Reflections on Conservatism
Reflections on Conservatism

Edited by

Doğancan Özsel
Dedicated to the memory of Naci and Semral Acar
# Table of Contents

Preface .................................................................................................................. ix

The Meaning of a Concept: Conservatism ......................................................... 1
Levente Nagy

Conservatism and Libertarianism: Friends or Foes? ........................................ 33
Gerard Casey

The Importance of Inequality in Conservative Thought.................................. 54
Peter Dorey

On the Nature of Anglophone Conservatism and its Applicability
to the Analysis of Postcolonial Politics .............................................................. 81
Stefan Andreasson

The Relevance of Hegelian Social Thought to Contemporary
Conservatism ........................................................................................................ 107
David Edward Rose

Adam Ferguson and Conservatism ...................................................................... 124
John Varty

A Conservative “Third Way”?: British Conservatives
and the Development of Post-Thatcherite Conservatism ................................. 146
Peter Dorey

Nicolas Sarkozy’s UMP: The Reinvention of the Bonapartist
Tradition? ............................................................................................................... 178
Agnès Alexandre-Collier

Current Trends in Conservatism in the United States ..................................... 190
William Miller

New Trends in the Political Discourse of the Turkish Military:
Marching towards Radical Conservatism? ....................................................... 215
Doğancan Özsel, Hilal Onur İnce and Aysun Yaralı
The Conservatism of József Antall: Hungarian Version of Patrician Conservatism ................................................................. 247
Gergely Egedy

Cultural Conservative Traditions in Postwar Denmark .................. 269
Kasper Støvring

What is to be Considered? An Appraisal of the Value of Conservatism in light of the Life Ground ......................................................... 287
Giorgio Baruchello

Contributors .................................................................................. 314

Index ............................................................................................ 317
There is a striking contrast between the reputation of conservative thought in daily politics, and its attractiveness for scholars. As Ewen H. H. Green notes in the opening page of his *Ideologies of Conservatism*, in most of the existing democracies, conservative parties are either in office or are among the leading opponents of the governing party. Conservative movements not only enjoy a rather generous support from the public, but also have their own newspapers, TV channels, opinion leaders, research institutes, and the like. Still, anyone who takes a brief look at the shelves of a university library can easily realise that conservatism is one of the least popular subjects for scholarly analysis. Even anarchism, an ideology which is much less influential for *realpolitik*, seems to galvanise academic curiosity much more than the conservative ideas. Apart from the self-proclaimed conservatives, not many political scientists are writing on conservatism.

That is probably because of a widespread presumption that there is nothing much to study in the conservative thought. Many people, both within academia and in the public, assume conservatism to lack a genuine theory and to be a banal pragmatism, if not reactionism. Interestingly, those who are sympathetic to conservatism also contribute to these prejudices. Rather than presenting conservatism as a sophisticated theory or an ideology, they tend to present it as a disposition, an attachment, or an insight on practical life. As a consequence, there is a striking gap in the literature on scholarly analysis of conservative thought and conservative movements in different countries.

*Reflections on Conservatism* is an important contribution to this relatively ignored subject of the political studies. In this volume, readers will find many interesting discussions and analyses resolving around the conservative thinking. In *The Meaning of a Concept: Conservatism*, the first chapter of the book, Levente Nagy analyses the concept of conservatism and digs out the “core of conservatism”. Following that, Gerard Casey’s *Conservatism and Libertarianism: Friends or Foes?* offers a comparative reading of conservative and libertarian approaches to politics. There, beyond casting a light on the similarities and differences between the two, Casey reflects on the possibility of being both a libertarian and a conservative. In the third chapter, Peter Dorey focuses on
the theme of inequality in the conservative thought. In *The Importance of Inequality in Conservative Thought*, Dorey presents the arguments used to justify inequality and to criticise the egalitarian agenda. After Dorey’s account on the inegalitarianism of the conservative thinking, Stefan Andreasson’s *On the Nature of Anglophone Conservatism and its Applicability to the Analysis of Postcolonial Politics* offers the blueprint of a conservative perspective for the postcolonial studies.

Following these four chapters on the conservative thought in general, the next two chapters are focused on the relation between particular thinkers and conservative politics. David Edward Rose’s *The Relevance of Hegelian Social Thought to Contemporary Conservatism* reads conservatism through Hegelian terms and reminds the contingency of the border between conservatism and liberalism. Depending on that contingency, John Varty’s *Adam Ferguson and Conservatism* suggests a conservative interpretation of Ferguson’s writings.

