Challenging the Conservative Exceptionalism: Theme of Change in the Conservative Canon

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Abstract

This thesis is presented by Dogancan Özsel to the University of Manchester, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, division of Politics for the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences in 2011.

The thesis focuses on the conservative canon and analyses the validity of exceptionalist claims of conservative thinking through a deconstructive reading of conservatism. The comparison of classical and radical conservatisms provides the grounds for this analysis.

After the introductory chapter, the second chapter of this thesis focuses on the general characteristics of the conservative ideology. It consists of three sub-sections. The first of these presents the characteristics of classical conservatism, while the second turns to consider radical conservatism. Then, in the third sub-section, a discussion of the similarities and differences between these two conservatisms leads to a proposed definition of a core of the conservative canon. Here, it is argued that the epistemological and ontological imperfection of individuals can be regarded as the definitive core, or as the precept which the justification of conservative policies relies upon.

The third chapter then focuses on the views of a number of significant figures in the development of political thought on ideology, which is used by these thinkers as a critical tool. A narrative of the historical developments in the analyses of ideology and ideologies is presented in this chapter. In the last part of the chapter, Derridian thinking is introduced.

The fourth chapter problematises conservative exceptionalism, or the belief that there is a fundamental difference between conservatism and other ideologies. This chapter is founded upon the analyses of the previous two chapters, using the Derridian reading and referring to the characteristics and commonalities of the conservative canon presented. In this chapter, radicalism is argued to be a persistent theme in conservative thinking, and conservatism is claimed to be founded upon its impossibility.
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1 Introduction

There is a striking contrast between the reputation of conservative thought in daily politics, and its attractiveness for scholars of politics. In most of the existing democracies, conservative parties are either in office or are among the leading opponents of the governing party (see Green, 2002:1). 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 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 academics 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 (see Honderich, 2005). 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 merely an insight on practical life (see Gilmour, 1980:121; Green, 2002:3). And one of the authors of the party’s semi-official history claims that the history of the Conservative Party “does not owe much to the work of philosophers” (Green, 2002:3).

The intent to counter this general inclination and focus on the theory of conservatism has formed the roots of this study. During the initial formulation of the idea of this thesis, I decided to focus on the conservative theory, and especially to the theory of radical conservatism, to be one of the constituents of the study.

Here, the term radical conservatism labels a line of critique inaugurated in the Weimar Republic against the so-called liberal culture and politics. Although the main arguments of this critique are well known, the relationship between radical conservatism and classical conservative ideology is still unclear. As conservatism, especially in its British variant, is generally associated with anti-radicalism (see Freeman, 1980; O’Sullivan, 1976; Kirk, 1987), it is not easy to argue for the existence of a common ground between radical and classical
conservatism. Especially pro-conservative writers who would like to reserve certain virtues like moderacy with their own conception of conservatism tend to totally ignore radical conservative position. That is why most studies on conservatism refrain from mentioning radical conservatives (see Kirk, 1987; Schuettinger, 1970), and scholars like Roger Griffin suggest to comprehend the radical conservative movement as in between proto-fascism and fascism (Griffin, 1993:51). Against these attitudes toward radical conservatism, one of the points highlighted in this study is the relationship between radical and classical conservativisms. Here, I underline the commonalities in the fundamentals of these two political positions. Moreover, by relying upon this commonality, I approach the conservative canon through appreciating the richness and diversity of its underlying theory, and offer a comparative analysis of the classical and radical interpretations of conservatism. In doing so, I intend to read the conservative ideology with a deconstructive sensibility, and to reach some conclusions about conservatism. My study aims to analyse conservatism through utilising the existence of its classical and radical forms, and to reveal the ambiguity and temporality of the borders of its dichotomised concepts, such as ‘conserving and altering’ or ‘natural and arbitrary’.

To achieve these ends, in chapter 2, I analyse classical and radical conservativisms, and discuss their relationships with each other in order to provide grounding for my reflections in chapter 4. In this second chapter, I suggest a definitive core of conservative thinking which also points at the fundamental commonality between the classical and radical conservatism. Hence, I demonstrate in this chapter that, despite its revolutionary intentions, it is perfectly possible to read radical conservatism as a legitimate interpretation of the conservative precepts, and a part of the conservative canon.

Following that, in chapter 3, historical background of the deconstructive reading of ideologies is presented through what I call the ‘ideology critique’. In this chapter, beginning with the orthodox Marxism, I discuss the evolution of the use of ideology as a critical analytic tool. After discussing the approaches of Gramsci, Althusser, and Freeden, in the last part of the chapter, I present fundamentals of the Derridian thinking and a Derridian approach to the ideology.

By relying upon this Derridian approach, chapter 4 reads the conservative canon with a deconstructive sensibility. Here, I read conservatism through the exceptionalist claims of the
conservatives. In thinking of radical and classical conservatisms as part of a single unity, I question the validity of certain binary oppositions upon which these claims are founded. What is underlined in this chapter is that radicalism is not limited to the self-proclaimed radical conservatives. Rather, because of the nature of politics, all conservatives should be radical to some extent. Finally, through demonstrating the invalidity of the exceptionalist claims of conservatives, I hope to present an alternative way to read conservatism; that is, as an ideology that desires to realise its ideal society.
The aim of this chapter is to develop a satisfactory definition of the conservative ideology, and to reveal the nature of the relationship between classical and radical conservatisms through this definition. Having said that, in most of this second chapter, I deal with summarising the emergence, and presenting the theoretical features of, these two political sects. That is because discussing the suitability of the previously suggested definitions of the conservative ideology and analysing the relationships between these two variations of conservative thought requires some historical and analytical knowledge on both. To provide this background, I focus on classical conservatism in 2.1, while focusing on its radical counterpart in 2.2. Both sections first locate the sects in their historical context, and then present their main features, characteristic attitudes, and political inclinations.

2.3, the final section of the chapter, builds on this historical and analytical background. After highlighting some methodological problems with attempting to define an ideology, I examine some prevalent views in the literature on the definition of conservatism. After criticising these approaches for their various drawbacks, I propose a new approach which focuses on conservatism’s theoretical core. Here, a theoretical core is suggested for conservatism, which involves three important qualities: being fundamental enough to bear a substantial role in justifying other main arguments of conservatism; being extensive enough to be prominent in the texts of self-professed conservatives of different sects; and being exclusive enough to differentiate conservatism from other ideologies. After framing this core and referring to its limitations, the nature of the relationship between classical and radical conservatisms is evaluated in the light of this definition, and the core shared by both parties is underlined. It is thus argued that conservatism cannot be regarded as an essentially anti-radical political disposition, and radical conservatives have developed a revolutionary interpretation of the conservative precepts that is as legitimate as that of the classical conservatives. This interpretation is strengthened by returning to the historical conditions in which radical conservative thoughts flourished, and by highlighting the modernist cultural environment prevalent in fin de siècle Europe as the main factor in the radicalisation of conservatism.
2.1 Classical Conservatism

As indicated, 2.1 focuses on classical conservatism. I use the term classical conservatism to refer to a line of political thought that is exemplified in the works of political philosophers like Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott, who are thought to oppose the radical political schemes that aim to reshape socio-political forms substantively.¹ Since this sort of conservatism is generally regarded as the mainstream of the conservative tradition, it is often labelled simply as conservatism. Nevertheless, as is discussed in 3.3, I believe that this anti-radical conservatism is not the only possible form of conservative thought, and that various other forms of conservative politics are evident, including radical ones. To appreciate this diversity of the conservative tradition, I prefer to identify mainstream conservatism as the classical conservatism.

This section begins with a brief discussion of the chronological emergence of conservatism in its classical form during the last quarter of the 18th century. I then present the epistemological basis of conservative thinking which highlights the importance of practical knowledge against the theoretical one. The following two sections then deal with the conservative conceptualisation of society and individual, and the final part of the section summarises the most common features of the classical conservative politics.

2.1.1 Emergence of the Conservative Ideology

Before focusing on its emergence, the question of “which conservatism?” should be answered, as our answer to this question will determine the narrative on its emergence. However, by highlighting the importance of this question, I do not intend to undertake the problematic of defining conservatism for the time being; it would necessarily be a premature attempt, as only a narrative on the historical emergence and features of conservatism can provide us the basis for evaluating the appropriateness of different definitions. Therefore, even in the first step of analysing conservatism, a dilemma is at hand. The historical and analytical analysis of conservatism is determined by the definition of conservatism, and vice versa.

I neither believe in the availability of a final solution to this dilemma, nor in a perfectly objective analysis and definition of conservatism free from any precepts. However, taking a somewhat vague and open approach to the initial definition of conservatism as the foundation

¹ I analyse these claims in the fourth chapter of the thesis, and especially in 4.2.
of the historical and analytical analysis of conservatism, and then moving toward the more specific definition of conservatism through this analysis is somewhat closer to objectivity than beginning with a strict definition or a self-assured historical narrative. So, I will begin by stating what not to understand from the term conservatism.

The conservatism which is the focus of this work is not conservatism in the lexical sense. If conservatism is understood in its lexical meaning, it is impossible to form a historical narrative on it and to argue for its chronological emergence. In other words, the conservative attitude understood as simply status quoism, or an inclination to conserve the socio-political structure as it is, has probably always been evident in the history of political struggles. Society is a dynamic phenomenon and the structure of societies has always been subject to change. During this course of change, different status quos have always been challenged, and it is reasonable to imagine that there have always been some political groupings in all these cases, who argue for the status quo, defended the establishment, and employed conservative politics in this lexical sense.

Nevertheless, it is another phenomenon which draws our attention in this study. We intend to analyse conservatism as an ideology, as labelling a distinct way of thinking about socio-political issues. Conservatism in its lexical meaning is only a basic attitude toward status quo\(^2\) and falls short of signifying a relatively coherent set of conceptualisations, beliefs, or understandings regarding the sociocultural and political spheres. Unlike the lexical meaning, the conservative ideology is far from being a singular attitude toward any socio-political establishment. On the other hand, despite this diversity of attitudes, all derivations of conservative ideology must obtain a commonality, a conservative core in their theoretical outlook.

To clarify the difference between lexical and ideological meanings, although lexically conservative attitudes may be in favour of completely different socio-political systems or establishments – for instance a communist in Cuba and a republican in USA can both be called as conservatives in a lexical sense – different incarnations of conservative ideology must all share some common theoretical conceptualisations. Unlike the former, of which particular examples share solely a formal similarity, all variations of the conservative ideology must have substantial commonality resistant to historical and social conditionings.

\(^2\) For a discussion of a number of rhetorical strategies commonly employed by upholders of this attitude, see Hirschman (1991).
And since the conservatism in question here is conservatism in this latter sense, it is indeed possible to determine the era of emergence of this exclusive approach, or this specific mapping of political concepts.3

By the end of 18th century, conservatism in the lexical sense was evident in Europe, representing the resistance of the aristocracy and the church against the rise of bourgeoisie with all the industrial, social and cultural changes it was promoting. However, as the bourgeoisie succeeded in transforming the political sphere mostly into a more deliberative form along with the rise of popular movements and rationality,4 opposition against bourgeois modernity necessarily transformed into a more fully fledged political ideology consisting of a number of arguments theoretically linked within each other, and presenting a more profound rejection of the Enlightenment. Thus, in a sense, it was some lexical conservatives’ response to the changing form of the political sphere that resulted in the emergence of the conservative ideology. It is therefore claimed that “conservatism arouse not against the Enlightenment but within it” (Muller, 1997b:24). Within the age of reason, these lexical conservatives began to theorise the reasons for conserving existing social, political, and cultural forms. This act of theorising distinguished their views from that of lexical conservatives. They began to shape a specific map of political concepts and propose some universal principles.5 It is this approach with all its diverse representations and reinterpretations that we today call the conservative ideology, or more simply, conservatism; it is this conservatism we attempt to analyse in our study.

We can specify the end of 18th century as being the emergence of conservative ideology, and name Edmund Burke as its founder with a distinct political perspective in the modern age (Kirk, 1987:6; Burke, 1970a:38; Kramnick, 1977:27; Baumann, 1929). Conservatism emerged at that period as an ideology against the French Revolution (O’Sullivan, 1976:9; Schuettenger 1970:29) and Burke was its foremost theoretician. As “a passionate maintainer of the established order of things, and a ferocious hater of abstractions and metaphysical politics” (Kirk, 1987:16), the 18th century British politician had deep concerns about the revolution in France. According to him, the French Revolution was nothing but the destruction of stability, order, and welfare of the French society. It was creating a chaotic

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3 For the Freedenian understanding of ideologies as a map of essentially contestable political concepts, see part 3.4.

4 For one of the best analyses of this transformation, see Habermas, 1992.

5 See part 3.4.
state in which the achievements of civilisation would perish. What is more, Burke was anxious about a possible spread of revolution to Britain. According to him the French revolution was not the result of conditions peculiar to France but of a general way of thinking that was becoming prevalent in all Europe, including Britain. He expresses his concerns on that possibility in one of his letters:

Is our monarchy, after their example [the French revolution], to be annihilated, with all the laws, all the tribunals, and all the ancient corporations of the kingdom? Is every landmark of the country to be done away, in favour of a geometrical and arithmetical constitution? (...) Are all orders, ranks, and distinctions to be confounded, that universal anarchy may arise out of national Bankruptcy? (Burke, 1791b:7).

As is seen in these lines, Burke comprehends the threat of revolution as directly related to a philosophy which favours the design and implementation of a “geometrical and arithmetical constitution”. According to him, it was the modernity and the Enlightenment which triggered chaotic incidents in France. Thus, rather than limiting itself with opposing solely the French Revolution, Burke’s political project challenges the thinking behind the revolution. As Russell Kirk states, “the universal principles he applies to the transitory French scene of terror transcend their immediate topic” (Kirk, 1987:23) and lead to the emergence of the conservative ideology.

One of these universal principles mentioned by Kirk is the idea that the universalist and progressivist thinking of Enlightenment rationalism gives rise to a false hope for equality, freedom and fraternity, by arguing that people are able to reshape established social structures and mould the society according to their will (Kirk, 1987:26). As the founder of the ideology, he suggests in his works that the modern beliefs in human perfection are nonsense, and along with his practical refutation based on the obviously undesirable events in France, he claims that this humanist optimism can also be falsified theoretically by reference to reason. For Burke, Enlightenment thinking exaggerates individuals’ intellectual capacity and oversimplifies the nature of social existence. Burke accuses so-called enlightened revolutionaries of his time, whom he calls “men of letters” (Burke, 1791:18), for being overly confident about their capability to construct a new socio-political order. The consequence of this overconfidence, he continues, can be nothing but the destruction of the existing order by these men of letters who “are rarely averse to innovation” (Burke, 1791:18) but are also incapable of forming a new, superior order. Therefore, the policies of these men necessarily lead to the reduction of civilised people to the status of savages:
These enthusiasts [men of letters] do not scruple to avow their opinion, that a state can subsist without any religion better than with one; and that they are able to supply the place of any good which may be in it, by a sort of education, the scheme of which has been long known. Of late they distinguish it by the name of a Civic Education; but its tendency is to form a new race of savages in Christian countries (Burke, 1791b:19).

In contrast to the revolutionist politics of substituting existing social institutions with supposedly better ones, Burke argues that it is more reasonable to conserve already-established institutions and social structures.⁶ And to make this point, he provides a universal theoretical approach which criticises the Enlightenment spirit for aiming to reshape societies with a mathematical strictness and faith, but without realising the value of social continuity. “It is impossible not to observe,” says Burke, “that in the spirit of this geometrical distribution and arithmetical arrangement, these pretended citizens treat France exactly like a country of conquest” (quoted by Nisbet, 1986:34). Unlike many pro-aristocracy writers of his time, Burke’s conservatism is not simply conservatism in its lexical sense. He does not particularly defend the plausibility of the Ancien Régime against the French Revolution. He formulates theoretical arguments on the categorical superiority of a conservative-traditionalist thinking against the universal rationalism of modernity. As Freeman indicates, this aspect of his corpus has outlasted his accounts on more particular issues (Freeman, 1980:47).

Today, after more than two centuries, conservative ideology still persists as a significant tradition and bears an important political influence in many countries (see Green, 2002:1). Of course, the socio-political and cultural environment has changed tremendously since the 18th century, and contemporary derivations of conservatism represent greater diversity. Even some conservatives argue for revolutionist politics in the name of conservatism. However, the mainstream of the canon, at least in the first glance, still preserves a strong rejection of any kind of substantial changes in the existing forms of socio-political and cultural structures.⁷ It is this sort of conservatism which I call classical conservatism. In the next part I will focus on this classical conservatism and present its main features with reference to prominent thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott, and Roger Scruton.

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⁶ According to Burke, “[r]ather than bring the Commons before the bar of speculative theories of natural right, one should treat it with the respect due its age. Its legitimacy is prescriptive. Prescription, a fundamental concept of Burke’s conservatism, is the natural and dutiful reverence to any institution that has existed through the ages and persists to the present day”⁷ (Kramnick, 1977:25).

⁷ See parts 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 for a discussion of this perception.
2.1.2 The Conservative Epistemology

As Devigne puts forward, “[c]onservatism developed as an ideology against the Enlightenment beliefs that society could be guided along a secular, egalitarian, and self-governing path” (Devigne, 1994:1). More substantially, it developed against the universalist rationalism of the Enlightenment which underpins all these beliefs. According to conservatives,

Enlightenment philosophy was triggering the destructive modern and/or revolutionist politics, especially in its epistemological overconfidence to the faculty of individual reasoning. Burke points to this overconfidence as “the disease of the time” and blames it as the source of all other diseases (Burke, 1791b:65). Thus, it can be said that the refusal of this overconfidence and criticizing of the modern epistemology stands as a significant challenge for conservatism. Conservatives are bound to meet this challenge as well as substituting the modern epistemology with a genuinely conservative epistemology that favours the politics of conserving instead of the politics of altering. But before focusing on the ways through which conservatives deal with that challenge, I should first provide a sketch of the Enlightenment epistemology.

In a sense, the philosophy of the Enlightenment is very similar to that of the medieval Europe with one exception: the role of God is substituted by the concept of human (see Mendel, 2007). Similar to the medieval conceptualisation of ‘God as creator’, the Enlightenment attributes subjectivity to human beings while denoting all remaining entities as objects. It thus promotes a humanist philosophy with almost limitless trust in human reason and perfection. The concept of human is thus seen as the main reference, the final authority, and the single source of justification. That is why one of the fundamental precepts of the Enlightenment epistemology is the capacity of the human subjects to grab the whole knowledge of the objective world. According to that idea, the main limit on the knowledge is not the individuals themselves, but the means and methods through which they interact with what is to be known. Providing that the right method is chosen, there is in principal no reason for the individuals to gain anything short of the full knowledge of the object. This epistemology is perfectly expressed by René Descartes in Discourse on the Method (1998 [1637]) and Meditations on First Philosophy (2010 [1641]). As Descartes attempts to prove in these.

8 Carl Schmitt’s argument that all concepts of modern politics do have a theological basis and his writings to develop a ‘political theology’ to analyse political concepts in their true context is grounded on this relation between Enlightenment humanism and the idea of God. See Schmitt 1992:31-32.
works, once the scientific method is employed, all underlying laws that govern our external material and social environment can be uncovered. Hence, by utilising these laws, people can control and mould their environment as they please. Following the example of Descartes, having the knowledge of these underlying laws is regarded as a key for freedom in the course of modern thinking, since only these can provide us with the capacity to form and reform the external world. What is important for our study here is that this key for emancipation is generally perceived as the theoretical knowledge gained by a scientific method (Golinski, 1999:196).

It is not hard to see the relationship between this epistemology and the revolutionist politics of modernity. With a deep confidence in the intellectual faculties of the people, the promise of emancipation through knowledge became popular in the 18th century Europe and caused the rise of political movements struggling for major social transformations. These transformative politics were commonly justified through claims of objective knowledge. Members of those groups regarded themselves as holding the fundamental laws of socio-political reality, and as capable of forging society into a better shape. They thus claimed superiority and domination over all rival political views and attempted to implement their transformationist agenda.

It was this epistemological position that was countered by the founders of the conservative ideology. Because of the popularisation of the political domain in modern times, the conservative response involved a theoretical aspect which would reject Enlightenment thinking and replace it by an alternative philosophy that could convince the masses of the reasons for conserving the establishment. Hence, against the revolutionist challenge of modernity, conservative thinkers developed a rival conservative epistemology which was initially presented in the 18th century and popularised by the writings of Burke.

This conservative epistemology draws attention to the importance of practical knowledge which, unlike the theoretical knowledge gained through a methodological and contemplative practice, can only be acquired through direct experience and physical contact between the individual and her environment. Practical knowledge, labelled by William James as the knowledge of, is the knowledge which “we acquire simply through experience, through direct exposure to life or at least major areas of life”. According to James, the essence of this type of knowledge is practicality (Nisbet, 1986:31-32). It is not this practical knowledge but the theoretical knowledge, the knowledge about which is utilised by the revolutionist politics.
This theoretical knowledge can be “acquire[d] from the textbook, from learning about something that can be presented in the form of abstract or general principal, something that is susceptible to prescriptive formulae” (Nisbet, 1986:32).

Conservatives consider this practical knowledge of direct experience as categorically superior to theoretical knowledge. For instance, Burke, while not totally denying the value of reason, gives primacy to experience and accuses French philosophers of being merely the men of theory (Freeman, 1980:27-29). In this sense, he detests abstractions (Kirk, 1987:22) and this conservative gesture is apparent in one of his letters at which he underlines the particularity of rights and political restrictions:

[A]s the liberties and restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they are not to be settled upon any abstract rule; and it is as foolish to discuss them upon that principle, as it would be to discuss a man’s abstract right to food and to medicine (Burke, 1791b:25-26).

One of the best formulations of this aspect of the conservative epistemology can be found in Rationalism in Politics (Oakeshott, 1991c), an article of Michael Oakeshott, the famous British classical conservative of the 20th century. For Oakeshott, it is not possible to fully comprehend human reality through theoretical thinking, as there are two different categories of knowledge embedded in all human experiences. Although these can be distinguished from one another, he underlines their inseparable nature by defining them as “the twin components of the knowledge involved in every concrete human activity” (Oakeshott, 1991c:12).

As might be guessed, the first of the two categories Oakeshott talks about is the theoretical knowledge. It does not necessitate a physical or direct interaction between the knower and the known. It is the technical knowledge which can be formulated in rules and transferred through interpersonal communication like speaking or writing. However, this knowledge is necessarily incomplete as there is also a practical dimension of our experiences which is the domain of practical knowledge. This category of knowledge necessitates a direct interaction between the knower and the known, and can only be acquired through practice (Oakeshott, 1991c:12).

This distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge is the Archimedean point of the conservative rejection of Enlightenment rationalism. Rationalists ignore the practical aspect of our experiences, and regard theoretical knowledge as the only form of knowledge involved in all kinds of human activities (Oakeshott, 1991c:15-16). If it is accepted that these two
categories of knowledge are embedded in all human experiences, then Enlightenment rationalists’ attempts to fully comprehend the social and material environment, and to forge them into a better shape through theoretical knowledge, should necessarily be unsuccessful. As Oakeshott suggests, “[their] knowledge will never be more than half-right” (Oakeshott, 1991c:36).

From this conservative perspective, it is obvious that all attempts to redesign society by utilising the theoretical knowledge of the society are misguided. Due to their blindness on the practical aspect of life, such attempts nearly always lead to unforeseeable, and mostly undesirable consequences. The fate of France in the late 18th century in the hands of revolutionaries is referred to as a clear example of this point in conservative narrative. As Burke writes in Reflections,

Nature of man is intricate; the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity: and therefore no simple disposition or direction of power can be suitable either to man's nature, or to the quality of his affairs. When I hear the simplicity of contrivance aimed at and boasted of in any new political constitutions, I am at no loss to decide that the artificers are grossly ignorant of their trade, or totally negligent of their duty. Simple governments are fundamentally defective, to say no worse of them (quoted by Stanlis, 1986:133-134).

As is seen here, as well as proposing the inadequacy of theoretical knowledge to grasp the social reality to its full extent, the conservative epistemology also underlines some distinct qualities of practical knowledge to challenge the social engineering attempts of the Enlightenment rationalists. Firstly, since societies are composed of numerous individuals living in a web of continuous relationships with other individuals and the material environment, an enormous amount of practical knowledge is available in society. Secondly, as practical knowledge can only be gained through engaging in first-hand experience, each individual can only acquire a very small amount of the practical knowledge embedded in society. In other words, since the amount of practical knowledge circulating in social life is much more than individuals’ capacity to obtain, individual reasoning is always short of fully comprehending the sociality. Social life is too complex for our intellectual potential. As Burke states,

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 do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages... (Burke, 1970b:51)
Therefore, according to the conservative epistemology, as a result of the distinct qualities of practical knowledge, individuals are bound to remain ignorant on social issues, and thus their attempts to redesign society through individual reasoning is always dangerous. Even though they are unable to create a social form better than the one at hand, they are capable of destroying it. As Kirk puts it, “[m]en not being angels, a terrestrial paradise cannot be contrived by metaphysical enthusiasts; yet an early hell can be arranged readily enough by the ideologues of one stamp or another” (Kirk, 1987:iii-iv).

Another feature of the conservative epistemology is its emphasis on particularity. As the practical aspect is primary in every phenomenon, the theoretical knowledge on any issue must always be conditioned by the practical dimension, or the particularity of the issue. This particularistic tendency is the basis of the conservative rejection of the universal as a valid scale of thought. Full knowledge of a social incident necessitates comprehending the incident at hand in its particularity, and any abstract contemplation on it is misguided from the very beginning. This particularist emphasis also suggests the impossibility of a theoretical outlook, a law, or a social form to preserve its validity in all particular examples. That is why, despite praising the British socio-political forms and harshly criticising the French revolution, Burke still refrains from proposing the British constitution as a cure for France: “When I praised the British constitution, and wished it to be well studied, I did not mean that its exterior form and positive arrangement should become a model for you, or for any people servilely to copy” (Burke, 1791a:62). As Oakeshott proposes in his article, even the concept of rationality is to be understood with its practicality rather than a sum of universally applicable rules. It should be understood as a context-bounded phenomenon which can have a different content in each of its particular expressions. Oakeshott thus rejects the universalist rationalism by referring to the particularistic tendency of the conservative epistemology (Oakeshott, 1991b:115-117).

In sum, by developing a conservative epistemology which underlines the primacy and particularity of practical experiences, conservatives challenge the claims of Enlightenment rationalism. They argue that Enlightenment rationalism has an ungrounded faith in our capacity to fully understand society and to attempt to change it according to our will. In

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9 We should remind again the lines of Burke: “[A]s the liberties and restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, they are not to be settled upon any abstract rule; and it is as foolish to discuss them upon that principle, as it would be to discuss a man’s abstract right to food and to medicine” (Burke, 1791b:25-26).
response, classical conservatives underline the significance of accumulated practical knowledge which is totally absent in the Enlightenment outlook. They suggest relying on habits and common prejudices which are derived from the practical knowledge of numerous individuals and are the “distillation of a whole way of knowing, of understanding, and of feeling” (Nisbet, 1986:30). Classical conservatives thus formulate an epistemological argument for the preservation of present social forms. That defence attributes a unique value to social structures and promotes a genuine conservative conceptualisation of society, to which I now turn.

2.1.3 Conservative Approach to Society
The classical conservative conceptualisation of society finds its roots in the conservative epistemology that emphasises practical knowledge. According to this, society is not merely the sum of a group of people who live alongside each other, but also of the collection of routine activities, relationships, and practices among those people. The term society not only signifies the people who live in the present as a part of it, but also the ones from whom the traditions (habits, customs, prejudices, values, practices, etc.) are inherited and to whom they will be left as inheritance. Burke’s famous lines highlight this historicity:

[Society] is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born (Burke, 1970a:38).

