

POLITICAL SCIENCES

CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

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Abstract

Over the centuries, conservatism has manifested as a multifaceted political and cultural force across both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, shaping the trajectories of nations and the beliefs of their peoples. While both European and American conservatism are rooted in a reverence for tradition and a disdain for radical change, the historical, socio-political, and cultural contexts in which they have developed have led to different characteristics and emphases. Although their principles and values share some similarities, they are often significantly different. European conservatism, deeply tied to the continent's monarchical, religious, and revolutionary heritage, often exhibits a complex interplay of European and supranational trends. In contrast, American conservatism, born from the revolutionary break with colonial rule and the vast frontier spirit, intertwines with themes of individualism, federalism, and capitalism in ways unique to its New World context. Over the centuries, conservative political thought, in the face of deeply rooted British and French traditions, has outlined as distinct socio-political landscapes. This analysis will point out the nuanced differences and shared principles that have defined and shaped the conservative ideologies of both nations, thereby indicating the fundamental principles and values of conservatism traditional to Western societies. A proper analysis requires stating that the scope of this analysis is primarily directed towards examining the internal content of conservatism and the genesis of its principles and values. Historical events and their consequent outcomes, while significant, fall outside the scope of this specific study.

Keywords: *conservatism, principles, values, conservative thoughts, conservative philosophy, conservative principles and values*

Throughout the centuries, conservative political thought, embodied by the deeply rooted traditions of Britain and France, has manifested as distinct socio-political landscapes. In this analysis, we will highlight the nuanced differences and shared principles that have defined and shaped the conservative ideologies of the two nations.

British conservatism, personified by figures such as Edmund Burke, embraces the principle of evolutionary change, advocating for gradual adaptations rooted in established traditions and societal wisdom.¹ This perspective is based on a deep respect for historical continuity and skepticism towards sudden societal changes. In contrast, French conservatism, especially in the 19th century, displays pronounced reactionary elements, with many conservatives longing for a return to the old regime following the upheavals of the French Revolution.² These reactionary tendencies often harbor skepticism towards rapid social changes and aim to restore previous social and political orders. While both traditions are cautious about sudden change, British conservatism tends to view change as a natural evolution, whereas certain strands of French conservatism seek to revert to earlier states of social order.

British conservatism places significant emphasis on the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, viewing Parliament as the supreme legal authority - every act of

Parliament or any part of an act of Parliament that makes a new law, or repeals or amends an existing law, must be adhered to by the courts.³ This respect for parliamentary sovereignty stems from the history of constitutional monarchy and the gradual diminution of monarchical powers in favor of elected representatives. On the other hand, French conservatism is strongly influenced by Catholicism, with the Catholic Church historically playing a central role in shaping political and social norms. Counter-revolutionary theory in France highlights the inseparable link between the political and religious spheres, with even many theorists adopting a theological viewpoint to interpret the events of the French Revolution. Figures such as Maistre, Bonald, and Chateaubriand, while starting with political analysis, invariably anchor their perspectives in religious principles, emphasizing the indivisibility of power and its acquisition predominantly through tradition, rather than individual reasoning.⁴ While both principles - parliamentary sovereignty and Catholicism - reflect reverence for established authority, they manifest differently, emphasizing legal-political power in Britain and religious-moral authority in France.

In the realm of conservative political thought, British Toryism and French Gaullism stand out as emblematic principles, each deeply rooted in the history of their respective nations. While Toryism precedes the

¹ Burke, Edmund (1790) *Reflections on The Revolution in France*. McMaster University, Social sciences., pp.29

² Özsel, Doğançan (2014) The theme of change in the conservative ideology. *Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume VII, Number 2. pp.63-64

³ Dicey, A. V. (1885). "Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution." LibertyFund, Inc., pp.152