Beginning with Peter Dorey’s analysis of the British Conservatives in the leadership of Cameron in *A Conservative “Third Way”?*, there are five essays that focus on conservative parties or movements in different countries. Agnès Alexandre-Collier’s *Nicolas Sarkozy’s UMP: the Reinvention of the Bonapartist Tradition?* analyses Sarkozy’s politics and explains why scholars should be reluctant while comparing his movement with the conservative parties in other European countries. In chapter nine, William Miller provides a vivid portrayal of conservatism in the United States and offers his views on the future of the U.S. conservatism. Following that, in *New Trends in the Political Discourse of the Turkish Military: Marching towards Radical Conservatism?* Aysun Yaralı, Hilal Onur İnce and I present some features of radical conservative thinking and highlight the similarity between this genre of conservatism and the Turkish military’s reactionary discourse in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Next to that, Gergely Egedy’s *The Conservatism of József Antall: Hungarian Version of Patrician Conservatism* introduces József Antall and his particular interpretation of conservatism in the postcommunist Hungary. After that, in *Cultural Conservative Traditions in Postwar Denmark*, Kasper Støvring provides an overview of the Danish conservatism. Lastly, Giorgio Baruchello, in *What is to be Conserved? An appraisal of the Value of Conservatism in light of the Life Ground*, focuses on Hans Jonas and John McMurtry’s conception of “Life ground”, and reflects upon the approaches that suggest an inherent link between the ethical and environmental conservatisms.

This book will never be materialised without the hard work, tolerance and patience of the contributors. I would like to thank them all for their
contribution to this project. Also, I would like to thank to the staff in Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their enduring support to this project during the editing process of the book. Lastly, I would like to thank to my wife for her understanding in the meantime.

Doğancan Özsel
Ankara, June 2011
THE MEANING OF A CONCEPT: CONSERVATISM

LEVENTE NAGY

This article is not an analysis of conservative parties or party politics. It is not about conservative governments (and programs to be implemented) of particular countries at particular times. It is, however a theoretical approach to conservatism as a concept. My method is a morphological analysis. The emphasis is on an analytical mapping of concepts in general, in order to illustrate the complexity and peculiarities of their inner structure, and of conservatism, in particular, to provide an explanation as to the variety of conservatism over the past nearly two hundred years.¹

The historical context (social, political, economic and idea environment, including political language) which the concept is embedded into cannot be disregarded. As long as it is accepted that key political concepts are to a great extent the reflections of social and historical context, it seems that morphology alone cannot account for meaning; it is necessary to situate these concepts in contextual environments as well. The morphological analysis will point at the polysemic, as well as the synchronic and diachronic character of the concepts,² but the environment (context) which the concepts are embedded into is equally important in studying the history of concepts (conceptual history). It seems therefore that the analyst of key political concepts has to be not just a philosopher (and/or a linguist) for analytical purposes, but at the same time an historian as well, in order to locate the concept in time and space. The thesis of this paper is that a

² Polysemy comes from the Greek words of poly (many), and sêma (sign). A polyseme is a word or phrase with two or more related meanings, having this way a large semantic field. “Wood”, for example, means a piece of a tree, as well as a geographical area with many trees. The terms synchrony and diachrony will be discussed later.
morphological or structural analysis is central for a better understanding of concepts in general, and of conservatism in particular. The dominant features of conservatism, and the ranges of its meaning in time and place can best be emphasized through this method.

In Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872), the main hero, Humpty Dumpty had a discussion on semantics and pragmatics with Alice. At one point Alice did not understand what Humpty Dumpty meant by “glory”.

“Of course you don’t–till I tell you”, explained Humpty Dumpty, “I meant there’s a nice knock-down argument for you”.

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’” objected Alice.

“When I use a word”, replied Humpty Dumpty, “it means just what I choose it to mean–neither more nor less”.

The example of Humpty Dumpty shows that in order to have purposeful discourses, people in conversation must have a proper understanding of one another’s language, of the meanings of the terms they use. The need for clarification and explanation of the meaning of concepts we use seems to represent not just the central task, but one of the greatest challenges for the analyst.

**Essentially Contested Concepts**

Most concepts are essentially contested concepts. As Gallie argues, there is a variety of meanings employed for key terms, but we should avoid inappropriate attitudes, such as dogmatism, scepticism and eclecticism toward the variety of meanings. Even though we cannot conclusively

---

3 There are various theories about the origins of Humpty Dumpty. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term originally referred—in the seventeenth century—to a drink of brandy boiled with ale. In the eighteenth century it was slang for a short and clumsy person. According to some the person of Humpty Dumpty is linked to historical figures, such as King Richard III of England. Nevertheless, Humpty Dumpty is a widely known figure in the English world, but for our purpose his origin is not that relevant.


5 According to the *dogmatic* attitude one thinks that his or her answer is right, all the others’ are wrong. The *sceptic* argues that all answers are equally true or false, and everyone has a right to his or her own truth. According to the *eclectic* attitude, each meaning gives a partial view of truth, so, the more meanings the better.
define concepts such as “justice”, “democracy” or “moral life”, it is possible and rational to discuss justifications for holding different interpretations. Clarification of such concepts, argues Gallie, involves considerations of how a given concept has been used by different agents throughout its history.

The contested nature of concepts cannot be disregarded, moreover it seems to be of great importance. Essentially contested concepts inevitably involve “endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of the users” or, as Gray puts it, these disputes “cannot be settled by appeal to empirical evidence, linguistic usage, or the cannons of logic alone”. The question then is whether these disputes can or cannot be settled at all. In any case, these concepts can be, and have been regarded as a serious challenge, because the use of such concepts by one analyst is to be in competition with the uses of the same concepts by other analysts. And each of them tries to prove his or her truth, and at the same time most of them argue that the concept is being used improperly by others.

