to explore the 'real' meaning of these ideas in Tory Democracy, it is necessary to study Tory Social Reform as it was understood in the context of nineteenth-century Britain.

5.2. The historical meaning of Tory Social Reform

A political tradition finds its ultimate meaning in the immediate contextual circumstances. Being a historical phenomenon, Tory Democracy thus primarily signifies a distinct approach and a particular answer to the problems Britain faced in the period of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century.[66]

Nineteenth-century Britain saw tremendous industrial growth, rapidly increasing wealth, rapidly growing population; as Lord Kilmuir declares, it was "an age permeated with a spirit of progress, expansion, and wealth ... But it was also an age of 'dark satanic mills,' of *laissez faire* economics which deemed human labour a commodity like any other; ... an age of squalor in dwellings and filth in streets of towns" (1960:70).

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[64] As Oakeshott says, "it is an agent continuously disclosing and enacting himself in his own chosen actions while subscribing adequately to considerations of moral propriety or worth" (1996:118–119).

[65] What Drechsler actually talks about here is "Social Toryism," but in this context, this term can be used synonymously with "Tory Democracy." On this, see also the first segment of the first chapter.

[66] A collection of essays on the political context of the period considered is Ewen Green (ed.), *An Age of Transition: British Politics 188–1914* (1997).

F. E. defines the question of "the condition of the people", as "the most pressing of our problems to-day."[67] And it is precisely these social problems[68] that F. E. refers to in his essay "On the Future of the Conservative Party",[69] when asking: "What politician is so bold as to dare to talk of the Empire to men who cannot nourish their families, at the price gladly rendered of a life of grinding toil, and who know that its certain conclusion, when they have become the wastage of the industrial scrap-heap, is a lonely and a dishonourable death in a workhouse?" In asking whether anybody would think that "our existing slums will be tolerated for long or that they will be removed without public contribution", he strongly points to the need for government action. (1913a:18–19)

For F. E., then, as much as for other Tory Democrats, the above-described inhuman conditions were not unavoidable, as they obviously appeared to the apologists of the 'doctrine of the survival of the fittest', but could and should be improved in a civilised country.

However, Tory Democracy did not merely signify a critique of the contemporary "conditions of the people"; as was also argued earlier (see pp. 18–20 above), it marked a distinct answer to these problems, differing in contrast from its opponents: "The *laissez-faire* Conservative or Whig wishes the State to touch nothing; the Socialist, and in a lesser degree the Radical-Socialist, wishes the State to touch everything and to touch it in the wrong way." The Tory, however, "wants the State to touch some things but to touch them in the right way" (Smith 1913b:25–26).[70]

It is stated explicitly here that, though the Tories condemned the individualist approach, they were not willing to give up civility either, in order to try to get rid of the social problem, which the socialists appeared to favour.

Defining the meaning of Tory Social Reform, F. E. says that the "Tory principle must be based in this sphere as it is in others, first on the unity of the State, which Individualism denies, and second, on the conception of the continuity and stability of the State, which Socialism would destroy" (1913b:31).[70] For F. E. a little State capital may well be better invested "in training men to new trades or in finding them

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[67] In this sphere, F. E. finds such questions as "Food Prices, Wages, Rents, Land Tenure, Housing Accommodation, Health Conditions, Local and Imperial Taxation, Industrial Legislation, Poor Law, etc." (1913b:20–21).

[68] For a thorough account on the British social and political context at F. E.'s time, see Martin Pugh, *State and Society* (1994:109–162).

[69] The focus here is on the meaning of Tory Social Reform as it appeared mainly in the writings of Frederick Smith, for it was with him, that the social problem found its especially elaborated treatment; this choice is also made for the sake of balance, as Disraeli has elsewhere been widely dealt with in this regard.

[70] For an analysis of the divisions in the Conservative Party according to the understanding of the role of the state, see Ewen Green, "The Conservative Party, the State and Social Policy, 1880–1914" (1996).

[70] Smith sees "unity" also as "the sense that the nation is a single unit, and not a haphazard collection of conflicting individuals" (1913b:31).

employment rather than in paying for them, on and off, as more or less permanent paupers and the fathers of paupers to the end of their days" (1913b:36).

For F. E. the essence of Tory Social Reform is the study of the "real aptitudes of the people":

> *Humanity is composed neither of men struggling to arrive at all costs nor of men ready to sacrifice anything to a common end. ... most individuals tread the accustomed paths, and demand of life that it shall give them security, and security in the state in which it has pleased God to call them ... Security to those who need it, opportunity to those who desire it, on what a better foundation can the state of the future be built?* (1913c:45)

Social Reform was to be seen as an investment by the State in its future; F. E. traced it back to Disraeli, whom he saw as the great Tory social reformer; and even so much so as to claim that: "If Providence could have made Disraeli a dictator in the early 'thirties, there would have been no social problem today" (1913b:41, see also 1903).

It appears then that the Aristotelian Good State concept as a guideline of action shaped F. E.'s thinking to a large extent. The state had, for Tory Democrats, beside the duty of providing and maintaining the (moral) laws as "the rules of good conduct", an obligation to secure that the social conditions would not constitute an impediment for the people's enjoyment of civility. (See also pp. 21–23 above)

Although not being unambiguously used,[71] yet another Aristotelian concept seems to have had an impact on F. E., namely the concept of "mesotes":[72] he portrays the conservative "philosophy for the organisation of society" as the middle way between two 'vice' extremes, socialism and individualism:

> *The vice of Individualism is that it would hamstring man's power for co-ordinate advance and joint sacrifice; the vice of Socialism is that it would cut the other motor-muscle of character, the desire for the struggle, and for the award the struggle brings* (1913b:29–30).