This historicity is linked with the conservative epistemology, as it supposes the continuous accumulation of practical knowledge being inherited among generations in the name of traditions. Moreover, in connection with the particularity of the conservative epistemology, this perspective also proposes that these inherited traditions as accumulated practical knowledge are an important part of the life of each member. While expressing the outlook to society, Scruton defines tradition as,

a form of social knowledge (...) [aroused] ‘by an invisible hand’ from the open-ended business of society, from problems which have been confronted and solved, from agreements which have been perpetuated by custom, from conventions which coordinate our otherwise conflicting passions, and from the unending process of negotiation and compromise whereby we quieten the dogs of war (Scruton, 2001:31-32).

Scruton is hardly an exception in conceptualising established traditions and institutions as outcomes of the struggles of past generations to form a stable and harmonious social order in
the middle of ever-present possibility of conflict, chaos, and dispersion. For instance, the neoconservative sociologist Nathan Glazer writes that what he learned about society from a stint of government service was “to develop a certain respect for what was; in a world of infinite complexity some things had emerged and survived” (Glazer, 1970:75).

This perspective praises the traditional routines for being practiced by numerous individuals, and passing the test of time up until now. They are seen as being tested by the practices of our forefathers and shaped in accordance with the practical needs of real people, instead of any abstract principal like equality. This past is the source of the practical knowledge embedded in social structures and cannot be founded in books or anywhere else except in their “repeated exercise” (Scruton, 2001:32). This point renders existing social structures and traditions extremely valuable, as it is impossible for individuals to generate an alternative social structure which contains so much practical knowledge derived from, and tested by, so many individuals in practice.

An important consequence of the historicist outlook is that of regarding the society as transcending temporality. In this view, society is a challenge to the modern linear conception of time solely by its existence. As Nisbet indicates, for conservatism “true history is expressed not in linear, chronological fashion but in persistence of structures, communities, habits, and prejudices generation after generation” (Nisbet, 1986:24). It is thus argued that accumulated experience of past generations is directly transferred to the newest members of society from the earliest moments of their socialisation in the form of traditions and social institutions. Consequently, rather than being a narrative of the long-gone, the history - of a society - is seen as an actual and concrete part of the individuals. In Scruton’s words, tradition “makes history into reason, and therefore the past into a present aim” (Scruton, 2001:31). Nisbet draws attention to the similarity between this accumulating practical knowledge and the evolution. In terms of this similarity, “history for the conservative has been very much the kind of force that the natural selection is for the biological evolutionist” (Nisbet, 1986:28). In other words, like natural selection is the dynamic of the accumulative biological progress, history is the dynamic of accumulative social maturity; it is the social evolution. This is why history is not conceptualised by conservatives as just something about the past, but turns into a phenomenon that is passed on from generation to generation and that is always actual.
Since the existing form of society is regarded as the outcome of this history, conservatives perceive society as a harmonious unity. As a result of their evolutionary outlook, contrary to the Marxist approach, conservatives conceptualise society as an organism, every part of which is in need of each other to exist and is so evolved to fulfil a specific function and to harmoniously cooperate with other parts. Within this organic view, “[c]onservatives regard society as ‘a unitary, natural growth, an organised living whole not a mechanical aggregate’, composed of ‘social beings, related to one another within a texture of inherited customs and institutions which endow them with their specific social nature” (Green, 2002:281). In Nisbet’s words, for conservatives,

[s]ociety is not a mechanical thing, not a machine the parts of which are both interchangeable and individually separable. It is organic in its articulation of institutions and interrelationship of functions... (Nisbet, 1986:25).

This organicism implies that only if all parts of society work in collaboration and fulfil their function smoothly can the social organism have a healthy life. Otherwise, it is argued that the organism will lose its ability to orient itself to new conditions, and consequently be unable to reproduce itself in the long term. To prevent this dispersion, conservative politics is very sensitive to any kind of ‘abnormalities’ in a society. As Scruton states, conservatism “presupposes the existence of social organism”, and attempts to “sustain the life of that organism, through sickness and health” (Scruton, 2001:14).

This ‘sickness’ here mostly stands for any kind of social conflicts in conservative narrative. Because a healthy society is grasped as a perfectly harmonious and unitary being, it is hardly surprising that conservatives perceive any social conflicts or struggles as pathological. Furthermore, as social structures are argued to be shaped by an evolutionary process, conservatives argue that when there is no external interference, they are supposed to function properly and no conflict should arise. Thus, the reason for any internal struggles or abnormalities should be some kind of external interference to the self-evolution of the social organism.\(^\text{10}\) Conservatives commonly accuse modernity and the Enlightenment thinking for causing such interferences by encouraging individuals to redesign society as they please.

\(^{10}\) For an example of this kind of reasoning, see the conservative critique of governmental intervention for egalitarian purposes: “For the conservative there is a natural hierarchy in society (and not one merely based on wealth), and to disrupt this by constant governmental intervention disturbs the necessary stability which that hierarchy provides” (Barry, 1987:90).
Conservative ideology may be understood as a response to this ‘modern’ politics. It intends to cure the social organism by the policies which are based on and reflect the accumulated wisdom embedded in traditions, and aim to make some minor corrections on the course of social evolution to put society on its natural and stable route again. Thus, it refrains from encouraging individuals to treat society as a mere object to be shaped or rationalised. Instead, it desires to prove that society has its own source of wisdom which is superior to rational design. This point reveals another characteristic of classical conservatism: Classical conservative arguments justify themselves by referring to the practical knowledge embedded in traditions and traditional social institutions instead of referring to the individual reasoning. In this sense, classical conservatism is sceptical about individuals’ intellectual faculties. This scepticism is a major point that underpins the conservative understanding of individuality to which I now turn.

2.1.4 The Imperfect Individual of Conservatism

As an ideology which constructed itself against the French Revolution, albeit having an Enlightenment pedigree, conservatism is also the rejection of the Enlightenment philosophy. This is especially apparent on the conceptualisation of the individual. As stated before, the concept of human holds a central place in the Enlightenment philosophy. Exemplified in the Kantian ethics, the individual is the final referent and absolute authority of justification. No external authority is perceived as superior to her. Moreover, she is also encouraged to take her fate in her own hands through the intellectual capacity and creative potential she has. In this sense, Enlightenment thinking has a deep trust in individual’s potential. Thus, not only is individual the place of justification, but is also the basic unit of modern thinking. She is accepted as the departure point of modern thinking - a point which is expressed by Descartes’ first principle of thinking, *cogito ergo sum*. And as a prerequisite of this status, individuality is understood as a self-sufficient state. That is, according to Enlightenment thinking, human beings do possess everything needed to emerge as free willed individuals with endless potential. They require no other external referent either to form or sustain their individuality and are innately capable of shaping the external world.\(^\text{11}\) All resources they need to develop themselves as free subjects are in them waiting to be explored and developed.

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\(^{11}\) Although it can be argued intellectual maturity is a prerequisite in Enlightenment thinking for the emergence of individuals with free-will, since the foundation of this maturity is the intellectual capacity inherent in every human being, it can still be argued that Enlightenment thinking grasps individuals as self-sufficient subjects.
In contrast with this conceptualisation, conservatism presents a very different portrayal of the individual. While Enlightenment thinking can be characterised by a trust and belief in the individual, conservatives have deep concerns about the individual in a number of senses. Firstly, unlike the Enlightenment outlook, conservatives do not attach an absolute value to individuality or regard it as a final authority (see Scruton, 2001:8). They see individuality from a particularist perspective, according to which it should be understood not as a universal phenomenon but as a product of Western societies (Scruton, 2001:24). So, conservatives argue that the modern approach of attaching a transcendental value to individuality and of proposing individual emancipation as a universal project is nonsense. They argue that, like any other phenomena, human existence is conditioned by the particularity in which it emerges. Different forms of existences, of which individuality is just form, should be apprehended with relation to the specific contexts within which they emerge. And from this view, individuality is also the product of a specific social form. It is not a genuine mode of human existence but “an artefact, an achievement which depends upon the social life of people” (Scruton, 2001:24).

This view suggests that the idea of self is a social product and depended on society for its specific form of existence. “[C]onservatives acknowledge no such thing as an individual outside of the social context” (McAllister, 1996:266-267). One of the founders of the conservative ideology, Joseph De Maistre, “agree[s] with other romantic philosophers on the absurdity of reasoning about man’s state prior to the organization of society. Also like them, he subordinate[s] the development of the individual person to that of the higher unity, the community or tradition” (Femia, 2001:29).

Only through the determinative role of the society can humans construct their self and individuality:

The condition of mankind requires that individuals, while they exist and act as autonomous beings, do so only because they can first identify themselves as something greater – as members of a society, group, class, state or nation, of some arrangement to which they may not attach a name but which they recognise instinctively as home (Scruton, 2001:24).

We can thus say that in classical conservatism, the individual is a secondary concept and is subsidiary to society in this sense (Devigne, 1994:1; Scruton, 2001:20). This subjection of individuals to society has two significant consequences: first, if the self and identity are artefacts of social life, then for the firmness of their self-conceptions, individuals are in need
of order and social stability. In other words, as individuals are argued to have an existential relationship with their particular social environment (see Oakeshott, 1991a:408), extensive social change is also perceived as an existential threat for them. Nisbet points to this feature by referring to the well-founded conservative belief that “human beings, once they got loose from major orthodoxy, are likely to suffer measure of derangement, of loss of equilibrium” (Nisbet, 1986:72).

Another consequence of the subjection of individuality is that if individuality is an artefact, it must then be conditioned by its spatio-temporality; and thus, there must be an existential and unbridgeable gap between people from different societies. As they are conditioned by different particularities, the differences between them should be substantial while the similarities are not. That is why conservatives regard talking about humanity in general as misleading. Rationalists who “abstract individuals from their social and historical background” (Barry, 2000:13) may imagine a universal category of human, but in the real world no such category has any expression. As De Maistre puts it,

there is on earth no man as such. I have seen... Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc. Thanks to Montesquieu I even know that one can be Persian, but I declare that never in my life have I seen a man – unless indeed he exists unknown to me (quoted by Nisbet, 1986:27).

So, talking about universal values like ‘universal human rights’ is arbitrary, abstract, and meaningless as it presupposes a universal category of humanity, and ignores each individual’s spatio-temporality. For this reason “conservatives [are] loath to found their political enterprise upon any idea of ‘universal’ or ‘natural’ rights” (Scruton, 2001:41), and rather than thinking in a transnational scale, they tend to think within the locality and particularity of their society.

Apart from the conception of individuality as an artefact, as a phenomenon existentially depended to and conditioned by society, conservatives perceive individuals as intellectually deficient as well. As mentioned before, acquiring practical knowledge necessary to fully comprehend the world is the primary limitation for humans. Individuals’ comprehension will always remain partial, because of their relatively small opportunities to engage in a practical relationship with the external world, in comparison to past generations’ accumulated experiences in engaging in such. This intellectual deficiency is apparent in comprehending society. Socio-political phenomenon are conceptualised as an overly complex entity for individual intellect. Thus conservatives reject “the claims of individual reason to act as guide
in human affairs” (Minogue, 1967:196) and thus while explaining the absence of full-confidence of conservatives on their expressions, Scruton argues that it is caused by their “awareness of the complexity of human things” (Scruton, 2001:1).

Finally, apart from these two imperfections, individuals are also portrayed by conservatives as morally deficient beings. According to this, individuals are seen as having an inclination towards chaos and unsocial behaviours. Russell Kirk, a well-known American conservative, expresses this feature of the conservative narrative by accusing political radicals with “deny[ing] that humanity has a natural proclivity toward violence and sin” (Kirk, 1987:10). Since individual is simultaneously regarded as in need of social bonds for its stable existence, it can be argued that in classical conservative narrative individual is inherently a self-destructive being. For instance, in the conservative thought formulated by Burke, “[d]eep reservoirs of evil and sin lurk in human nature, (…) and government is necessary, not as an occasional umpire but as an indispensable external authority thwarting and repressing antisocial inclinations of individuals” (Kramnick, 1977:30).

For Burke, one of the most important perquisites of a society, and thus of the existence of individuals, is the restraint on individuals’ passions:

Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters (Burke, 1791a, p.69).

And in another piece, he talks in the same manner:

Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. (Burke, 1970a:41).

As is clear from these quotations an external point of reference, “a power out of themselves” which can be the foundation of both morality and repression is vital to prevent the self-destruction of individuals. Furthermore, apart from this primary source of power and morality, several other authority centres, like family, church, and state are needed to inculcate morality and other social values. That is why classical conservative policies aim to ensure that individuals are under the control of such social authorities by empowering and securing them (Nisbet, 1986:40). Especially the intermediary institutions like family, school, church, and state, which are suitable to meet this function of inculcation have an important role in the
conservative narrative (Schuettinger, 1970:15). Burke’s defence of the authoritative state free from individuals’ will and passions implies this conservative notion of morally deficiency individual, and her need to be subjected to an external authority:

Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Among these wants is to be reckoned a want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. This can only be done by a power out of themselves; and not in the exercise of its functions, subject to that will, and those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue (Burke, 1791a:25).

It can be deduced from these words that the conservative insistence on a powerful – if not necessarily big - state (see Scruton, 2001:23) is related to the view of individuals as morally deficient self-destructive beings. Since individuals are untrustworthy, unforeseeable, fallible, and inclined to corruption, a powerful authority figure such as a central state is always needed to ensure stability, impose a common identity, and maintain order. Only a powerful state implementing conservative policies may succeed in offering a decent and socially secure life to the people. Now, in the next part, I present main features of these policies of ensuring the social stability.

2.1.5 The Classical Conservative Politics

The politics of classical conservatism is commonly described briefly as a politics of securing the ‘establishments’. As is put forward by Burke, he and his colleagues “are resolved to keep an established Church; an established monarchy; an established aristocracy; an established democracy” (Burke, 1791a:30). Even if this specific list is subject to change, general conservative principle is set and clear: it is about securing and promoting the socio-political inheritance. Again it is Burke who puts a clear manifestation of this political style:

The very idea of the fabrication of a new government, is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all that we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers; well knowing that, without an hereditary government, we can have no hereditary right to any thing. To the people of England, the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free; but it secures what it acquires. All the reformations we have hitherto made have proceeded on the principle of reference to antiquity; and I hope, nay, I am persuaded, that all those which possibly may be formed hereafter, will be carefully formed upon analogical precedent, authority, and example (Burke, 1791a:24).

However, this tendency to preserve the establishments and inheritance does not necessitate a categorical rejection of change. Classical conservatives are only against the revolutionist and
radical policies which aim for substantial changes in existing social, political or cultural forms. As indicated by Burke, although they are not against all kinds of changes, they are sceptical about changes and want to be sure that any policy of change will not alter the substance of existing forms, but will make minimum alterations required for the healthy survival of the social organism:

I would not exclude alteration neither; but even when I changed, it should be to preserve. In what I did, I would follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation, as nearly as possible, in the style of the building. A politic caution, a guarded circumspection, a moral, rather than a complexional timidity, were among the ruling principles of our forefathers, in their most decided conduct. Let us imitate their caution... (Burke, 1791a:30-31).

Same point is highlighted by Scruton: “The desire to conserve is compatible with all manner of change, provided only that change is also continuity” (Scruton, 2001:11). In light of these views, we can restate that classical conservative scepticism is peculiar to revolutionist changes which alter the so-called substance of society. At this point, two beliefs derived from the conservative conception of the individual can be linked with this scepticism. The first of these is that individuals are unable to grasp the complex nature of society. In accordance to that view, since man-made political projects are always hampered by a lack of perfect comprehension, any broad attempt to change socio-political and cultural structures via political means may end up in a disaster and cause a social chaos. Such a daring style of politics is like building bridges without comprehensive knowledge on construction, and expecting good results. But a social engineering project risks much more than a single bridge and a couple of cars; it risks the whole of society. If we destroy existing social forms because of our epistemological imperfection while attempting to create better ones, we would be unable to restructure a stable society like the one we had. Thus, according to classical conservatives, radical politics takes unacceptable risks and should be rejected for the sake of a conservative politics with moderate goals.

Moreover, even if such radical policies may not result in social chaos, they are still discarded by classical conservatism in accordance with a second belief of conservatism. Because individuals are dependent on society to construct their identities, even if a comprehensive proposal for social change may not end in chaos, it is still a threat for our identities and selves. We are necessarily “attached” to the particularities within which we live (see Oakeshott, 1991a:408) and it is these particularities that radical projects seek to destroy.
argument is completely separated from the first one and is the reason for the categorical rejection of any radical policies, no matter how practical and applicable they may seem.

In contrast with such radical politics, classical conservative politics propose only some moderate adjustments which will ensure the health of the social organism. One of the most common ‘adjustments’ is promoting the common identity to stiffen social harmony. A common identity, a sense of commonality, is of central importance in classical conservative politics. For instance, while complaining about the prevalence of revolutionist ideas, their corrosive effect on common sense is one of Burke’s emphases:

> We cannot be ignorant of the spirit of atheistical fanaticism, inspired by a multitude of writings, dispersed with incredible assiduity and expense, and by sermons delivered in all the streets and places of public resort in Paris. These writings and sermons have filled the populace with black and savage atrocity of mind, which supersedes in them the common feeling of morality and religion (Burke, 1791a:20).

In contrast with these tendencies, classical conservatives intend to cure all social conflicts by strengthening the “natural relation” between individual and her society (Scruton, 2001:22). This tendency leads classical conservatives to be sympathetic to nationalism. Through employing the nationalist corporatist narrative, they aim to convince individuals that all are parts of the same big family, are sharing a common history, and may all have a better life if they work harmoniously and play their role in society as best as they can. In other words, by emphasising the authenticity of the existing society and the underlying unity (see Scruton, 2001:15), classical conservatives aim to strengthen the collective sense. They intend to cure social conflicts with reference to this collectivity. I believe that the negative and restrictive attitude of classical conservatives on migration policies (see Layton-Henry, 1980) may also be understood in the light of this tendency to ensure social harmony through promoting a common identity. Since immigrants do not share a supposedly common historical background with the rest of society and lack a substantial link with most of the social particularities, as subjects causing heterogeneity, they are regarded as threats to social harmony.

Apart from promoting a common identity, elitism can be proposed as a second feature of classical conservative politics. As indicated before, conservatism has an elitist tendency resulting from its organic comprehension of society. Since society is seen as an organism, it is assumed to be composed of different and unequal parts. And in parallel to this conception, classical conservatives are sympathetic toward social inequalities and relationships of domination. They are convinced that “men are equal in the sight of God, but equal only so”
(Kirk, 1987:17), and that “some decent, regulated preëminence, some preference (not exclusive appropriation) given to birth, is neither unnatural, nor unjust, nor impolitic” (Burke, 1970c:61). For conservatives, these social inequalities and hierarchical structures are natural and in accordance with the universal order the whole universe is structured hierarchically and “our world is only a little part of [this] great spiritual hierarchy” (Kirk, 1987:33). American Conservative John Adams plainly articulates this view:

Nature, which has established in the universe a chain of being and universal order, descending from archangels to microscopic animalcules, has ordained that no two objects shall be perfectly alike, and no two creatures perfectly equal. Although, among men, all are subject by nature to equal laws of morality, and in society have a right to equal laws for their government, yet no two men are perfectly equal in person, property, understanding, activity, and virtue, or ever can be made so by any power less than that which created them; and whenever it becomes disputable between two individuals or families, which is superior, a fermentation commences, which disturbs the order of all things until it is settled, and each knows his place in the opinion of the public (quoted by Kirk, 1987:98).

Moreover, conservatives argue that as people are not equal, it is even good for the less gifted majority to be ruled by a skilled and bright minority. They can even talk about a right to be restrained from political processes, or to be governed:

If natural right be called into question, indeed, men do possess a natural right to be restrained from meddling with political authority in a fashion for which they are unqualified and which can bring them nothing but harm. The nature which we inherit is not simply a nature of license; it is also a nature of discipline. Not every real natural right man possesses is always palatable to him, but the limitations of our nature are designed for our protection (Kirk, 1987:60).

Of course this does not mean that conservatives are in favour of a despotic monarchy or tyranny. It simply means that they are “committed to inequality” and do not perceive social inequality as a problem by itself (Eccleshall, 2000:279). As a result, they are sceptical against participatory forms of politics and populist movements that rely on masses. As Benjamin Disraeli argues, “whatever form a government may assume, power must be exercised by a minority of numbers” (Disraeli, 1970b:228). “If you establish a democracy you must in due season reap the fruits of a democracy. (...) You will in due season have wars entered into from passion and not from reason” (Disraeli, 1970c:236-237).

Of course contemporary conservatives are not that pessimistic about the capacity of ordinary man, at least openly, and are less harsh in their criticisms toward participatory forms of politics. But they still prefer a moderate democracy which grants people the right to vote and
provides social elites a significant space of manœuvrability to administer the masses (Muller, 1997a:261). This distanced position against democracy can be seen in many conservative texts. For instance, Scruton argues that “[t]he unity between state and society demands no democratic process; indeed, at present, democratization is in many respects a threat to this unity” (Scruton, 2001:63).

Besides, empowering the authority of intermediary social institutions like state, family, and church may be argued as another inclination in classical conservative politics (Schuettinger, 1970:15). Since one of the emphases of conservative comprehension of the individual is its self-destructive tendency, classical conservatives assume the necessity of some social institutions to put individuals under control. Also, they underline the importance of these institutions as focal points of authority in individuals’ identity formation and comprehension of social duties:

One is a member of a family, the local church, a guild or profession as well as a citizen of a city or village and a state. In the interstices of these institutions, along with the traditions and prejudices inherited from one’s ancestors, one understands one’s place in relation to the whole as well as one’s duties and liberties (McAllister, 1996:266-267).

Lastly, its approach to international politics should be pointed out as a characteristic of classical conservative politics. Conservatism’s particularistic tendencies lead to scepticism among conservatives toward transnational organisations. These organisations are generally founded upon some universal, humanitarian principles, and some of them, like the European Union, seem to have a vision of forming a single transnational political form. This makes international organisations a target for conservative critiques (see Devigne, 1994:153-154, 170-173; Scruton, 2001:176; Scruton, 2006:1-32). Against such transnational organisations, conservatives insist on seeing nation-states as the only legitimate actors of the international sphere (see Devigne, 1994:173). Furthermore, in accordance with the particularistic inclination, conservatives deny the ultimate authority of any transnational morality, interpret international relations in terms of realpolitik, and define national security as the only legitimate goal for foreign policy (Devigne, 1994:170, 176).

So far, I have proposed a sketch of classical conservative thinking with some of its significant features. However classical conservatism is not the only member in the family of conservatism. There are other interpretations which share some features with the classical interpretation and reinterpret some others. One of the most interesting of these alternative
interpretations is radical conservatism, whose revolutionary tendencies seem in direct contradiction with the foundations of classical conservatism. In the next section I will attempt to portray this interesting thought.
2.2 Radical Conservatism

As explained in the previous part, conservative ideology developed at the end of 18th century against the broadening influence of epistemological and political modernity. Thus, conservatism can be read as an alternative to ‘modern politics’ of the Jacobean radicalism, which desired to destroy the Ancien Régime and create a new society through reason. Conservatives criticised this radical style of politics and suggested a moderate, self-possessed style intending to make some small alterations, rather than substituting existing socio-political forms with new ones. By relying on this point, some thinkers see non-radicalism as a fundamental feature of the conservative ideology (See O’Sullivan, 1976:11-12; Freeman, 1980:3; Kirk, 1987:10). From this perspective the term radical conservatism is a paradoxical phrase. “To many self-professing conservatives,” says Muller, “the predisposition toward continuity and prudence by which he defines conservatism makes the term radical conservative or revolutionary conservative a contrdictio in adjecto” (Muller, 1987:19). Even if radical conservatism is not paradoxical as a phrase, it still signifies a line of thought which is inclined to paradoxes and utilises them widely in its arguments. Paradoxical slogans like ‘organic construction’, ‘conservative revolution’, or ‘changing for preserving’ have a considerable place in radical conservative discourse. However, this does not mean that radical conservatism is totally insensible and unreasonable. Rather, these paradoxical phrases point toward a characteristic aspect of the socio-political conditions in which radical conservative ideas are popularised. Therefore the seemingly paradoxical name, radical conservatism, should not be a reason to ignore this line of thought, but should guide us toward comprehending the conditions which allowed the rise of these political ideas. As a result of this comprehension, the need to re-examine the assumed proximity between anti-radicalism and conservatism will also rise.

As a beginning for this comprehension, defining some basic features of radical conservative politics is a prerequisite; this prerequisite is challenging, since radical conservative literature lacks a central text or texts which may be taken to summarise the basic views of radical conservatives. Moreover, most of the supposedly radical conservatives refrain from accepting such a title. But the radical conservatives of the Weimar Republic are an exception. At least some of them used or tacitly accepted titles like ‘radical conservatives’ or ‘conservative revolutionaries’. Although there was no uniform party, organisation, or institution of the radical conservatives of Weimar, by approaching socio-political problems from a distinct perspective, these are thinkers who developed the idea of radical conservatism for the first
time. It was in Weimar where “the dynamics and ‘dilemmas’ of conservatism were intensified and caused the first form of radical conservatism” (Dahl, 1999:40). That is why my main reference will be to those Weimar writers, which aims to present in this section a sketch of radical conservatism.

The emergence of radical conservatism in its most comprehensive form in Weimar is far from being a coincidence. A number of peculiar social, political, economic, and cultural conditions triggered this emerge. These factors, along with the history of the emergence of radical conservatism, are mentioned in the first part of the section. Following this, in the second part, characteristic features of the radical conservatism are being presented. And in the third part, the place of radical conservative views in contemporary politics is discussed to remind the reader of the contemporariness of this political style.

2.2.1 **Historical Context of Radical Conservatism**

From its political unification in the 19th century until the Great War, Germany experienced a relatively quick process of economic and social modernisation. Intense industrialisation found its reflections as improved economic relations between Germany and the rest of the world. In parallel with the ascending weight of industry in national production, the importance of traditional sectors like agriculture and the influence of classes attached to those sectors (most significantly of the landowners, or the *Junkers*) have decreased dramatically. Furthermore, industrialisation triggered a wave of demographic change and intense migration toward cities caused a problematic urbanisation. In the political sphere, all these socioeconomic changes motivated German elites to implement imperialist policies to acquire the raw materials and new markets demanded by the industry, and to import welfare to conciliate *Junkers* in order to resolve the problems caused by those changes.

Nevertheless, despite the efforts, all of these economic, social, and political transformations caused a deep cultural crisis in pre-WWI Germany. It is argued, especially in the right-wing circles, that as society became more urbanised and industrialised, the so-called traditional German culture had begun to lose its references of legitimacy, or its habitat. As Germany became more integrated with international markets and world politics, new ideas, values, and concepts alien to this imagined traditional culture began to influence people and traditional culture came under question. Many aspects of the traditional culture were thus substituted by the new ones in the modernisation process (Peck, 1978:89). For those critics, one of the most
concrete examples of this process was the federative-decentralised political structure substituted by the Second Reich for a unitary and centralised nation-state.

Although welcomed by some classes like the industrial bourgeoisie, this rapid transformation raised protests from other groups. Most notable of those protesters were Junkers, whose influence in economic and political domains was shrinking. As agriculture’s share in national production falls, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie took the lead and their political influence became the decisive factor. Although the political stability of the Second Reich – Otto Von Bismarck, the iron chancellor, held office – was due to his success in finding a balance between Junkers and industry while satisfying both parties, the long term developments were against Junkers. That is why Junkers were in a reactionary position. Organised in the Deutsche Konservative Partei, they were arguing for preservation of the authentic German culture and its traditional political forms. The foremost emphasis of their party was on the preservation of the old voting system, giving disproportionate representation to land owners and of the Evangelical Church’s higher influence relative to the Catholic Church. These policies were the result of Junkers’ particular interests. Their reaction against the so-called cultural decline of Germany was motivated, not by some theoretical concern, but these interests. That is why the critique of modernity does not seem to have central importance for these lexical conservatives (see Peck, 1978:7).