As we see, these concepts are in fact under constant dispute and therefore open to contest. Instead of “absolute agreement” the only agreement is in fact to disagree, and the disputes over these concepts are driven by disagreements over a range of different, but entirely reasonable (whether correct or mistaken) interpretations of them.

A very stimulating thought about the contested concepts is given by Barry Clarke. Clarke’s valuable contribution to the debate is his suggestion that the analyst should seek to locate the source of the dispute, in the sense that the source might be “within the concept itself, or within some underlying non-conceptual disagreement between the contestants”. As Clarke points out, there is a substantial difference between essentially contested, and essentially contestable concepts. In case the concept is merely contested, argues Clarke, the contestants attribute significance primarily to the contest rather than to the concept itself. In case the

---


concept is contestable, the contestants attribute at least some part of the contest to the concept itself. Clarke’s observation leads us to the conclusion that contestable concepts contain some internal conflict of ideas, which in turn provide these concepts with inherent potential for generating disputes.

Further, as Gallie points out, or as Gray would have it, some general words have a series of distinguishing features that really denote that these concepts are essentially contested. Some of these features, as we shall see later, are of primary importance in analyzing ideologies, in general, and the concept of conservatism, in particular. These features can be classified into three major groups:

Features in the first group are about the open-endedness and modifications over time of these concepts:

a. These concepts are open-ended, and are subject to modification over time (with the changing circumstances), which can neither be predicted nor prescribed in advance.

b. One interpretation of a contested concept may be considered better than another interpretation of it, which means that the former interpretation may be generally more accepted than the latter, but even if one instantiation seems best at one particular moment, it could be easily replaced by another instantiation that can emerge at any time in the future.

In the second group are features related to the inner structure of these concepts:

11 Take, for instance, “welfare state”, as an essentially contested concept. It is not difficult to see the “open-ended” character of it, because with the changing circumstances (primarily, but not exclusively economic circumstances) the interpretation of the concept—as well as the welfare objectives of the government of the day—may be modified, and the achievement of the government may be evaluated in the light of the altered conditions.
a. These concepts (delivering value-judgements) denote evaluated entities that have an internally complex character.\^13

b. The evaluation refers to the internally complex entity, as a whole.

c. This complex entity, as a whole, is composed of different constituent elements that are variously describable.

In the third group are features related to the different interpretations and to the contestability of concepts:

a. The different users of these concepts may attribute different relative importance, or weight (determining the order) as well as different interpretation\^14 to each of those constituent elements. (The relative order of these elements therefore may be interchanged.)

b. Each user knows that his or her interpretation of the concept is disputed by others, who hold different views about it. Moreover, each user has the aspiration, and is driven by the need to uphold his or her “correct” or “proper” interpretation against all other “incorrect” or “improper” interpretations of other users. (It seems that the decontested nature of the main ideologies has its origin in this aspiration.)

c. The use of essentially contested concepts are the application of one use against all other uses, and any usage is meant to be (intentionally) “defensive” and “aggressive”.

Based on the above features, it seems that essentially contested concepts denote essentially questionable and corrigeble concepts, which, as Hampshire puts it “are permanently and essentially subject to revision and question”.\^15 In case we accept Clarke’s argument, Gallie’s approach, and Gray’s views, then we can come to the conclusion that essentially contested


\^14 Multiple interpretations of an essentially contested concept should not be confused with the polysemic or homonymic character of certain concepts. Polysemy has been discussed above. The word homonym comes from the Greek words *homos* (“one and the same”), and *onomo* (“name”). The term, thus, refers to words that have two or more unrelated meanings. “Bank”, for example, means a financial institution, as well as a riverside. It is true that homonyms have nothing to do with studying and analyzing the concept of “conservatism”, but it should be kept in mind that the dispute over two homonyms means that they have been confused, and it leads nowhere, because the parties in dispute over homonyms are talking past each other.

concepts are *polysemic* in character, having *different interpretations* at a given point in time, thus permanently subject to *dispute*. Further, these concepts are *diachronic*, and they have a complex and changing *inner structure* of their own.

One of the main reasons of the multiple or differential interpretations of essentially contested concepts is their *polysemic* character. The word liberal, for instance, may refer to *liberal* thought, in general; it could mean *liberal* political view or attitude; and it could also refer to the name of a political party.\(^{16}\)

As Dieckmann argues, there are three sources of the uncertainties about the meaning of *polysemic* concepts.

First, a *polysemic* concept is a *generalization*, that is, it denotes the meaning of more things and/or relations based on common characteristics. The precise meaning of a *polysemic* concept thus is uncertain until the user does not make it clear, or the analyst does not circumscribe precisely his or her interpretation of the term in question. The context which the concept is embedded into is needed, says Dieckmann, not just to “annul” the lexical character of the concept, but to provide a concrete and precise meaning of the term.

