Conservatism, Epistemology, Risk and Mind

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Introduction

An interesting recent series of papers has attempted to delineate the essential aspects of conservatism (Brennan & Hamlin 2004, Müller 2006, Brennan & Hamlin 2006, Brennan & Hamlin 2014, Beckstein 2014), in a world in which the death of conservatism, or at least the impossibility of being a successful conservative politician, has been trumpeted for some time. In these papers, conservatism is stripped down to basic components to try to uncover the fundamental philosophical position it contains. Although many conservatives claim that they are 'above', or possibly 'below' ideological or philosophical questions, and are purely practically focused, academic commentary is generally agreed that an ideological or philosophical core can be located, and there is a good deal of consensus as to where it lies.

Even some prominent conservatives would agree that their position is amenable to philosophical analysis and dissection. For example, Michael Oakeshott remarked that "the common belief that it is impossible … to elicit explanatory general principles from what is recognized to be conservative conduct is not one that I share (Oakeshott 1991b, 407) – although it is noticeable that in that essay Oakeshott goes on to pursue a different project, perhaps intending to hint that seeking the essence of conservatism is not the sort of project that is likely to uncover important truths. O'Hear makes a similar point – that although one might articulate conservatism into a set of principles, it is the kind of exercise that the conservative himself dislikes, because it carries with it the danger of erecting "principle and dogma over practice and habit" (O'Hear 1998).

However that may be, many of the controversies about the nature of conservatism, such as they are, can be dispelled by noting, with Samuel Huntington (1957), that conservatism is a situational ideology whose content in any specific setting makes essential reference to contingent aspects of that setting, and so it simply should not be expected that conservatives across the globe agree on policy matters. A written constitution codified in a single document is the bedrock of American political life, while this would be an innovation in the United Kingdom. Hence conservatives in these two polities are likely to disagree over whether a written constitution is a good thing.

In this paper, I wish to comment on the recent contributions to the debate about what conservatism is. Like other authors, my aim is to delineate something central or even,

dare I say it, essential to conservatism as very broadly defined as "an ideology predominantly *concerned* with the problem of change: not necessarily proposing to eliminate it, but to render it safe" (Freeden 1996, 332). As Francis Wilson argued in an interesting paper that is worth revisiting (and which I shall revisit in the course of this paper), "beyond all doubt, conservatism involves a theory of change" (Wilson 1941, 30). This is admittedly not the most original part of Wilson's paper, and indeed is not the only *desideratum* of an account of conservatism. If possible, any account should also illuminate, and make sense in the context of, at least some of the important political philosophers in the tradition of Burke and Oakeshott which is generally known as the conservative tradition. Given the promiscuity with which politicians and thinkers describe themselves as 'conservative' (cf. Brennan & Hamlin 2004, 676), this is always a bit of a balancing act.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section I will briefly summarise a series of papers about conservatism, from Müller, Brennan and Hamlin (including their direct response to Müller), and then a further commentary by Beckstein. Next, I will consider the importance to conservatism of a bias toward the status quo. Using a definition of conservatism that I introduced some time ago (O'Hara 2005) which emphasises scepticism, I will argue that a status quo bias is neither necessary nor sufficient for conservatism. In the next section, I will consider some of the consequences of the focus on epistemology in definitions of conservatism such as my own, arguing that the conservative is neither prevented from acting politically, and that sceptical conservatism can inherit some moral force. I end with a brief recap in a conclusion.

The argument unfolds

One plausible foundation for conservatism was given by Brennan and Hamlin as "a disposition that grants the status quo a normative authority by virtue of its being the status quo" (Brennan & Hamlin 2004, 676). These authors considered it possible that, phrased like this, it might be consistent with other ideological positions, because most ideologies – liberalism, socialism, feminism – are concerned with establishing ends, whereas conservatism thus described is not. One could therefore be, as David Cameron describes himself, a liberal conservative (or, perhaps more properly, a conservative liberal), if one sought the ends of liberalism while simultaneously recognising the normative authority of the status quo. The difference between a conservative and a rival ideologue was conceptualised in terms of utility functions. An ends-based ideologue would have a utility function that sloped away steeply from his ideal point, so that any position that was not ideal was unlikely to be acceptable either. Those of a more conservative disposition would have a more shallowly sloping value function, so that even if they recognised an ideal society it was less likely that they would value current society very far below it (Brennan & Hamlin 2004, 687). Thus built into conservatism is a status quo bias.

At the same time, Müller set out a more sociological characterisation of conservatism that drew on its multifaceted nature, suggesting it be defined across a set of four dimensions (Müller 2006, 361), which would pay due heed to the conservatives' claims to be uncharacterisable by a single set of dispositions or beliefs.

- The sociological dimension "is simply the ideology or the specific political program of a particular social group trying to hold onto its privileges" (2006, 361).

- The methodological dimension "is about a carefully managed process of change" (2006, 362).
- The dispositional dimension "is a presumption in favour of the past … and … a presumption in favour of the particular" (2006, 362).
- The philosophical dimension "implies a commitment to realizing a set of substantive values … [which may be] primarily vested in the importance of hierarchical relationships, or some more or less naturalized conception of inequality" (2006, 363).

Conservatism isn't a definite thing, but for someone to be properly counted as a conservative, "at least two of the four dimensions … need to be present" (2006, 363).

In a reply to this, Brennan and Hamlin accepted the value of Müller's multidimensional approach, but rejected three of the four dimensions as irrelevant, at least to the political philosophy task of understanding the rational force or otherwise of the underlying ideas. The attachment of a person to a political ideology, they argued, is no doubt interesting for all sorts of reasons, but says nothing about the conceptual structure to which he adheres. Hence the sociological dimension, on their account, is an expression of self-interest which is only contingently connected to the concepts involved (Brennan & Hamlin 2014, 233).

This is somewhat contentious, perhaps. For example at least one commentator has accused conservatives of being no more than selfish (Honderich 2005), while (Eccleshall 2003) argued that they are concerned solely with preserving inequalities, Worsthorne opined that conservatism is "about satisfying the strong" (Worsthorne 1978) and in an early paper Wolfe suggested that "there is no such thing as disinterested conservatism (Wolfe 1923, 236). At least some thinkers over the past century have considered that contingent social structures and self-identification with particular groups is important, and some (Wolfe, like Müller several decades later) thought that understanding interests essential to understanding conservatism.

Of the other dimensions, Brennan and Hamlin argued that the dispositional dimension is an aesthetic attachment that is not necessarily political at all (2014, 236). Meanwhile, the methodological and philosophical dimensions seem to collapse into each other (2014, 237), while they also questioned Müller's suggestion that hierarchy is a foundational methodological value for conservatism.

Brennan and Hamlin replied with their own analysis of the methodological dimension, which is the only one that is really relevant to conservatism as a political philosophy, and identified "three distinct ways in which a conservative can relate to underlying values or reasons for action" (2014, 234).