On the other hand, there were some other political groups in the Second Reich whose concerns on cultural and social disintegration were more sophisticated and not directly motivated by their own interests. One of these groups was The Youth Movement, a popular organisation of college students who were “longing for spiritual renewal”. Muller notes that this organisation was to form the cultural environment which influenced some important radical conservatives during their college years (Muller, 1987:4). Especially with the new century, voices of these and other similar groups begun to be heard more loudly. According to the general discourse of these groups, Germany was losing its collective sense and experiencing an ever intensifying disintegration. They argued that because of the pragmatic class-based politics, foreign liberal ideas, and the ‘Jewish politics’, the vanishing of German identity was a close danger. Because of modernisation, everything that was German and traditional was fading away and was substituted with international culture. This was

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12 For a detailed analysis of the Junker conservatives’ socioeconomic situation and political strategies in the Second Reich, see Peck, 1978.
engendering the collective identity of the people, creating a risk of social chaos, and many other problems of the time were actually caused by the weakened common identity.

For the members of this movement, The Great War provided a surprising and never-considered solution to the problem of identity and social integration. “The hardships that the war brought were discovered to be a blessing in disguise” as total mobilisation and the ‘trench communities’ reinforced the sense of identity and social solidarity of the German people (Muller, 1987:60). A sense of belonging to the German Nation flourished in every individual. This encouraged citizens to work as a part of this community, devoid of class conflicts. Also, a new consciousness on the common interests and fate of all Germans against their common enemies has emerged within the ‘trench communities’ of German soldiers. This eventually allowed the people longing for a common identity among Germans to appreciate the value of war to ensure integration, cooperation and solidarity. Some writers like Johann Plenge even began to praise “the ideas of 1914” which, unlike “the ideas of 1789”, gives emphasis on collectivity (Muller, 1987:61). And Ernst Jünger described his “revolutionary nationalism” as “a new relationship to the elementary and to the soil, which was opened up afresh by the fires of the bombardment and has been enriched by streams of blood” (quoted by Bullivant, 1985:48-49).

In his book, Muller explains the reactions of some academics who were close to the Youth Movement against Great War, along with the reaction of Hans Freyer, a young activist and future radical conservative:

The coming of the war was interpreted by the academic intellectuals admired by the youth movement as a break with the individualistic and egoistic era that had preceded it and the beginning of a new sense of national community (Volksgemeinschaft). For some members of the youth movement, such as Hans Freyer, who served as a junior officer at the front, the war experience itself provided intimations of a solution to the problem of collective purpose (Muller, 1987:5).

This emphasis on the integrative role of war was one of the lessons which would be inherited by the radical conservatives of the Weimar period and would remain as one of the features of radical conservatism.

However, although the influence of Great War on the integration of German people had been positive while it was being fought, the consequences of the defeat of Germany were catastrophic. Problems of the pre-war period re-emerged in a much worse manner. In a
political dimension, the Versailles Treaty forced Germany to accept harsh economic and military limitations, pay war reparations, and award some of its territories to victor states. These conditions were totally humiliating to most of the German people. Furthermore, the overthrowing of the monarchy and formation of the Weimar Republic also caused a political vacuum. In the middle of a chaotic political environment, many extremists tried to direct the newly emerging political structure in opposite directions. Apart from these, Germany faced with a huge economic crisis after the war. The blow of hyperinflation rendered the German Mark virtually invaluable, and people were forced to barter instead of using the German Mark. This hyperinflation had not only socioeconomic but also psychological consequences:

[During the hyperinflation years] traditional structures of feeling characteristic of bourgeois subjectivity underwent a significant transformation. While in 1919, at the height of postwar expressionism, Theodor Däubler could still maintain that “our times have a grand design: a new eruption of the soul! The ego creates the world,” the subsequent years of (hyper)inflation shattered this belief. The skyrocketing devaluation of money, which Georg Simmel once termed the gatekeeper of the most inward (Torhüter des Innerlichsten), exposed the isolated intérieur of the bourgeois subject to collective demise. Monetary devaluation led to a sense of individual self-devaluation (Durst, 2004:85) [Emphasis added].

As a result of all of these, social integration was endangered in a manner that has never been experienced. Collective identity dissolved in wide political disagreements, daily routines were disrupted by economic crises, and the total social collapse became a real possibility in a society in which neither material nor intellectual entities could have a stable value. Everything seemed about to share the fate of the German Mark in Weimar; an unstoppable loss of credibility. With reference to Gordon Craig’s Germany: 1866-1945, Muller describes the political and economic instability of Germany in those years as follows:

From 1919 through 1928, the average government cabinet lasted only fifteen months, and even the half decade after 1924, often referred to as the “phase of stabilisation”, appears more like a “phase of reduced conflict” when examined closely. Unemployment never fell below 1.3 million during 1920s, real economic growth was laggard, the rate of wages and the demands of the Weimar welfare state made the lack of domestic capital formation, and a diminution of foreign investment capital had led to a downturn of the German economy well before the stock market crash in New York (Muller, 1987:192).

In this context, old concerns for solidarity and the preservation of the authentic German culture were popularised, intensified, and developed into a purer and more systematic mode, while classical conservative policies emphasising the evolution of society through its natural course lost credibility as Germany was thought to be totally out of its natural course. A
proactive conservatism emerged to put society again into its natural course. It replaced the classical conservative politics of ‘organic growth’, with a constructive politics (Dahl, 1999:41). It is this new conservatism arguing for an ‘organic construction’, rather than passive preservation, which is called radical conservatism.

A number of intellectuals from different professions, like writer Ernst Jünger, sociologist Hans Freyer, political philosopher Carl Schmitt, jurist Ernst Forsthoff, social theorist Arnold Gehlen and philosopher Martin Heidegger, were actively participating in the process of re-emphasising the concerns for an authentic culture and formulating the radical conservative politics (Muller, 1987:17). Their main argument was the inadequacy of existing socio-political forms for a harmonious social unity. According to this, the Weimar republic was unsustainable in its liberal form. Radical conservatives of the Weimar accused the liberal economy-centred view – inherent to this system – for creating unstable social forms and inciting social conflicts. The prominence of this liberal system was seen as the cause of all the chaos that the country was experiencing. As argued, the international liberal culture alien to German society pushed it out of its natural course. As the liberal system became fully predominant and the society was already pushed out of its course, moderate reform policies would not be sufficient anymore for the radical conservatives of Weimar. Just like the problem, the solution must also be substantial. It must be the substitution of the paradigm and a total replacement of existing sociocultural and political forms with an alternative rooted in German culture and history. As Moeller puts it, the central concern of the radical conservatives of Weimar, or of ‘revolutionary conservatives’ was to “combine revolutionary ideas with the conservative ones” and to “restore the old” (Bullivant, 1985:49). Radical conservatives were thus looking like an antithesis of classical conservatives who avoid any radical transformations. Dahl underlines the same point and notes that the beliefs about the boringness of existing society, the corruptness of current institutions, and a call for more heroism, are some points which differentiate radical conservatism from its classical counterpart (Dahl, 1999:53).

As could be deduced from their call for heroism, radical conservatives were not suggesting a Burkean reform which would preserve the substance of existing structures. Instead, they were underlining the need for reconstructive politics to preserve the dissolving common identity

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13 It should be noted in radical conservative narrative liberalism does not mean a specific ideology for radical conservatives, but more of an umbrella term similar to modernity as demoting parliamentary politics, capitalist economy, class based social formation and mass culture.
and authenticity of German society, or the German ethnos. They were arguing for the formation of new social structures with the guidance of the tradition, history, and genuine German culture. They were calling for a revolution which would recover the traditional values of German people and bring the social demise to an end. This would be distinct from the French example of 1789, as the former’s epistemological reference was to the particularistic accumulated knowledge of the German history rather than universal theoretical knowledge. It was a conservative revolution instead of a liberal or Marxist one, as it was not referring to individual reasoning as an ultimate reference; and it was a revolution as it was calling for an overall change in socio-political structures.

The overall structural change hoped for by radical conservatives did eventually occur, very soon after. But the course of the change was not precisely the one they had mind. In 1933, the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) seized power and forged German society into a national socialist shape. Most radical conservatives supported them in the beginning, although their support was mostly a tacit one rather than an active contribution. Their hope was that the NAZIs would prevent a communist revolution, restore the fading identity, and ensure social solidarity. However, as the regime developed on its route, they realised that the revolution programme of NSDAP was not a conservative one. On the contrary, their references to the German history and traditions were shallow and discursive. They were actually furthering the alienation of the German society from its roots and seeking for an ‘alternative modernity’.14 The support of radical conservatives thus ceased, but again it never turned into an active resistance - this point would not be forgotten after the WWII and put many radical conservative thinkers under suspicion (see Bullivant, 1985:66; Muller, 1987:290-305).

As a result, the national socialist experience strongly influenced radical conservatives of the Weimar period. Although they continued to put emphasis on the significance of conserving social particularities and promoting a common sense for the health of the social organism, and criticised liberal regimes on these issues even after the war, radical conservatives of the Weimar converted in the post-war era to a position much closer to that of the liberal democratic ideas. They reformulated their former political positions and ‘corrected’ the most extreme points, and thus ceased to be the ideal-type of radical conservatives. As the title of

his book indicates, Muller names this last period as the deradicalisation of Weimar conservatives (see Muller, 1987).

Before ending the presentation of historical context in which radical conservatism is firstly developed, two things should be noted: First, according to Dahl (1999), radical conservative views are still popular among some right-wing groups, despite the deradicalisation of radical conservatives of the Weimar. This point will be mentioned in 3.2.4. Second, though radical conservatives of Weimar were the founders of radical conservatism, none of them wrote a manifesto of radical conservatism. Instead, their writings were widespread, focusing on different issues and sometimes being in defence of different propositions. However, despite this heterogeneity, it can still be proposed that in the works of all those radical conservative thinkers there was a single perspective. They were focusing on the same problems and notions, and proposed solutions which were similar. From these commonalities it is possible to derive the features of radical conservatism, which will be done in the next part.

2.2.2 The Radical Conservative Critique of Zivilisation

Presenting an exhaustive list of the features of radical conservatism will not be a realistic aim - any more than it is for any other political disposition. However, it is possible to highlight a number of features that are common among radical conservatives. Beyond this, an attempt to understand the radical conservative phenomena through its relationship with classical conservatism and within its historical context will be engaged in 3.3. For now, I will focus on the main features of radical conservative critique of liberalism, and then turn in 3.2.3 to the policies that are proposed by radical conservatives as the solution to social decline.

A central theme of loss is probably the most noticeable feature of radical conservatism. This theme can be seen as a departure point of radical conservative critique, as all other features of it are attached to it. When “the foundations of society and of existing institutions are perceived as decayed beyond restoration”, and concerns for an either actual or possible loss of the ‘spirit of the society’ gain popularity, there may emerge the radical conservative politics (Muller, 1997:28). Here, the concerned-about ‘spirit’ refers to all the traditions, values, beliefs, and other social forms that are perceived as vital for the authenticity and particularity of the society. This spirit symbolises all features that differentiate the society from others. It is a society’s culture, in the word’s widest sense. It is the essence which differentiates the society from being a mere sum of individuals and attaches a particularity and an identity to it. It is this spirit which turns people into an ethnos. Since such an
existential link is seen within the spirit and the society, a possible loss of the former is also perceived as having catastrophic consequences for the latter.

Insofar as the awareness of such a risk is its main theme, radical conservatism is a reactionary movement. Radical conservative discourse necessarily emerges as a reaction to existing conditions. According to this, the society in which it emerges is seen as having already lost or about to lose its spirit. It is argued that social chaos is a close threat and “existing institutions are incapable or unworthy of assent” (Muller, 1987:20). It emerges as a reaction to these and proposes itself as the saviour. We can then argue that this theme of loss is the first and most significant characteristic of radical conservatism critique, and all policy proposals of radical conservatism are formulated for getting through this danger and preventing the death of ethnos.

The second main feature of radical conservatism can be derived from the subject who supposedly threatens the spirit. In radical conservative thinking, the danger awaiting ethnos is not a natural death, but a murder. It is the death of the authenticity of society, or the Kultur, in the hands of so-called liberal international culture, or the Zivilisation. Intellectual roots of this dichotomy between Kultur and Zivilisation can be traced back to 19th century:

As Freyer had demonstrated in his Habilitationsschrift, it had been common for nineteenth-century European intellectuals to regard the spread of technology as a threat to human values. In Germany this had often been expressed as the antagonism of Zivilisation to Kultur, and especially during and after the First World War the identification of Kultur with Germany and of Zivilisation with England or France had become widespread (Muller, 1987:104).

In the radical conservative discourse, the diffusionist and homogenising Zivilisation supposedly composed of global capitalism, internationalism, liberal parliamentarism, and all other values and institutions attached to these, are accused of being the potential murderer(s) of the particularity and authenticity of the national culture, i.e., the Kultur. This dichotomy is still in use in arguments of contemporary radical conservatives. Alain de Benoist’s calls for putting a stop to the reduction of all cultures to a world-civilisation exemplify this:

What is the greatest threat today? It is the progressive disappearance of diversity from the world. The levelling-down of people, the reduction of all cultures to a world civilization made up of what is the most common (De Benoist 1995:346).

Here, the world-civilisation accused of threatening sociocultural particularities stands for materialism, economism, individualism, atomism and hyper-reflexivity (Dahl, 1999:67).
According to this feature, the spreading dominance of the liberal civilisation weakens local cultures, and is disruptive for society’s authenticity as well as people’s sense of commonality. In the Weimar case for example, the alien Zivilisation is accused of infiltrating German society in the form of liberal economics, politics, and arts, and for corrupting existing Kultur by deteriorating the particularity of German society and thus destroying the common identity of German people. It is argued that the economism of the liberal civilisation encourages people to focus on their individual interests and disrupts the traditional harmony of the Germans. As everyone begins to focus on their personal fate rather than working for the common good, class struggles come to the scene and social separation begins (Muller, 1991:704-705).

The focal point of radical conservatives’ critique is that of the liberal democratic systems, seen as the political form of Zivilisation. This criticism suggests that liberal democratic parliamentarism is nothing but never-ending bargains of different political parties, each representing the interest of a particular group or class rather than the whole society (See Schmitt, 1992:6). As a result of the influence of the liberal civilisation, the German state is transformed into a bargaining-site and a place to be conquered, when it should supposedly be the symbol of the solidarity of people and the body of their collective will.

Schmitt explains this degradation of the state within a historical narrative as a “dialectical development (...) from the absolute state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through the neutral state of the liberal nineteenth century, to the total state based on the identity of state and society” (Schmitt, 1997:270). According to him, in the 17th and 18th centuries, the state was an absolute entity. Neither this absolute state nor the neutral state of the 19th century was ‘total’, in the sense of embracing the whole social domain. In those centuries, state was superior to, and distinct from, the social. This was granting a reciprocal autonomy to state and society, and was also ensuring state to be “visible as a concrete and distinct entity” (Schmitt, 1997:267). The state could thus fulfil the role of a superior and neutral paterfamilia who defines, secures, and symbolises the collective identity through its distinctive visibility against the social. However, Schmitt argues that liberal parliamentarism lead the emergence of total state in the 20th century. As a result of the transformation of the

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15 Schmitt argues that this inclination of economist thinking is not peculiar to liberalism but is characteristic to modernity. Thus, for Schmitt, both liberals and socialists are the representatives of the same sort of thinking: “The world-view of the modern capitalist is the same as that of the industrial proletarian, as if the one were the twin brother of the other. (...) American financiers and Russian Bolsheviks find themselves in a common struggle for economic thinking…” (Schmitt, 1996:13).
parliament into a bargaining site of particular interests represented by separate political parties, all social antagonisms transformed into political antagonisms:

As the various social interest groups organize themselves into parties, the state develops into a party-state; and because there are parties determined by economic, confessional, or cultural groups, the state can no longer remain neutral in regard to economic, confessional, or cultural matters. In such a state everything becomes at least potentially an object of politics and of the state (Schmitt, 1997:269-270).

This point is the backbone of the radical conservative critique of liberal parliamentarism: as a result of the emergence of modern liberal regimes, states transformed into a space in which socio-political and cultural antagonisms became apparent and local interests clashed. It was no longer the symbol of social particularity and solidarity. Liberalism emasculated the state as the symbol of the common identity and social spirit.

Furthermore, as a result of the parliamentary government with its endless discussions, radical conservatives argue that liberal socio-political system also paralyses the state and negates its capacity to take necessary decisions in crucial times with enough decisiveness. For radical conservatives, this impotence is crucial because of the decisionism prevalent in radical conservative thinking.

Decisionism can be explained briefly as “the glorification of the act of deciding and a faith in the value in the decision in itself, totally independent from its contents” (Dahl, 1999:56). Though decisionism is evident in most radical conservative thinkers, Schmitt must again be named on this issue, as his works are a genuine example of decisionism. According to Schmitt, every social unity must depend on a fundamental decision which underpins existing sociocultural and legal forms. It is this decision that creates an order out of chaotic presociality. This primal decision is valuable in itself, free from its content, just for being decisive enough to form an order. What is more, since existing social forms rely on the validity of this first decision, social routines embedded to these forms are incapable of functioning in an ‘exceptional state’, i.e., when the persistence of a fundamental decision is challenged by an alternative, an ‘other’, the ‘enemy’ (see Schmitt, 1985:5-16). Schmitt thus argues that the long term stability of social unity necessitates the existence of a sovereign political actor, which is capable of taking the required decisions decisively, especially in exceptional times, and which can reconstruct the social routines through power when needed. As Schmitt puts it, the only sign and quality of sovereignty is the capacity to take decisions on the state of exception (Schmitt, 1985:5). As is seen in decisionism, decisions’ value are
free from their content. And having a sovereign capable of taking decisive decisions in exceptional times is crucial for the long term survivability of a society. Thus, the impotence of a liberal state to take decisions quickly and decisively when required is perceived, not only by Schmitt but by all conservatives, as a serious threat for the survival of society. “Radical conservatism is a revolt against existing institutions in the name of authority” (Muller, 1987:20) and this emphasis on the authority justifies itself through decisionist views.

Another aspect of the radical conservatism critique of liberalism is the accusation against the liberal culture of substituting the central role of politics with that of the economy (Muller, 1997:29). Radical conservatives attribute great importance to political life and perceive politics as a crucial sphere through which individuals get in touch with the commonality and social spirit, and strengthen their common identity. In this sense, a popular interest and admiration to the Greek Polis and to the active political life of the citizens of these city-states can also be observed in Weimar radical conservatives and their descendants (for instance see Strauss, 1964). As radical conservatives argue, through political participation, individuals experience the belonging to something that is spatially and temporally greater than their individuality. Politics thus give individuals a chance to transcend themselves, and their partial and limited existence. It is only through this transcendence that individuals can constitute a strong collective identity. At this point, the well-known radical conservative Hans Freyer’s Hegelian conception of state is worth mentioning with reference to Muller:

In keeping with his neo-Hegelian perspective, Freyer described the state as the ultimate objectification of Geist, its most concrete, institutional expression. As with the economy and technology, so too were all other realms of human endeavour to be guided by the state in the interests of the Volk. The role of the state, Freyer wrote, was to politicize all elements of culture. He scoffed at the liberal, ‘negative’ view of freedom which sought to secure ‘so-called individual freedom’ from the ‘so-called coercion of the law’. True freedom, he wrote, is positive freedom, ‘freedom not from the state, but through the state; not in contrast to law, but in the law itself’. Freedom in this sense meant the freedom to participate in the self-realization of the Volksgeist, the freedom to subordinate oneself to the goal of collective self-assertion (Muller, 1991:706).

According to the radical conservative critique, despite the importance of politics in social unity, economics becomes relatively more important than politics, and the latter declines into an unimportant dimension of life as the tendency toward economism gains popularity through liberal tendencies. According to Schmitt, the utopian goal of this economic thinking is “bringing about an absolutely unpolitical condition of human society” (Schmitt, 1996:25). Thus, economism is seen as another point of critique in radical conservatism.
Furthermore, as indicated before, radical conservatives argue that civilisation not only substitutes politics with economy, but also substitutes local traditions and authenticities with international values and practices. This obliges people to live within an abstractly founded sociocultural environment insofar as those international values and practices are not rooted in their particular society. Furthermore, as the international values of modernity and liberalism are largely ambivalent, it is impossible for people to form existential links with the new \textit{Zivilisation} and formulate a new particularity for themselves. In other words, since values of \textit{Zivilisation} are not clear and definite but deliberative and subject to interpretation, unlike those of the \textit{Kultur}, they fall short of providing an absolute set of references for people to define themselves and construct a stable mode of individual existence. An article in the journal \textit{Die Tat}, a publisher close to Weimar radical conservatives, expresses the concerns caused by this inability, by stating that the people of Weimar under the domination of \textit{Zivilisation} “long for dogma and certainty” (Klemperer, 1957:130). And as Dahl adds to this point, according to the radical conservatives of Weimar “there had been nothing but ambivalence and this was associated with the alienating and mechanical structures created by liberal democracy and capitalism” (Dahl, 1999:43).

In this respect, radical conservatives propose that as a result of the prominence of \textit{Zivilisation} against \textit{Kultur}, people find themselves living in an alien culture to which they do not substantially belong. People become unable to form a transcendental link with the totality in which they exist, as that totality lacks any reference to the authenticity of their lives. The sense of collectiveness and common identity thus diminishes, and people find themselves in an epistemological insecurity in which their life is losing its meaning because of the lack of a transcendental entity they can refer to, and derive goals and meanings from. As a result of the prevalence of \textit{Zivilisation}, people lose their common identity and collective purpose, and according to radical conservatives, “[a] society that lacked a common collective purpose (...) left the lives of its members bereft of meaning” (Muller, 1987:100).

To summarise then, radical conservative critique proposes that as a result of \textit{Zivilisation} characterised by internationalism and a liberal outlook, particular authenticities are diminished, continuity of ethnos is disrupted, a culture lacking any roots within the society is imposed, and people depoliticise and lose their relationship with the social spirit. In this narrative, \textit{Zivilisation} is understood as “a sterile, anti-German construct who demeaned and destroyed the vitality of the \textit{Volk} and repressed true German \textit{Kultur}” (Peck, 1978:89). It is argued that because of the prevalence of \textit{Zivilisation}, common identity and sense of
collectivity fades away and life becomes meaningless. This meaninglessness is the main problem which radical conservative politics deals with.

2.2.3 The Radical Conservative Scheme

Insofar as the problem highlighted is the loss of the social spirit and the death of commonality, the treatment should be a politics of resurrection. Thus, radical conservative politics proposes to resurrect the dead, reconstruct the organism, and conjure the lost spirit through a conservative revolution. The enemy against this course of action is liberalism (Dahl, 1999:2) and what needs to be done is arising the dead against the resistance of the enemy. Thus, the agenda for “restor[ing] the virtues of the past [through] radical or revolutionary action” (Muller, 1987:19) will be realised. People will then get in touch with their authentic culture again. Through this interaction, they will again be able to experience something greater than their individuality: the authentic collective being to which they belong and of which they are a part. Through this experience they will restore the meaning of their lives, and their social spirit will be empowered. Thus social order will be restored firmly, and the long term survival of society will be ensured through the conservative revolution.

The primary focus of the proposed revolution is the state, as it is regarded as the most important and most suffered institution in the societies invaded by Zivilisation. Radical conservative project on the state is two-fold. It seeks both to redefine the role of the state and to re-empower it. The first part of the project arises from the critique of the role of state in a liberal worldview. As is noted before, according to radical conservatives, liberal systems turn the state into a space for discussion and negotiation. Furthermore, in these systems it is seen as a means to realise particular demands of different groups and classes. Thus, different parts of the society fight with each other to conquer the state and maximise their own interests through it. By rejecting this approach, radical conservatives underline the importance of the state in providing a common collective identity. According to this view, the state should be located above the society with equal distance to each inferior parts of society. It should be like a protector father, the symbol of collectivity and common fate (see Schmitt, 1997). As Adam Müller, a romantic thinker who influenced radical conservatives, puts it,

the state is not a mere factory, a farm, an insurance institution or mercantile society, it is the intimate association of all physical and spiritual needs, of the whole of physical and spiritual wealth, of the total internal and external life of a nation into a great, energetic, infinitely active and living whole (Müller, 1955:150).
Hence, in parallel with the decisionism of Schmitt, radical conservatives propose that the state should be the objective point of reference for all members of the society. Its objective, supreme, and uniting role should be regarded as the main assurance of the social unity and stable daily routines (see Dahl, 1999:74-76). However, for a state to be capable of effectively securing the way of life of its members and the authenticity of society, its supreme and objective position in social hierarchy would not alone be sufficient. It should also be empowered. Then, as radical conservative politics suggest, the state weakened by the liberal civilisation should also be re-empowered. An ideal state must not only have the will but also be capable of taking radical decisions in exceptional times to protect the society. Only with reference to such a sovereign state can the individuals construct their collective identities in a firm way and promote the social spirit. Thus, empowering the state and redefining its role is an important aspect of radical conservative politics. As Muller notes, creating a powerful and transcended German state is intended by many prominent radical conservatives like Schmitt’s and Freyer to “recreate the collective purpose” (Muller, 1991:705).

A radical conservative project of restoring collective identity is not limited to empowering the state. It also underlines the importance of other social institutions, the authority of which is under the threat of Zivilisation for securing individual identity and social spirit. According to Freyer, for instance, the solution to the problem of individual identity lays in the ability of the whole society to delimit individuals rather than a single institution in it (Muller, 1987:93). By moving from this point, to provide more reference points for individuals who are seeking a firm identity and meaning, radical conservatives aim to promote different kinds of social authorities through resurrecting and empowering a number of Kultur intermediate social institutions like family and church. It is one of the numerous commonalities in the strategy of radical and classical conservatives: “Like the conservative, the radical conservative has an acute appreciation for the positive role of authoritative institutions in the life of the individual and of society” (Muller, 1997b:28).

When it comes to international relations, there are two important features of their outlook: First, for radical conservatives, all transnational organisations like the United Nations and the European Union are essentially meaningless and detrimental for social identities. They are viewed by some radical conservatives even as “agents for a conspiracy to abolish nations and cultural differences” (Dahl, 1999:88). In connection with this stance, radical conservatives also deny the claim of supremacy of transnational organisations like The European Court of Justice. According to radical conservatives, all these transnational organisations should be
seen as tools that are utilised by some states within their relations with other states. Moreover, the particularity and the sovereign are the sources of law and morality; the notion of ‘universal rights’ is also problematic in a radical conservative interpretation just as in classical conservatism. There cannot be a set of rules, either moral or juridical, that can be valid for all societies at all times. Thus, radical conservatives are suspicious about concepts like international human rights. According to radical conservatives, freedoms and rights should be thought out in the scale of particular societies. For Schmitt and Heidegger for instance, “there is no freedom outside organic communities, no rational individuals free from these, and if there is opposition, it must be crushed in the name of the true and great existence [and] this pattern of thought lives on in contemporary radical conservatism” as well (Dahl, 1999:57). When transnational organisations emerge and internationalist concepts of Zivilisation infiltrate into a society, the power of the particular political system of the society weakens, and its legitimacy begins to be questioned. This enhances nihilism, promotes a society composed of individuals belonging to nowhere, and having no connection with the social spirit or their particularity but some abstract and rootless rights. This development is itself detrimental for real, concrete freedoms of individuals. It creates an epistemological vacuum and a danger of social chaos, the prevention of which is radical conservatism’s sole aim.

A second important feature in their outlook to international relations is that, since the particularity of the society is the source of all morality, legislation and identity, the presence of an ‘other’, an enemy, is of crucial importance. As Schmitt argues, presence of an enemy is the factor that unites society around a collective spirit (Schmitt, 2007:6-8). And by combining the experiences of WWI with these teachings of Schmitt, radical conservatives perceive war, or the real possibility of a war, as an opportunity to strengthen the common identity. It is more than rare that radical conservatives focus on the positive effects of war instead of its disastrous consequences.