Second, most *polysemic* concepts are *abstract* terms, in the sense that they do not actually exist in the real world. “Freedom”, “equality”, “justice” or “ideology” are not “out there”, but they are quite often used, because of their commonly defined meanings, or even widely known definitions. Definitions indicate, at the same time, that these concepts may have several interpretations, thus different meanings.

Third, *polysemic* concepts are *complex* terms, reflecting on very complex systems of things, facts or processes. The terms “democracy”, “conservatism”, or “freedom”, for instance, reflect on complex entities, that cannot be experienced directly. The search for the meaning of this concept therefore becomes central and challenging. The difficulty of their proper understanding, though, stems from the complexity of the “facts” these concepts are referring to. What actually happens is that while analyzing a complex “social reality” analysts have different understandings of it, and the concept used to reflect on, and describe this “social reality” as loaded with different social, political and philosophical values and value-systems, according to the interpretation of it.

It is a widely accepted view that language is a *natural organism* that grows and evolves in accordance with certain “natural” and fixed laws, not

---

determinable by human will. Saussure goes against this organicist view, and he defines language rather as a social product in constant change. Because of its changes, a cross-section, as well as a longitudinal-section of the language should be made. The former is needed, in order to be able to study language at given points in time; the latter is important to grasp language in its historical development.

The importance of the distinction of the static (but not to be taken in absolute value), and the dynamic character in studying a language is well demonstrated in Saussure’s chess metaphor. If I join a chess game midway through, I see a well defined arrangement, and I will assumingly understand the actual state of the game. But with each move a new state is created, and a series of “actual states” will provide the process, the dynamism of the game, which in turn will constitute the “history” of the game in itself. Understanding the game, means understanding the moves of every “actual state”. (That explains the relevance of the relationship of each move to the game.)

According to Saussure, language should be studied, on the one hand, as a complete system at any given point in time, in order to understand the momentary arrangements of its terms. This is called synchrony. We speak of a synchronic relationship when two related things exist at the same time. A good example of a synchronic relationship is Modern American English and British English. In the case of a key political concept, synchrony may refer to the state or meaning of a given concept at a particular time. The concept is in a well defined stage, embedded into, and reflecting on its own environment.

On the other hand, language should be examined in different times as well. This is about diachrony, and it is mainly about change in the meaning of a concept over time. Diachronic relationship comes into being when related things exist separated by time. The English of the fourteenth century, and the English of the twenty-first century, for example, are in a diachronic relationship. The diachronic study is more about the historical development of the term under investigation. For Saussure, one should distinguish the two. The relationship between the two is that a series of synchronies are transformed into diachrony. On a horizontal “time-axis”

17 The term synchrony comes from the Greek words of sun (“together”), and chronos (“interval of time”).
18 Diachrony originates from the Greek words of dia (“over”), and chronos (“interval of time”).
19 For a more detailed analysis of synchrony and diachrony and the relationship between the two see F. Saussure, Writings in General Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
synchrony would best be expressed by a vertical cross-section of the concept under discussion, while diachrony would best be represented by a longitudinal cross-section of it.

But in studying a language, one of the most relevant issues, as Koselleck points out, is the relationship of individual concepts to the language in which the concept is used. Not just language, as a complete system, but the individual basic concepts as well could be and should be studied in their historical development: What these concepts were; how they were contested; to what extent they remained constant; to what extent they were altered; what the cause of change was. These and similar questions are the central themes of the conceptual history developed by R. Koselleck, O. Bruner and other representatives of the German School of history of concepts, in their colossal Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe.  

The Inner Structure of Concepts

Apart from the fact that we may usually identify concepts with mental representation, or cognitive ability, or abstract objects, it seems that

---

20 Some English historians, such as John Pocock, Quentin Skinner and John Dunn, the outstanding representatives of the Cambridge School, have developed a distinctive mode of approaching political language historically. They put emphasis not on concepts but on the language itself. Pocock’s main strategy was to seek the overall patterns of the political languages used in given times and places. Skinner put emphasis rather on linguistic conventions and the intentional speech acts of writers (authorial intention), saying that they are of central importance when analysing political (philosophical) texts of the past. (Perhaps he borrowed the idea from John L. Austin, who introduced the term of illocutionary acts.) He ruled out the possibility of meaningful history of concepts. The critique of Skinner’s point goes beyond the framework of this paper.

21 One of the focal points for many theories of concepts is their ontology. Some theorists look at concepts as psychological entities, whose starting point is the representational theory of mind. Beliefs enter into mental processes as internal systems. These mental representations (presentation of the perceived or learned things to the mind in the form of an idea or image) of beliefs have internal structure, and are composed of more basic representations or ideas (mental images). Concepts in turn, are identified with these more basic representations. Early advocates of representational theory of mind were Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690); Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (1739); and Hume, Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding (1748). But, modern versions of representational theory of mind assume that much thought is not grounded in mental images.