> First, a conservative might recognize the same values as the non-conservative but have a different attitude or posture relative to those values. We term such a conservative an adjectival or postural conservative …
>
> Second, a conservative might identify a value (or values) that is (are) not recognized by non-conservatives. We term such conservatives substantive conservatives, since their conservatism builds on a substantive claim about values. …
>
> Third, a conservative might … differ from the non-conservative in relation to empirical beliefs about the world. In this case the distinctly conservative

> disposition reflects beliefs about the way in which the agreed values fall in the world. We term such a conservative a practical conservative. …
>
> These three forms of conservatism, the postural, the substantive and the practical, may operate in any combination, so that rather than just three types of conservative, we may identify a total of seven … . (Brennan & Hamlin 2014, 234-235).

Finally, Beckstein weighed in to argue that practical conservatism "does not withstand scrutiny" as an option distinct from the other two (2014, 11), and that postural (or, as he termed it, adjectival) conservatism "is an insufficient basis for claims to true conservatism" (2014, 13), and so substantive (or, as he termed it, nominal) conservatism is all we have left. I shall examine his arguments in more detail later.

The conservative, properly so called, is therefore a substantive conservative who recognised at least one distinct value, which entails a positive bias in favour of the status quo. Conservatism means "to attach a value to the status quo because it is the status quo" (2014, 15). This does not narrow down the options for conservatism as far as it might – there are plenty of status quos (and hence the situational and relative aspects of conservatism highlighted by Huntington are respected), and indeed different aspects of the status quo may be highlighted by different thinkers.

Status quo bias

The idea of a status quo bias is conceivable and defensible, and was ably described by Gerry Cohen (2011). Cohen's analysis rests on three aspects of the value of existing things. First of all, they have value in virtue of its relationships to existing people. Second, they have value as particular valuable things (as opposed to being valuable because of the value they hold). Third, we shouldn't view everything as something to be potentially shaped by us. Destruction of something valuable is not bad solely because of the removal of some value from the world; removal of the thing in which that value inhered is an extra burden. And indeed evidence from psychology indicates that liking the familiar is a good adaptive response. In a dangerous world, it makes sense for an organism to react cautiously to novel stimuli, but it is also adaptive to begin to enjoy a stimulus if it becomes familiar and has not caused harm previously (Zajonc 2001).

Brennan and Hamlin were "drawn to the idea" (2014, 234), while Beckstein argued that "the attribution of existence value to the status quo is clearly distinct from doubts about policy outcomes and ends" (2014, 9). Yet the relationship between a status quo bias and the philosophy of conservatism is not quite so clear to me.

Firstly, there is the question of how we should judge aspects of the status quo which are not valuable, or of negative value. If we love something valuable because it exists, what attitude should we have toward something horrible – should we love it because it exists, or despise it because it exists? What is the conservative bias towards things of negative value? In favour of preservation? Or in favour of destruction? Is the existence important, or is it the value?

Secondly, there is the obvious point that the status quo is a deeply complex and dynamic set of states of affairs and power relations, and furthermore we must accept it over potentially varying periods of time. Do we accept the status quo of the moment, or the week, or the year, or of a culturally-determined decade (the swinging sixties)? In some communities, traditional hierarchies are removed for a period annually – for

example, the festival of Saturnalia in Ancient Rome where values were inverted, masters served their slaves, no work was done and no justice administered. Presumably it would not be conservative to include the status quo obtaining during that period as part of the bias. Similarly, the status quo has many attributes and properties – which are important, and which can be disregarded? Or do we accept everything current has implicit value?

In asking these two questions, we can see that the value-matrix of existing institutions, practices, dispositions and relationships is surely important, as well as their existence. It is not simply their existence per se that adds value to any existing value; this is a crude representation. We must also wonder which of their aspects confer value, and decide which things, or aspects of things, have positive value. Simply valuing the status quo for its existence seems rather to disconnect it from the value placed in it by existing people, which is presumably not the intention. How would a conservative discriminate between the fishing industry and the steel industry, were industrial policy to come under his purview? Which should be saved? Surely both, on this account. But even a conservative must be able to make policy distinctions between them. Of course, all commentators would accept that, but conceiving authentic conservatism as effectively involving a status quo bias creates an extra question for the conservative to answer.

Neither of these two questions is fundamentally problematic – solutions to these issues will no doubt present themselves in particular contexts. However, we do need to pursue the issue of whether substantive conservatism is sufficient for a clear account of conservatism.

Scepticism and risk

One of the alternative models of conservatism in Brennan and Hamlin's analysis is postural or adjectival conservatism, premised on "risk aversion in the face of uncertainty" (Beckstein 2014, 8). Certainly there are versions of conservatism that emphasise risk management, and at the cost of appearing narcissistic I shall quote my own (O'Hara 2005, 2007, 2011), in which conservatism is broken down into a knowledge principle and a change principle. Neither is sufficient for a conservative philosophy.

The knowledge principle is as follows:

> … because society and its mediating institutions are highly complex and dynamic with natures that are constantly evolving as they are co-constituted with the individuals who are their members, both data and theories about society are highly uncertain. (O'Hara 2011, 49-50).

Uncertainty on its own is not enough for conservatism. It does not constrain the politician in any way – indeed, as Ulrich Beck argues, politicians can often be "condemned to respond", pushed into taking action, *any* action, by adverse media reaction (Beck 2009, 41), and as a class they have not exactly adopted a humble attitude following their frequent policy failures (King & Crewe 2013). Someone uncertain about the effects of a proposed policy might easily reason that they will implement the policy as it might, for all they know, turn out much better than expected.

Hence an extra nostrum is required to furnish a rationale for opposition to change, as follows:

> … because the current state of society is typically undervalued, and because the effects of social innovations cannot be known fully in advance, then social change (a) must always risk destroying beneficial institutions and norms, and (b) cannot be guaranteed to achieve the aims for which it was implemented. It therefore follows that societies should be risk-averse with respect to social change, and the burden of proof placed on the innovator, not his or her opponents. It also follows that change, when it does come, should ideally be (a) incremental, (b) reversible where possible, and (c) rigorously evaluated before the next incremental step. (O'Hara 2011, 88-89)

In my book I argued that these two principles together are sufficient for a conservative philosophy, and indeed that many points of conservative consensus are entailed by them, at least in the context of a reasonably well-off and peaceful democracy such as the one in which I live. In this paper, I shall refer to the conjunction of the two principles as kp+cp. At this stage, I do not assume this is a conservative philosophy in the light of the argument in (Beckstein 2014), who recognises kp+cp as an adjectival, and therefore not 'true', conservatism.

There are three important points to note about kp+cp. First of all, there is a strong epistemological component running through them. This is of course obvious given that the first principle is a statement about our knowledge of society, or lack of it. Data and theory are flawed. Even in the big data age, the conservative will strongly resist claims to understanding and knowledge. The risks that the conservative detects in innovation, alluded to in the change principle, follow from that uncertainty. The risk of destroying value is ever-present, while the probability that innovation will achieve its ends is systematically overestimated by its proponents. This kind of adjectival conservatism not only raises the bar to innovation, but also strongly challenges the calculable cost/benefit view of politics put forward by the rationalist. Sure, we can still see politics as an attempt to balance costs and benefits, but these principles undermine any claim that such a balance is ultimately computable with any certainty. As Burke put it, "I am not possessed of an exact measure between real service and its reward" (quoted in Stanlis 1961, 266, and see Stanlis' argument about the contrast between Burkean prudence and Benthamian expediency).