⁴ Nyirkos, Tamás (2019) *Christianity and Conservatism: Theology of the French Counterrevolution*. Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Department of International Studies and Political Science. Available at google scholar. pp.3-4

formalization of conservatism as an ideology, and Gaullism emerged around World War II, both encapsulate the foundational principles of conservatism, unique to England and France, respectively. The term Tory in Britain appeared in the 18th century to denote a parliamentary faction that demonstrated loyalty to the crown and support for the English monarchy and the Church of England. The specific traits of the Tories as a term are traditionally associated with respect for the crown, English tradition, hierarchy, the concept of society, and duty to the country.⁵ In England, the existence of a strong national monarchy and a national church allows for conservative defense of both.⁶ Gaullism is a form of conservatism rooted in the political principles and strategies of Charles de Gaulle during and after World War II, emphasizing national independence, strong central governance, and a distinctive French identity. Gaullism aimed to stabilize as well as to blend pride with normalcy, rather than opposing pride with anger.⁷ It, as a political movement whose activities have always been focused on elections, parliamentary life, and governance⁸, advocated for France to regard its existence as a world power, relying solely on its own interests.⁹ In the comparative analysis, Toryism and Gaullism are outlined as emblematic frameworks, clarifying how England and France have historically shaped their conservative principles in tradition, national identity, and centralized governance.

Robert Eccleshall, honorary professor of politics at Queen's University Belfast and an expert in political ideologies, especially English conservatism, presents the book "English Conservatism from the Restoration: An Introduction and Anthology". Based on the first chapter, titled "Principles in Abundance", the author of the current study will highlight some of the key principles of conservative thought in Great Britain. First, English conservatism is anchored in a mistrust of radical social changes, preferring the wisdom of time-tested structures and advocating for cautious, gradual reforms. Second, it emphasizes the values of duty, loyalty, and submission to the established state authority as crucial for maintaining social order. Third, English conservatism recognizes property, both as an inheritance of accrued wealth and as a result of entrepreneurial efforts, without this being in contradiction to authoritative leadership and social stability. The fourth distinctive feature of conservatism in Britain is its resistance to egalitarian

reforms, defending the preservation of traditional social hierarchies and the authority of the state. Lastly, although sometimes aligned with free-market ideologies, the consistent principle of conservatism is a stable state authority that ensures public order and maintains established hierarchies.¹⁰ Here, it can be added that British conservatism provides a kind of continuum of ideas, encompassing the main structural transitions of all Western capitalist societies. The two transitions of particular importance here are the primary, from a predominantly agrarian rural society to a predominantly industrial society, and the secondary, from an entrepreneurial industrial society to a managerial or bureaucratic industrial society.¹¹

In the Catholic monarchy of France—where the "Ancien Régime" was overthrown and subsequently, at least partially restored—it was inevitable for a conservative faction to emerge. Conservatives categorically opposed the principles of the French Revolution and fervently advocated for the restoration of the powers of both the king and the church, illustrated by figures such as de Maistre, Bonald, and Donoso Cortes.¹² The fundamental principle of the religious character of the French monarchy, as well as conservatism regarding religion, emphasizes the inseparable link between Christian ethics and Authority, where "Authority" derives from the divine power of God, manifested in Creation. This principle underscores that any challenge to this concept of power could compromise the qualities humanity derives from it, with the Christian ethical framework deeply rooted in divine guidance and the central role of the Church as the embodied authority, connecting God and Man.¹³ Another principle of French conservatism, shaped by Bonald in his critique of individualism developed by Rousseau in "The Social Contract," is that people have no power over the laws of society because the world is a Divine creation—everything is made possible only through God's will, not as a result of mere human activity.¹⁴ In France, Catholic traditionalist conservatism emphasizes that the successful functioning of capitalist society depends on pre-market and non-market institutions and cultural practices. Concerns about whether the cultural effects of the market will undermine these institutions and practices have engaged the care of conservative social and political thought.¹⁵ In the principles of French conservatism, we can summarize that there is a deep rootedness in the