22 According to some thinkers, concepts are not mental images (nor word-like entities in a language of thought), but rather abilities of cognitive agents. The
just as thoughts are composed of more basic concepts, concepts themselves are generally believed to be composed of even more basic concepts, creating a particular structure of the term.\textsuperscript{24}

When we study the inner structure of concepts it seems to be to the point to give definitions of concepts. What do we mean by a definition? How can we define, for example, an object? What is the relationship between definition and meaning? These are just a few of the basic questions we have to deal with whenever we try to analyse concepts.

In the broadest sense, the \textit{definition} is a statement which captures the meaning, the function, and the essence of a term, or a concept.\textsuperscript{25} Definitions, as such, must be universal, in the sense that they must apply to all members of a defined category. Take for example the proposition “All chairs have four legs”. If we find one chair with three legs, then the property of having four legs cannot be part of the definition of chair. In case we try to define the essence of a chair, its “chairness”, our goal is not to

\begin{itemize}
\item concept of “dog”, for example, might amount to the ability to discriminate “dogs” from “non-dogs”, and then to draw some conclusions. On this see R. Brandom, \textit{Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discoursive Commitment} (Harvard University Press, 1994), and M. Dummett, \textit{Seas of Language} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
\item Concepts (as Fregean senses) are identified here with abstract objects, as opposed to mental objects, and mental states. According to this theory, concepts are constituents of propositions, and they mediate between thought and language and referents. On this see G. Frege, ‘On Sense and Reference’, in P. Geach and M. Black (eds. and trans.), \textit{Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); C. Peacocke, \textit{A Study of Concepts} (Cambridge: 1992).
\item According to the so called “classical theory”, concepts are created by assembling their definitional constituents. A commonly used example illustrating this is the concept of “bachelor” composed of definitional constituents of “unmarried” and “man”. Both elements apply to the basic concept of “bachelor”. Generally speaking, concept “A” has definitional structure if it is composed of simpler concepts that express \textit{necessary and sufficient conditions} for falling under “A”. Another approach to the structure of concepts is revealed in the so called “prototype theory”, according to which concepts do not have definitional structures, but rather have probabilistic structures, in that something falls under concept “A” if it satisfies a \textit{sufficient number of properties} encoded by A’s constituents. This theory has its philosophical roots in Wittgenstein’s famous “family resemblance” remark. We shall discuss this issue later.
\item S. Vaknin, ‘The Definition of Definitions’ (http://samvak.tripod.com/define.html).
\end{itemize}
to define one specific chair, but to capture the essence, the use of it,\textsuperscript{26} and try to give an answer to such questions as: What is it made for? What does it do? What does it look like? It seems that the definition must reveal the meaning of the term defined. The definition of a chair must include its function, which actually constitutes the central part of its meaning, moreover, it has no meaning outside its function. (The function of the term defined is called 	extit{definiendum}.)

The starting point for defining the concept of chair would be 	extit{something intended for sitting}. But, a chair must be made of solid material and have a structure. The definition thus should be expanded and the term described as a 	extit{solid structure, intended for sitting}. The 	extit{definiendum} has already filtered and narrowed the set of words which can fulfil this function, but our definition is still not satisfying, because it does not distinguish chairs from beds, or couches, or from appropriately shaped rocks or chunks of tree. The exclusiveness of a chair is not revealed by this wider class or category, called 	extit{genus}, to which the concept of chair belongs.

We have to go further, though, and try to refine our description, by introducing some distinguishing characteristics, called 	extit{differentia}. One of these features is that chairs are manufactured by man, therefore the definition becomes broadened, and a chair is an 	extit{artificial solid structure, intended for sitting}. Appropriately shaped rocks, as well as chunks of tree are excluded from the definition, but there is need for more 	extit{differentia} to get the exclusiveness of the concept. A chair makes use of one bodily axis of the sitter. With this step even beds and couches are excluded from the definition.

As we see, to provide a definition of chair there is a need to go from the general (more lexical) to the more particular (more stipulative), and to make a union of the general and the particular (genus and differentia). Each of the four components (artificial; solid structure; intended for sitting; makes use of one bodily axis of the sitter) is a necessary element of our definition, and they may be called ineliminable or indispensable components of the concept. Individually, none of the above elements is sufficient to the definition, but taken together, the four elements constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for describing the term. They may be called the core components of the concept, that helps to capture the essence of being a chair, to define “chairness” as such, and not to describe this or that specific chair.

\textsuperscript{26} As we shall see later the “definition” constitutes the core of the term providing the essence of being a chair, but the core alone, as I will try to show, is not enough to get a proper understanding of the concept.
It is true, that a concept is an abstraction from individual things, formed in the mind as “a cognitive unit of meaning”, and it is equally true, that a concept is a collection of characteristics common to all individual instances within the category under discussion, but if our goal is to understand the meaning of the chair to the fullest then the core (nucleus) alone may not be enough.