Though all radical conservative thinkers are not arguing for the same set of policies and not expressing the same interpretations, the basic features that are shared by most of them are presented in these second and third sections. By taking these features as a reference point, the nature of the relation between radical conservatism and classical conservatism is being discussed in the third part of this chapter of the study. However, prior to this discussion, the influence of radical conservatism on contemporary politics should be sketched out briefly.
2.2.4 Radical Conservatism and Contemporary Politics

Before concluding the discussion on radical conservatism, further details on the existence of radical conservative politics in the contemporary world should be provided. Though much water has passed under the bridge since the Weimar period, radical conservative politics is still an actuality, and radical conservative arguments can still be identified in the narratives of different groups from several countries. In Dahl’s study (1999), radical conservative movements from a number of different countries are addressed briefly. Dahl notes for example that after the reunification, “the question of national identity” re-emerged in Germany and “a renewed intellectual interest in the conservative revolution” appeared mostly in parallel with increasing support for extremist parties like Republikaner (Dahl, 1999:99). A similar popularisation of a number of features of radical conservative politics is observed by Dahl in Austria also. According to this, along with Jörg Haider’s Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), “the old radical conservative idea of a German etnos nation” revived in 1990s (Dahl, 1999:105). However, despite FPÖ’s clearly Schmittian conception of state and democracy, Dahl also highlights their neo-liberal outlook in economics, which is different from radical conservatives of the Weimar period, probably caused by their strong anti-socialism (Dahl, 1999:105-106). Apart from the German-speaking countries, Dahl mentions the existence of radical conservative tendencies in the politics of France, Russia, Canada, Libya and USA. He argues that the resemblances are evident between radical conservatives of the Weimar period and the politics of several political groupings like Le-Pen’s Front National in France, National Bolshevik Front in Russia, The Reform Party in Canada, Qaddafi movement in Libya and Pat Robertson’s The Christian Coalition of America (Dahl, 1999:104-119).

Of these countries, the USA is an especially interesting case. In the USA, the political perspective of some ‘marginal’ groups, and also of the neo-conservatives who had remarkable influence on the George W. Bush administration, present striking similarities with radical conservatism. For instance, neo-conservative writers’ views on the positive effects of so-called ‘war on terror’ on the national identity (see Drury, 1999:152), their conception of the sphere of international relations like a Hobbesian state of nature (Halper & Clarke, 2004:12), and their emphasis on the need for religion and a common identity along with their concerns on the weakening of these traditional authorities in the prominence of liberalism (Halper & Clarke, 2004:55) can all be seen as a reflection of radical conservative politics. This reading of neo-conservatism through the similarities of its politics with those of radical conservatism makes much sense when the personal and intellectual link between radical
conservatives of Weimar and Leo Strauss, the founding father of neo-conservatism in USA is taken into account (see Drury, 1999; Norton, 2004). It also provides a broad critical perspective to interpret the national and international policies of the Bush government. And beyond this, it underlines the significance of radical conservative views to grasp contemporary world politics. However, discussing the nature of the relationship between neo-conservatism and radical conservatism is beyond the scope of this study. Thus, we will leave the issue at this point and turn to the questions regarding the nature of the relationship between classical and radical conservatisms.

But before passing to the next section, we should underline again that radical conservatism is not just a concept with merely historical relevance, but is also important for understanding contemporary politics in many regions of the world. To understand radical conservatism and the nature of its relationship with classical conservatism is thus not only crucial to reach a better understanding of conservative ideology, but also is indispensable to understand certain dynamics in the contemporary world. In this sense, the next section will focus on the conditions which caused the emergence of radical conservatism, after discussing the definition of conservatism as a comprehensive tradition of thought within which radical conservatism emerged.
2.3 A Theoretical Framework for Further Analysis: The Theoretical Core and the Question of Radicalism

If deconstruction is a parasitic reading revealing the non-absoluteness and temporality of the borders supposedly separating the dichotomised concepts of the discourse, then to deconstruct conservatism, we need first of all a definition of it which can reveal the dichotomies employed by the conservative canon in a constructive role. This section aims to provide such a definition of conservatism by relying on the points presented in the two previous sections. Furthermore, it argues that by depending on this definition, classical and radical conservatisms can be seen as very similar political positions in terms of their fundamental approaches, both can be regarded as valid interpretations of the conservative precepts, and a comparative analysis of conservatism can therefore be undertaken through studying these two political stances.

2.3.1 Some Preliminary Reflections on the Problems of Defining an Ideology

Defining an ideology is always problematic. Every definition is necessarily speculative and challengeable. The difficulties emerge in the very first step when a political view is intended to be defined as an ideology. This intention can itself be rejected before any discussion on the appropriateness of possible definitions. That is so because such an attempt must presume the totality of the analysed texts as a single corpus. It must assume that this totality is employed as a semantic tool and consequently that analysing the texts as forming a single ideology will not be an injustice to these. Also, when a singularity is imposed, the idea of the structurality of the totality follows naturally. And as every structure necessarily has a centre, the substantialist urge to locate the definitional substance which provides an insight on the ideology becomes irresistible.16 These presumptions cannot ever be verified through the analysis of the text(s), as the analysis must itself depend on these. That is why the attempt to define ideologies is always challengeable.

To return to our specific subject, every attempt of defining conservatism must begin with a presumption of the existence of a conservative corpus and a pre-evaluation of this corpus that precedes the analysis. It is thus not possible to propose an objective apprehension of conservatism while developing a conclusive, true, and final solution to the problem of defining conservatism. Every suggestion on the problem is challengeable both in terms of form, as an attempt to forge conservatism into an ideological structure, and of content, as a

16 For a discussion on the inevitability of a centre in the concept of structure, along with its double role as both allowing the discursive freeplay and limiting it, see Derrida, 1978; and part 4.4.
particular attempt to locate the definitional core of conservatism. Nevertheless, this problematical nature does not render the efforts futile for providing more comprehensive and qualified definitions. Instead, such efforts are a precondition to critically analyse these political phenomena, and not grasp the political domain in a purely relativist sense as a market in which incomparable or equally valuable political thoughts are available for choice. In other words, along with other prerequisites, having a political attitude necessitates thinking through the term ideology and on ideologies. And we need to reflect on the definitions of ideologies to analyse ideologies critically and compare them with each other.

In this sense, this study is aiming to analyse conservatism through utilising the existence of its classical and radical forms, and to reveal the ambiguity and temporality of the borders of its dichotomised concepts, and is in need of a definition of conservatism through which the conservative narrative can be identified and read. This definition should be regarded as qualified insofar as it embraces the diversity of the conservative narrative. In this sense, the definitional core I aim to suggest in this section should be a fundamental feature which is implied in the arguments of many different interpretations of conservative politics. However, this implication could only be ever-present and easily observed if conservatism is a purely logical construct, the arguments of which are deduced from one source according to the formal rules of logic. Instead, like any other ideology, conservatism is moulded within daily life. It thus has emotional and instinctive dimensions, and its richness depends on these dimensions as well as logical deduction (Freeden, 1996:36-37). Thus, just as with the condition of every narrative, conservatism is also deprived of a perfect internal consistency. It should then be accepted that the theoretical core we intend to locate will never provide us with a stable and absolute border between the conservative and the non-conservative politics. This border will necessarily remain liquid and challengeable against the continuous dynamism of individual experiences. This point is the impassable limit and the sign of inevitable incompetency of the efforts to locate a conservative core.

However, instead of being a reason to renounce defining conservatism and promoting a critical approach toward it, referred incompetency will be perceived as an opportunity in this study. If there is a common core which provides the fundamental precept of a number of different political movements or writings, and which allows us to analyse all of these under the category of conservatism, then the exceptions signifying the indefiniteness and ambiguity of the definition will provide us clues on the influence of socio-political particularities on the logical formation of conservatism. Such an exception may also be utilised to enlighten us
about the reciprocal influence between conservatism and other ideologies. For instance, if a definition that is satisfactorily comprehensive of different interpretations of conservatism fails to differentiate some supposedly Fascist cliques from the conservative narrative, this may be utilised as an opportunity to highlight the theoretical affinity between these two ideologies on some points, as well as revealing the limits of the definition. For this reason, despite the outcome’s inevitable limitedness and defectiveness, efforts to reach a definition of conservatism as comprehensive as possible are by no means futile.

Furthermore, developing a theoretical core by which we can identify different political discourses as conservative is especially important for this study. A study which argues that the conservative narrative is capable of generating both radical and classical politics, and that such a diversity actually signifies the flexibility of the joints of the conservative structure, must necessarily propose the radical and classical conservatisms as the genres of a single narrative by presenting the point that a single core or underlying precept is available in both interpretations. Engaging the comparative analysis without meeting this condition may be criticised through the argument that the study actually compares two completely different political forms. That is why the next part of the section attempts to locate the theoretical core of conservatism which has the qualities referred to above. After locating it and drawing the external borders of the conservative narrative, the next section questions the relationship between radical conservatism and the conservative narrative. During this questioning, radical conservatism is presented as an interpretation of conservative ideology which is popularised in certain socio-political and cultural conditions.

2.3.2 Identifying a Theoretical Core for Conservatism

The literature on the definition of conservatism is extremely diverse. Definitions proposed by writers seem to be influenced by their political stance. For instance, a significant number of writers sympathetic to conservatism tend to suggest the lack of a theoretical body in conservatism. Hence, they claim that conservatism cannot be comprehended as a political narrative, or as an ideological construction utilised to perceive and interpret the socio-political and cultural phenomena (see Eccleshall, 2000:282; Schuettinger 1970:12; Green 2002:3; Kirk 1987:iii). This view is generally defended with three different arguments.

The first of these arguments proposes that, since conservatism is an anti-rationalist way of thinking, the rationalist attempt to define conservatism as a theory necessarily contradicts with the very nature of it (Müller, 2006:360-361). The heart of this argument is the refutation
of the definition ‘practice’ itself regardless of its content. It is the refutation of the presumption that conservatism is a single theoretical body, or a narrative that can be located in the theoretical plane. To exemplify this argument, I can refer to Lord Gilmour, who argues that conservatism is neither an ideology nor a doctrine (Gilmour, 1980a:121). As this argument goes, developing theoretical definitions is an Enlightenment gesture and the outcome of the urge to comprehend everything through theoretical reasoning. But conservative thinking is the refusal of this thought from the beginning. Thus, being defined theoretically would be contradictory for conservatism. It should not be comprehended as a phenomenon that can be defined in the theoretical plane.

To evaluate this argument, we should first state that if it is considered that defining is the initial step of a critical approaching to any genre of political thinking, it should not be surprising that this argument is accepted as valid by nearly no one but the conservatives themselves. By this argument, conservative thinkers grant immunity to conservatism against intellectual analysis. However, as Müller underlines, this view cannot be accepted since those who sincerely hold this anti-rationalist view are not political conservatives but just a number of “aesthetic conservatives” who should be political pacifists in order to preserve their consistency (Müller, 2006:361). In other words, the vast majority of conservatives who actively participate in the political process and promote conservative politics against any other alternatives cannot be seen as anti-rationalists who are against all kinds of theoretical reasoning. This majority to whom Müller calls political conservatives do have a set of abstract definitions, references, and theoretical principals that allow them to promote conservative politics. Furthermore, being a contradictory attempt when looked at within the conservative discourse does not necessarily mean that conservatism lacks any theoretical core which can be revealed. Anti-rationalist inclinations of conservatives are sufficient for the impossibility of such a definition. Though having a definitional core in the theoretical plane may cause a contradiction with their anti-rationalist inclinations, since ideologies are not purely logical theories as stated before; they may have such inconsistencies. And what is more, even this refutation of rationalism can be proposed as a theoretical core which is available in all different representations of conservative thinking. For these reasons, this first argument on the impossibility of defining conservatism as an ideology is implausible.

The next argument highlights the particularistic character of conservatism. According to this, each representative of conservatism formulates its theoretical content through the specific conditions within which it emerges. Thus, conservatism should not be perceived as an
ideology, representatives of which share a common set of values and perspectives regardless of their particular conditions. Defending this view in his influential article *Conservatism as an Ideology*, Samuel Huntington argues that,

> [c]onservatism develops to meet a specific historical need. When the need disappears, the conservative philosophy subsides. In each case, the articulation of conservatism is a response to a specific social situation. The manifestation of conservatism at any one time and place has little connection with its manifestation at any other time and place. Conservatism thus reflects no permanent group interest. Depending upon the existence of a particular relation among groups rather than upon the existence of the groups themselves, it lasts only so long as the relation lasts, not so long as the groups last. (Huntington, 1957:469)

Furthermore, he claims that conservatism cannot be defined with reference to some universal values that are common in all conservatives, since unlike other ideologies which can be labelled as *idealistic*, conservatism lacks a ‘conservative ideal’ to host these universal conservative values.

Most ideologies posit some vision as to how political society should be organized. The words “liberalism,” "democracy," "communism," "fascism," all convey an intimation as to what should be the distribution of power and other values in society, the relative importance of the state and other social institutions, the relations among economic, political, and military structures, the general system of government and representation, the forms of executive and legislative institutions. But what is the political vision of conservatism? Is it possible to describe a conservative society? (…)[N]o conservative ideal exists to serve as the standard of judgment. No political philosopher has ever described a conservative utopia. In any society, there may be institutions to be conserved, but there are never conservative institutions. The lack of a conservative ideal necessarily vitiates the autonomous definition of conservatism. (Huntington, 1957:457-458)

Relying on this claim of non-idealistic and particularistic nature of conservatism, Huntington offers a positional approach, according to which conservatism's definitional character is not some set of values or theoretical arguments it necessarily embodies, but its positional state relative to other political views - which is not subject to change in each specific example (see Huntington, 1957:469). In other words, for Huntington, a definition of conservatism can be developed by mentioning primarily the single political position occupied by conservatives, rather than looking for a discursive or theoretical commonality within them. According to this, there is no common set of values, perceptions, or some kind of theoretical core for conservatism but rather that all different conservatisms emerge to preserve the *status quo*. Furthermore, since all other ideologies have a conception of ‘ideal society’ and are idealist in
this sense, they are all radical. All non-conservative ideologies argue for change insomuch as the wideness of the gap between their ideal and the reality. However conservatism, as Huntington claims, lacks this idealistic feature and can best be defined positionally and as anti-radicalism. For Huntington, as well as for other thinkers who propose this positionalist argument, there is no universal foundation or a common theory of conservatism extraneous to the particular conditions in which each specific representations of conservatism emerges, apart from this anti-radicalism. Kirk gives an example of this approach in the foreword of one of his studies, although in forthcoming pages he offers the list of the ‘six cannons of conservative thought’:

The book distinctly does not supply its readers with a ‘conservative ideology’: for the conservative abhors all forms of ideology. An abstract rigorous set of political dogmata: that is ideology, a ‘political religion,’ promising the Terrestrial Paradise to the faithful; and ordinarily that paradise is to be taken by storm. Such a priori designs for perfecting human nature and society are anathema to the conservative, who knows them for the tools and weapons of coffee-house fanatics (Kirk, 1987:iii).

Also, Andrew Vincent offers a sketch of this positional view in his article on the ideological character of British conservatism:

[According to the positional view,] conservatives thus stand on the defence of an established order (whatever its political complexion) against change and chaos. The present structure is always preferred to future possibilities. In this positional reading it thus becomes legitimate to speak of a conservative socialism or conservative anarchy. There is no ideological substance or content which is distinctive of conservatism as such (Vincent, 1994:210).

After this sketch, Vincent criticises the positional approach to conservatism as follows:

Apart from the fact that many proponents of conservatism would find themselves very uncomfortable with such a view, it also becomes virtually impossible to differentiate between groups, apart from the criteria of institutionalized or transcendent ideas. Such a scheme does little justice to the enormously rich diversity of ideological reflection and policy which are incorporated in each of these categories. Every ideological scheme becomes reduced to two simplistic categories and every ideology is potentially conservative when pressured (Vincent, 1994:210).

In fact, this particularistic and positionalist definition has a number of deficiencies caused by limiting itself with the lexical meaning of conservatism. First of all, as Muller states, Huntington’s conceptions of conservatism “exaggerate the lack of continuity of conservative
social and political thought” (Muller, 1997b:4). In contrast with their particularism, many thinkers may easily develop some similar sets of common features of conservative thinking (see Allen, 1981:593; Eccleshall, 2000:277-278). But the perspective which denies any significant commonality between particular expressions of conservatism and defines conservatism as merely a positional and anti-radical political gesture of status quoism fails to mention these commonalities. This approach fails to grasp conservatism in its full depth and reduces it to a shallow, reactionary status quoism. Furthermore, against this positionalist argument derived from the existence of a foundational link between conservatism and the preservance of status quo, David Allen draws attention to the radical potential embedded in conservative thinking by stating the ever presence of an alienation and a discontent from existing conditions:

The consideration of the relationship between romantic conservatism and radical conservatism leads into two final reflections concerning the nature of conservative thought -both of which will doubtless strike some readers as unacceptable. The first of these observations concerns the important role in conservative thought of that cultural alienation to which I have already alluded. By cultural alienation I mean a strong sense of disaffection from existing society, a disaffection which is frequently coupled with an urge to reorder society to provide a more satisfying, harmonious life. That such a sense of alienation should form a characteristic component of conservative ideology sounds paradoxical, yet nonetheless alienated conservatives are not hard to find. Indeed, it may well be that the transition from traditionalism to conservatism could not have been made without some alienation, for the capacity to conceive of society as an independent entity which can be shaped by human effort – a prerequisite of ideological thought – cannot be attained without the ability to distance oneself considerably from one's own society and see alternatives to it. (...) Even Burke, who subscribed to a much more fixed and hierarchical view of the world than Carlyle or the German romantic conservatives, has been found by at least two writers to be characterized by a kind of half-suppressed disaffection from the existing aristocratic order, which could fairly be described as symptomatic of cultural alienation (Allen, 1981:598-599).

The third and last argument against the view that conservatism is a theoretical construction which can be comprehended through a theoretical analysis argues that conservatism should be seen not as an ideological construction but as a disposition, a psychological feature, or a human condition. Schuettinger offers such an approach to grasp conservatism. As he suggests, “[c]onservatism is not an ideology or a firm set of doctrines on man and the universe. We will be nearer the truth if we view conservatism as a disposition” (Schuettinger, 1970:12). This dispositionist view is famously defended by Oakeshott. In his article On Being Conservative, Oakeshott graps conservatism not as a doctrine but a disposition, an individual
inclination toward some specific choices. In that context, albeit not exclusively denying the existence of a conservative doctrine, Oakeshott defines the state of being a conservative as such:

To be conservative is to be disposed to think and behave in certain manners; it is to prefer certain kinds of conduct and certain conditions of human circumstances to others; it is to be disposed to make certain kinds of choices. And my design here is to construe this disposition as it appears in contemporary character, rather than to transpose it into the idiom of general principles (Oakeshott, 1991a:407).

He then defines this disposition as follows:

[T]he general characteristics of this disposition are not difficult to discern, although they have often been mistaken. They centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was, or what may be (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

As is seen, Oakeshott develops a view that reduces conservatism, not to some theoretical principles, but to a psychological inclination and some individual choices. Hence, the view is refused that at the background there exists a conservative theory rationalising and legitimising those choices. However, this view is problematic as well. To explain, the inclination toward order and stability is present in every individual, and this inclination is inevitable for the sustainability of their daily life. Individuals are always inclined to form some routines. Forming those routines, primarily in a semantic and phenomenological sense, can well be seen as the prerequisite of rendering the external world perceptible and experienceable. However, even if this is accepted as a psychological fact, whether named as conservatism or not, it might not necessarily be either the foundation or the promoter of conservative politics. In other words, those gestures do not need to find their reflection in political sphere as the ‘conservative politics’. Instead, it is the political conservatives who interpret the sociocultural environment in a specific manner and assume a link between this inclination toward stability and conservatism. Insofar as the conservative self-conception, the conservative way of interpreting sociocultural environment can be refused, the inclination toward stability may well find its reflection in the political sphere in the form of any non-conservative ideology. So, Oakeshott’s attempt to equate conservatism to a disposition and to ‘naturalise’ it must necessarily depend on a specific theoretical understanding of the socio-political.\(^{18}\) It must also depend on some ‘non-natural’ theoretical presumptions that form the

\(^{18}\) I analyse the use of the terms natural and arbitrary as binary oppositions in 4.3.
conservative theory. So, it seems misguided to argue an innate continuity between the psychological inclination toward stability and the conservative politics, which has a peculiar understanding of the social and which favours a political approach to satisfy this inclination.

It is then misleading to perceive conservatism as a mere psychological phenomenon, and arguing conservative politics to be a direct reflection of this phenomenon as the link between referred disposition and conservative policies can only be maintained through a comprehensive theoretical background. This does not mean that the disposition Oakeshott highlights is non-existent. Just as the political positions labelled by the previous arguments as ‘conservatism’ do exist – the first as being a perfect anti-rationalism and the second as a status quoism – a psychological inclination toward conserving also exists. However, it is not possible to reduce the conservative ideology solely to any of these phenomena, the persistence and development of which can be roughly traced from Burke to Oakeshott. That is why I refuse the claims concerning the inaccurateness of comprehending conservatism as a theoretical construct with relative consistency, and grant that conservatism refers to a common theoretical content shared to some degree by all its representatives. However, when we turn to the question of defining this common theoretical content, the diversity on the definition of conservatism is also evident on this issue.

In the first part of the third chapter, without proposing a definition, I presented the classical conservative approach to epistemology, society, and the individual with reference to a number of thinkers who are commonly accepted as conservatives. It can then be proposed that in order to consider other thinkers and groups as conservative, those thinkers and groups must necessarily share the approach of classical conservatism to epistemology, society, culture, and the individual to some degree. However, labelling all socio-political ideas that have some similarities with classical representatives of conservative thinking as conservative will be highly inadequate. Apart from causing ambiguities, such an approach will fail to differentiate the cases in which there is a genuine similarity between classical conservatism and the analysed view, and the cases in which arbitrary similarities exist alongside more fundamental differences. To avoid such problems, we should look for a theoretical core which is the basis for previously presented features of conservatism. In other words, if an effort to define conservatism aims to do more than listing the common features in the ideas of well known conservative thinkers, it should look for the answers of these questions: Are there any fundamental theoretical core which can be read as the foundation, or underlying precept,
of all commonalities observed in different conservative thinkers or genres? If there is, what is this core to which all conservative policies, including the classical or radical ones, rely upon?

As may be guessed, many thinkers have previously attempted to attribute a definitive core, albeit not always understood as a common precept, to the conservative canon. Some thinkers like Karl Mannheim tend to reduce conservative canon to its social foundations. As Mannheim argues, conservatism is inherited from European aristocracy and should be perceived through the concerns of aristocrat and bourgeois classes to preserve their elite social positions (Allen, 1981:584). In a similar way, Ted Honderich refuses to define conservatism in the theoretical plane by suggesting the inconsistencies of conservative discourse, and states that conservatism is founded on a social or class-based selfishness, and reduces it to the inclination of a selfish opportunism promoted by elites to preserve their interests (see Honderich, 2005). Though the approaches of Mannheim and Honderich have a significance as readings of conservatism with its social foundations, since the aim of this study is comprehending the conservative text(s) itself and its internal characteristics – rather than understanding the reasons and conditions of the emergence of the whole text - and since the definitional core is perceived not as a social basis but as a characteristic theoretical belief to which the whole text refers directly or indirectly, these approaches are not satisfactory for the purposes of this study.

Another approach to defining the core is focusing on the conservative theory. One of the two remarkable ideas within this approach belongs to Robert Eccleshall. Eccleshall proposes that the approval of inequality is at the core of conservatism, and that the whole conservative theory is structured around this idea (see Eccleshall, 2000:278-280). As is pointed out in 2.1.3, it is true that social hierarchies are approved and inequalities are perceived as legitimate and beneficial in conservative thinking. It is also probable that Mannheim and Honderich were aware of the central role of inequality in conservative theory while perceiving conservatism as a tool of elites to secure and justify their social positions. Nevertheless, the approval of inequalities is not a distinctive characteristic of, or peculiar to conservative theory. Instead, the approval of inequality is one of the most important features of fascist ideology. It is not plausible to assume that all socio-political interpretations that have the notion of the approval of inequalities must necessarily fall into the field of conservative ideology. A view which approves inequalities but does not share any other

19 The eugenic efforts in Fascist Italy can be given as an example of the prevalence of inegalitarian views in Fascism (see Griffin, 2007:242-244).
features with conservatism is hypothetically possible. That is why it is not persuasive to suggest the approval of inequalities as the theoretical core or the characteristic feature of the conservative narrative.

The second significant alternative on the definitional core of conservatism focuses on the recognition of the limited nature of humankind by the conservative canon. According to this view, conservatism is essentially a “politics of imperfection” (see Quinton, 1978). Preferring this alternative, Noël O'Sullivan suggests conservatism to be understood as “defence of a limited style of politics, based upon the idea of imperfection” (O'Sullivan, 1976:13). O’Sullivan argues that all genres of conservative thinking are constructed around the notion of an imperfect and deficient individual. All conservative interpretations refer to and assume this imperfection, and it can be used as a measure to distinguish the conservative stance from the non-conservative one. Though this idea underlines a crucial point on conservatism, this imperfectability seems too broad to be the characteristic feature of conservatism.

There is indeed an emphasis of imperfectability at the core of conservatism. But this notion cannot be regarded as the differentiating characteristic of conservatism as well. Especially some poststructuralist thinkers like Lyotard (see Lyotard, 1984) also emphasises this imperfection but do not derive a conservative politics from this notion of imperfectability. For poststructuralist thinkers, this imperfectability is the very reason for preserving the emancipatory and transformationist dynamic in socio-political policies, rather than implying conservative politics. As this fact reveals, the belief in epistemological imperfection does not necessitate conservative politics. Without assuming infallibility, one can still follow a non-conservative politics.

Therefore, if the notion of imperfection of the individual will be employed as a differentiating theoretical core of conservatism, it should be a more specific kind of imperfection. And it is my argument in this section that the imperfection of individuals within another domain can work as the core, or the common precept, which differentiates conservatism from other ideologies while embracing the diversity of the conservative canon.

To present this argument, we should turn to Althusser and remind that in Althusserian understanding, each ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, and does this in a specific way.20 In other words, each ideology bears a specific philosophical anthropology, a specific

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20 See part 3.3.
conceptualisation of the state of the individual. And the philosophical anthropology of conservatism conceptualise the individual in a Heraclitusian way. According to this, the individual is in a constant and uninterrupted flux where there is no limitation, boundary, or regulator inherent to individuals (Muller, 1991:700). Any immanent element which may interrupt this flux and form a stability is absent in individuals. Therefore, individuals are imperfect, not only in an epistemological sense but also, more importantly, in an ontological sense. It is assumed that if individuals were completely isolated from the social bounds, they would remain in a continuous and boundless motion, in a chaotic state, and they would be unable to produce either semantic or social stability. And as German conservative Röpke notes, that would be “a miserable existence” (Röpke, 1970:76). In this sense, conservative ideology decontextualises individual as a self-destructive being in itself. Just as with Heraclitus’ rejection of permanence for the sake of an absolute flux, according to the conservative philosophical anthropology, the ontologically imperfect individual would never ‘exist’ but would always remain as ‘to-be’ or as a ‘potential to exist’ if in an isolated state. 