⁵ Gjorshoski, Nikola (2015) Doctrinal and ideological paradigm of the conservatism in the western european countries. Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Vol. 1, No. 1, ISSN 1857-9760, pp.3

⁶ Huntington, Samuel P. (1957) Conservatism as an Ideology. The American Political Science Review, Vol. 51, No. 2., pp. 464

⁷ Edmund Fawcett, Edmund.(2020) CONSERVATISM, The Fight for a Tradition. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.pp.319-325

⁸ Demker, Marie(1997) Changing party ideology.Gaullist Parties Facing Voters, Leaders and Competitors.SAGE Publications.pp.408-409

⁹ Gjorshoski, Nikola (2015) Doctrinal and ideological paradigm of the conservatism in the western european countries. Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Vol. 1, No. 1, ISSN 1857-9760. pp.5

¹⁰ Eccleshall, Robert (1990) English conservatism since the restoration.An introduction and anthology. Academic Division of Unwin Hyman Ltd. pp.1-19

¹¹ Harris, Nigel (1968) Beliefs in society. The problem of ideology. London, C.A.WATTS & CO.LTD. pp.105

¹² Allen, David Y. (1981) Modern Conservatism: The Problem of Definition. The Review of Politics, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 597

¹³ Menczer,Bela (1962) Catholic political thought 1789-1848. University of Notredame press. pp.5-6

¹⁴ Todorova, Irena и Zikov,Petar N. (2017) Political conservatism. Siela, Bulgaria. pp.77-78

¹⁵ Muller, Jerry Z. (2019) Conservatism: The Utility of History and the Case against Rationalist Radicalism. The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought pp.238

country's Catholic monarchy, a firm opposition to the principles of the French Revolution, and advocacy for the restoration of the powers of both the king and the church. At the heart of its beliefs is the inseparable link between Christian ethics and divine power.

In both Britain and France, where ethnocultural and political unity have long overlapped, conservatism has never been in contradiction.¹⁶ The conservative political thought in Britain and France has been strongly influenced by their unique historical and cultural context, generating different principles and values in each nation. While British conservatism is embodied in priorities for the monarchy, the Anglican Church, and deeply rooted traditions, French conservatism is often represented by national identity, centralized governance, and a strong interpretation of religion as an important place in political governance. Despite these differences, both traditions emphasize the importance of maintaining social order, respecting established institutions, and valuing national heritage.

After analyzing the historical development of conservative political thought and its philosophy in different and fundamental regions and periods of Western societies, the upcoming part of the study will examine conservative political principles and values. Throughout history, conservative political philosophy and its development have consistently been supported by a set of fundamental principles that have shaped the political and social landscape of various nations. Rooted in reverence for tradition, emphasis on individual freedom, and a deeply ingrained belief in the importance of social order, the fundamental principles of conservatism offer a blueprint for governance that strives to balance change with the preservation of time-tested values. To fully understand the essence of conservative philosophy, it is essential to delve into these foundational beliefs, principles, and values to assess their role in contemporary political discourse.

Conservatism, more than any other political ideology, can be characterized by several fundamental principles that are universally recognized by both its proponents and its critics. The number of these principles can vary across different formulations, but their essence remains universally the same.¹⁷ In this segment of the research, the author will summarize the main principles of conservative political philosophy, drawing upon prior analysis and contemporary literature. In modern times, there is an increasing inclination towards conservative ideology, highlighted by its emphasis on social stability, traditional state values, private property rights, social values, national unity, patriotism, reli-

gion, and the family. This ideology also supports measured social reforms, standing in opposition to radical revolutionary movements.¹⁸

Foremost among these principles is the principle of tradition, which also underlies the genesis of conservative thought. Tradition, for conservatives, underscores the connection and profound respect for long-standing institutions and customs that are rooted in the historical evolution of the community, often manifesting resistance against abrupt and significant changes. This historically entrenched social order encapsulates a wealth of practical knowledge, serving as evidence of the wise experience of past generations in decision-making. Such traditions are not merely transient practices but the preserved wisdom and experience of predecessors within a society. This principle stems from the conservative understanding that society is not just an aggregate of individuals but a cohesive unit that has naturally evolved.¹⁹ Conservatives often give priority to preserving established customs, practices, and institutions, considering them as the inherited wisdom from the experience of ancestors.