To capture the essence of the concept is central to understanding the meaning of it, but revealing the exclusiveness of the concept by defining it, we may not get an answer, as I have noted earlier, to such questions as what a specific chair should look like, or where and what purpose a chair is exactly used for. It seems that for a better understanding of the term, there is a need to move from the core toward empirical statements as well, to be able to reflect the “real life” of a chair. In other words, the core components provide the distinguishing features, the exclusiveness of the concept, but they do not inform us at all neither about the relevant differences among chairs, nor about the inevitable relationship between chairs and their environment. Consequently, the four ineliminable features constituting the core of chair are not, by themselves, enough for an adequate interpretation of the meaning of the concept.

My statement at this stage is that for the fuller description of a concept additional elements to the core are needed, and the term must be examined within the environment the concept is embedded into.

Any particular chair may be white or brown or beige. It may be designed for common use, and it may be provided with a cover and even with a canopy to emphasize the importance of the occupant. It may be made of wood, steel, or plastic. It may have three or four legs, or it may be a revolving chair on casters. Looking exclusively at the core components it would be very difficult to find out whether a chair is an article of state and dignity (emblem of authority), or an article of ordinary use. In historical perspectives, it seems to be impossible to find out that before the sixteenth century the common use of chairs was not popular because most of them were reserved for kings, lords and ecclesiastical or church dignitaries. This explains the importance of the additional elements without which it would be extremely difficult to provide a longitudinal section (diachrony), a historical analysis of the term so essential for a better understanding of the concept.

The characteristics included in these additional elements attached to the core add much more to the meaning and understanding of chairs, in general, and of any chair, in particular, but it is important to emphasize that none of these elements is indispensable. They rather express non-universal features (that is, not all chairs must share them as common
features). Individually taken they are not ineliminable, but occupy categories that are indispensable. The *chairness* of a particular chair (presuming, naturally, that the object we refer to satisfies the conditions of a chair by our definition) is not jeopardized by changing its colour, or the number of its legs, or adding an arm rest assembly to it, but any chair must have some inherent attributes (ineliminable categories) such as material, shape, style, or colour.

It is therefore a logical *necessity* that a chair to be made of some hard material and have a certain shape, and have a colour, while the components of these three categories are rather floating or *contingent* elements. We can choose within each category and offer quite a number of combinations. This explains the variations of meanings, but it is important to emphasize that there is no infinite variety of meanings, facing absolute relativity. The meaning of a concept, as we have noted earlier, is determined by its usage, it is ascertained empirically. If this is so, then the core of a concept alone does not have real content without some additional categories. A first conclusion is that *concepts* thus *cannot be bereft of inner structure*.^{28}

Imagine different rooms in which a chair is positioned. It could be located in a kitchen, in a living-room, or in an office (workplace), each containing a certain number of other objects as well, organized in a special way. The environment becomes important, because the concept under discussion enters in a kind of relationship with its environment and with other concepts within that environment. It is highly likely that a kitchen contains, for example, a sink, a fridge, a cupboard, a cooker and a table. A chair must fit into this environment (simple, probably of white or at least light colour), and is expected to have similar or complementary design with the table.

---

^{27} This approach indicates the importance of the morphological or structural analysis of concepts. By applying this method, as we shall see later, we are able to explain why the concept of conservatism, for example, can have different meanings, and diverse interpretations in different historical times and places.

^{28} While analysing ideologies, and conservatism in particular, we shall pay attention to the special relationship amongst the contingent elements, and between the core and the additional components.

^{29} If it were to study a political concept (instead of an object), then the “environment” of that term would refer rather to a number of idea-environments in which the concept under discussion is located. We have to keep in mind, though, that we cannot give such a clearcut definition of basic political concepts, and that the context in which the object is located is an observable environment, and this is quite different from the idea-environment or ideational context we have to deal with, studying complex political concepts.
In a dining room a chair is probably made of wood, it is usually of dark colour, being part of a dining set, where the chairs and the table feature matching designs.

In a study or office, chairs may have adjustable components such as height and seat adjustable mechanisms, right and left arm rest assemblies mounted to the chair, swivels that roll about on casters or small wheels.

These examples indicate that the context of a chair (kitchen, living room, study, and workplace) determines to a great extent the type of chair that is supposed to be used, and getting familiar with the context, the study of the concept becomes easier. A second conclusion is that the context, within which the concept is located, should be taken into consideration. As Taylor mentions: “Things only have meaning in a field, that is in relation to the meanings of other things”.^{30}

Further, imagine a living-room as the basic concept under examination. A different room will be created each time the room is furnished with different sets or units of furniture. In other words, the same concept will have different content because of the different components that make up the structure of the concept. The third conclusion is that the meaning of a concept is determined to a great extent by the components that form the inner structure of the concept itself.