For this reason, individuals “have a fundamental need to be a part of a community,” of existing social forms and culture (McAllister, 1996:267). They are ontologically dependant on the existence of an external authority which can be utilised as a reference point. Individual can only compensate her lack of an immanent point of reference with acknowledging a transcended authority. She depends on linking herself with some kind of transcendentality to stabilise her existence, form social routines, and experience an order. And according to the conservative philosophical anthropology, culture - in the word’s most extensive sense as embracing all traditions, values, prejudices and beliefs of a society - is the primary candidate for this role of transcendent authority. As Devigne writes, for the conservatives, it is traditions, customs, prejudices and other social forms which “prevent chaos and (...) provide the resources and boundaries for future activities” (Devigne, 1994:17). By subjecting herself to a specific culture and to the social institutions of it, individual compensates for her ontological and epistemological imperfectabilities and can construct an established social life for herself. “Individuals only escape the limitless flux of subjective life by internalizing the delimiting purposes provided by culture” (Muller, 1991:700).

As Eccleshall argues, common to all conservative narrative “is an affirmation of the need for a firm framework of law and order to counteract the frailties of human nature which, unless

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21 Some conservatives explicitly underline a sense of belonging as a pre-condition of being “fully-human”. See Steukes, 1995:356.
curbed, would tear society apart‖ (Eccleshall, 2000:278). Here, while underlining the affirmation of firm authoritative social framework against individuals’ frailties, Eccleshall points to the same quality of conservatism, but not underlining that all these are derived from the conservative notion of the ontological imperfection of individuals. This imperfection suggests that we are ontologically dependant on attributing transcendence to, and forming a transcendental link with, our society, culture, and social forms. Without such a link, we cannot exist as individuals who live in relative stability with free will. As Scruton suggests, “the condition of mankind requires that individuals, while they exist an act as autonomous beings, do so only because they can first identify themselves as something greater” (Scruton, 2001:24). That is why even individuality is presented as a social artefact in the conservative canon. Conservative denial of ‘humanity’ as a universal category should be comprehended in this light (see Nisbet, 1986:27). Since people who are born into different societies construct their existence with reference to different transcendors, there is an existential gap among these people. Thus, the supposed members of the universal category of humanity lack any fundamental commonality among themselves. They come into existence not as equal human beings but as French, English, Indian, and so. Thus, according to the conservative discourse, it is the authentic culture of each society which forges individuals out of new born beings through defining them by subordinating and drawing their social, psychological, and political borders. According to this ontological imperfectability it therefore seems that in conservative narrative, culture is the creator of human beings rather than vice versa (McAllister, 1996:266-267).

If this ontological imperfection is accepted as the theoretical core of conservatism, then the reason for the general inclination of conservatives to preserve status quo becomes clear. Individuals come into existence as already-attached to the specific culture into which they were introduced. By accepting the culture of this status quo with all its institutions as a transcendent fact, and engaging in relationships with it individuals, construct their identities. The link between individuals and their culture is existential for the former:

What is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed not on account of its connections with a remote antiquity, nor because it is recognized to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on the account of its familiarity: not, Verweille doch, du bist so schön, but, Stay with me because I am attached to you (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

Thus, preserving status quo is synonymous with preserving the self, the identity of individuals. Every practice that suddenly transforms status quo will transform the
transcendent entity and wear the individuals’ relationships with it which provide existential security to them. That is why the general inclination of conservative politics is in favour of status quo.

However, this categorical defence is not also a blind defence of every existent institution and every social form. In essence, conservatism is the defence of continuous and stable existence for individuals which, according to conservatives, can best be ensured with some specific social formations. In this sense, conservatism is not synonymous with arguing for status quo. In other words, every defence of status quo is not conservatism, and any defence of social transformation is not necessarily non-conservative. Conservatism defends culture in functional terms, for its capability to exist as an external limit, a transcendent authority, and to provide individuals a stable semantic formation, daily routines, and orderly social life. It is thus probable for conservatives to propose a qualitative social change if the existing culture falls short of meeting these demands.\(^\text{22}\) However, although conservatism may sometimes defend a sociocultural transformation, it – supposedly - does not argue in favour of a genuinely new culture. Instead, the conservative attitude in such a situation is turning its face back to the past and ‘resurrecting’ the culture of the past which previously secured individuals from social chaos and provided them epistemological security and a social routine.\(^\text{23}\) If we express this point with the words of Oakeshott, in such a condition, conservative attitude “will display itself in a search for a firmer foothold and consequently in a recourse to and an exploration of the past” (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

It should be noted at this point that the links between different features of conservative theory, and the proposed philosophical anthropology of conservatism – which sees individuals as needed culture, and social institutions as a transcendent referent – can easily be demonstrated. For example, the conservative critique of Enlightenment which emphasises the limitedness of individual reason, also presupposes the conservative philosophical anthropology that grasps individuals as being epistemologically imperfect, as conditioned by a particular culture and as experiencing the world within their unsurpassable particularities. On their outlook to society, the link is obvious between the organic perception of society as a separately evolving being and the need of conservative conception of the state of individual for an external, transcendent point of reference. Likewise, many features on conservative

\(^{22}\) For further discussion on this point, see 4.2.

\(^{23}\) For the analysis of the plausibility of this conservative self-perception, see part 4.3.
thinking noted in the first section of the chapter, like the subsidiary nature of individual against the social, the comprehension of individual within its particularity, and the effort to empower intermediary institutions like family and church to limit individuals and to put them under control can be seen as a direct reflection of the conservative philosophical anthropology. For instance, the emphasis of conservative politics on a common identity can be explained in accordance with conservative philosophical anthropology, through the existential significance of the relation between individuals and their society for the former. Also, the defence of hierarchy and social inequalities can be interpreted as a means to control the self-destructiveness of individuals through limiting them within social hierarchies, and as refraining from disrupting the natural evolution of society – perceived as a transcendent being – by taking the initiative to reduce social inequality.

As is then seen, the notion of ‘ontologically and epistemologically imperfect individuality’ is a fundamental conception in the conservative narrative. So, this proposed philosophical anthropology of conservatism can be regarded as being the theoretical core which is presupposed by most conservative arguments and policies. However, defining conservatism with a specific theoretical core depends on one more condition other than its prevalence in the conservative narrative. That is, if the proposed core is not peculiar to the conservative ideology, it cannot be utilised as the characteristic notion of conservatism. Therefore, resenting those rival ideologies of conservatism, most notably liberalism, Marxism, and fascism, does not assume the ontological imperfection of individuals is a must.

I believe it is an easy task to accomplish. In none of these three ideologies is individual grasped as in need of a transcended authority to secure its existence. In the narratives of these, individuals have some immanent authorities which grant them a free existence, inherent stability, and social cohesion without the need of any extra authority. In most variants of liberal and Marxist ideologies, human is assumed as a being which is distinct for its reason (Freeden, 1996:445). This notion of reason is different from the conservative conception of reason insofar as it is already embedded in and inherent to the individuals. It is an authority with reference to which individuals can regulate their behaviours without the need of any external entities. For instance, in the classical liberalism, this inherent reason is proclaimed “as the foundation of individual freedom” (Steger & Roy, 2010:5). That is why both ideologies refuse to offer an existential link between individuals and the sociocultural formations within which they come to the world.
It should be noted here that, unlike liberal discourse on the individual, the role of reason in the Marxist discourse of *homo praxis* is somewhat dubious. In Marxism, reason is generally conditioned by historical processes and particular conditions. In other words people can be assumed as perceiving the world through the window of their own temporality and social class. Although this aspect seems similar with the fundamental role of the social and temporal in the conservative discourse, there is nevertheless a very important difference between the Marxist and the conservative approaches. In Marxist perception, this socio-temporal conditioning, and the subjection of individuals, is problematised. Marxist theory depends on a principal belief in the individuals’ capacity to transcend their particularity and to discover the laws governing both their existence and the socio-political reality through their individual reason. Alienation of individuals to the phenomena of culture and the perception of society as an entity external to human praxis is completely disapproved of by Marxism (Churchich, 1990:16-17; also see Marx, 1970). In a sense, the whole point of the Marxist ideology is putting an end to individuals’ alienated relationship with their society, allowing them to see that society as the product of its own praxis, and encouraging them to reshape sociocultural forms. Thus, just like liberalism, reason is the notion in Marxism as the final authority, and the limiting and identifying referent for individuals; this reason is principally assumed as inherent in every individual pre-socially.

When it comes to fascism, the picture is similar. It is again not possible to find an external reference point which ensures the regularity of and provides a stable existence for the individual. In fascist understanding, the spirit of nation or race is assumed as already embedded in the individual, either biologically or spiritually.\(^{24}\) To formulate a healthy identity, individuals should do nothing more than return to their own, genuine selves. The difference between fascism and conservatism is clear: In conservatism, the identity of the individual is endangered as the culture weakens, since the identity depends on these specific cultural and social forms. That is why conservatives generally refrain from cultural transformation. But in fascist narrative, individuals come to the world with their identities and particular existences, i.e., their racial/national features, as embedded to themselves. Thus, according to the fascist narrative, comprehensive social transformations are not so problematical. That is why fascist governments do not refrain from implementing new social and cultural forms. There is no necessity in fascist discourse to make a cultural criticism by promoting the culture of the past. In fascist narrative, individuals are ‘complete’ beings to the

\(^{24}\) For a detailed analysis of the fascist ideology see Griffin, 1993.
extent that even the leader is not perceived as an external authority figure and emerges from
the very soul of its people. A leader’s authority is seen as inherent to, and emerging from, the
individuals.

To summarise at this juncture, it seems that the notion referred to previously, i.e., that
individuals are subject to an ontological and epistemological imperfectability, can be put
forward as the ideological core of conservative discourse. It can be argued that defining
conservatism with reference to this core is more plausible than other formerly mentioned
approaches, as it reduces their indicated shortcomings while analysing those approaches.
Arguing that conservative canon shares this common core, this conservative minimum,
allows avoiding some drawbacks of the approaches that totally deny the existence of a
conservative theory, and that equate conservatism either with a pure anti-rationalism or a firm
status quoisim. Unlike those argue for the absence of a general conservative discourse, the
approach proposed in this study underlines the similarities perceivable within works of a
group of thinkers and politicians from Burke and Peel, to Oakeshott and Cameron.

On the other hand, the proposed approach also refuses the naturalisation of conservatism and
suggests that conservatism is not an intuition but a choice. It suggests that conservative
politics must presuppose a specific conservative perception (and meanwhile a conservative
ideal) in regards to the individual, the social, and the cultural, and that the traces of this
presupposition and this conservative ideal can be identified in the works of well known
representatives of the conservative tradition. In this way, whilst a suitable framework for the
theoretical analysis of conservatism is provided, necessary intellectual space to critically
approach the conservative thinking is also created, since conservatism is grasped as being
formulated as a result of some theoretical suppositions. Moreover, the proposed definition
refrains from merely making a list of characteristics of conservative thinking by putting
forward the determinative role of a single feature in conservatism, and thus produces a new
knowledge on the inherent structure of the conservative discourse. Besides, rather than
explaining conservatism over a specific social class, but as complementary to this approach,
the proposed attempt at a definition focuses solely on the conservative discourse itself, and
does not reduce conservatism to the socioeconomic relations that caused its emergence.
Lastly, as clarified before, a conservative minimum in its form as proposed here is capable of
both mentioning and appreciating the diversity inherent to the conservative discourse, and
also differentiate conservatism from other ideologies.
Of course, despite all of these points, the approach argued in this study is not proposed as the sole accurate approach or as an epilogue on conservatism studies. As is stated previously, insofar as the attempt to define conservatism as an ideology is necessarily preceded by a conclusion on conservatism, that being a conclusion that the word conservatism signifies a definable and singular discursive totality, this attempt is always challengeable. What is more, since ideologies are not purely logical constructs, it does not seem possible to be able to always spot the proposed ideological core clearly in every reflection of the conservative thinking. But despite these inevitable drawbacks, the theoretical framework proposed here on the approach to conservatism can be considered as valuable and important because of the opportunities it provides on conservatism studies, such as reaching new knowledge about it and developing a critical attitude against it. That is why this approach is defended and utilised in this study. In the next part, I focus on radical conservatism, and with help of the framework developed here, I clarify some of the fundamental points regarding the relationship between conservative ideology and radical conservative thinking.

2.3.3 Radical Conservatism as a Modernist Reaction to the Modern

Although it may be assumed otherwise because of the label ‘radical conservatism’, the relationship of radical conservatism with the general family of conservative thought is problematic. From the point of view of those who define conservatism as an essentially anti-radical thinking (O’Sullivan, 1976:11-12; Freeman, 1980:3; Kirk, 1987:10; Huntington, 1957:458-460), the term radical conservatism is a paradoxical term. Following that view, because of its radical policies, radical conservatism should be accepted as a non-conservative thought, if not an anti-conservative one. When the proposed treatment of radical conservatives to social problems is examined, one can assume a categorical difference between classical and radical conservatisms in the first glance. For instance, against the classical conservative principle of conserving, radical conservatism is a project of transformation. Against the anti-radicalism and moderateness of classical conservatism, radical conservatism can be perceived as the breed of radical Enlightenment thinking, and one of the many non-conservative ideologies.

However, I argue that despite such obvious differences between radical and classical conservatisms, the former cannot be understood as categorically different from the latter. Although radical conservatism defends a radical political scheme of sociocultural and political transformation, it justifies this scheme not with the desirability of a totally new order designed by individual intellect, but with the promise of recreating the corrupted or destroyed
order, resurrecting the disappeared traditions, and reacquiring the inherent wisdom of the past. Thus, radical conservatism promises the supposedly stable and meaningful life of these old times. What is more, the order attempted to be created by radical conservative politics is significantly similar to the political inclinations of classical conservatives. For instance, just as their classical counterparts, radical conservatives argue for the empowerment of intermediary institutions. Like the classical, they also believe in the benefits of the prevalence of religion and of the transcended status of the state. Again, like the classicals, radical conservatives also regard inequality as natural, and struggle to form an organic society that is devoid of any struggles. Moreover, radical conservative perception of international politics is also similar to the classical one as they both see the international relationships as an amoral domain, in which nation-states working solely to realise their national interests are the only significant actors.

More significant than these similarities, the theoretical core of conservatism is of central importance in radical conservative discourse. The ontological and epistemological imperfection of the individual, and the need of her to get in touch with some kind of transcendentality in order to experience a stable and meaningful life secure from social chaos, is a given for all radical conservatives from Schmitt and Freyer to de Benoist and Strauss. The backbone of all these writers’ critique for existing social forms is founded on the need of a transcendental entity, either symbolic or actual, to function as an external referent and ontological stabiliser for self-destructive individuals. They all underline the importance of such a transcendental relationship for stable social order. What differentiates them from classical conservatives is not the assumptions on ontological or epistemological imperfections of the individual, or the need for transcendentality, but the specific policies within which the transcendental link can be secured and social order can be maintained. For classical conservatives, existing social forms are still capable of this role, and what needs to be done is only minor adjustments to ensure the persistence of the transcendental rank of the social institutions, traditions, and the common identity in general. However, radical conservatives accuse existing socio-political forms of weakening the transcendental link between individuals and the society. They also accuse existing social forms of being abstractly founded alien designs which substitute arbitrarily the naturally grown organic and authentic forms of the society. According to them, this arbitrariness renders social forms unable to function as transcendent authorities. Thus, radical conservatives suggest a conservative

25 See part 2.2.3.
revolution to reconstruct the organic forms. But the motives of this revolution are indifferent from the motives of classical conservatives.

Therefore despite some clear distinctions between them, there is not a qualitative difference between radical and classical conservatism. They should both be regarded as interpretations of a single conservative discourse which includes many thinkers from Burke until present, who regard individuality as an ontologically and epistemologically imperfect state which is, for its stable existence, in need of an external authority functioning as a transcended referent point.

Of course, comprehending radical conservatism is not restricted to the question of its relationship with classical conservatism or the general conservative narrative. The reason for the emergence of radical conservatism with a radical style is still to be clarified. On this point, it is important to restate that radical and classical conservatives share the same conservative core, and the same urge for the conservative ideal society. But they differ on the means to achieve this ideal. As it is generally not the theoretical body but the particular socio-political and cultural conditions which determine the means, I believe it is sensible to search for the reason of emergence of radical conservatism in the socio-political and cultural context. That is because, as Scruton states, in some extreme conditions, conservatives may employ revolution as an appropriate means for conservative ends:

Of course there are some conservatives who in extremity have adopted the way of revolution – conservatives like Franco in Spain and Pinochet in modern Chile. In the ensuing vacuum, however, people are disrupted, aimless, incomplete. The result is bloodshed, and only afterwards the slow work of restoration to some simulacrum of the state that was destroyed (Scruton, 2001:11).

In this perspective, I argue that radical conservatism is an interpretation of conservatism developed in a modernist sociocultural setting, in accordance with those modernist critiques. To fully present this argument, a basic understanding of modernism and modernist critiques of modernity is essential.

Modernism can be briefly defined as a cultural phenomenon that emerged at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, characterised by scepticism of dominant social and cultural modern forms, and calling for genuine modernity as its alternative (Pippin, 1991:29). Pippin states that this phenomenon can be grasped only against the background of an “emerging, widely shared consensus in European high culture that the early modern hopes for a genuinely new, progressive, fundamentally better epoch had proven false” (Pippin, 1991:30).
According to the modernist critique, instead of providing freedom, justice, and fraternity, and instead of producing wealth and happiness for everyone, modernity reduced individuals to automatons, imprisoned them in a so-called objective and quantitative reality, reduced them to an economic factor of production, alienated them from their identities and social contexts, and rendered their life devoid of any enduring meaning. “The emancipatory promises of modernity were never fulfilled”, instead, “it presents itself as a state of permanent crisis; it offers apparent freedoms, but it is in fact linked to alienation, standardisation and loss of individual autonomy” (Armstrong, 2005:4). Thus, according to modernists, the fundamental presumptions of modernity should be re-evaluated; modern forms of perception underlying the processes of reality formation of the modern era should be debated; and the modernist effort to form an alternative, genuine modernity that enhances individual autonomy and ends alienation should be promoted. As a result, modernism can be understood as a reformist critique of the modern in the name of modernity itself (Armstrong, 2005:64).

This critical stance, this dissatisfaction of modernity with itself is reflected mostly in modernist art, which “already announces a complex crisis mentality, a deep concern with the effects of social modernization” (Pippin, 1991:32, 40). Developed within a critical cultural environment, pieces of modernist art, like the paintings of Monet, substitute an objective, single, clear, and calculable modern reality as apprehended by the rules of perspective with an incalculable, contingent, and perspectival reality. Just because of this authenticity and relativity, it always belongs to a specific place and a specific apprehender, unlike the unidentified, anonymous, and unattached reality of the modern (Pippin, 1991:36).

This reinterpretation of reality constitutes the backbone of the modernist critique of modernity. Modernism, either as an artistic style or in its intellectual and political reflection, always challenges the modern quest for the acquisition of unitary, universal, and anonymous knowledge. Instead, modernists underline the need for local, practical, relevant, and identified knowledge, which unlike to the universal knowledge of the modern, will not be subject to constant alteration labelled as ‘development’, but will reflect the relatively stable spatio-temporal particularity of individuals. It rejects the modernity that empties life of authentic meaning, and promotes a universal and anonymous way of life with constantly changing socio-technological forms. Against these, modernism “thinks of the sensory world as unique

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26 The prominence of spatio-temporality is already evident in the works of Baudelaire. As one of the first modernists intellectuals, he suggests that “[a]lmost all our originality comes from the stamp that time imprints upon our feelings” (quoted by Pippin, 1991:32).
and individual‖ and attempts to preserve a space for locality and individuality (Armstrong, 2005:4&103). It blames established modern forms for bringing about “the decline of fixed communities and stable class relations” (Armstrong, 2005:2) and for failing to provide a stable cultural and intellectual environment which renders individuals’ lives meaningful by functioning as the Archimedean point for their identity-formation processes.

This socio-political critique is also expressed in different art forms. For instance, Girard notes that the collapse of religion as an external and stable authority that bestows supreme worth on all ends is the great narrative of the modernist novel, and the central experience of modernity (Pippin, 1991:34–35).27 In parallel with this great narrative, the whole modernist response can be seen as a call for a new modernity that will both provide epistemological stability and ensure the respect for local sociocultural forms as external constants in individuals’ lives. To sum up, it can then be stated that, as a prominently cultural movement, modernism underlines the significance of perceiving, recognising, and identifying the locality of reality to experience a meaningful, autonomous, and unalienated life. It calls for an alternative modernity that will promote or produce such a perception of reality.

To turn to our theme, modernist critique had severe influences on politics. For instance, in Modernism and Fascism (2007), Griffin underlines the close relationship between modernism and fascism and reads the rise of fascism during the inter-war years against the background of a modernist cultural environment. He understands fascism to be “a form of programmatic modernism that seeks to conquer political power in order to realise a totalizing vision of national or ethnic rebirth” (Griffin, 2007:182). Griffin’s point seems plausible in light of the fascist attempt to free individuals from the fluidity of modernity and locate them in stable and hierarchical sociocultural structures. However, Griffin does not argue that there is a strictly determinate relationship between modernism and fascism. The modernist cultural environment is a very heterogeneous, complex, and self-contradictory phenomenon, and it may engage in an affirmative relationship with many different political inclinations. Along with any other political possibilities that modernism may promote, the one form of thought that can emerge only in a modernist cultural environment is radical conservatism, an interpretation of conservatism through modernist concerns and sensitivities. Thus, I believe

27 Kafka’s novel The Trial is an example of the modernist novel. In The Trial, K., the hero of the novel is desperate to subject himself to an authority to imitate the authority’s choices, and define and subjectify himself through this authority.
that like fascism, radical conservatism should also be comprehended by being read within its modernist context.

Read from this perspective, radical conservatism emerges as a genre of conservatism developed in response to the sociocultural situation of fin-de-siècle Europe, in which the discontent from modernity is raising the absence of identity, meaning becomes a problematic, and the search toward an alternative modernity and hopes for a fundamental change is popularising. I believe that radical conservatism is an answer to the searches for an alternative. This alternative is founded in the spirit of modernity, but utilises the language of conservatism. Though it proposes a radical politics, i.e., to abandon the status quo in favour of an alternative, it is still a conservative answer to a ‘modern’ problem, since this alternative is not an ‘other modernity’ to be constructed through reflections on the fundamentals of modernity but an alternative to be constructed in accordance with the conservative ideal. It is an alternative that reemphasises the accumulated social knowledge rather than focusing on individual rationality, and that fights for the prevalence of the past, the disappearing social forms and authorities. Radical conservatism argues that the alternative to modernity should be the one which will limit and control individuals, and provide a transcendent external authority for their ontological and epistemological stability. To realise such an order, they do not work like an architect designing a building as she pleases, but as a fictive archaeologist letting ancient gods come out again from their resting places. In other words, this conservative alternative should be constructed with reference to the past, and to social wisdom. Within the cultural environment of a prevalent unhappiness from fluidity and the absence of constant meanings and identities, radical conservatism is a call for returning to the authentic Kultur repressed by modernity. It is a call to resurrect the transcendent entities and symbols of the past as interpellators and master signifiers. Thus, I believe it is possible to read radical conservatism as a response of conservatism to the modernist sociocultural and political context.

To sum up the point, radical conservatism can then be read as a part of the conservative narrative. It is only an interpretation of conservative ideology developed in a different cultural environment than that of classical conservatism. It is then time to ask about the possible openings of this reading; it is time to utilise the proposed commonality between classical and radical conservatism in order to analyse the fundamental binary oppositions of the conservative canon. This will be the focus of the next part of the study.
3 A Historical Background of Deconstructive Reading of Ideologies: The Legacy of Ideology Critique

There are numerous ways to analyse an ideology. For instance, following the Marxist school, one can focus on the social base and develop an explanation of political ideologies through their foundation within the socioeconomic relations. Alternatively, through a content analysis of politicians that are close to a specific ideology, one can discern prevalent themes - and their particular expressions - in that ideology’s reflection in practical politics.

Other than these two ways of analysis, if focused on the ideology itself more than its practical implications or its foundations in social classes, there are still a number of alternative paths that can be followed. One of the better known of these is Michael Freeden’s ‘morphological analysis’ which is explained in part 3.4. In this approach, the ideology is analysed in order to uncover its peculiar positioning of political concepts relative to each other. Moreover, these concepts are grouped under core, adjacent and peripheral ones, and thus, a discernible profile can be created for each political ideology. This morphologic approach is fruitful to analysis many other ideologies, but conservatism seems to be an exception. In his book *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (1996), where Freeden introduces this methodology and analysis all major political ideologies through it, the chapter on conservatism concludes with a definition of conservatism as a swivel mirror. In other words, Freeden fails to locate any political concepts which, in their conservative positioning, always rest in the ‘core’ of the narrative. That is because, different variants of the conservative thought uses political concepts very differently. Or to rephrase it in a Freedenian way, political concepts are placed by different variations of conservative thought in quite different ways. To use the two particular interpretations of conservatism that are the focuses of this study, the term revolution, if taken as a political concept, while sits at the far periphery in classical conservative construct, radical conservatism places the term at the core of its discourse.

Hence, a fruitful analysis of conservatism should first of all be able to explain this range of difference between the variants of conservatisms. How can this be possible at all? How can an anti-revolutionary ideology incorporate most radical views while preserving its fundamental precepts?
To answer these questions and provide a comprehensive understanding of conservatism, Derridian reading seems to be an ideal tool. By perceiving conservatism as a single text with many interpretive opportunities, and by reading conservatism through questioning the dichotomies onto which conservatism’s core beliefs and politics depend, deconstruction might provide us some important insights on conservatism. Rather than positioning the political concepts within a morphological map and trying to reduce conservatism to one of its interpretations, through a deconstructive reading of conservatism, one can underline the dynamics that gives way to the wide range of interpretive opportunities within the conservative canon. Moreover, with this method, it is possible to reach some conclusions about the exceptionalist claims of conservatism and about the nature of political ideologies in general. That is why, as is explained in the introduction, this thesis intends to read the conservative ideology with a deconstructive sensibility, and to reach some conclusions about conservatism.

To achieve these ends, it approaches the conservative canon through appreciating its diversity while offering a comparative analysis of the classical and radical interpretations of conservatism. The plausibility of this study depends on the validity of two claims: first, that analysing the relationship between classical and radical conservatisms, and revealing commonalities and the differentiations between them, can be regarded as grounds for a deconstructive reading of the conservative canon; second, since deconstruction inherits the project of ‘ideology critique’, and has an implicit promise of emancipation, reading conservatism through deconstructive sensibilities is a significant undertaking. The main purpose of this chapter is to present the validity of these two claims, and to provide a grounding of legitimacy and a theoretical framework for the whole study.

To this end, part 3.1 focuses on the views of Karl Marx, who utilises the term ideology in a pejorative sense to analyse the obstacles between subjects and the Real, or the extra-textual truth. While acknowledging the diversity of literature on the interpretation of Marx’s works, the focus of this part is the orthodox interpretation of Marx and the orthodox Marxist understanding of the term ideology, since ideology critique approach has evolved as a critique of this orthodoxy. Here, *The German Ideology* (1970 [1846]) is utilised as the main source on Marx’s conceptualisation of ideology. Afterwards, the evolution of the critical ideology analysis is demonstrated in the second and third sections by referring to two important Marxist thinkers of the 20th Century, Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser. The change which occurred after the time of Marx in the imagination of the relationship between
the real and the ideological is also noted here. For Marx, the real and the ideological are two undoubtedly separate categories, and awareness of this distinction is regarded to be the key to the emancipation of humankind (Kolakowski, 2008:127-128). However, later thinkers who initially shared the foundations and ideals of ideology critique have become gradually more sceptical about this distinction, mainly because of the epistemological problems it poses. Thus, as the ideology critique approach evolves, the real begins to be understood as more ideological, and the ideological as more real, or at least the only real within our possession. Parts 3.2 and 3.3 demonstrate this trend by referencing the ideology analyses of Gramsci and Althusser.