The second point to note is that the value whose destruction is risked, it should be clear, is not fixed by this definition. Here, the definition takes note of conservatism's situational nature. The values in question – which could be moral, economic, nationalistic, religious or whatever – will depend on what a particular society or culture valorises. The conservative, on this reading, holds some values dear, but these will not identify him as a conservative (i.e. in the substantive sense). The values he holds will be, all things being equal, (some of) those that matter in his home society or culture. Any conservative is such that there exists a value that he holds, but it is not the case that there is a value such that all conservatives hold it.

He is unlikely to want to reason very deeply or in very complex terms about such values. The knowledge principle implies that there are limits to the certainty which can be produced by moral, ethical or other types of deontic reasoning, even though we may be tempted to do such reasoning. Hence the difficulties and complexities that progressive thinkers are wont to raise are usually dismissed. As Burke put it, "there are some fundamental points in which nature never changes – but they are few and obvious, and belong rather to morals than to politicks" (Burke 1887, 468), while Joseph Conrad – hardly a lightweight moral thinker – wrote that the "temporal world

rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple they must be as old as the hills" (Conrad 1912, xxi).

This epistemological thread in adjectival conservatism is important, but we must ask not whether adjectival conservatism is as weak as commentators such as Beckstein suggest, but rather whether it is restricted to epistemological claims. Can it say something important about politics?

Does the sceptical conservative exhibit a status quo bias?

The immediate task is to respond to Beckstein's argument (2014, 11-13) that adjectival conservatism is insufficient to be called truly conservative. The adjectival conservative may act like a conservative without actually being one, when external circumstances happen to be such that he is drawn to conservative actions or attitudes which may not obtain in different circumstances. The existing social order is indeed such a contingent circumstance, and so a liberal may be drawn to do not very much in a liberal society. The proof of the pudding, as Beckstein argues, is what the liberal/conservative would do in a socialist society (say), in which he might begin to agitate for change. His failure to pursue change in the actual society he finds himself in doesn't make him a conservative. On the other hand, if he behaves exactly the same in the socialist society despite not believing in socialism, then he could reasonably claim to be a conservative.

But does it follow that in the latter case "he or she must be a nominal conservative, who is inclined to defend the status quo" (Beckstein 2014, 12-13)? Well, yes and no.

Is kp+cp a species of substantive conservatism?

The knowledge principle and the change principle together make important claims about the status quo. As expressed in (O'Hara 2011), they entail at least the following points.

- Data and theories about the status quo are highly uncertain. Therefore the status quo is not properly understood.
- The status quo is undervalued by non-conservatives. "Criticism is almost baffled in discovering the defects of what has not existed; and eager enthusiasm, and cheating hope, have all the wide field of imagination in which they may expatiate with little or no opposition" (Burke 1968, 280). Broadly speaking, the ideologue who focuses on a particular end detects its absence in existing society. This then becomes a key aim of the ideologue's policy, because of his one-dimensional yardstick of what constitutes a successful society. On the other hand, the conservative eschews the idea of society having ends at all (Oakeshott 1975), and so – though he may well be critical of existing society – he is also appreciative of its positive aspects without a sense of contradiction.
- The positive aspects of the status quo are threatened by innovation.
- The negative aspects of the status quo may well not be addressed by the planned innovation.
- Change, by being incremental and reversible where possible, should (where possible) make it feasible to regain the current status quo were the innovation to prove unfortunate.

Now, I don't know whether this constitutes a status quo bias. Certainly this sort of conservative is not going to go about challenging the status quo without good reason, and will be able to furnish a series of arguments that make it more difficult for the innovator to alter the status quo. It may be that this *does* constitute a status quo bias. If it does, then it may also be that this sort of conservative is *ipso facto* a nominal or substantive conservative. However, it does seem that this status quo bias is derivative from the epistemological and other themes contained in kp+cp, rather than being first order. I am not fully confident in this judgment, but that seems to suggest that such a conservative is most likely not a substantive conservative, in that any status quo bias is derived from principles and values that are not unique to him.

In particular, the conservative himself would argue strongly that he does *not* have a status quo *bias*. His claim is that he values the status quo properly, while his opposing ideologues have a bias *against* the status quo. Again, it's not immediately clear to me from the discussions of Cohen, Brennan and Hamlin whether or not they would class this conservative's attitude as a positive status quo bias.

Is kp+cp a species of practical conservatism?

Kp+cp looks very like a species of adjectival conservatism, as it is pitched in terms of risk and epistemological scepticism. It is not obviously a species of substantive conservatism, as it does not incorporate values that are distinctive to conservatives, and does not obviously display a status quo bias. The definition does imply some crossover with the class of practical conservatives, in that the definition contains the empirical claim that the status quo is typically undervalued, especially by innovators, progressives and rationalists.

This claim is not essential; there are at least two other options. It is possible to flesh out the relation between kp+cp and the status quo using, not an empirical claim, but an epistemological one (albeit a disputed one). An adjectival conservative could adopt the so-called principle of *methodological conservatism* (an idea from the philosophy of science that is at best a distant cousin of political conservatism), which maintains that, given our interconnected belief set is highly coherent, the very fact that a proposition is believed becomes a reason to believe it (or, perhaps better, becomes a reason not to reject it, thereby raising the bar for a competing hypothesis that is equally justified by the evidence). Perhaps the most famous proponent of this idea is Quine (Quine 1980, Quine & Ullian 1978), and we can take a handy formulation from Sklar.

> If you believe some proposition, on the basis of whatever positive warrant may accrue to it from the evidence, a priori probability, and so forth, it is unreasonable to cease to believe the proposition to be true merely because of the existence of, or knowledge of the existence of, alternative incompatible hypotheses whose positive warrant is no greater than that of the proposition already believed. (Sklar 1975, 378)

So the adjectival and methodological conservative could argue, not that the status quo is undervalued by rationalists, but rather that in the absence of powerful evidence in favour of the rationalists' contention, it is irrational to reject the reasons and motivations for preserving the status quo. This is not an empirical claim, and so such an adjectival conservative would not necessarily be a practical conservative.

Having said that, maybe this is not an enticing proposition, for two reasons. First of all, methodological conservatism is hardly unchallenged in the philosophy of science

(Christensen 1994), so the adjectival conservative would be picking a fight on away ground. Secondly, as a matter of fact, many conservatives *do* make the empirical claim about rationalists undervaluing the status quo.