Many conservatives believe in the importance of religious values and teachings as guiding principles for personal conduct and public governance. They argue that these values have historically provided societies with a moral compass and virtuous qualities. For conservatives, the venerable doctrines of mercy, family, community, and responsibility, proclaimed by the Church over the centuries, are foundational.²⁰ Religion occupies a central role for conservatives in promoting social cohesion and strengthening collective behavior. Furthermore, the religious concept of a divine being that punishes immoral actions serves as a moral compass, helping many to adhere to ethical standards, thus conservatives may possess a more effective plan for cultivating a flourishing society.²¹

Conservatives are natural defenders of the traditional elites - the aristocracy and the observance of hierarchy, which guarantees the preservation of elite privileges. According to most conservatives, along with religion and tradition, at the foundation of European civilization - the aristocracy and the observance of hierarchy ensure civilized existence. Conservative hierarchy is an expression of respect for the authority of those whose ancestral memory preserves the class tradition.²² In this way, within conservative ideology, the reverence for the aristocracy and hierarchy transcends the ordinary dynamics of power, serving as pillars that support the cultural and historical fabric of European civilization.

¹⁶ Muller, Jerry Z. (2019) *Conservatism: The Utility of History and the Case against Rationalist Radicalism*. The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought pp.253-254

¹⁷ Huntington, Samuel P. (1957) *Conservatism as an Ideology*. The American Political Science Review, Vol. 51, No. 2. pp.469

¹⁸ Salokhiddinovich, Turaev (2022) *The Ideology of Neoliberalism: Theoretical and Political-Categorical Analysis*. Texas Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies. pp.4

¹⁹ Todd, D. (1982). *The Politics of Imperfection: The Religious and Secular Traditions of Conservative Thought in*

England from Hooker to Oakeshott Anthony Quinton London and Boston: Faber and Faber. *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review / Revue Canadienne De Philosophie*, 21(1). pp.174-175

²⁰ Kirk, Russell (1990) *The Conservative Constitution*. Regnery Gateway., Washington. pp.182

²¹ LaFollette, Hugh (2015) *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. Published by Taylor & Francis. pp.6-7

²² Zikov, Petar N. (2011) *The birth of Bulgarian conservatism*. Paradigma, Bulgaria. pp.109-110

Conservatives view the family as a fundamental social institution and believe that a healthy society depends on strong family bonds and community cohesion. The family is emphasized in conservative thought as a primary institution of socialization, with the assertion that a certain degree of sexual division of labor is not only inevitable but also desirable. As Burke noted, this non-contractual basis of the commercial society extends to other social relations as well. While marriage may be a matter of choice, the obligations that come with it, especially between parents and children, are binding and obligatory.²³

At the core of conservative thought is the protection of private property rights, stemming from the belief that it fosters individual responsibility, economic freedom, and societal stability. Conservatives hold that property and power are eternally intertwined, and if one is transferred to new hands, the other will follow. Family ownership of property—especially land—is, according to conservatives, what gives a significant number of people their early advantages in life: private property enables the independence of action.²⁴ Conservatives value the tradition of inheritance, seeing it as a means to preserve wealth across generations, ensuring continuity and stability in families and broader societal structures.