The fourth part is slightly distinct, in that it focuses on Michael Freeden’s morphological analysis of ideologies. Freeden’s perspective is difficult to see within the context of a Marxian analysis of ideology, but as his methodological approach to analyse ideologies will be employed in this study, as a description of its foundations is both necessary and desirable. Furthermore, since the premise of ideology critique is not about conceptualising ideologies specifically as something, but specifically for something, there is no fundamental need to exclude Freeden’s methodology from the ideology critique approach. On the contrary, it can be used with an emancipatory spirit, as I intend to show in part 3.4.

The fifth part of this chapter has three aims. Firstly, it offers an account of Derrida’s peculiar approach to texts, which is commonly termed deconstruction. Next, it claims that Derridian theory shares the fundamentals of the Marxian ideology critique approach for its emancipatory aspirations, and in the way that it conceptualises the ideological and the real.28

Derridian ideology critique is, in a sense, a complete reversal of Marx’s view. Marx sees ‘perceiving the distinctness between the real and the ideological’ as the key to emancipation; for Derrida, ‘perceiving the impossibility of making such a distinction extra-textually’ is the key to emancipation. Both approaches share a common enthusiasm for emancipation and, to reach that aim, both problematise the relationship of discursive constructions with the category of the ‘Real’. Thus, it is argued that Derrida’s approach may be seen in proximity

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28 An interesting similarity between Derrida and Freeden should be noted here: both thinkers seem to agree that discourses consist of concepts which lack fixed meanings, and which define each other mutually. Nevertheless, the aspect that differentiates Derrida from Freeden is that, for Derrida, all human experience is contextual – and that contexts are, by definition, ideological constructions. Thus, while Freeden assumes the existence of an un-ideological Real which precedes the ideological sphere, Derridian thinking perceives everything – including the term Real – as ideological. In this latter view, emancipation is not conceived as being emancipated from ideological constructions and settling in the Real, or as an extra-textual reality; rather, it is being emancipated from the illusion of the Real, and facing the disturbing fact of the necessarily ideological construction of reality.
with the emancipatory project of ideology critique, and by positing the contextuality of the categorical distinctions between the real and the ideological, his views represent a step which is in line with the general trend of the evolution of ideology critique.

The third and final aim of the chapter is to indicate that focusing on the relationship between radical and traditional conservatisms, and demonstrating them as legitimate interpretations of the single conservative corpus, can be grounds for reading the conservative canon with deconstructive sensibilities. That is in fact the case since, if these two forms of conservatisms are different perceptions of the same ideology, the differences between policy proposals of them can be thought to indicate the intermingling of the supposedly mutually-exclusive dichotomies – dichotomies which are considered of utmost important in the self-perception of the conservative ideology, i.e., conserving and altering, and natural and artificial. This intermingling can then be used to question the conservative exceptionalism (itself a fundamental belief in the conservative canon that suggests a categorical difference between conservatism and other political ideologies) due to the supposedly peculiar, unmediated, and undistorted relationship between conservatism and the real. This state of questioning, as is discussed in the fourth chapter of the thesis, will not falsify conservative canon nor render it subordinate to any other ideology. But it will demystify conservatism, offering us a different view of conservative ideology, and provide us a framework within which conservatism can be analysed comparatively with other ideologies.
3.1 Emergence of Ideology Critique: Classical Marxism’s Understanding of Ideology

3.1.1 Ideology and Ideology Critique

The term ideology originates from a Greek composite of *idea* and *logos*, and appeared during the Age of Enlightenment. It was first coined by Destutt De Tracy to name a new science, which he hoped would reveal the natural laws that shape the ideas of humankind. According to De Tracy, the techniques to be developed by this new science would allow the perfection of our ideas (Seliger, 1979:14-15). Thus, at its foundation, with the purpose of developing the technology of ideas, ideology was proposed as a positive concept.

Although De Tracy is the originator of the term, most studies overlook this fact and begin to present the history of ideology with its use of the term by Marx and Engels. This attitude indicates an important aspect about the term: despite the positive intentions at its foundation, it has been popularised in a negative, if not pejorative use. In contrast with De Tracy’s intentions, beginning with Marx, ideology has been widely utilised not to construct a new theory of human ideas, but as a critical tool against existing ideas on society and politics among other things. Throughout the rest of this paper, the use of ideology as a critical tool will be referred to as ideology critique; that is, not the critique of ideology, but the critique by using ideology.

Ideology critique in this sense is the problematisation of social phenomena, and especially of the discursive constructions surrounding it, through the questioning of these constructions’ in relation to the real. As Žižek notes, the starting point of ideology critique is the “full acknowledgment of the fact that it is easily possible to lie in the guise of truth” (Žižek, 1994:8). In a sense, it is an epistemological quest motivated by the desire for emancipation: “When we do ideology critique, we try to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequities and oppression that lurk beneath” (Brookfield, 1995:87). Herein lays the initial departure point of the ideology critique approach. It supposes that the relationship between the categories of the real and the ideological - as well as the nature of both categories - can be grasped through criticising discourses with a focus on their interpretation of reality. It will highlight the ways in which we actually construct our own ideological discourses. We will then be able to distinguish the ideological from the real, and have an opportunity to emancipate ourselves from the constructed, socially imposed ideological realities. The metaphor of *camera obscura* and its utilisation within the writings of Marx is a classic example of this strategy (see Marx, 1970:47). Therefore, ideology critique can be briefly
defined as the name of an epistemological investigation, which is headed for the knowledge of the categorical differences between the real and the ideological, for the sake of emancipation.

Turning to the point I previously underlined, since the term ideology has been popularised by writers whose approaches can be seen as examples of ideology critique, it is very reasonable that most studies on ideology begin by presenting the term as understood by the founder of the ideology critique approach. This study will do likewise, and focus on Marx’s original interpretation of the term ideology.

3.1.2 The ‘Ideology’ of Classical Marxism

Although Marx, beginning from his earliest studies, made numerous explicit and implicit references to the term (Larrain, 1983:9-41), it is still impossible to find a clear definition of ideology in his works (Torrance, 1995:191). Because of this ambiguity, Marx’s successors were able to find a wide range of discursive opportunities in his corpus to argue very distinct interpretations of ideology, each of which is intended to present ‘Marx’s understanding of ideology’. The discussion is still far from over and a study which intends to fully present Marx’s perspective on this issue should necessarily analyse each of these interpretations. However, such a broad analysis is both impossible within the scope of this study, and unnecessary in relation to its foci. Rather, it aims to provide a brief account of the classical or orthodox - Marxist understanding of ideology, to which all significant contributors of ideology critique refer, even in a critical manner. It is the particular perception which constitutes the first example of ideology critique and therefore, in this section, only this orthodox perception of Marx’s approach will be presented. Thus, any further discussion about Marx and his genuine conception of the term ideology is mostly irrelevant in this case.

Bearing that in mind, the orthodox interpretation of Marx’s approach to ideology is presented below in brief. In particular, the epistemology and the role of ideology critique in relation to that epistemology are described. Finally, the possible drawbacks of this approach are succinctly discussed, and the section concludes with an explanation of the rationale behind the direction that the evolution of ideology critique is taking.

As stated earlier, the orthodox Marxist approach to ideology, formulated from a specific reading of the works of Marx and Engels, is the first example of ideology critique. Ideology

29 There are various interpretations of Marx’s understanding of the term ideology. For two contrasting arguments on the issue see Torrance, 1995: 2-7; Parekh, 1982: 13.
is utilised for the first time by Marx and Engels to question social phenomena, through problematising the relationship between the real and the discourses which justify it. Classical Marxist argumentation of ideology critique begins such an analysis with the assumption that “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life” (Marx, 1970:47). By separating material activities and consciousness in a Cartesian way, and attributing a primacy to the former over the latter, classical Marxism creates the possibility of a new critique of sociocultural and political structures, which focuses on unique forms of consciousnesses, and of discourses, that are promoted by these structures. This new critique analyses the harmony and conflicts between the real and existing forms of consciousnesses of that real.

The term ideology is employed within this critical project to indicate any form of consciousness that distorts the real, and does not reflect actual life as it is. Hence, in Engels’ words from his letter to Mehring, “ideology is the process accomplished by the thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him” (quoted by Seliger, 1979:30). At the centre of this understanding of the term is a critical awareness aimed towards the bourgeoisie’s inability to account for its own contradictions (Larrain, 1983:7). And as Marx notes, ideology - which is responsible for that inability - not merely distorts, but actually reverses the reality:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. (…) If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process (Marx, 1970:47).

It is striking that Marx does not perceive the ideological nature of certain structures or discourses as incidental epistemological faults. As Larrain underlines, “even in his early writings Marx was quite aware that the theoretical distortions he criticises - which he will later call ideology - were not mere illusions in the sense of purely logical or cognitive errors, but have a basis in reality itself (Larrain, 1983:12). For him, this ideological nature is itself a trace of the real, and by analysing the ideological with the correct method, i.e., dialectical materialism, it is possible to uncover the nature and laws of that real. This is the case because ideologies for Marx are not merely wrong perceptions of reality. Instead, they are the reverse images of it, functioning to conceal class struggles (Larrain, 1983:29). Thus, according to Marx, if people examine the ideological phenomena as the reversed image of the real, and if
they question the reason for the existence of these phenomena, they can reach an understanding of the real and its underlying dynamics.

For Marx, ideological distortion is the absolute sign of dominance of a ruling class over other classes. Marx emphasises this point by presenting ruling ideas as tools of the ruling class:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hands of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance (...) This whole semblance, that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas, comes to a natural end, of course, as soon as class rule in general ceases to be the form in which society is organised, that is to say, as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest as general or the “general interest” as ruling (Marx, 1970:64-66).

It must be emphasised that Marx’s arguments on the nature of the ruling ideas are founded on a conclusion concerning the correlation between these ruling ideas and the real. For Marx, this relationship is always problematic, or distortive. He signifies ruling ideas as ideological and intends to explain their emergence through their function within the social structure. Ideology critique’s crucial role for classical Marxist theory thus reveals itself: with the help of ideology critique and by using the term ideology as a critical tool, Marx uncovers the class-dominated structure of the society, which is concealed by these ideological ideas, and thus promotes the struggle for a communist society.

To detail this approach to ideology critique and discuss its strengths and weaknesses, the separation proposed by Newman for the analysis of the classical Marxist understanding of ideology provides a good starting point. According to Newman, Marx’s and Engels’ earliest interpretation of the term that can be found in The German Ideology:

…to hide the material basis of ideas and to see ideas as abstract, autonomous entities which determine the material world, as Marx and Engels accuse the idealist philosophers of doing, is an ideological gesture. Ideology, in other words, is the distortion of the real relationship between life and ideas, the disguising of the real, material basis of consciousness (Newman, 2001:311).

But beyond this first definition, Newman claims the existence of a second understanding of ideology within the same piece of Marx and Engels:
The second understanding of ideology found in The German Ideology, is political, where the first one may be said to be epistemological. For Marx and Engels, ideology may be explained as the rejection of class domination. They say: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas (...) The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of dominant material relations.” Ideology, then, is always the expression of the dominance of an economic class. Members of the ruling class are also producers of ideas—ideas which legitimize and perpetuate their rule (Newman, 2001:311).

Here, Newman actually proposes a separation between Marx’s epistemological and political understandings of ideology. However, such a separation is implausible as both understandings of the term have a strong correlation with each other and signify the same problematic relation with truth. Also, when seen through the terms of classical Marxist theory, it is difficult to formulate a distinction between ‘the epistemological’ and ‘the political’, as the former is necessarily shaped and covered by the latter. Thus, I believe it to be a mistake to argue that in The German Ideology Marx proposes a separate epistemological and political understanding of ideology. Marx probably saw them as different aspects of the same phenomena, rather than two differing understandings of a term. To explain, according to Marx, ideas are subject to material life; more specifically, to the ‘relations of production’. In Grundrisse, he notes that an idea is “nothing but the theoretical expression of those material conditions which dominate it” (quoted by Seliger, 1979:38). In his thinking, the sphere of ideas is therefore secondary to, and dependent on, the material relations. Ideas are determined by real life, and not the opposite. In this understanding, ideology emerges as the name of the conceptualisations which ignore this determination and which, moreover, reverse it as if real life were a function of ideas. At this point, Newman halts the flow of the Marxist theory and turns his focus upon an epistemological understanding of ideology distinct from the political one. However, classical Marxist argumentation does not end here.

For classical Marxism, real life is characterised by relationships of production, class struggle, domination, and exploitation. In other words, the real is itself political to the teeth, and its determination over ideas necessarily has a political character. Ideological conceptualisations are epistemological mistakes that, through rejecting the determinacy of class struggle over ideas, prevent the genuine and honest reflection of these struggles to appear in the sphere of ideas. The epistemological understanding of ideology defined by Newman as the distortion of the real relationship between life and ideas is first of all the rejection of domination, and is the political understanding of ideology. the rejection of class domination. By refusing to conceptualise themselves as functions of class struggle, ideological ideas also reject the
determinant role of class struggle in human societies and bear the political function of justification. That is why ideologies consist of ideas that “necessarily serve the interests of the ruling class even if it has not been produced by that class” (Larrain, 1983:25).

Within the context of this approach to ideology critique, classical Marxism proposes scientific investigation through the dialectical materialist methodology to be freed from ideological ideas, and to explore real social dynamics which determine our existence:

[In classical Marxism] there is a notion of the real, essential interests of the proletariat, which have been misperceived due to the operation of bourgeois ideology, and can only be correctly and rationally perceived through the scientific study of real, historical conditions. In other words, there is an essential and rational truth about society, and a core of essential interests within the subjectivity of the proletariat as a class, that is hidden under layers of ideological mystification and false consciousness, and is waiting to be discovered (Newman, 2001:313).

Since all social phenomena are determined by the class struggle rooted in relations of production, this ‘real’ can, for Marx, be labelled as the base of society, while all other aspects are superstructure. In 1859, in his Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx wrote this passage to refer to this relationship between base and superstructure:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness (quoted by Rigby, 1998:178) [Emphasis mine].

For him, any true methodology for investigating superstructures should continually refer to the underlying structure, and endeavour to uncover the relations of determination between base and superstructures. Here, the aim of ideology critique is more than just separating ideological gestures from the rest. By problematising the relationship between ideological perceptions and the reality which consists mainly of the activities within the base structure, it should not just explain the falsehood of ideological formations. More importantly, ideology

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30 It should again be reminded that this chapter presents an orthodox reading of Marx. Some writers like Torrance argues that none of Marx’s works contain enough material to legitimize such a broad conceptualisation of the category of superstructure (Torrance, 1995: 7) while others like Rigby argues that, on the issue of the relations between base and superstructure there was a ‘fundamentalist’ Marx as well as a non-fundamentalist one (Rigby, 1998: 183).
critique in the Marxist sense should provide information on the nature of the base structure by explaining the conditions of emergence that were present for these ideologies. As Étienne Balibar proposes, “historical materialism is primarily an analysis (or a series of analyses) of the formation, the real production, of idealist representations of history and politics – in short, of the process of idealization” (Balibar, 1988:163). Thus, for orthodox Marxism, ideology critique is also the means to explain how and why the real produces the ideological. Since orthodox Marxism is strongly deterministic, explaining this relationship is crucial for Marxist theory because all superstructural phenomena must have a foundation in the base of society. As Rigby notes, Marx was “refer[ring] to bourgeois ideas as no more than the expression of class will or of economic relations and the works of philosophers as merely the ‘reflection’ of their age” (Rigby, 1998:183). Even if they do not reflect the real as it is, all ideological formations must therefore have their raison d’être within that real. Otherwise, they cannot be theorised or comprehended by the orthodox Marxist thinking.

To clarify this notion, one can think of the comprehension of ‘conservatism’ within Marxist theory. Conservatism is itself an ideology for classical Marxism, as it denies the existence of a determining base structure, ignores class conflict, perceives society as a harmonious organism, and argues social inequalities to be natural and beneficial for all.31 However, because conservative ideology is a superstructural phenomenon, it cannot be simply ‘wrong’. Its existence must have a rationale within the base structure. At this point, ideology critique enters the scene. It uncovers that rationale and reveals the function of conservatism within the reproduction of existing social forms and relations of production. Through utilising the term ideology as a critical tool and marking conservatism as an ideology, Daniel DeLeon defines the aim of conservatives as “to conserve the power they now enjoy to live in luxury without work, to ride the proletariat, [and] to fleece the workers” (DeLeon, 1895). Just like this example, Marxist thought uncovers the truth beyond different ideological formations, and as Marx “assumes a fundamental harmony between truth and freedom” (Parekh, 1982:193), ideology critique is regarded as a tool for emancipation, a tool with which people will be emancipated from the artificial consciousesses imposed on them.

But, there is an important problem in that particular understanding of ideology critique: Views that reject the determinacy of relations of production are dispraised as ideological, and as such any discourse other than Marxism is labelled as ideological. Since every ideological

31 For the discussion of these features of the conservative canon, see part 2.1.3.
phenomenon is assumed to have a function of concealing the so-called ‘truth of class struggle’, the role of ideology critique turns out to be limited with demonstrating this proven truth. Hence, ideology critique arises not as a genuine investigative-critical tool for emancipation but as an attempt to reach the answer that was already known from the beginning.

This result is unavoidable as long as Marxism insists on the essential truth of its own definition of the real, and conceptualises the ‘real’ and the ‘ideological’ as two perfectly separate categories.\(^{32}\) In *The German Ideology*, Marx clearly reflects his confidence in his own epistemological assumptions: “We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process” (Marx, 1970:47). At this point, he does not sound to be suspicious of his own epistemology or of his theory’s capacity to form an undistorted relationship with reality. As a result, the term ideology becomes a substitute for ‘theories other than Marxism’, and ideology critique becomes a weapon designed to falsify – the ideas of which falsity is decided a priori. But in spite of its own epistemological vulgarity, classical Marxism succeeded in introducing the term ideology as a tool of critical analysis, and formed the first example of ideology critique in practice. After the initial formulation of the classical, orthodox Marxist position, thinkers who intended to use the term ideology as a critical tool often referred to this classical conceptualisation, underlined its strengths and weaknesses, and even engaged in imaginary debates with Marx and Engels. Through the works of such thinkers, ideology critique was established and evolved during the last century. During that time, the prominent tendency of this evolution has been towards a more self-reflexive theory which, instead of arguing an uncontaminated separation between the categories of the ideological and the real, can conceptualise the formation of both categories dialectically. For instance, Lenin’s comments on the need of an ideology for the proletariat (see Lenin, 1902:23) can be seen as a progress towards self-reflexiveness, given that it created the possibility for Marxism to recognise itself as an ideology among others. Another step was taken by Gramsci, who rejected the strong determinism of the classical position and proposed that;

the claim, presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism, that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an

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\(^{32}\) We should bear in mind that there are alternatives to this orthodox reading of Marx and Marxism. For instance Parekh claims that orthodox Marxism’s confidence in his own truth is inconsistent with even Marx’s own ‘socio-relativistic’ theory of knowledge (Parekh, 1982: 200-201).
immediate expression of the structure must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism… (Gramsci 2003:407).

Althusser can also be named as another example of this trend. Althusser’s Marxist approach perceives all kinds of subjectivity as necessarily ideological.\(^\text{33}\) Since subject as a category is *sine qua non* of human experiences, his perspective attaches great significance to the concept of ideology and to ideology critique. Despite its strong structuralism, Althusser’s approach represents the path toward self-reflexiveness and towards questioning the possibility of moving away from the ideological field.

For some, that evolution ended with the self-destruction of the ideology critique. Social theory became continuously more self-reflexive, and more clearly realised the problems inherent in the term ideology. Thus, for them, ideology critique is a problematic approach which borders on being a mere expression of pre-judgements and personal biases, etc. One of the most influential thinkers who considered abandoning the term altogether was Foucault. Moriarty gives a clear explanation of Foucault’s position on this issue:

Foucault argues, first, that the notion of ideology always stands ‘in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth’, and is thus an obstacle to an analysis, like his own, committed to bracketing out the true/false opposition in favour of studying truth as an effect produced within discourse; secondly, he suggests that the concept of ideology depends on, and thus preserves, another notion he wishes to challenge, that of the subject; and thirdly, he finds the term unhelpful on account of the implication it always seems to convey (at least in the Marxist discourse to which he is referring) that whatever it denotes is a secondary phenomenon to which some other deeper reality (the economic) is primary (Moriarty, 2006:53).

Nevertheless, not all thinkers share Foucault’s ideas. In spite of the popularity of the views in favour of stigmatising ideology as a term of no use for its inseparable links with ‘the modern’, some contemporary writers still insist on the importance of the term. For instance, Laclau states that through certain closing operations, “discursive forms construct a horizon of all possible representation within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is ‘sayable’ are going to be necessarily figurative”. It is this closing operation that Laclau calls ‘ideological’ (Laclau, 2006:114). Likewise, while taking the meaning of self-reflexivity to a higher level, Derrida can still utilise the term ideology while preserving the vision of emancipation through this utilisation. Thus, in the *Spectres of Marx* (1994) he conjures

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\(^{33}\) See part 3.3.
‘Marx’s spirits’ and creates a theoretical field for the continuation of the ideology critique project.

As the views of Derrida and various other thinkers’ will be summarised in the coming parts, there is no need to give any further details about them here. But it should be stated before continuing on that there is emancipatory potential in the ideology critique project. It lies in the approach’s capacity to develop a critique of reality by problematising the term reality as an epistemological effect. Therefore, I argue that ideology critique has the potential to demonstrate the limits of our subjectivity and our knowledge of the real. Furthermore, by underlining the gap and interaction between the real and the ideological, ideology critique may further our understanding of the political, and of political ideologies. This specific potential makes ideology critique indispensable for the quest of emancipation. Throughout that quest, we will likely be challenged to rethink the meaning of freedom and of emancipation, and we will re-conceptualise the nature of the real. But this rethinking should not be seen as an excuse to abandon the ideology critique. As the work of Derrida and other thinkers like him demonstrates, there are plenty of other options preferable to abandoning the whole project of emancipation, or ceasing to think too much on the possible uses of the term ideology. I choose to focus more directly on opportunities proposed by Derrida in the final part of this section, but prior to this, it is appropriate to first summarise the further evolution of ideology critique approach through discussion of some of its more noteworthy contributors.
3.2 Gramsci: The Subject as the Architect of Ideology

Gramsci is one of the first significant intellectuals to have reinterpreted the classical Marxist theory and redefined its conceptualisation of ideology. His works have been very influential on post-war Marxism, and lead to a break-away from the strong determinism of the classical approach.34 His influence on later studies of ideology critique is also obvious, and the fundamentals of post-war approaches to ideology critique can be found within the Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 2003). Thus, Gramsci’s approach is given consideration in 3.2.

This part begins by presenting Gramsci’s conceptualisation of ideology in the context of his perspective on society. Emphasis is placed on the points which differentiate him from the classical Marxist line. The role of ideology critique within his overall theory is discussed, and his emancipatory project is summarised afterwards. Lastly, the effects of the Gramscian approach on the evolution of ideology critique are also briefly noted.

Gramsci’s approach perceives ideology as a reality, but a textual reality produced by people. It finds its roots in the writings of Marx and Engels, just as the Orthodox Marxist position does. Some paragraphs of The German Ideology allow such a perception of the term by implying the possibility of defining the term production very broadly: “...men, who daily remake their own life begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: The relation between man and woman, parents and children, the family” (Marx, 1970:49) [emphasis added]. In such a broad extent, production can be understood not only as the transformation of nature for creating food or shelter, but also a category which includes all kinds of transformative actions that serve the continuous existence of humankind in every capacity. For instance, family can be regarded as a means of production by which humans reproduce themselves biologically. This broad conception of production is the foundation of Gramsci’s approach to ideology: in a sense, Gramsci perceives ideology as a means of production. It is a form of reality produced for people to reproduce themselves culturally and politically.

Before explaining the details of the Gramscian approach, it is better to clarify the differences between it and the classical Marxist approach. First of all, as mentioned before, Gramsci is very critical of the determinist interpretation of Marxism. He accuses such a vulgar determinism of being a “primitive infantilism” (Gramsci, 2003:407). In contrast, his approach highlights the creativity of the individual, and its role in the reproduction of social

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34 See Mouffe, 1979; Sassoon, 1980; Laclau and Mouffe, 1989.
phenomena. He even announces every single human to be a philosopher even though some are not aware of this creative role they play (Gramsci, 2003:9). Secondly, Gramsci does not use the term ideology pejoratively, as the name of a false consciousness. Instead, he conceptualises it as a kind of ‘produced reality’ or an intellectual product that can also be found as embedded in practical life (Gramsci, 2003:328). Thus, Gramsci also admits, albeit silently, the ideological character of his own approach. This notion illuminates the self-reflexivity of Gramscian ideology critique. Based on these differences, it seems possible to suggest that Gramsci’s approach is an attempt to avoid determinism and lack of self-reflexivity, the two major deficiencies of classical Marxism.

Turning to the conception of ideology, ideology for Gramsci is the foundation of all our conceptualisations, understandings, and interpretations, and which is embedded in the collective life of humankind. In his words, it is “the conception of the world”:

One might say “ideology” here, but on condition that the word is used in its highest sense of a conception of the world that it implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life (Gramsci, 2003:328).

For him, these ‘conceptions’ are the lenses through which we experience, understand, and transform the world. Individuals are in psychological need for these ideologies. Ideologies “create the terrain on which man [can] move” (quoted by Boggs, 1976:37). Thus, in the Gramscian perspective, ideology is neither the result of a direct relationship between structure and superstructure, nor a mere tool of the ruling class’ domination. Ideologies are reproduced by people - by all people – and at every moment. They are “embodied in the social practices of individuals” (Simon, 1982:59); they emerge, reproduce, and are transformed through language. With the medium of language, people either rephrase the dominant ideological conventions, or challenge them with alternatives. According to Gramsci, this function renders every individual a philosopher:

Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (Gramsci, 2003:9).

And in another part of the Notebooks, he makes the same point as such:

It is essential to destroy the widespread prejudice that philosophy is a strange and difficult thing just because it is the specific intellectual activity of a particular
category of specialists or of professional and systematic philosophers. It must first 
be shown that all men are ‘philosophers’, by defining the limits and 
characteristics of the ‘spontaneous philosophy’ which is proper to everybody. 
This philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of 
determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of 
content; 2. ‘common sense’ and ‘good sense’; 3. popular religion and, therefore, 
also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things 
and of acting, which surface collectively under the name of ‘folklore’ (Gramsci, 

When these writings are taken into account, we can suggest that Gramsci defines the sphere 
of ideologies as a subjective field, in the sense that it lacks an objective existence and is 
produced by the subjects. And this subjectivity causes another important differentiation of the 
Gramscian approach from the orthodox one. According to the orthodox interpretation of 
Marxism, the correlation between the structure and the superstructure is direct, definite, and 
immediate (Kołakowski, 2008:359). However, in the Gramscian approach, the subjectivity of 
the ideology marks the gap between the structure and the superstructure. In other words, 
unlike the orthodox conception, Gramscian thought assumes the existence of the individual as 
eexisting and mediating between these two layers of reality. This existence of the individual 
allows for the variations and differentiations during the interaction of the layers:

The historical “automatism” of certain premises (the existence of certain 
objective conditions) is potentialised politically by parties and men of ability: 
absence or inadequacy (quantitative and qualitative) of these neutralises the 
“automatism” itself (which anyway is not really automatic): the premises exist 
abstractly, but the consequences are not realised because the human factor is 
missing (Gramsci, 2003:191-192) [emphasis added].

Because of this mediation, Gramsci is seen as a member of the humanist wing of Marxism, 
whose humanism “derives essentially from an emphasis on conscious human agency rather 
than economic structures in the historical process” (Martin, 1998:149). For Gramsci, the 
‘objective’ conditions rooted in the base of society – i.e., the relations of production – are 
reflected to the superstructure through human subjects. In this reflection, conflicts of 
economic interests transform into the conflicts of conceptualisations and interpretations; or in 
short, the clash of ideologies. However, because of the lack of a direct reflection or 
determination between a base and superstructure, ideological struggles may – at least 
temporarily – cover the structural ones, create new struggles, or resolve existing ones. These 
possibilities render the sphere of ideologies as the crucial field of struggle for both 
dominating and dominated classes:
For there is no understanding of the facts that mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and that therefore, at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements - hence that there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership’s policies, are understood (Gramsci, 2003:168).