The second alternative is to deny the legitimacy of the innovation, and place the burden of proof on the innovator. Oakeshott simply digs in his heels:

> … this condition of human circumstance is, in fact, current, and … we have learned to enjoy it and how to manage it; … we are … adults who do not consider themselves under any obligation to justify their preference for making their own choices; and … it is beyond human experience to suppose that those who rule are endowed with a superior wisdom which discloses to them a better range of beliefs and activities and which gives them authority to impose upon their subjects a quite different manner of life. (Oakeshott 1991b, 427)

Oakeshott here doesn't go as far as Cohen, in that he doesn't say that "this condition of human circumstance" is actually *better* because it is "in fact, current", but rather that no-one has the right to change it. This is a line that an adjectival conservative could take which makes no empirical claim. However, even if the conservative endorses Oakeshott's claim, it is arguable that this is not an attractive position to hold in a vibrant 21st century democracy for two reasons. First of all, this principle provides no reason to *dissuade* the authorities from innovating, particularly in societies where innovation is popular. There is stubbornness in Oakeshott's claim, but no ground for resistance. Secondly, once more the debate will ultimately devolve to a wider controversy, discussed in some depth in (Oakeshott 1975), between two roles of government – as *civitas* (a neutral government which holds the ring for civil society) and *universitias* (an activist government which imposes its own agenda). The claim in (Oakeshott 1991b) depends on government restricting itself to the *civitas* role, which by his own admission is against the historical trend. And if a government with its own agenda has popular support (which many arguably do), then it is not clear that this kind of conservative has much of a response.

Arguments that the sceptical conservative is not a true conservative

However that may be, it does seem to follow from the knowledge principle that at least part of Beckstein's argument fails to hit the mark. He argues that "uncertainty about policy outcomes and goals is, to a very large extent, on any reasonable account … a kind of external contingent circumstances. … A person who had not been inclined to promote innovation in a situation characterized by conditions of uncertainty related to policy goals or outcomes, and is equally disinclined to promote innovation once those conditions have become much more favourable, cannot be an adjectival conservative only. He or she must be a nominal conservative too" (Beckstein 2014, 13).

Yet this unfortunately will fail to provide a test for the adjectival conservative who denies that the epistemological conditions could ever become more favourable. The uncertainty is endemic, on the adjectival conservative's account. So this kind of test of the conservative's propensity for conservatism, where the adjectival and the nominal conservatives can be pitted against each other in a game, can never happen because only one of the two sets of conditions can possibly obtain.

However, a simulacrum of this test can be imagined, and the adjectival conservative will fail it. Suppose the status quo is lousy (Syria 2014, say). Then the risk of

innovation is correspondingly lower, whatever level of uncertainty obtains (presumably quite high in a place like Syria). The conservative of the type we are now discussing will certainly not be "equally disinclined to promote innovation." In fact, he may welcome it. The risk of lousing up a lousy status quo is far less than the risk of lousing up a pleasantly functioning society. However, this test does not compare two different states of uncertainty, as Beckstein suggests, but rather two different qualities of life. Some judgments will be more certain – it is relatively certain that the status quo in Syria currently is a lot worse than the status quo in Luxembourg currently, although such is the complexity of modern societies that no doubt some people, even some Syrians and Luxembourgeois could be found to dispute such assertions.

So the status quo bias is not entrenched in conservatism of this stripe, but is conditional, as argued by Wilson who points out that "in no state of society have all interests reached an equilibrium which permits of complete coöperation and no struggle. In this sense, conservatism represents a functional value in existence, since the stability of a conservative society is a situation in which the conflict of interests and wills is muted and restricted" (Wilson 1941, 29). In other words, the conservative tends to be biased towards the status quo when everyone else is too. Existence value has to be significant, and the institution or structure must contribute to stability, before the conservative undertakes to defend it.

Beckstein allows that "one could argue that risk and uncertainty qualify not simply as possible contingent circumstances … but are permanent features of the human condition" (2014, 13), which I indeed do. But there are still three additional arguments against adjectival conservatism in Beckstein's paper to be addressed. They are structured so that each in sequence is a generalisation of the previous one. Hence refuting the final one should be sufficient to establish our purpose, but the discussion will be clearer if we take the arguments in order. Let us consider whether the intuitions they trade on are valid in the case of a person who subscribes to kp+cp.

First, there is the example of Hilda (Beckstein 2014, 13-14). Hilda is a communist, but because she realises that policies that move in her direction are unlikely to succeed and may even put off the glorious day still further into the future, she has made the bizarre decision to join the CDU. Beckstein argues that she is not a conservative; instead she is risk averse, all the while reasoning strategically. Yet Hilda surely does not buy into kp+cp. She doesn't accept the knowledge principle at all; it is because she (believes she) knows about the current, future and hypothetical states of society that she eschews moves toward change. She is risk averse, but has not adopted a sceptical epistemology. She also does not accept the conditions of the change principle – she does not believe that she undervalues the status quo, does not believe that she risks destroying beneficial institutions, and actively believes that the suggested radical policies will fail to correct the problems they are intended to. Her caution is soundly based in her own certainty. The combination of kp+cp completely fails to characterise Hilda's political logic. Although she outwardly appears to behave like one, she is not a conservative (of this type). Intuition is saved.

The second argument is that because Hilda isn't alone, the adjectival view of conservatism would "suffer from conceptual overstretch" (Beckstein 2014, 14). Moderate members of most political parties would fall under the definition of conservatism (although this is contemplated by Brennan and Hamlin (2006) without too much of an outrage to their intuition, so these are complex matters and our intuitions may not be a clear guide here). Exactly how we draw a distinction – if

indeed it would be helpful – between a conservative properly so-called, and an adherent of another ideology who happened to reason conservatively is not clear. The knowledge and change principles as I drafted them above are intended to appeal across political divides, or at least to be hard for ideological opponents of conservatism to deny. Beckstein is concerned in his own paper with defining 'true' or 'authentic' conservatives, and his project is intended to draw that distinction as clearly as possible.

It doesn't seem to me outrageous that someone who cleaved to an ends-based ideology might still be called conservative, if he often reasoned in the cautious way set out in kp+cp. His end-based ideologue colleagues might, however, balk at someone who always advised them not to act. Someone who reasoned in this way regularly would have a pretty watery commitment to an idealistic redrawing of society's structures and institutions. He would also believe that his theory about society was highly uncertain (not just that that there was a risk in applying it – by the knowledge principle, he would have no confidence in the truth of the theory itself). He would believe not just that innovating was a risk, but also, by the change principle, that the current state of society is typically undervalued by political thinkers, including presumably his fellows. He would not believe that his party's proposed policies could be guaranteed to address all the problems that they were intended to, and would be worried about their unintended consequences.

In short, he would not be a very strong ideologue, and his political thought would be highly conservative in character. He might be better characterised as a conservative whose values were congruent with another ideological group – for example, he might hold dear a value such as liberty or equality or the promotion of his nation, but he would clearly have very little confidence in his own ability, or the ability of his comrades, to achieve those ends. To that extent, he would sound very much like Montaigne.

> To speak frankly, it seems to me that there is a great deal of self-love and arrogance in judging so highly of your opinions that you are obliged to disturb the public peace in order to establish them, thereby introducing those many unavoidable evils and that horrifying moral corruption which, in matters of great importance, civil wars and political upheavals bring in their wake – introducing them moreover into your own country. Is it not bad husbandry to encourage so many definite and acknowledged vices in order to combat alleged and disputable error? Is any kind of vice more wicked than those which trouble the naturally recognized sense of community? (Montaigne 1991, 135)

Of course, Montaigne's status as a conservative is a matter of dispute, but his public-facing scepticism is, I would argue, at a bare minimum an important inspiration for conservative thought. The person that Beckstein describes, if he subscribes to kp+cp, would be motivated by thoughts very like those of the sceptical Montaigne, and if the conservative tradition wished to claim Beckstein's hypothetical realo for itself, it would surely have a strong case.