Continuing to highlight the fundamental principles of conservative thought, we will combine into a single pillar the inseparable principles of limited government, the supremacy of law, and the capitalism of the free market. These are bound and integral parts according to the author of the present study, because conservatives tend to prefer a government that interferes minimally in the lives of its citizens, believing that individual freedoms can be best preserved when the power of the state is limited. The state, in the guise of legislative power, according to conservatives, must ensure that laws are applied impartially, ensuring public order and predictability. Through laws and established rules, conservatives advocate for a free market economy, arguing that it encourages individual initiative, innovation, and economic prosperity. The state has minimal functions from an economic standpoint, and its government should not hinder economic initiative in any way, but on the contrary—government should encourage and protect industry and guard property, as it is a source of wealth.²⁵ The role of the state is precisely in achieving these three goals—limited government intervention, the supremacy of law, and the capitalism of the free market. According to conservatives, the state should deal with externally established forms of religion, the judiciary, taxes, naval and land military force, and associations that owe their existence to it.²⁶

Conservatives often emphasize the importance of national identity, sovereignty, and a shared sense of patriotism, believing that these elements bind communities together and provide a shared purpose. For conservatives, patriotism is expressed through loyalty to the homeland, with its specific traditions, institutions, and history, its dynasty, cultural achievements, and even natural features.²⁷ Regarding national identity, it is determined from the perspective of its constitutional order and shared traditions. According to conservatives, the constitution should be depicted as reflecting the accumulated wisdom of the past and the essential character of the people, and in a stable political system, institutions are in alignment with the values and habits of the nation. National character and the constitution are inseparably linked: values such as the rule of law, personal freedom, and allegiance to authority must be reflected in the constitutional arrangement because the constitution mirrors morality, natural law, and national habits.²⁸

The following distinguishing principles of conservative philosophy are individual freedom and inequality. Although valuing social order, conservatives also prioritize individual liberties, arguing that each person should have the autonomy to pursue their own happiness, provided that it does not infringe on the rights of others. Conservatism emphasizes the legitimacy of inequality and the necessity for cultural, political, and economic elites.²⁹ Therefore, inequality was both inexorable and desirable because it provided an incentive for the talented to apply their potential talents for actual economic improvement.³⁰ Thus, within the conservative philosophy, individual freedom and inherent inequalities are regarded as driving forces for social progress and economic improvement, with inequality serving as a recognition of its role in motivating peak achievements and fostering innovation.

Conservatism warns of the dangers of all-encompassing principles and stands as an independent ideology, affirmed by universal values. As Russell Kirk postulated, conservatism is shaped by "will and intelligence" and is not confined to the interests of a single class. Essentially, conservatism rationalizes existing institutions through historical, divine, natural, and personal beliefs.³¹ The principles and values of conservatism can vary according to the region, culture, and specific conservative tradition, but we have highlighted the most important and fundamental principles, especially for European conservatism, which are: tradition, religiosity and family, aristocracy and hierarchy, the protection of private property, limited government, the supremacy of law, free-market capitalism, patriotism, individual freedom, and inequality.

²³ Muller, Jerry Z. (2019) *Conservatism: The Utility of History and the Case against Rationalist Radicalism*. Cambridge University Press. pp.5-6

²⁴ Kirk, Russell (1990) *The Conservative Constitution*. Regnery Gateway., Washington. pp.39

²⁵ Malinov, Svetoslav (1999) *Conservatism, Volume II*. Centre for Social Practice. pp.17

²⁶ Malinov, Svetoslav (1999) *Conservatism, Volume II*. Centre for Social Practice. pp.17

²⁷ Zikov, Petar N. (2011) *The birth of Bulgarian conservatism*. Paradigma, Bulgaria. pp.111-112

²⁸ Lynch, P. (1999) *The Politics of Nationhood: Sovereignty, Britishness and Conservative Politics*. Macmillan Press Ltd, pp.6

²⁹ Muller, Jerry Z. (2019) *Conservatism: The Utility of History and the Case against Rationalist Radicalism*. Cambridge University Press. pp.6

³⁰ Muller, Jerry Z. (2019) *Conservatism: The Utility of History and the Case against Rationalist Radicalism*. Cambridge University Press. pp.22

³¹ Huntington, Samuel P. (1957) *Conservatism as an Ideology*. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 51, No. 2. pp.455-457