Since ideologies are products which are produced by individuals, like any other production process, they must somehow be distributed. That is to say, ideologies are not only produced by but also for someone. Different conceptions of the world can meet different functions and promote one of the sides of social struggle. In that context, because the politico-cultural stability of society relies on the conservation of some conceptions, beliefs, and loyalties, dominant classes must guarantee the reproduction of the existing social forms through imposing their ideology.35 Such an ideological domination of the ruling classes is the only way for them to secure a relatively stable social structure in the long term (Boggs, 1976:38). As Gramsci puts it, “if the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer ‘leading’ but only ‘dominant’, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously” (Gramsci, 2003:275-276). And the superiority of a class which lacks the domination in ideological field, which fails to be hegemonic and merely relies on brutal force, is doomed to cease in the long term. Consent, necessitated for a stable social structure, can only be produced through ideological domination. On the other hand, if the structure of a society is to be changed, it is only possible though a victory in the ideological field; a victory which will interrupt the reproduction of existing superstructure. A victory of the suppressed classes in the ideological field may thus put an end to the production of consent, and in that case the underlying dominative nature would be revealed.

Concerning the nature of the struggle within the ideological field, Gramsci stresses an important point: for him, the aim of the different social groups and/or classes do not blindly urge to dictate their very own ideologies. Because the aim is to build consent, the struggle in the field of ideology is also subject to bargains, alliances and compensations:

35 It is important to note that, in Gramscian understanding, “the ideological elements articulated by a hegemonic class do not have a necessary class belonging. (...) [F]or Gramsci the organic ideology does not represent a purely classist and closed view of the world; it is formed instead through the articulation of elements which, considered in themselves, do not have any necessary class belonging” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1989: 67-68).
Although every party is the expression of a social group, and of one social group only, nevertheless in certain given conditions certain parties represent a single social group precisely in so far as they exercise a balancing and arbitrating function between the interests of their group and those of other groups, and succeed in securing the development of the group which they represent with the consent and assistance of the allied groups—if not out and out with that of groups which are definitely hostile (Gramsci, 2003:148).

Another distinct point of the Gramscian approach to ideology is the vital role of intellectuals. Because intellectuals are the main producers of ideology, they have a relative degree of importance within the ideological struggle. They are the ‘mass production units’ of the ideological field. As such, one of the characteristics of the Gramscian ideological struggle is the strategic importance of conquering these ‘units’. As Gramsci notes, “one of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer ideologically the traditional intellectuals” (Gramsci, 2003:10).

The course of action proposed by Gramsci is all that remains to be clarified for attaining full comprehension of the Gramscian ideology critique. First of all, what Gramsci puts forward is that people produce ideologies because they need them. Thus, trying to avoid all ideological positions and hoping to reach a totally un-ideological mode of existence is not realistic. He claims that those who argue for such a vision “forget that the thesis which asserts that men become conscious of fundamental conflicts on the level of ideology is not psychological or moralistic in character, but structural and epistemological…” (Gramsci, 2003:164). So, Gramscian ideology critique does not project an emancipation that can be reached through focusing on the relationship between the ideological and the real, and by the total elimination of the former. Rather, Gramsci’s emancipation project is about being aware of the role each person plays during the reproduction of the society and about becoming an active subject - a conscious producer within the ideological production of experienced reality. In other words, for Gramsci, although we unavoidably experience reality within the mediation of the ideological sphere, because of the role each of us takes in the process of reproduction and/or transformation of the content of that ideological sphere, we have an opportunity to make a conscious production. Gramsci explains to be able to be a conscious producer as ‘the second level of being a philosopher’:

Having first shown that everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in “language”, there is contained a specific conception of the world, one then moves on to the second level, which is that of awareness and criticism. That is to say, one proceeds to the question - is it better to “think”, without having
a critical awareness in a disjointed and episodic way? In other words, is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e. by one of the many social groups in which everyone is automatically involved from the movement of his entry into the conscious world (and this can be one’s village or province; it can have its origins in the parish and the “intellectual activity” of the local priest or aging patriarch whose wisdom is law, or in the little old woman who has inherited the lore of the witches or the minor intellectual soured by his own stupidity and inability to act)? Or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one’s own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labours of one’s own brain, choose one’s sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world, be one’s own guide, refusing to accept passively and supinely from outside the moulding of one’s personality? (Gramsci, 2003:323).

For Gramsci, even though everyone is a philosopher and everyone reproduces an ideology in his or her daily life, most people do it unconsciously. They are unaware of their role within the reproduction processes of the reality, and the resulting power they hold to change the reality. Because mankind experiences reality through the mediation of world views, or ideologies, the role of people within the reproduction of ideologies renders both subordination and emancipation as a possibility for them. They can either produce their experiences of reality in a way that would emancipate them, or in a way that would reproduce their subordination. People either choose a passive role and unconsciously accept a world-view which does not reflect their real interests and thus reproduce their submission to domination, or be aware of their role in ideological production by consciously (re)producing the ideologies that are consistent with their interests, and thus emancipate themselves. The function of ideology critique is very clear: it is to clarify the ideological character of different conceptualisations, interpretations, etc., and to highlight the capability of individuals for changing them. In other words, ideology critique helps people to think of alternatives and possibilities. It encourages people to reflect their interests and imaginations onto ideological reproduction processes. Of course, Gramsci’s expectation as a Marxist is that when people realise the necessarily ideological character of the social conventions, they will be more critical toward the status quo, and in the long term they will act according to their structural interests and endeavour to realise a communist society. But Gramscian ideology critique provides many diverse theoretical opportunities which may allow many alternative interpretations and propositions other than a strictly communist one.

Lastly, to clarify once again the route of evolution of the ideology critique, it is beneficial to summarise the significant differences of Gramsci’s utilisation of the term ideology as a critical tool, or in short the ‘Gramscian ideology critique’, from that of classical Marxism.
First of all, unlike the classical Marxist understanding, ideology is not regarded as a reversed reality, or *camera obscura*. It is a valid part of the reality itself, a part onto which structural struggles are reflected indirectly. Thus, the aim of ideology critique is not to avoid or debase the ideological field. Rather, it is to draw attention to the ideological field, to underline its mediation for experiencing the reality and for interpreting the relations of production, in order to highlight every person’s inalienable role within the (re)production of it and thus creating the possibility for them to consciously reshape that field according to their own interests. As long as the dominant class’ hegemonic apparatus – which gives them the opportunity to shape the ideological field – is a philosophical fact (Gramsci, 2003:365), Gramscian ideology critique remains a ‘counter philosophical fact’, which warns ordinary people, the already-philosophers, to progress to the next level and let themselves free.

Secondly, Gramsci’s ideology critique denies a direct determinism and highlights the human factor. It stresses the role of the individual in structural and ideological struggles. For Gramsci, reality cannot be fully comprehended without taking into account the notion of subjectivity:

because reality is a product of the application of human will to the society of things (the machine-operator’s to his machine) (...) if one excludes all voluntarist elements, or if it is only other people’s wills whose intervention one reckons as an objective element in the general interplay of forces, one mutilates reality itself (Gramsci, 2003:170-171).

The denial of strong determinism through focusing on the notion of subjectivity leads to the third and most important differentiation of Gramscian ideology critique from that of the classical one. Although Gramscian theory urges for emancipation just like the classical Marxist ideology critique, it does not perceive emancipation as being subordinated to a single interpretation of reality, but as an awareness of the alternative interpretations. He thus uses the term ideology as a tool to clarify the artefactual nature of world views, to uncover people’s roles within the reproduction of these, and to show people the functional links between these world views and people’s structural interests.

At this point, it is vital to remember again that Gramsci is a Marxist, and believes in the determination of structural conditions in the long term (Boggs, 1976:36). Thus, for Gramsci, the limit of subjectivity, of the human factor, and of the ideological struggle, is class struggle. Moreover, he considers a ‘true’ experience of reality to be one that is consistent with the so-called realities of class struggle. Emancipation through ideology critique should be seen only
as a prerequisite to reach that true experience. However, despite these commonalities with classical Marxism, the standpoint of Gramsci is still very different from that of classical Marxism. Gramsci does not refer to relations of production as the sole field of reality, but talks about different realities which are largely forged by individuals. Thus, Gramsci’s approach should be highlighted as the beginning of an evolution that breaks away from classical Marxism to avoid its numerous deficiencies, including those concerning its conception of ideology. The abolition of conceptualising the real and the ideological as two distinctly separate categories begins with Gramsci. He perceives these two categories in a reciprocal, intermingling relationship at which the real is seen as an ideological effect, and at which ideology is comprehended as a part of reality. Of course this departure from classical Marxism caused some important problems for the Gramscian approach to ideology critique: if we experience the reality necessarily through the mediation of the ideological, then how can we consider a real domination or a possibility of real emancipation? In the final analysis, Gramsci’s answer to such a question must refer to the Marxist conceptualisation of the fundamental social dynamics, i.e., the means and relations of material production. For Gramsci, it is still impossible to talk about emancipation without referring to the category of real, or to the antagonistic class relations which have the quality of being real in themselves. This essentialist core was also noted by Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 1989:69). As we shall see, such a necessary reference is denied by some other thinkers of the late 20th century. But the seeds of this denial are still perceptible in the departure of Gramsci from orthodox Marxism. This direction is more obvious in Althusser’s conceptualisation of ideology; as ideology in his thinking is an even more crucial and constructive term for the relationship between the individual and the real, or in his case, phenomenal world.
3.3 Althusser: Ideology as the Architect of the Subject

Althusser’s ideas represent another step in the evolution of the use of the term ideology as a critical tool. Essentially, he reverses the Gramscian relationship between individuals and ideology. Instead of interpreting ideology as a product of the individuals, Althusser comprehends subjectivity of the individual as a product of ideology. This reversal confirms the transformation in the functioning of the ideology critique. Ideology critique ceases to be an attempt to emancipate people from illusions just by marking the loose relationship between those illusions and the real. Instead, it turns into a practice that seeks emancipation by demonstrating the shaky ground of every singular reality, and suggesting the multiplicity of realities. In contrast with the classical Marxist ideology critique which emancipates people from illusions in the name of a single real, the new ideology critique attempts to emancipate them from all single real, in the name of multiplicity of the real. It should be noted at this point that this approach can be seen as a logical consequence of the ideology critique project. This new approach emerges at the moment when ideology critique turns to itself, and the term ideology is used to approach its own utilisation critically. The next step of ideology critique arises when the classical ideology critique, which demystifies ‘illusions’ by referring to a definite category of reality, attempts to demystify its own illusion of a definite, stable and concrete category of reality. This next step is by no means immune to theoretical difficulties. Because there is no definite reality, emancipation within its ordinary understanding, reached through grasping the pure reality, is a mission impossible for this approach. Thus, new interpretation requires a new understanding of emancipation. However, because this and other theoretical problems will be noted and discussed in the part on Derrida, we can bypass them for now and begin discussing the pioneer of this new understanding: Louis Althusser.

To begin with, Althusser’s ideas on the structure of the society and on ideology’s role within that structure will be presented. To underline his distinctive contribution to ideology critique, Althusser’s conceptualisation of the correlation between ideology and human experience will be detailed. Finally, his attempt to secure the safe epistemological ground of scientficity by reference to which he defends a Marxist emancipation is problematised, and the consistency of his overall theory is questioned.

But before engaging in further discussion, a vital point to be mentioned at the outset of any discussion of Althusser’s contribution to ideology critique is that it is possible within Althusser’s writings to find many different approaches towards ideology. In some of these, as
in the article titled *Lenin and Philosophy* (Althusser, 1971), sympathy towards an orthodox Marxism is obvious. However, in some other works which are written not much later, he proposes a fresh understanding of ideology that is quite different from the orthodox language. Instead of a fruitless attempt to read the mind of Althusser and to try to organise these different views into a single coherent theory, I will instead focus on one of these articles by Althusser, the *Ideological State Apparatuses* (1971), in which he presents a fresh look to ideology and pioneers a new phase of ideology critique.

In this article, Althusser grasps ideologies as phenomena which have a material existence: “an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material” (Althusser, 1971:166). Not that he ignores the intellectual aspect of ideologies, but material existence remains primary for Althusser: “the ‘ideas’ of a human subject exists in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform” (Althusser, 1971:168). In other words, the material existence of ideologies is the primary concern of Althusser because, in keeping with orthodox Marxist dictum, he claims opinions to be determined by actions and not vice versa. Althusser refers to Pascal to defend this primacy:

> Besides, we are indebted to Pascal’s defensive ‘dialectic’ for the wonderful formula which will enable us to invert the order of the notional schema of ideology. Pascal says more or less; ‘Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.’ He does scandalously invert the order of things, bringing, like Christ, not peace but strife, and in addition something hardly Christian (for woe to him who brings scandal into the world!) - scandal itself (Althusser, 1971:168).

This primacy of material existence and performance over ideas necessitates the understanding of the ideological as the category of reality through which individuals experience and their opinions are derived. Thus, ideology turns into a context within which people experience their lives, develop their opinions, and join emotional relationships. Smith notes at this point that Althusser reverses the older materialistic epistemology which proposes that reality is something ‘outside the head’ (Smith, 1984:71). Its ideological practices\(^{36}\) which construct experienceable realities for people, and reach beyond that reality, can be possible through the interpretative lens of ideologies:

> However, while admitting that they [ideologies] do not correspond to reality, i.e. they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that

\(^{36}\)Given the primary role attributed to practices in the conception of ideology and the ideological, for the Althusser of the *Ideological State Apparatuses*, the phrase ‘ideological practices’ should resemble a tautology.
they need only be ‘interpreted’ to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology=illusion/allusion) (Althusser, 1971:162).

Ideological reality is in need of an interpretation and is non-transparent because it is subordinated to a struggle which mystifies the real that is beyond ideologies (Larrain, 1983:92). To put it clearly, the ideological sphere is subject to class struggle, and dominating classes promote a number of ideological practices that legitimise their domination, as well as generalise or normalise their reality through the utilisation of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). They need to do so because “no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses” (Althusser, 1971:146). For long term domination, dominating classes should ‘naturalise’ their position by generalising a specific reality which interprets this domination as legitimate and signifies itself as the only real, or the real. Althusser gives a list of some of the most important ISAs that are utilised for this task:

With all the reservations implied by this requirement, we can for the moment regard the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (the order in which I have listed them has no particular significance):

The religious ISA (the system of the different Churches)

The educational ISA (the system of the different public and private ‘Schools’)

The family ISA

The legal ISA

The political ISA (the political system including the different Parties)

The trade-union ISA

The communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.)

The cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.) (Althusser, 1971:143).

For Althusser, these ISAs are one of the two important tools of class domination, the other being the repressive state apparatus (Althusser, 1971:148). However, the subjectiveness of ideological apparatuses to class struggle is not only a tool for dominating classes, but an opportunity for the dominated ones. In other words, in thinking for a capitalist society, ISAs are not eternally reserved for utilisation by the bourgeoisie. They also pose an opportunity that threatens this domination: “Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the stake, but also the site of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle” (Althusser,
ISAs may be utilised by dominated classes to overthrow existing relations of domination. Thus, Althusser implies that the ideological should be seen as a battleground, where victory is essential for vanquishing class domination.

Till this point, Althusser’s views on ideology seem like a structuralist interpretation of Marxist understanding that is very similar to Gramsci’s view. It does not seem to offer much novelty to the tradition of ideology critique. But after these remarks, Althusser begins to speak clearly about the impossibility of any practice outside ideology, and about the ‘Subject’ as the constitutive notion of all ideologies. At this point, the peculiar place that may be given to Althusser while narrating the critical use of the term ideology becomes clearer:

But this very presentation reveals that we have retained the following notions: subject, consciousness, belief, actions. From this series I shall immediately extract the decisive central term on which everything else depends: the notion of the subject.

And I shall immediately set down two conjoint theses:

1) There is no practice except by and in an ideology;

2) There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects (Althusser, 1971:170).

These theses are natural outcomes of Althusser’s previous suggestions. Because Althusser interprets ideologies as meaning-producing practices through which allusions turn to reality, and because every human practice necessarily has a meaning, there should be no other kind of practice but the ideological. Since every ideological practice necessities a subject, there should be no ideology except by the subjects. And since there is no practice except by ideology, the practice of identifying and recognising a subject must also be an ideological practice, i.e., ideological acts must have a subject-creating aspect, ergo, they must be for subjects. After these remarks, Althusser adds that subject is not only a producer and product of ideologies. Its role for ideologies is more fundamental: “[T]he category of the subject (which may function under other names: e.g., as the soul in Plato, as God, etc.) is the constitutive category of all ideology, whatever its determination (regional or class) and whatever its historical date - since ideology has no history” (Althusser, 1971:170-171). Althusser then emphasises that the relationship between subjects and ideologies is reciprocal: “I say: the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as
subjects‖ (Althusser, 1971:171). To clarify this constituting function of ideologies, he names and explains ‘interpellation’, or the way in which ideologies create subjects from individuals:

ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was really him who was hailed’ (and not someone else). Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by ‘guilt feelings’, despite the large numbers who ‘have something on their consciences’ (Althusser, 1971:174).

We can continue to follow Althusser’s own words, this time concerning the nature of the relationship between ‘subjects’ and ‘Subject’. Althusser proposes that two different types of subjects are at hand: ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, by reference to ‘The Subject’ as their constituter - the transcendent, master-subject. In other words, ideological practices constitute a Subject which interpellates individuals as subjects. Althusser explains the central role of Subject in ideology by giving the example of religious ideologies:

[I]nterpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects. All this is clearly written in what is rightly called the Scriptures. ‘And it came to pass at that time that God the Lord (Yahweh) spoke to Moses in the cloud. And the Lord cried to Moses, “Moses!” And Moses replied “It is (really) I! I am Moses thy servant, speak and I shall listen!” And the Lord spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am that I am”.

In the old testament God thus defines himself as the Subject par excellence, he who is through himself and for himself (‘I am that I am’), and he who interpellates his subject, the individual subjected to him by his very interpellation, i.e. the individual named Moses. And Moses, interpellated-called by his Name, having recognised that it ‘really’ was he who was called by God, recognises that he is a subject, a subject of God, a subject subjected to God, a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject. The proof: he obeys him, and makes his people obey God’s Commandments. (Althusser, 1971:178-179).

This whole approach as presented by Althusser in *Ideological State Apparatuses* understands ideologies as mediatory tools by which individuals are themselves interpellated by a Subject.
by a transcendent, an extra-textual, and privileged signifier - as subjects. And thanks to
ideologies, individuals constitute a stable portrayal of the phenomenal world and their own
subjectivity in this world. This fundamental and inevitable role played by ideologies and the
ideological in individuals’ lives is stated many times in the text. In one section, Althusser
mentions a similarity, based on the notion of inevitability, between the Freudian subconscious
and his own understanding of ideology (Althusser, 1971:161); in another, he moves one step
forward and proposes that we are subjected to ideologies and defined as subjects by
ideologies, even before our birth. Again with reference to Freud, he proposes that we born
into ideologies:

That an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born, is
nevertheless the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all. Freud shows that individuals are always ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects
they always-already are, simply by noting the ideological ritual that surrounds the
expectation of a ‘birth’, that ‘happy event’. (...) Before its birth, the child is
therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific
familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been
conceived. I hardly need add that this familial ideological configuration is, in its
uniqueness, highly structured, and that it is in this implacable and more or less
‘pathological’ (presupposing that any meaning can be assigned to that term)
structure that the former subject-to-be will have to ‘find’ ‘its’ place, i.e. ‘become’
the sexual subject (boy or girl) which it already is in advance (Althusser,

Althusser thus underlines the essential role of ideology in social life, in forming the reality
experienced by people. As is clear from many of the quotations above, ideology for Althusser
is the architect of individuals as subjects, and the creator of the reality they experience. His
pioneering role in the new phase of ideology critique should be clear now: in Althusser’s
work, the concept of reality is presented as a product of ideology. A critical approach toward
the ideological sphere is still present, within the argument of the utilisation of ideology by
dominating classes through ISAs. In other words, Althusser endeavours to locate himself in a
position where he can both admit the reality-constructing role of ideologies, and approach to
the ‘bourgeois ideology’ critically. Unfortunately, he fails to locate himself in such a position
without falling into a contradiction. This contradiction becomes apparent when it comes to
the particular method with which the term ideology can be employed in a critical project
aiming for emancipation.

To develop a critical approach, Althusser perceives society as a multi-layered structure and
defines ideology as one of the layers of this structure (Althusser, 1971:134). He legitimates
this proposition, along with all of his analyses about the nature of ideologies and their role in society, by referring to its quality of ‘scientificity’, and thus assumes the availability of a scientific position in opposition to the ideological one (Benton, 1984:28-29). But this proposition is in contradiction with the whole argument. Althusser fails to find any other way to provide an epistemologically defensible ground for his role as ‘an objective analyst of socio-ideological phenomena’ and sustaining the critical aspect of his analysis, except where defending an un-ideological sphere at which scientific knowledge, or a subject-free discourse, is possible. Thus, he sees scientific discourse as a must to break out of the sphere of ideology and to reach the knowledge of ideological structures, with help of which the ideology can be utilised as a critical tool and ideology critique can be practiced.

But to recognise that we are subjects and that we function in the practical rituals of the most elementary everyday (…) gives us the ‘consciousness’ of our incessant (eternal) practice of ideological recognition -its consciousness, i.e. its recognition -but in no sense does it give us the (scientific) knowledge of the mechanism of this recognition. Now it is this knowledge that we have to reach, if you will, while speaking in ideology, and from within ideology we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subjectless) discourse on ideology (Althusser, 1971:173).

In another part of his article, this time while describing the relationship between ideology and the relations of production, Althusser implies the availability of an un-ideological real, the Real, and clarifies that he sees Marxist political-economy as the knowledge of this real:

To speak in a Marxist language, (…) we can say the following: all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that arrive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that arrive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live (Althusser, 1971:164-165).

Althusser’s ideology critique thus turns into a hybrid model. While it admits the ever-presence of ideologies and their paradigmatic role in the formation of reality, it also accepts the possibility of an undistorted knowledge of the real in order to develop a convincing critique. He attempts “to distinguish as sharply as possible between historical knowledge, that is ‘science,’ on the one hand, and the lived experience of human agents, on the other” (Smith, 1984:72). But there is a problem in that attempt: while defining the role of the Subject or
Logos in our beings and highlighting ‘the un-obviousness of all obviousness in daily life’ as such, Althusser fails to see the Logos of science:

As St Paul admirably put it, it is in the ‘Logos’, meaning in ideology, that we ‘live, move and have our being’. It follows that, for you and for me, the category of the subject is a primary ‘obviousness’ (obviousnesses are always primary): it is clear that you and I are subjects (free, ethical, etc…). Like all obviousness, including those that make a word ‘name a thing’ or ‘have a meaning’ (therefore including the obviousness of the ‘transparency’ of language), the ‘obviousness’ that you and I are subjects - and that that does not cause any problems - is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect. It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are ‘obviousness’) obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the ‘still, small voice of conscience’): ‘That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!’ (Althusser, 1971:171-172).

As a response to Althusser, it is possible to argue that science, in its Marxist form as proposed by Althusser, is also an ideology; an ideology which has a Logos, a Subject, a privileged centre, and which interpellates individuals as subjects, as members of different classes, who are themselves obliged to find this knowledge and dominate the nature. When this proposition is accepted, Althusser’s attempt to legitimise his critique by reference to scientificality becomes implausible.

Let me take another example and focus on the social perception of Althusser, to again show the contradictions in his views. In his article, Althusser seems to share the view with Marx that society is composed of a number of layers: “The infrastructure, (…) and the superstructure, which itself contains to ‘levels’ or ‘instances’: the politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.)” (Althusser, 1971:134). Althusser thus differentiates the politico-legal level of society from the ideological one. According to him, the politico-legal level in which the Repressive State Apparatus operates is characterised by the primacy of power, while the other in which Ideological State Apparatuses operates is characterised by ideology (Althusser, 1971:144-148). However, because every relationship of power puts forward questions like “by whom?”, “against whom?”, “how?” etc., it presupposes a category of subject ontologically, and so, it presupposes a pre-defined ‘ideological reality’. For the coherency of Althusserian understanding of layered society, the politico-legal level must be based on ideological level;

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37 For a masterpiece on transformations in the Logos of scientific practices in that sense, see Kuhn, 1996.
and power, in order to be practiced, must be conceptualised as in need of an ideological environment.

It is worthwhile to ask what allows Althusser, if not his adherence to the Marxist ideology, to posit the so-called infrastructure as the base and render it as outside of the real with a small ‘r’? It should be argued that the practice of production is embedded in the symbolic order. It is realised, reproduced, and even defined in this symbolic order. It is the symbolism of the ideological level that enables us to recognise some practices as production. Production practices of the industrial age, for instance, may well be symbolised in a very different way, as ‘a mass-destruction of nature’. Or on the contrary, the death of a martyr may be symbolised not as the destruction of a human, but as the re-production of a virtue or common spirit. Thus, as with any other human practices, production practices also exist, or at least are recognised in a symbolic context. And because of their epistemological dependence on a symbolic order, production practices cannot be seen as un-ideological. Althusser’s reductionism is contrary to his understanding of ideology as an opinion-creating and subject-arising practice. After all, given that discourse is itself a social entity that presupposes subjects who will express and interpret it, it does not make much sense to talk of science as a “subjectless discourse”.

However, it is important to understand the reasons that forced Althusser to accept an epistemological category that is outside the ideological real. Although Althusser does not seek emancipation from ideologies and accepts our need for ideologies to define ourselves and construct our realities, he is in need of a non-ideological position to design his ideology critique and formulate his analysis of the ideological as an emancipatory undertaking. He looks for a safe epistemological position to validate his analysis on the structure of ideologies and to define an emancipated ideological existence for humanity. But the availability of such an epistemological position is contradictory with the ideological as it is defined in Althusser’s way. This contradiction is appreciated by the successors of Althusser and gave rise to two different reactions towards the project of ideology critique.

The first reaction, which is argued by Foucault and Lyotard among many others, is to abandon the ideology critique as a whole. This position, depending on the impossibility of grounding the claims to distinguish the Real from the ideological, defends the abolition of all grand narratives as well as the critical use of ideology.\(^{38}\) It argues that every grand narrative

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\(^{38}\) For a classic piece of this position, see Lyotard, 1984.
is inherently restrictive and distorts the human experience. Grand narratives are portrayed as dominating epistemological tools which are useless for the emancipation of humans, if not a danger to it. Ideology critique, as a grand narrative aiming for emancipation, thus turns out to be a contradictory project. As is seen in Marx’s, Gramsci’s, and Althusser’s attempts, it is impossible to argue for emancipation and abstain from dictating a single category of reality as the Real. Because of this problem, like every other grand narrative, the narrative of emancipation founded around the term of ideology should have an internal repressiveness and must be abandoned. Reading Foucault’s critique of ideology from Moriarty’s sentences is informative about this reaction:

Foucault argues, first, that the notion of ideology always stands ‘in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth’, and is thus an obstacle to an analysis, like his own, committed to bracketing out the true/false opposition in favour of studying truth as an effect produced within discourse; secondly, he suggests that the concept of ideology depends on, and thus preserves, another notion he wishes to challenge, that of the subject; and thirdly, he finds the term unhelpful on account of the implication it always seems to convey (at least in the Marxist discourse to which he is referring) that whatever it denotes is a secondary phenomenon to which some other deeper reality (the economic) is primary (Moriarty, 2006:53).