The third argument is that there is an undistributed middle fallacy in play, and that the champion of adjectival conservatism is confusing conservatism with risk aversion, based on their very similar behaviour (Beckstein 2014, 14). However, kp+cp has more content than merely a description of behaviour – it involves a set of attitudes to other ideologies, to the status quo, to theory and data, and so provides enough context to allow the necessary distinctions to be made.

This leads us to the question, implicit through this discussion, whether kp+cp is sufficiently focused to count as a version of adjectival conservatism (as opposed to a more complex type of conservatism with adjectival and substantive aspects). My intuition here is that kp+cp is largely epistemological and sceptical, with a few observations about political opponents and the complexity of society thrown in for good measure. It says very little about values, and is as written consistent with someone having green or feminist or liberal values at the heart of their philosophy. So I would assert that kp+cp is an adjectival stance (Beckstein 2014, 8, places it there) which is moreover entirely sufficient for someone to be a conservative properly so called.

Is a status quo bias sufficient?

The conclusion of the above is that a status quo bias is not necessary for someone to be a conservative. Let us now ask the converse question: whether exhibiting a status quo bias is *sufficient* to demonstrate conservatism. Let's take a limiting case where social scientists in a society consider that they have a quantifiable understanding of human value that, if not completely certain, is at least considered by all as good enough for policymaking. Suppose there was an institution which had been in existence for a sufficiently long period of time for a conservative to adopt it as one of his own. Suppose the social scientists determine that the value of the institution is 15 utils per person over the population as a whole, but the conservative, being conservative, argues that it has an extra existence value of 5 utils pp more, hence 20 utils pp. Now an innovator comes along with a design for a potential institution to replace the existing one. The conservative is dubious, but the social scientists determine that the value of this new institution will be 21 utils pp. The conservative, who accepts a status quo bias but holds no distinctively sceptical epistemological position, is now forced to agree that the new institution is OK really, and accepts the replacement of the old one. This is surely most odd, and not terribly conservative in fact or spirit. The status quo bias adds a little friction to the world of innovation, but not necessarily terribly much. It raises the bar, but otherwise acquiesces in the same determinable calculations of costs and benefits as the unconservative rationalists.

This does seem to be implied as a possibility by the specification given in (Brennan & Hamlin 2004, 679), where "one possible 'reduced form' of conservatism" has the following normative valuation function:

$$W(X_i) = V(X_i) - a(X_s - X_i)^2$$

where $a > 0$, X_s is the status quo, X_i is an arbitrary social state of which $V(X_i)$ is its normative value and $W(X_i)$ is its overall, all-things-considered, value. The subtrahend is always positive, so the greater the difference between the status quo and a possible social state, the greater the amount shaved off the latter's normative value. But if $V(X_i)$ was provably great enough, $W(X_i)$ might still prove large enough for the conservative to countenance, and indeed welcome, change.

The point is not that the conservative would accept change – that naturally happens, as all commentators accept. And of course few conservatives would work with such a formulation, as Brennan and Hamlin themselves point out. But what is relevant is that no conservative would even countenance such a position. These numbers, the conservative would say, cannot be filled in. The conservative's bias in favour of the status quo, which he is may accept he has, cannot possibly follow from or be

described by this kind of reasoning, because the conservative does not and will not reason in this way (implicitly nor explicitly).

In other words, although Brennan and Hamlin are properly aware that their characterisation is not explicit in conservative writings, we can go further and suggest that the outcomes of their characterisation won't happen either. If the conservative happened to behave in such a way as to instantiate this valuation function, then he would find himself on occasion arguing that an innovation should be made because either $V(X_i)$ was high enough or that $(X_s - X_i)^2$ was low enough. The status quo bias that the function subtends may feel conservative, but allowing reasoning about these terms into political discourse does not. The square of the differences may possibly be meaningful from a conservative point of view, but conservatism seems doomed if the V function is given any kind of credence as a useful parameter. At a minimum, the suggestion that these two terms might be commensurable and quantifiable (or might behave as if they are in conservative discourse) will put the conservative's conservatism under threat the moment he accepts it as plausible.

Thus this suggestion threatens, not to define, but to undermine the conservative project altogether. Again, there is a lesson from Wilson's work, where he asserts that "conservatism is not necessarily a defense of the *status quo*" (Wilson 1941, 39). His own suggestion, in support of that statement outlines different classes of conservatism in such a way as to provide some support for Brennan and Hamlin's ontology. He argues for:

> … the proposition that … there is a primary and a secondary conservatism. The primary or fundamental conservatism is broad in its nature, though it is constantly intermingled with the secondary or non-essential features of change. The conservative may well insist on the principle of private property while not maintaining the present system of the relations of production. … [As an example] the Catholic Church is a defender of private property, though it cannot be said that the Church is a believer in the current system of capitalistic production. (Wilson 1941, 33)

So there are key values or broad structures which the conservative will generally wish to preserve, while making concessions on secondary issues (Wilson 1941, 40). As well as private property, the common law, sound money, freedom of speech and worship, representative democracy, a multicameral Parliament, limited liability and the suppression of *ex post facto* law might count as broad principles of such kind. A conservative (in the United Kingdom) might defend all of these, while accepting (secondary) changes to their implementation, or small measures that are inconsistent with the broad principles yet insufficient to threaten them seriously. Using Wilson's nomenclature, Burke looks like a primary conservative, able to defend the revolutionaries of 1688 and 1776, and to advocate far-reaching changes to Britain's colonial governance during the Warren Hastings trial, because these innovations actually preserved enduring principles that the short-sighted government of the day was undermining. The French Revolution, however, was not an innovation of that character.

In these terms, Brennan and Hamlin's substantive conservative looks like the defender of the status quo against even the secondary changes. Could it be argued against Wilson's own assessment that the primary conservative that he describes is also prone to the status quo bias, and is therefore also a substantive conservative? In that case Wilson's primary conservatives and secondary conservatives are *both* types of

substantive conservative, distinguished from each other by the different level of abstraction from which they consider the status quo.

However, as the example of Burke suggests, it seems counterintuitive that the status quo can be properly described at such a high level of abstraction. Only a very unconstrained understanding of the term 'status quo' could lead one to suggest that the Glorious Revolution or the American Revolution left it unchanged. As Wilson argues with respect to inequality:

> Conservative emphasis has tended to approve the fact of inequality, but it has also accepted changes in the structure of inequality in any society. If inequality, and its obverse, power, remains a fundamental similarity in historical continuity, there is no argument implied that either X or Y ought to be members of the élite. (Wilson 1941, 31)

In this example, the conservative wishes to preserve inequalities – yet the ordering of wealth and power could change relatively dramatically, thereby upending the status quo, within that rubric.