F. E. thus marked the competing political traditions, Radicalism/Socialism and Individualism/Liberalism, as two impracticable and entirely academic extremes. (See 1913b:45) As was the case with conservatives in general, so F. E.'s

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[71] The idea of the *middle-way* is used by F. E. not only in the qualitative sense, but sometimes also as marking a simple compromise between the demands of the socialists and the individualists. (See 1913b) However, while arguing about Tory Democracy in the context of Socialist – Liberalist opposition, the former clearly represents a *qualitatively* different approach between the two alternatives: although acknowledging to a certain extent the emphasis the Liberals put on the individual, Tory Democrats also share the Socialist criticism of Liberalism. Nevertheless, this partial agreement with its opponents cannot be reduced to a compromise; being essentially different from its competitors it would be more correct to argue that the (distinct) parts of the understandings that Liberals and Socialists share with Tory Democrats, are (from the viewpoint of Tory Democrats) overemphasised by them.

[72] See Aristotle, *The Nikomachean Ethics*, Book II, esp. 1103b26–1104b18, 1106a1–1109b26; see also Nikolai Hartmann, *Die Wertdimension in der Nikomachischen Ethik* (1944).

philosophy rested "on common sense rather than on theory", which, as Campbell argues, "has been their strength in an imperfect world which never stands still long enough for academic formulae to be consistently applied" (1991:359). It is also strongly stressed in Disraeli's *Vindication of the English Constitution*: "Throughout the whole of our history we observe that the leading men who have guided the fortunes of our Commonwealth in times of great difficulty and danger have invariably agreed on one line of policy – namely to eschew abstraction. ... it is the principal cause of the duration of the English State" (1913:147).

If one now looks for the true meaning of Tory Social Reform, then it is to be found, along similar lines, not from abstractions, but from the historical situation. It was the thoroughgoing industrialisation and urbanisation of modern Britain that demanded an answer from its statesmen. And, as a part of the Conservative party, the Tory Democrats came up with an answer, which did not rely merely on abstract considerations but, first and foremost, on immediate observations.

Though maintaining as their highest aim the continuity of the British state, and its constitution as the main 'bulwark of civility', the Tory Democrats adjusted their principles to the demands of real life, which meant, above all, an acknowledgement of the nature of 'modern poverty', and its disastrous impact on the living conditions of the 'lower classes'.

It is thus, perhaps, justified to recall here the understanding outlined earlier, according to which modern poverty was a relative, not an absolute condition, and it was the counterpart of modern wealth rather than a sign of personal inadequacy. Great discrepancy in incomes constituted therefore an encumbrance to the enjoyment of civil life in Britain, and it could and should be reduced according to the understandings of the Tory Democrats.[73]

However, "welfare is essentially personal" according to the Tories' understanding. Therefore, it is possible to define Tory Social Reform as "of fitting all people to develop their qualities and play their full part in national life, of setting them up, not propping them up" (Lord Kilmuir 1960:72–74).

5.3. Towards solving the Disraelian puzzle

At the beginning of this essay, the supposedly paradoxical nature of Disraeli's Social Toryism was outlined: how could it be possible – a conservative politician and a collectivist approach? Although a more elaborate answer is, if at all, to be found in the passages above, it might nevertheless be appropriate to provide here a very brief one as well.

Thus, Toryism and democracy, conservatism and social reform, how do they fit together? Probably the best answer comes from history itself, and not from theory: as this essay also demonstrated, Disraeli's Social Toryism has been a very real historical phenomenon. As Drechsler demonstrates, it is possible as well, beyond

[73] It is inherent also in the following statement of Frederick E. Smith: "the fear of absolute poverty may make a man work, but absolute poverty itself destroys all desire for initiative" (1913b:37).

any myth or personal charisma, to come up with an inclusive list of characteristics of Disraeli's Social Toryism which, being quite similar if not identical to the alleged "myth", is not only a real but also a realistic concept. (See Drechsler 1995:234–235)

First of all, Social Toryism has its roots in the conservative *world-view*, which presupposes a fundamentally different way of thinking and experiencing as compared to its historical counterpart, the progressivist world-view. This is a fact that is frequently neglected, especially by those scholars who sympathise explicitly with the progressivist streams. (See, e.g., Smith 1967, Blake 1966, Freeden 1996, and Ffjorde 1990) The typical outcome of this neglect is the categorisation of the political landscape along the left-right divide, the conservatives belonging exclusively to the latter.

Secondly, it is illogical to suppose that Tory Democrats should have favoured, even at the level of rhetoric, thorough changes and an active policy on behalf of the state to cure 'the social ills'. The conservative disposition is the clue here to make Disraeli's 'cautious social reform' understandable.

Closely connected to the conservative disposition is a specific reading of the character of the state in terms of *societas*, a relevant assumption also in Tory Democracy. It provides a further, more theoretical, explanation for the limited role Disraeli, as well as the other two prominent Tory statesmen considered, assigned to the state.

However, it would be impossible to grasp Social Toryism and Tory Democracy without acknowledging the importance the concept of the Good State has had to the thinkers in the tradition: the British state, in the concrete historical circumstances, had a clear obligation and responsibility to improve the conditions of the people in order to make it possible also for the 'lower classes' to enjoy civil life, and to aim individually at the Good Life or 'human excellence'. (See pp. 28–33 above)

To conclude, one cannot leave aside Disraeli's personality either, for the above-outlined distinctiveness of the tradition can be said to have been reflected in his character as well. His Jewish origins and other unusual personal traits made him appear as thoroughly strange in the political landscape of Victorian England. On the other hand, his personal qualities make him an epitome of the non-leader type of statesman, distinguished as a common character in all the Tory statesmen considered in this work. Thus it is possible to claim that it was Disraeli who united Toryism with democracy, and conservatism with social reform in both his ideas and in his very personality.

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