Things can become even more complicated when it comes to the relative positions of the component elements within a concept. Take, for instance a common set of furniture to furnish the living-room under discussion. It would be highly likely, as Freeden points out, that different furnishers would create different rooms with identical units of furniture. This is the issue of organization of the components. The fourth conclusion is that the relative position of the components will also determine the content or the meaning of the concept.^{31}

---


^{31} As we shall see, this aspect is of great importance in studying the main ideologies, because they actually display most of the basic political concepts, and the difference between liberalism, conservatism, and socialism mainly lies on the organization (the relation of the component elements to one another in their positioning to the core). The “arrangement” of these constituents suggests the weight of each element within ideologies.
The Conservative Core

As we will see, the concept of *Conservatism*—as any other political concept—includes indeterminate concepts within it, and it can be understood as a combination of at least two factors: the presence of an ineliminable core, and a collection of additional components that may not be historically or geographically universal, or ever-present features of conservatism. To put it in a different way, the concept of Conservatism is composed of substantive core elements and of secondary or adjacent components, whose relative order and meaning may vary over time. It seems, thus, that the concept of Conservatism has an inner structure of its own, within which the core elements and the secondary components interact with one another, and are interpreted and reinterpreted over time. Naturally the morphological analysis (the theoretical arguments) presented in this work should be supported by supporting empirical evidence from contemporary societies, but this requirement exceeds the framework of this paper.

At the start we should ask whether Conservatism is an ideology or not. The answer depends to a great extent on how we define ideology. If we interpret it as an *a priori*, abstract system, or a total and cohesive view of human beings in society, or as an artificially constructed set of ideas, removed from everyday life, manipulated by political powers, who attempt to control the world of politics, then Conservatism is not an ideology. But, in case ideology is defined as a structural configuration of political concepts, entertaining ideas about the political world, and primarily serving as a (presumed or real) means of orientation for human beings, then Conservatism may be called an ideology.

Conservatism, like all the other ideologies, came into being as a result of the social, political, and intellectual upheavals that accompanied the Industrial and the French Revolutions. Studying Conservatism it is important to keep in mind, on the one hand, that societies which ideologies

---

32 For the conceptual analysis, for the analytical mapping of concepts and the importance of the contextual environment (the integral arena within which political concepts are located, and which helps to concretize the particular meaning of concepts), and for word-concept and concept-reality issues see some of the outstanding works of J. Austin, R. Koselleck, Q. Skinner, W. Dickmann and M. Freeden.

33 It is important to know that for an ideology to come into being the presence of a wide audience is a must. There is a need, therefore for development of mass media for its dissemination, mobilization of public masses, and consumption. Conservatism therefore, as an ideology, is a modern concept.
in general reflect on are in constant change (social, cultural, political and economic changes), whilst on the other hand that each ideology was the product of an increasingly pluralist society in which it had to face—especially Conservatism—rival ideologies in change.

Conservatism, as I have mentioned earlier, is composed of concepts. As Michael Freeden says, ideologies can be appreciated as “multi-conceptual constructs, and as loose composites of decontexted concepts with a variety of internal combinations”. It seems that the term “Conservatism”—as any other ideology—signifies a combination of political concepts as its components.

It is generally accepted that Edmund Burke is “the articulate spokesman and intellectual apogee of conservatism”, who opposed equally to unchanging reaction and to revolutionary change. For many, Burke is considered or taken as the starting point of the so-called fixed-list theory of Conservatism. According to this approach conservatism has the same internal conceptual structure that liberalism and socialism do, while holding that this structure—representing the core of conservatism—has a static and unchanging nature.

Conservatism, according to the fixed-list theory, does not seem to be more than a series of timeless and cultural-indeterminate responses to social, historical and economic changes. For Burke, some of the substantive core elements of conservatism are as follows:

- Society is a natural and organic product of slow historical growth, which implies a peculiar relationship between past, present, and future.
- History is the accumulated wisdom of all generations.
- Inequality of human beings is natural, implying that inequality of results (social and economic) is also natural, and hierarchy and leadership are inevitable characteristics of any civil society.

---

34 Ideologies in general reflect on societies, but if we ask ourselves what ideologies are good for, the answer is that these ideas would serve teleological goals – that is, they would be the foundation of a just and happy society. The investigation of individual ideas of ideologies would show that their common origin is in universal human needs and desires. To put it in a simplified manner we could say that human needs would form the framework of norms and laws regulating society and promoting the fulfilment of relevant desires.


• Respect for existing institutions, authority, law and religion.
• Gradual change is the only form of change that can be reasonably accepted.
• Community is superior to the individual.

These elements are of great importance for the conservative ideology, and have been adopted by later conservative thinkers. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Burke’s ideas were used to defend aristocracy against the rising middle class, industrialism, liberalism, and individualism. His ideas could also be well used to justify the established order and institutions. For many, Burke can be an expounder of values and ideals universally valid.

Even Samuel Huntington confirms Burke’s fixed-list theory, by pointing out that conservative thought has a static and repetitive character which is reflected by the fact that it can be condensed into a brief catalogue of principles or concepts. Hearshaw’s “twelve principles”, Kirk’s “six canons”, and Rossiter’s “twenty-one points” of the conservative tradition reaffirm Burke’s fixed-list theory.

It is true, today’s analyst has the enormous advantage of tracing the evolution of conservatism for the past two hundred years, which could not be foreseen by Burke (this evolution suggests the diachronic character of the concept), but his “fixed-list principles” would serve as timeless and insensible responses to changes. If we accept that conservative thought has a static and repetitive character, the assumption that over and over recurrent ideas of conservatism can accurately characterize a viable ideological position over time seems to be false.