We should of course be careful of concluding too much from this analysis, based as it is on a tiny sample of writings about conservatism. Yet two thoughts occur which it is hard to dispel. Firstly, the type of substantive conservative described by Brennan and Hamlin, differing in values from his fellows and exhibiting the status quo bias, is a rather narrowly-defined type of person, not typical of conservative thinkers in the tradition. Is a substantive conservative conservative at all? Beckstein argues that the substantive conservative is the only candidate for the 'true' conservative; Brennan and Hamlin don't go that far, but certainly contend that such a figure is conservative. On the other hand, Wilson does not quite assert the opposite, but writes as if conservatism is 'really' primary conservatism, whereas secondary conservatism, which unlike primary conservatism looks very like substantive conservatism, is something else (pig-headedness, perhaps). In terms of kp+cp, substantive conservatism is not conservatism. There is obviously a split here.

Secondly, with the exception of Beckstein, most commentators feel pressed to oppose substantive conservatism (or secondary conservatism) with another type of conservatism that is *not* centred on values unique to the conservative. Of these non-substantive conservatisms, adjectival conservatism as expressed by Brennan and Hamlin has a narrow focus, but primary conservatism (Wilson 1941) and kp+cp (O'Hara 2011) are relatively rich in content.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the central vector of content for adjectival conservatism. For example, kp+cp claims that data and theories about society are uncertain and because of this we should be careful how institutions and practices are treated – the orientation is sceptical. Conservative scepticism is not the thoroughgoing Cartesian kind that doubts everything. Rather, the doubt is whether we (either as individuals or as a collective) can be effective in gathering reliable information about the world, and how to act in order to achieve our aims, in the absence of a suitable scaffolding from the world itself. Brennan and Hamlin characterise adjectival conservatism as focusing on "normative risk" (2014, 234, and 2004), but this somewhat underplays the key function of scepticism. In fact, it plays two complementary roles in motivating conservative thinking.

One way of putting this to bring out the duality of conservative scepticism is, in the words of Enoch Powell, "the Tory prejudice that, upon the whole, things are wiser than people, that institutions are wiser than their members and that a nation is wiser than those who comprise it at any specific moment" (Powell 1990, 5). This proposition needs to be taken seriously – it is of course a metaphor but is not merely fanciful anthropomorphism. Institutions *do* act as stores of knowledge, experience and expertise and in certain circumstances can be treated quite properly as independent agents (Douglas 1987, Fuller 2002, O'Hara 2002). Although they obviously don't construct themselves, and cannot impose patterns of behaviour on people or communities, they are important in shaping the possibility of effective action in the world, and in retaining the information and, as Powell suggests, wisdom that a culture accumulates. Indeed, when we speak airily of 'accumulated wisdom', we should not ignore the need for a means for the accumulation to take place. Experience, if it is to be learned from, needs to be readily available, and our institutions, traditions and certain other constructs are essential for making that happen.

To say that things are wiser than people works on two levels: it entails attitudes to both collectives and individuals in conservative writings. Many accounts focus on the larger policy role – not only much of the *Reflections* but also well-known pieces such as Oakeshott's 'Rationalism in politics' (1991a), in which the ambitions of rationalist policymakers are attacked. Data is lacking, theory is underdetermined, the risk of top down innovation is too great. Yet there is also a micro-level corollary about the boundedly rational individual and his limited cognitive capacity. The imperfection of humankind has always been a theme of conservative philosophy, yet although most commentators focus on the contention that people are *morally* flawed, conservatives will also emphasise that people are *epistemologically* fallible too, and that this has political consequences.

In this section, I want to fill out the detail of conservative scepticism in more detail, to see how rich a project can be inferred from the bare bones of kp+cp. In the first subsection, I will examine the macro level and consider whether a sceptical policymaker will inevitably be paralysed into inaction. In the next, I will move down to the micro level, and consider what type of psychology is subtended by the adjectival conservative proposal.

Epistemology and engagement

As Oakeshott argued, a conservative-voting person might be quite adventurous – he might simply want government to leave him alone to pursue a radical idea of the good (1991b, 434). For the individual conservative, on Oakeshott's liberal account, the question of whether and how to act is not a political question *per se*. The conservative doesn't agonise about whether to do something exciting, like trek along the Annapurna Circuit. His concerns are that (a) society is stable enough to allow him to pursue his idea of the good, (b) government will not stop him doing it, and (c) if for some reason his pursuit of his idea of the good causes some conflict with other individuals' legitimate pursuits, government will provide some kind of procedure to resolve the issue. The conservative isn't restricted to cultivating his suburban lawn.

However, that doesn't solve the dilemma of the conservative politician. A conservative who conforms to the lugubrious stereotype of the master of inactivity will struggle in today's politics. He will need to persuade a mass media and a Twittersphere that are driven by novelty, innovation and problem-solving – unfortunately, the very things that his ideology is meant to hinder. He will have

problems with negotiation – the classic technique for which is to state an unachievable goal that is anathema to one's interlocutor, and allow oneself to be beaten down until a successful compromise is found. But if the conservative's starting position is epistemological humility, pluralism and compromise, who is going to find him a convincing opponent? Isn't he obviously going to cave in? Maybe a conservative politician properly so-called should simply bow out of the fray, like Lord Derby who "was not at all sure that the Conservative Party should hold office. To do so meant compromising with the process of change, with the risk of being egged on further than one intended by the opposition. In opposition, the party could bolster [Whig/Liberal Prime Minister] Palmerston's natural conservatism" (Charmley 1996, 2). Perhaps predictably, although Derby led the Conservative Party for nearly 22 years, he was Prime Minister for fewer than three (and then reluctantly).

Does the conservative politician have to abstain from action?

Nevertheless, the conservative is not condemned to such unadventurousness. The risk-based approach of kp+cp leaves room for political action. After all, no-one seriously accused Margaret Thatcher of lacking a talent for hard-nosed negotiation. Thatcher was often identified as a radical (correctly so on a number of occasions), but as I argue elsewhere (O'Hara 2013), her philosophy had prominent conservative aspects, at least until 1986 or so when she began to plot a measurably radical course.

Risk-based adjectival conservatism leaves it entirely open for a conservative to demand change, even radical change. When the state of a political unit is extremely dire, then the risk of change will be diminished. "To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely" (Burke 1968, 172). In the case of Thatcher, it was common ground across the political spectrum that the United Kingdom in the 1970s was "the sick man of Europe", its economic situation was terrible, voters and citizens were fed up with strikes and power cuts, and popular culture was nihilistic and anarchic. Although one conservative wing of the Conservative Party wished to make an accommodation with the trade unions, it was equally conservative to say that the current position was untenable and change was needed.

Certainly, conservatism should not be automatically equated to conflict-aversion. A vital, living tradition that is worth preserving will very probably be an object of discussion, debate and even controversy. Vital traditions "embody continuities of conflict" (MacIntyre 2007, 222). The less controversial is the status quo, the happier the conservative will be (Wilson 1941, 29), but that is not inconsistent with MacIntyre's point that a bit of argument and controversy is a sign that an institution or tradition is an important part of people's lives.

Thatcher's first term included an attempt to get the public finances under control by lowering public spending, reducing the government's involvement in the economy, and to provide a more stable business environment by undermining the legal protections of trade unions. It was the last UK government to emphasise its lack of control of the economy (an epistemological humility that was dropped when her second chancellor Nigel Lawson wished to take credit for the boom of the mid-1980s). All these were attempts to fix identified problems with British politics. Later in her period of office, the innovations for which Thatcher came to be known (e.g. the Big Bang deregulation of the financial sector) were more likely to have theoretical rather than practical backing, and to address no specific problem apart from perceived opportunity costs. If we consider Oakeshott's nostrum that "an innovation which is a response to some specific defect, one designed to redress some specific

disequilibrium, is more desirable than one which springs from a notion of a generally improved condition of human circumstances, and is far more desirable than one generated by a vision of perfection" (Oakeshott 1991b, 412), it seems clear that her first term policymaking meets the condition while the second two terms abandoned it.

So there is no conceptual problem with an activist conservative, even of the milk-and-water adjectival type, as long as he is able to argue that the current situation is rotten enough to justify action. That leaves the problem that his sceptical epistemology will let him down when it comes to deciding *what* action is justified: "the weakness of conservatism appears in not knowing always what are the fundamental propositions supporting its manner of living, and in inability to judge the consequences of political and economic mutation" (Wilson 1941, 29).

What should a conservative politician do?

In practice, the weakness may not be as glaring as it appears in the abstract. As Freeden points out (1996, 336ff), the conservative's contributions to policy will often be intending to confound the innovator or the rationalist. The conservative is there to protect, and what is under threat is usually evident. The conservative's political discourse will be crafted around the threats he perceives. It is also important to go beyond "the boiling point of the moment" (Wilson 1941, 30). Wilson notes that social change is an interesting indicator of the 'fundamental' institutions and practices the conservative will seek to conserve: "the conservative looks upon similarities and dissimilarities in social change, and the 'fundamental' is practically always the similarity between two periods" (Wilson 1941, 30). Neither of these heuristics is an essential part of conservatism, and would probably fall under Müller's sociological dimension. But between them, Freeden's suggestion to look at what radicals are trying to change, and Wilson's idea that continuities over time will be valorised, can sharpen the conservative's palette of policy options. They also take the sociological dimension away from Müller's focus on interests towards something a little more informative for the student of ideology.

Conservative nostrums, such as pessimism about human nature, help differentiate its predictive task of understanding change from the analogous task for radicals and progressives. The conservative argues that at least some humans will always try to game any new system in creative and unpredictable ways, as they have always done. The only reason we understand how people work around today's systems, and can therefore adapt to those systems' inadequacies, is that the systems are in place and the unpredicted behaviour is there to observe. Indeed, some sociologists have gone so far as to argue that designed systems can *only* work if we leave room for the workarounds (Scott 1999).

The conservative's charge against the radical is that he is handicapped by having to present a system design that he cannot prove will survive the first contact with the enemy. The radical's optimism about human nature works to his disadvantage. The conservative does not need to argue that it is *correct* to be pessimistic about human nature (although many conservatives do – this is a bold claim and not needed to support his point). The weaker claim, that a system that functions successfully *without* requiring an optimistic view of human nature is more likely to function whether or not people behave well, is adequate for the conservative's purpose. The conservative concludes that his own ideas about the future, even if not accurate in detail, are less likely to impose risk on society.

The situated mind

Scepticism is important at two levels in conservatism, as noted above. As well as having things to say about high policy, conservatives also maintain that ordinary life is facilitated by a regimen of epistemological humility. If things are wiser than people, it follows that people are less wise than things.

> We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would be better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages. … Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature. (Burke 1968, 183)

The psychology of epistemological weakness

This epistemological frailty has been amply confirmed by generations of psychologists and social scientists (Evans & Frankish 2009, Kahneman 2011). Kahneman draws a distinction between two epistemological pathways within the human psyche, which he calls System 1 and System 2. System 1 is a set of evolved responses to the immediate needs of a body in a potentially hostile environment, while System 2 is a set of rationalising methods for coming to a reflective, reason-based view. System 1 is an automatic, speedy decision-making process which has little sense of voluntary control, deals in associativity, neglects ambiguity, suppresses doubt, generates limited and basic assessments of the current environment, focuses on existing evidence (ignoring the possibility of absent evidence), gives unduly high weight to low probabilities, and is biased to confirm rather than to challenge hypotheses (Kahneman 2011, 105). These are characteristic of decision-making where time is short, the stakes are not high, or we are otherwise unreflective about our own cognitive behaviour.

System 2 can correct these biases, but it imposes a surprisingly heavy cognitive and physical load when it operates (Kahneman 1973, Gevins et al 1997, Vergauwe et al 2010, Kool et al 2010). Broadly speaking – given the giant gap between 18th and 21st century understanding of the mind, we can only speak broadly – Burke's instincts on humankind's intellectual limitations were sound. We need systems "of ready application in the emergency." His description in this part of the *Reflections* is little to do with high policy, and everything to do with the actions and decisions of the individual. The institutions and traditions of a society or culture provide the individual with resources to spread the cognitive load of choice and decision-making.

System 1 economises on the cognitive load. In a sense, Burke describes a proto-System 3 where the load is not reduced, but shared across a society's members (past, present and future). In the individualistic methodology of experimental psychology, this would be described as a series of social decisions to engineer the environment in such a way that System 1 becomes more reliable. Yet as those social engineering decisions are generally unconscious, and are often emergent from a series of behaviours collected and aggregated at scale, there is a powerful temptation, which I propose not to resist, to use the metaphor of a System 3 that is not based solely in the individual's mind, although the individual remains the locus of decision-making.

Indeed, the temptation is strengthened when we consider that, at least sometimes, System 2, the reasoning part of the mind, is outperformed by an aggregation of instant System 1 decisions of a group of people. The micro and the macro can come together in the conservative tradition when a low opinion of expertise produces a respect for the wisdom of crowds. The practical wisdom and native wit of the common man, supported by stable and familiar institutions, can correct the ideas of experts. "In my course I have known, and … have co-operated with great men; and I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business" (Burke 1968, 281). The mechanism that brings the observations of those "much inferior in understanding" to bear is what I am calling System 3. In more recent times, the Internet has proved an enticing aggregation mechanism for conservative sceptics about government (Carswell 2012).

The various bases of cognition

System 3, then, is the "general bank and capital" of reason, and people who are properly connected to System 3 – in other words, people familiar with the society and its assumptions – can socialise their reasoning about moral and other matters. Such familiarity will vary from person to person; some people are highly attached to and embedded in their societies, while others are more cosmopolitan and have a weaker but still significant connection with a range of societies. Some people are marginalised – immigrants, say, or convicted criminals – and their connections and support networks are concomitantly weaker. Different people function differently in different strata of society – the manual labourer might stereotypically function better in the local pub than the senior common room, while the don's functioning will have the opposite pattern. Sometimes an environment is consciously altered to make some people feel less at home there, and others more so – for example, the institutions surrounding football spectatorship were deliberately engineered ('gentrified') in the UK after a wave of hooliganism in the 1970s and 1980s to make it a more family-friendly, middle class pursuit. All such changes alter people's System 3 cognition, for better or worse.