Accepting the fixed-list and the repetitive ideas of conservatism, it would be extremely difficult to explain (especially if we stand for the continuity of conservatism) how this ideology could once be the defender of aristocracy, the representative of hierarchy and natural inequality, the ideology opposing liberalism in the name of authority, then the force opposing socialism in the name of liberty. It would be equally difficult to

---

37 It is quite interesting that the fact Burke himself hardly had in mind defending feudal values of the Ancien Régime, so much the more because the British society in which he lived was in fact not feudal but more and more bourgeois.

38 These lists are worth being taken into consideration because they contain significant conservative elements. Kirk’s “canons”, for instance, are about belief in a transcendent order, which rules society; acceptance of the proliferating variety and mystery of human existence; conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes; distrust of calculators and economists, who would reconstruct society upon abstract designs, and so on.
explain how, at the beginning of the twentieth century, conservatism could be the defender of libertarian traditions (individualism and free market), and starting from the 1950s to become reconciled to welfares, and later to be the promoter of anti-welfares, in the form of “new right” or “neoconservatism”.

In order to give an answer to this “chameleon” feature of it, we have to admit the diachronic character of conservatism. It seems that conservative thinkers of different ages have had very different lists over the past two hundred years, and that conservatism of a particular age, as any other ideology, cannot claim absolute validity in itself, for it is relative to changing social and historical situations.

It is also a commonly held view that conservatism is mainly concerned with upholding the status quo. One of the proponents of this argument is Samuel Huntington.\(^\text{39}\) According to Huntington there are three broad conceptions of the nature of conservatism as an ideology: the aristocratic, the autonomous, and the situational definition.

According to the aristocratic approach, conservatism is an ideology of a single special and unique historical movement, being a reaction of the feudal-aristocratic-agrarian classes to the French Revolution, liberalism, and the rise of the bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth century. This explains why conservatism is often associated with feudalism, status, landed interests and nobility, and it is opposed to the middle class, labour, industrialism, and democracy.\(^\text{40}\)

The autonomous definition of conservatism holds that conservatism is not necessarily connected with the interests of any particular social group, nor depends upon any specific historical event, as the aristocratic interpretation claims. Conservatism, according to this approach, is defined rather in terms of universal values (order, balance, moderation, justice, and so on). Whether or not an individual holds these values in high esteem depends rather upon his or her personal capacity to see and understand their inherent truth. Conservatism, in this sense, is a matter of “will and

\(^{39}\) On this issue see M. Freeden, Ideologies and Political Theory, pp. 329-332.

\(^{40}\) This approach fails easily once we try to explain the manifestation of conservatism of the middle of the nineteenth century, when conservatism was a response of the governing class to the lower class demands for a share in the direction of society (for example, the demand for extension of the suffrage). The conservative manifestations of the twentieth century would be even more difficult to explain with the aristocratic interpretation of conservatism. This concept of conservatism, however, may become popular among the critics of the neoconservatism.
intelligence” and the principles of conservatism “are not confined to the interests of a single class”.\footnote{R. Kirk, ‘A Program for Conservatives’, in S. Huntington, ‘Conservatism as an Ideology’, \textit{American Political Science Review}, Vol. 51 (1957), p. 454.} This approach implies that conservatism is relevant and desirable; moreover, it is the preferable political philosophy under any social and historical circumstance.\footnote{And as such, it may become popular among contemporary conservatives including “new conservatives” as well. The critique of this interpretation would be that by attempting to describe Conservatism in terms of universally valid, metaphysical values and ideas, conservatism may become almost exclusively an artificially constructed, \textit{a priori}, abstract system, instead of being something experimental, concrete and delimited, and evolutionary as many conservatives claim their ideology is.}

The third approach is the \textit{situational} definition of conservatism, the one most preferred by Huntington. As Clinton Rossiter says, according to this interpretation conservatism arises “out of a distinct but recurring type of historical situation in which a fundamental challenge is directed at established institutions and in which the supporters of these institutions employ the conservative ideology in their defence”.\footnote{C. Rossiter, ‘Conservatism in America’, in S. Huntington, ‘Conservatism as an Ideology’, p. 455.} Huntington reaffirms Rossiter’s idea pointing out that conservatism is a system of ideas “employed to justify any established social order, no matter where or when it exists, against any fundamental challenge to its nature or being, no matter from what quarter”.\footnote{S. Huntington, ‘Conservatism as an Ideology’, p. 455.}

The essence of conservatism thus is the passionate affirmation of the values of existing institutions. The articulation of conservative values and ideas is directed against any serious challenge to established order. Conservatism in this sense is possible in any society in which there is a basic challenge to existing institutions.

Huntington rejects the first definition, because, as he points out, no necessary connection exists between aristocracy (or feudalism) and conservatism, and this approach restricts conservatism to too small a segment of the social process. He does not accept the second definition of conservatism either, saying that according to this approach the appearance of conservatism seems to be a matter of random chance; moreover it frees conservatism from any connection with social reality.