This thought takes seriously the words of the change principle that individuals and social institutions co-constitute each other, and brings us onto the close link between conservatism and the philosophy of situated cognition, the idea that cognition cannot properly be understood without regard to (aspects of) the context. Burke argued that cognition depends, to a certain extent, on traditions and institutions (see also Douglas 1987), and the socialisation of identity, cognition, reasoning and rationality is an important aspect of his philosophy. In a similar vein, (Marsh 2012) argues that the commonalities between Oakeshott and Hayek can be found in a shared commitment to situated or socialised mind, which (i) retains the individual as the locus of cognition while socialising its content, and (ii) justifies their epistemic scepticism.

Other types of situatedness have been theorised by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and computer scientists (in general, these thinkers do not have specifically conservative agendas). As well as Burke's ideas, it has also been suggested that understanding cognition requires essential reference to:

- Its embodiment in a physical form (Huxley 1950, Brooks 1991, Niedenthal 2007).
- The engineered, built and managed environment (Clark 1997).

- The sociolinguistic environment, or the language games we play (Wittgenstein 1953).
- The current state of scientific understanding (Putnam 1975).
- The information that is generated about us and which is used to determine our choices (Floridi 2011).
- Our social networks, offline and online (Somers 1994, Stryker & Burke 2000, Spears et al 2007, Ellison 2013).
- The online environment generally (Carr 2010, Smart 2014).

I have not considered any of the other seven types of situated cognition argument listed above in any detail, and this paper does not depend on resolving the relevant debates. My points are simply that (a) as well as Burke, a number of thinkers with no political agenda have gone down the route of describing mind in terms of its relations with context or environment, and (b) these types of situated cognition are neither dependent on each other nor mutually exclusive, so one can pick and choose according to taste. Ultimately, they will all support a type of conservatism (with the possible exception of the embodiment argument), although of course each will motivate the preservation of a different aspect of the environment or context. It may be that the particular types of situated cognition that the conservative affirms constitute further empirical facts held by him, marking him down, in Brennan and Hamlin's terms, as a practical conservative.

To summarise, then, epistemological scepticism bears on conservatism at two separate levels. First of all at the high level, the conservative policymaker doubts the ability of rationalists to determine their policies' impact on a society (Oakeshott 1991a). The risk the conservative detects is that important and valuable institutions will be damaged and unable to perform their (perhaps unnoticed) societal functions in the future.

Secondly, at the lower level, citizens' behaviour and understanding of the world are inextricably tied to their social, cultural and institutional context. Their System 1 thinking can be augmented by effective System 3 heuristics which exploit deep, intuitive and unconscious knowledge of (and confidence in) their embedding society. Change that society too radically, and people will be forced to fall back on flawed System 1 thinking, or to reason slowly and laboriously using System 2. They will therefore make poor decisions, morally and otherwise, for themselves and society.

An ethical dimension emerges

The spectre raised by change and innovation is not simply the introduction of flawed decision-making, but that potential violence might be done to a person's identity. As Oakeshott has it, "change is a threat to identity … [b]ut a man's identity (or that of a community) is nothing more than an unbroken rehearsal of contingencies, each at the mercy of circumstances and each significant in proportion to its familiarity" (Oakeshott 1991b, 410).

Tracing scepticism through to a view of situated cognition, an ethical argument for conservatism emerges alongside the practical ones. It is this: if people's identities, and the contents of their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs are at least partially formed by their relationship with their social, physical or informational environment, and if we are concerned to protect their autonomy, then policymakers ought to try to ensure

continuity of the relevant aspect of the environment, and to take the risk of change seriously. The change principle above includes a statement about the risks to beneficial institutions and norms, and under this rubric must come the potential for identity formation, support for preference formation and the socialisation of individuals within a society. The benefits of institutions and norms are not just felt at the policy level; they are also important psychologically. Because they are psychological benefits, they demand an ethics of protection, and so via what may sound like a practical set of nostrums like kp+cp comes the ethical and moral force of conservatism.

But note that this doesn't purport to be a derivation of an ought from an is; it doesn't ground ethical principles in epistemology. As well as the sceptical epistemological premise, an ethical premise (that we should be concerned to protect the autonomy of citizens) is also in evidence. Given that ethical principle, the sceptic can show the ethical value of conservatism.

In this section I have been putting some flesh on the bare bones of the adjectival conservative. If we are now talking of values, is there a danger that such a conservative is inevitably going to be a substantive conservative too, thereby helping confirm Beckstein's point that true conservatism is substantive? The derived ethical principle may look like the part of Cohen's account of the status quo bias, that things are valuable in virtue of their relations with existing people (2011). However, this is only part of Cohen's account, and the ethical dimension I describe here is derivative from ideas stemming from the epistemological analysis, rather than being an independent axiom. Hence this ethical dimension doesn't show the adjectival conservatism we have been fleshing out to be a type of substantive conservatism as well. All the values it contains are likely to be shared by non-conservatives.

Conclusion

I appreciate that the foregoing only scratches the surface of this somewhat deep topic. My aim has been twofold. First of all, I have tried either to defend the idea of adjectival conservatism as an authentic form of conservatism, or, failing that, to demonstrate that epistemological considerations are vital for any kind of sensible conservatism, by presenting the kp+cp conception of conservatism. I am not sure I have achieved either of these. I am genuinely uncertain as to whether kp+cp is *solely* a species of adjectival conservatism, or whether it is an amalgam of adjectival, substantive and practical conservatism, but it certainly is a species of adjectival conservatism. Hence, if my arguments have hit the mark, then at a minimum I would claim a place in the conservative pantheon for us adjectivalists. At a maximum, I would throw out all non-adjectivalists.

Secondly, I have also tried to demonstrate that this kind of conservatism is not a "decaffeinated construct", as the kp+cp amalgam was once dismissed (Economist 2011). Granted, the conservative who adopts the kp+cp scheme would do less than many governments now do. This is not necessarily a bad thing. When (O'Hara 2011) appeared, many reviewers remarked that, in the words of one, "the [British government's current and supposedly successful] intervention in Libya would not have passed muster" (Ford 2011). The aftermath of that intervention shows conservatism's longer and more pessimistic view might perhaps have been a more accurate and sensible one. Other views in the book that were strongly contested upon publication included a complaint about politicians' love for *grands projets* – we now

see that the British government is determined to push forward with the HS2 high speed rail project, despite the lack of evidence in its favour – and a warning not to try to reform the National Health Service, an undertaking now recognised by senior Tories as their "worst mistake" (Iacobucci 2014). So in defence of (O'Hara 2011) I would suggest that caffeinated politics have an unfortunate tendency to keep one up all night.

Apologies for the self-justification, which I realise is inappropriate for an academic paper, but I have wanted to get that off my chest for three years. However, the main thing I wished to add in conclusion was that despite all that, epistemological scepticism is not a bar to effective political action, and that at least some of Margaret Thatcher's actions are evidence of that. I also argued that despite the epistemological focus of scepticism, when we follow through its dual role in conservative ideology, some ideas in social psychology amounting to a theory of mind are also suggested. Hence adjectival conservatism is not empty of entailments, and it is an essential component of any rich conservative account of the world.

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