However, there are some other thinkers, like Derrida and Laclau, who believe that we do not have to abolish the whole project of ideology critique. They think it is possible to conceptualise the term ideology in such a way that does not stand in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. In their view, it would still be possible to discuss emancipation while referring to ideology without implying a deeper and attainable Real. An emancipation project is possible which does not presuppose a single transcendental category of reality; and ideology critique, by forming such an understanding, can develop a consistent emancipatory project around the term ideology. In my opinion, if the Derridian approach is read as a possible option in the ideology critique, it can also be seen as taking the evolution of ideology critique to its logical end. However, as the subject of Derrida’s approach constitutes the final part of this chapter, we will move on for now and focus on a different thinker of ideology.
3.4 Freedon and Ideology as the Form of Political Thinking

Before discussing contemporary views on ideology critique, it is worthwhile to mention Michael Freedon’s approach to the term ideology. But while there are important insights on the nature of ideologies in his writings, there is a theoretical obstacle to utilising his approach in this study. Freedon seems to separate his approach from the ideology critique. The most significant difference is his perception of ideologies as phenomena that are secondary to reality. In contrast with contemporary ideology critique approaches, which generally suppose reality as something created by – and therefore secondary to – ideologies, Freedon perceives reality as a broader concept which contains ideologies. This position assumes the availability of an un-ideological reality that is antecedent to the ideological sphere, and thus, it is in contrast with some other variants of the ideology critic.

In order to utilise Freedon’s methodological suggestions on the analysis of ideologies while still insisting on the ideology critique approach, I will follow a two-step route. First, I will clarify the internal theoretical implausibility of Freedon’s approach, which is an inevitable outcome of the conceptualisation of ideologies as phenomena that are subsidiary to the real. I will therefore suggest questioning Freedon’s epistemological differentiation of his own approach from the ideology critique tradition. Second, I will demonstrate that the plausibility of his ‘morphological’ propositions on the analyses of ideologies is still valid and plausible, without the claim on the existence of un-ideological reality. In other words, in 3.4, I will argue that a new theoretical perspective can be presented, in which Freedon’s methodological propositions should be utilised. The discussion below begins with Freedon’s views on the structure of ideologies. After highlighting Freedon’s theory’s distinction from ideology critique, his assumption on the existence of pre-ideological ‘conceptual cores’ are problematised by arguing that Freedon fails to demonstrate any qualitative difference between pre-ideological and ideological decontestations. It is then argued that, in contrast with Freedon’s claim, a theory which neglects the distinction between ideological and un-ideological decontestations should still be heuristically manageable. Possible principals of such an approach are also presented in this section, and the value of Freedon’s argument for this approach is considered.

Freedon presents a peculiar, structuralist approach to ideologies in his well-known book *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. There, Freedon endeavours to uncover the ‘morphology’ that is assumed to be common in all ideologies. His theorisation
begins by identifying political concepts as “basic units of political thinking” (Freeden, 1996:2) and “raw material” of ideological structures (Freeden, 1996:41). Hence, understanding the nature of political concepts turns out to be a prerequisite for understanding the structure of ideologies. Then Freeden discloses his first proposition on the structure of political concepts, namely that they have some ineliminable meanings which emerge from daily usage of these concepts, and that form the nucleus of every single concept. But he notes that each political concept “contain[s] more than its ineliminable component [and] its precise components are impossible to establish” (Freeden, 1996:62). For Freeden, although each political concept contains a determinate core-meaning stabilised by daily linguistic practices, this core is insufficient to create a semantically complete concept with a specific meaning. Thus, concepts cannot be reduced to their definite ineliminable features. In order to correspond to a definite meaning, concepts are in need of a number of quasi-contingent features (Freeden, 1996:62). Nevertheless, for Freeden it is their ineliminable features that give their essence to these concepts, and unlike these ineliminable ones, each specific quasi-contingent feature is dispensable for political concepts. But it should be underlined that the same is not true for the category of ‘quasi-contingent features’. That is because, concepts always need a number of quasi-contingent features to complete themselves (Freeden, 1996:66).

The problem with political concepts emerges at this point. Unlike the ineliminable features, there is no linguistic agreement on specific quasi-contingent features of political concepts. Therefore, any specific quasi-contingent feature is replaceable. Because ineliminable features of political concepts are insufficient to complete the meaning, it means that all political concepts are essentially contestable. To rephrase it differently, for Freeden, there is a semantic gap between the objective features of any concept and its full meaning, and this gap allows subjectivity to come into play and let alternative decontestations coexist.

According to Freeden, the reason for the emergence of ideologies is also this semantic gap: practical politics necessitates decisions and demands decontested political concepts as its tool of understanding; ideologies are bodies which satisfy this demand by decontesting political concepts reciprocally (Freeden, 1996:77). To explain, because of a lack of a true meaning of concepts either linguistically or epistemologically, ideologies can decontest each political concept only by referring to another political concept. In other words, because a referential decontestation, decontestation through referring to the Real, is not possible, ideologies necessarily decontest political concepts differentially, by binding them with other political
concepts. Although the form of the links established by each specific ideology varies, this strategy is universal and is a morphological characteristic of ideologies. In fact, in the Freedenenian way of understanding, an ideology is above all the sum of a particular form of the bonds between political concepts. Freeden reflects this view by defining ideologies as a “distinguishable and unique genre of employing and combining political concepts” (Freeden, 1996:48). In another part of *Ideologies and Political Theory*, Freeden emphasises the differentially decontesting role of ideologies as such:

> Ideologies, as we have argued, will display the most, if not all, of the major political concepts within their system. Only the small number of closed, doctrinaire ideologies will succeed in forcing out a concept altogether. *The key lies in the relation of the units to one another, in their positioning vis-à-vis the centre, and in the way units are made to interlock and support each other* (Freeden, 1996:87) [Emphasis added].

Hence, in Freeden’s view, all ideologies follow the same structural plan to differentially decontest political concepts. They relationally place a number of concepts to their core and put some others to their adjacency, and the rest to the periphery (Freeden, 1996:77). Although different fractions of the same ideology may differ about the exact place of some adjacent and periphery concepts, or about the form of their links within other concepts, they all share the same set of core concepts. That is why core concepts can be seen as the characteristic quality of an ideology. However, it is important to note that even core concepts of an ideology are not unchangeable. Freeden mentions that, in a considerable amount of time, some core concepts of an ideology may migrate to the periphery of the structure while some peripheral or adjacent concepts may migrate to the core (Freeden, 1996:83-84). Hence, what renders core concepts as the foundation of an ideology is not their fixity, but the pace of their migration within the structure of ideology (Freeden, 2005:7). That is because even if they are at the core, every concept is essentially contestable and they cannot be subject to an ultimate semantic fixation.

At this point, Freeden’s proposition for the analysis of ideologies is predictable: he proposes a method which focuses on the specific morphologic form of every single ideology: “central to any analysis of ideologies is the proposition that they are characterised by a morphology that displays core, adjacent, and peripheral concepts” (Freeden, 1996:77). In accordance to him, by following that proposition, researchers should endeavour to clarify the core, adjacent, and peripheral features of every ideology and their variants. This methodology aims to examine the structure of ideologies and understand the decontested meanings and reciprocal
relations of different political concepts within. Core to this understanding is clarifying forms of the links between the concepts. It allows researchers to explore the specific meanings of each political concept within each ideology. Freeden acknowledges that this methodology is far short of providing a secure base for a comparative study by which some ideologies may be praised as superior. This is so since it is impossible to talk about the normative superiority of certain forms of the links between concepts, or to argue for a true interpretation, a genuine decontestation of political concepts. He uses a map metaphor to make his point:

no one dimension of an ideological map is constant. What is constant is the very network of mutually informing and influencing concepts, on which human minds (rational or otherwise) and human wills impose the particular preferred set. Moreover, as there is no absolute sense in which any of the competing ideologies is superior, there is no correct map (Freeden, 1996:86).

Hence, establishing an objective framework for the comparative evaluation of ideologies is impossible, and Freeden limits his goal as “offering an interpretative framework through which to comprehend [ideologies’] concrete manifestations” (Freeden, 1996:3). This limitation differentiates Freeden’s method from the ideology critique approach for which comprehending ideologies is not an end in itself, but a means toward the end of emancipation. In contrast with Freeden, ideology critique traditionally tends to look beyond ideology. Freeden underlines this differentiation at the very beginning of his book:

[This book’s] argument will not follow Marxisant schools whose critical notions of ideology constitute attempts to transcend its illusory nature. To adopt that critical disposition is to deflect attention from the product itself and to deflate its status and value both as an intellectual phenomenon and as a means through which social understanding may be attained directly. The thinking encapsulated in ideologies deserves examination in its own right, not merely for what it masks (Freeden, 1996:1).

To realise that aim of analysing ‘the product’, as mentioned earlier, Freeden’s approach renders the study on ideologies as a second level investigation. It assumes the existence of a socially predefined core-meaning for concepts, and interprets ideologies as a second decontestation of political concepts which were already partially decontested by “linguistic socialisation” (Freeden, 1996:83). This inclination to limit ideologies as a second level interpretation is necessary to stay clear of ideology critique and analyse ‘the product’ alone. If ideologies were perceived as first level interpretative bodies, i.e., if all intellectual activities were assumed to exist within the ideological sphere, or were thought to be preceded by an ideological decontestation, then the boundary between ‘product’, ‘producer’, and ‘consumer’
would be blurred. All three categories would themselves be nothing but ideological decontestations. In that case, Freeden’s approach would lose its *raison d'être*, that being to understand ‘the product’ as it is.

If ideologies are assumed as first level interpretations and the un-ideological decontestation of the core of concepts is refused, then Freeden’s theoretical framework would be self-defeating. If ideologies are first level interpretations, since we need some set of concepts to analyse any ideology, the knowledge that can be produced through the analysis of ideologies is necessarily ideological. To explain, if we are supposed to begin our quest of attaining the knowledge of ‘the product’ by proposing an distinction between the producer and the product, since that distinction is ideology par excellence without any semantic fixity or referential ground, the outcome of this quest would be an ideological assumption.

Freeden must therefore argue for the availability of an un-ideological core meaning of concepts if he wants to interpret ideologies as stand-alone intellectual structures while escaping from the ideology critique’s position: analysing ideologies not for the sake of a pure value of objective knowledge, but for the sake of a normative reason – emancipation – beyond that analysis. In other words, he should assume the foundational dichotomies of his approach, such as the producer-product and core-periphery, as un-ideological truths. That is the only way for Freeden to stay clear from the necessity of normatively legitimising his decision to create an ideological duality and focusing on the one side of this duality, the product. If not, he would have no other choice but to refer to the emancipative potential of his theory. So, it seems plausible to argue that the assumption of the existence of an un-ideological core meaning gives Freeden a chance to differentiate his approach from ideology critique.

However, Freeden’s assumption that there exists a core for every political concept which is antecedent to ideological definitions is unacceptable for two reasons. Firstly, it falls short of convincing us that there is a qualitative difference between these two acts of semiotic fixation: the existence of a social agreement on the core-meaning of a concept, which is marked as un-ideological decontestation, and the alternative propositions seeking that agreement to complete and fix the meaning of referred concept; these are marked as ideological decontestations. Actually, both of these alternative decontestations are differential; they lack an epistemologically safe ground to refer. If there is a difference within these two, it is nothing but their level of social prevalence. In Freeden’s approach, on the core
of any political concept, there is always a successful decontesting practice which gains prevalence within society. Conversely, intellectual constructions that are referred to by Freeden as ‘ideologies’ are not-yet-successful attempts of decontestation, or of semantic ‘completion’ of these concepts. Ideologies are incomplete in the sense that they fall short of imposing their decontestations on society. This may be seen as the point at which ideological decontestation of concepts differentiates from the decontestation of the core of these concepts, or from the objective meaning of the concepts. Depending on this difference, ideological decontestation may be portrayed as a second-level interpretation. However, this point is not plausible since the referred difference seems to be a contingent difference rather than a qualitative one. In other words, even if Freeden is right about the availability of socially agreed-upon cores of each political concept, these initial decontestations should still be seen as ideological decontestations, and should be subject to ideology studies. If these socially agreed decontestations will be excluded from the scope of ideology studies, a qualitative difference must be demonstrated between them and the ideological decontestations. That is why Freeden’s argument on the existence of a core for every political concept, which is antecedent to the ideological sphere, is not plausible.

We can also suggest another objection against Freeden. In the quoted text, Freeden assumes that denying the ineliminable elements in political concepts would be “heuristically unmanageable as well as ontologically unnecessary” (Freeden, 1996:63). However, in my view, Freeden is too pessimistic. An ideology critique which recognises any form of decontestation as its subject may still provide a heuristically manageable method to follow. Toward the development of such a method, I may offer two guiding principles. According to the first principle, to ensure communication, all concepts should be decontested, and this decontestation is a differential practice. Because of that differentiability, concepts can never reach an ultimate and final meaning. They always possess an inherent potential for change, and the second principle I am offering is also derived from that dynamic. Since the act of decontestation is a negative act of blocking the dynamic through semiotic multiplicity, the second principle states that every decontestation is promoting one of the many potential meanings. So, decontestation, which is also a necessary act for communication and intellectuality, simultaneously limits the intellectuality while creating the possibility of it.

Decontestation is a kind of power-relationship existing in the intellectual sphere, and this power-relationship is a conditio sine qua non for all intellectual practices. In that sense, if ‘the political’ signifies phenomena related to power relations, Freeden’s distinction between
political and apolitical concepts must be refused, and ideologies must be related to all kinds of decontestation acts. Freeden is right when saying that “…the decontesting of political concepts performed by an ideology is an attempt to legitimate a preferred political order by controlling the meaning of key political words” (Freeden, 1996:117). In fact, all decontestations, even those which seem so ‘natural’ in the first glance, have such a political character because they all promote a form of power relations within people. In an Althusserian way, it can be said that neutrality of the core meanings of some concepts should be seen as an effect of their ideological character.39

Therefore, what I offer is to reverse Freeden’s propositions and to argue that, since all concepts are necessarily decontested by ideological processes, ideologies are antecedent to concepts. But as previously mentioned, Freeden worries that such a broad conception of ideology will be “heuristically unmanageable” (Freeden, 1996:63). Moreover, when both the core and peripheral meanings of every concept are presumed to be results of ideological praxis, Freeden’s project for a scholarly investigation of ideologies would be impossible. We would then need to use ‘ideologically decontested’ concepts for the analysis of ideologies, and hence, an un-ideological knowledge of ideologies would be a paradoxical desire. But still, approaching the sphere of ideology in this way may not necessarily be heuristically unmanageable. We may propose a method which tends to understand ideologies within their inevitable subjectivity, and to uncover infinite alternative meanings that are repressed by each particular ideology. If we attach a normative value to that method, then we can still aspire to the analysis of ideologies, while admitting its impossibility to clarify the ‘real’ structure of each ideology, or the best among all ideologies. In other words, if we define emancipation in a way that does not refer to the real as a normative value, then we can show ideology studies’ importance as a tool of emancipation. The utilisation of the term ideology in a Derridian sense is, in my opinion, a realisation of this possibility. And by no means does it suggest a heuristically manageable method for the analysis of ideologies.

But before starting to discuss this approach, I should mention Freeden’s contribution to this study. I intend to utilise Freeden’s method in the next chapter to portray traditional and radical conservatisms, while criticising most of the underlying epistemology of this method. In other words, I am arguing for the practicability of Freeden’s method outside the epistemological context as defined by Freeden. In my opinion, this method is highly valuable

39 See the part 3.3 for the naturalisation effect of ideological structures.
for demonstrating similarities and differences among different variants of a single ideological structure. Thus, I analyse the two currents of conservatism with a Freedenian approach in this study. In this sense, my thesis owes to Freeden’s approach. At the epistemological level, I have serious concerns about his premises but I think his approach may well be utilised as a tool of an ideology critique. To demonstrate the context in which I will employ Freeden’s method, in part 3.5 I will focus on Derrida.
3.5 Derrida’s Ideology Critique

Though Jacques Derrida is one of the most influential and widely read philosophers of the 20th Century, there is a great range of interpretations of his works. Even the relationship of his philosophy with modernity is far from clear. Norris locates three different perspectives on Derrida’s thoughts and none of these defines ‘the Derridian approach’ in a similar way to one another (Norris, 2000:48). Thus, the task of defining deconstruction and placing it the broader context of ideology critique is difficult and necessarily controversial. Nevertheless, I do not undertake this task to claim a particular interpretation of Derridian deconstruction to be superior to all other possible interpretations. Rather, by highlighting the features of ideology critique that are present in Derrida’s work, I simply suggest that it is entirely possible to read Derrida’s ideas in line with the ideology critique tradition.

In this section, I will first present a brief summary of certain fundamental ideas of Derrida. Then I will underline the ideology-critical features of deconstruction. During the latter, I will especially emphasise the ‘new Enlightenment’ call of Derrida and the importance of the concept of emancipation in the Derridian corpus. Finally, in the closing paragraphs I will propose the foundations of my study: focusing on the relationship between classical conservatism and radical conservatism, in order to derive some deconstructive insights about the conservative canon.

Derrida’s works are strongly influenced by two prominent scholars, Martin Heidegger and Ferdinand de Saussure. It was “Heidegger’s recognition of the priority of language” that leads Derrida “toward underscoring the irreducible equivocation and undecidability of meaning” (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989:1-2). And during this underscoring, Derrida mostly utilised the principles of Saussurian linguistics. But when discussing Derrida’s relationship with Saussurian linguistics, one should bear in mind that this relationship is twofold. In one sense, Derrida affirms Saussurian linguistics and its motto that “in language there are only differences” (quoted by Derrida, 1991:63). Thus, for Derrida, as for Saussure, meaning is not something already present in the things or words themselves, but is something produced relationally and reciprocally among these linguistic elements. It is also improper to think of this production as a positive creation. Since meaning is produced within linguistic elements differentially, it is essentially a negative production, a production of distinctions, differences, lacunas, and gaps among different words and concepts.
However, Derrida takes this concept of differentiality a step further; in doing so, he argues against Saussure and his followers as well. The Saussurian approach fails to remain honest to the differentiality while theorising on the relationship between signifier and signified to explain the nature of linguistic signs. Hence, while the Saussurian approach assumes signified as the singular element which possesses meaning by itself, Derrida strongly opposes this and insists on the non-presence of meaning in any singularity. According to him, “sign is originally wrought by fiction” (Derrida, 1991:16) and meaning cannot be contained in one definite place within that sign. As Critchley puts, by this move Derrida “teases out the consequences of Saussure’s semiology. The signified concept is never present in and of itself; it signifies only in so far as it is inscribed in a chain or systematic play of differences…” (Critchley, 1999:37-38). And for Derrida, this objection is about exposing an ‘onto-theo-teleology’:

And for modern linguistics, if the signifier is a trace, the signified is a meaning thinkable in principle within the full presence of an intuitive consciousness. The signified face, to the extent that it is still originally distinguished from the signifying face, is not considered a trace; by rights, it has no need of the signifier to be what it is. It is at the depth of this affirmation that the problem of the relations between linguistics and semantics must be posed. This reference to the meaning of a signified thinkable and possible outside of all signifiers remains dependent upon the onto-theo-teleology that I have just evoked (Derrida, 1991:45).

Derrida’s diversity from Saussure is a truly critical gesture. It removes “the remaining philosophical nostalgia of Saussure’s project” (Beardsworth, 1996:2), and demystifies the onto-theo-teleology through the term differentiality. Yet, because this critique utilises the basics of Saussurian linguistics against Saussure himself, it is better to signify Derrida’s thinking as a dialogue with Saussure, rather than a refutation of Saussure. As Culler underlines, Derrida’s critiques are “far from invalidating” Saussure’s work; they actually signify its “its power and pertinence” (Culler, 1983:97-98).

That dialogue with Saussure gives birth to a radical critique of Western philosophy, by allowing Derrida to criticise “the fundamental requirement (…) that is supposed by the very notion of philosophy in the West: truth or meaning as a presence without difference from itself” (quoted by Kamuf, 1991:4). That understanding of the self-presence of truth, in contrast with the arguments comprehending meaning as a ‘differentially produced effect’, caused a logocentrism, or the claim that the truth is available out there, it can be fully known, and it should be fully known. Derrida argues that logocentrism, as a metaphysic assumption,
is available at the fundamentals of the classical linguistic conceptualisation of sign and is not an exception:

Derrida insists that linguistics remains a metaphysics as long as it retains the distinction between signified and signifier within the concept of the sign. This distinction is always ultimately grounded in a pure intelligibility tied to an absolute logos: the face of God. The concept of the sign, whose history is coextensive with the history of logocentrism, is essentially theological (Kamuf, 1991:32).

By moving one step further, Derrida declares that not only linguistics or Saussure’s philosophy, but all Western philosophies are versions of logocentrism. Indeed, for Derrida, what unites them in the single category of *Western Philosophy* is that logocentric search and the agreed-upon metaphysics of presence (Culler, 1983:92).

Against these metaphysics, Derridian canon can be read as an internal critique of this metaphysic. This critique rests upon the rejection of the logocentric, absolute, mutually exhaustive distinctions like signifier and signified, speech and writing, or representation and real:

…there is every reason to believe that representation and reality are not merely added together here and there in language, for the simple reason that it is impossible in principle to rigorously distinguish them (Derrida, 1991:9).

Instead of these absolute distinctions, Derrida proposes a non-definite understanding of reality, and a context-bounded comprehension of human experience. According to this view, words, concepts, and any other semiotic elements that constitute our experience define each other ‘différantially’; and thus, meaning is dependent upon the context in which it emerges:

…experience is not to be understood simply as the perception or intuition of phenomena that are present to self-consciousness; rather, experience is produced by chains of differentially ordered signs, or ‘marks’, which precede and produce meaning and exceed any determinate structure (Critchley, 1999:34-35).

Différance as the name of the process of this contextual production of meaning is described by Derrida as such:

…every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, différance, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general (Derrida, 1991:63).
Différence, as “the constitutive of meaning” (Critchley, 1999:37) not only signifies the possibility of conceptuality, but the impossibility of a foundational, ever-present, context-free meaning. As Culler puts it, all instances of presence which are cited by any argument for further development must themselves be complex constructions (Culler, 1983:94). These cited instances of presence, or ‘foundational truths’, owe their truthfulness to the context in which they emerge, to ‘the criteria of truth’ that are accepted as ‘the true criteria’ by that context. In this sense, all human experiences can be understood by Derrida as texts which necessarily emerge in contexts. His well-known maxim, “there is nothing outside the text” underlines this textual nature of human experience:

I wanted to recall that the concept of text I propose is limited neither to the graphic, nor to the book, nor even to discourse, and even less to semantic, representational, symbolic, ideal, or ideological sphere. What I call ‘text’ implies all the structures called ‘real’, ‘economic’, ‘historical’, socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that ‘there is nothing outside the text’. That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or en-closed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naïve enough to believe and to have accused me of believing. But it does mean that every referent and all reality has the structure of a différantial trace (d’une trace différantielle), and that one cannot refer to this ‘real’ except in an interpretative experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of différantial referring (Derrida, 1988:148).

However, this context-bounded understanding of human experience poses an important problem: although it limits meaning and/or experience through contexts, it does not propose a limit for contexts. As Derrida suggests, there are potentially infinite contexts for any given text. And furthermore, due to lack of a foundational, context-free, extra-textual truth or Real, one cannot find an objective ground to mark one of these contexts as objectively superior against others. Derrida explains this infinity by underlining the limitless citationality of all signs:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this itterability of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that (normal—abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called normal functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way (Derrida, 1991:97)?
This infinite contextuality results in another characteristic notion in Derridian philosophy: undecidability. This term should not be confused with an all-pervading nihilism which invalidates any decisions at all. Undecidability highlights only the lack of an absolute knowledge, a final decision. As Culler explains;

the combination of context-bound meaning and boundless context on the one hand makes possible proclamations of the indeterminacy of meaning—though the smug iconoclasm of such proclamations may be irritating—but on the other hand urges that we continue to interpret texts, classify speech acts, and attempt to elucidate the conditions of signification (Culler, 1983:133).

Thus, for Derridian philosophy, this lack is actually the reason why we must continually and simultaneously make and criticise decisions. If there would not be the notion of undecidability, life would be nothing but a technical work of implementing an already available absolute set of rules, which are transcendentally true and independent of time and place. Or, in Beardsworth's words, “a decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process” (Beardsworth, 1996:44). In contrast to this, the lack of an absolute knowledge, or undecidability, creates an obligation to take decisions and the responsibility for these decisions. We are obliged because we are unable to experience without any contexts; we are responsible because we necessarily take an onto-epistemological decision instead of implementing some external rules. Thus,

To describe a situation (whether ethical or hermeneutic) as undecidable is to denote it as a state of affairs where the actors lack a saturated context or complete knowledge. Nevertheless, they are in a position where they must make a decision despite lacking full knowledge of the situation. It is precisely this lack of knowledge which makes the situation ethical and makes the actors responsible (Smith, 2005:82).

In other words, all texts, in the term’s broader meaning, must be based on some decisions; they must cite some constructions as if these were context-free realities. But essential undecidability also marks the limit of these decisions. Although undecidability demands a decision, “at the same time (...) [undecidability's] essential irreducibility to the cut of a decision makes the decision which one makes contingent, to be made again” (Beardsworth, 1996:5). To put it another way, despite the need for decision-making, every specific decision is destined to fail.

We can explain the reason of this failure briefly: every specific decision excludes some other equally-valid alternative decisions. And although every text must have its foundation on such
a specific, exclusionary decision, the logic by which arguments construct themselves simultaneously signifies these excluded others, or the impossibility of the text itself. “The ‘other’, which is secondarised in the text, does not remain as a kind of inert residue; (...) it returns as an ‘excess’ which threatens the ‘legality’ of the system and its mediations” (Abbinnett, 1998:130). This is unavoidable because, although every single argument must be based on a metaphysical decision, they must construct themselves on these decisions through logic. This logic, as Derrida insists, is in conflict with the metaphysical decision(s), and can also be used to ‘deconstruct’ the text. Thus, it not only constructs the text, but also highlights the failure of the text's specific metaphysical decision and/or the availability of alternative decisions. Culler explains this failure as such:

Theories grounded on presence—whether of meaning as a signifying intention present to consciousness at the moment of utterance or of an ideal norm that subsists behind all appearances—undo themselves, as the supposed foundation or ground proves to be the product of a differential system, or rather, of difference, differentiation, and deferral. But the operation of deconstruction or the self-deconstruction of logocentric theories does not lead to a new theory that sets everything straight. Even theories like Saussure’s, with its powerful critique of logocentrism in its concept of a purely differential system, do not escape the logocentric premises they undermine; and there is no reason to believe that a theoretical enterprise could ever free itself from those premises. Theory may well be condemned to a structural inconsistency (Culler, 1983:109).

Because of that paradoxical relation of constructing and deconstructing, Derrida says that “presence is a certain type of absence; and a real historical event, as numerous theorists have sought to show, is a particular type of fiction. Presence is not originary but reconstituted” (quoted by Culler, 1983:106). Demonstrating this impossibility of the text is labelled by Derrida as the deconstructing of the text.

It should be underlined that deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction; this is because the impossibility of the text, which emerges simultaneously with the decision that functions as the foundation of the text, is also the possibility of the text. In that sense, deconstructing a text is not invalidating it, but showing its non-transcendental and signifying the excluded alternatives.40 That is why Derrida argues that,

[d]econstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other. This openness towards the other, we will see below, names the ethico-political heart of deconstruction. Thus, far from being a new nihilism, Derrida

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40 See Culler’s argument that Derrida’s deconstruction of Saussurian linguistics is “far from invalidating it” in Culler, 1983: 93-94.
emphasizes that deconstruction is not even a relativism: ‘I take into account differences’, he contends, ‘but I am no relativist.’ Relativism is a ‘doctrine’, a ‘way of referring to the absolute and denying it; it states that there are only cultures and that there is no pure science or truth. I never said such a thing. Neither have I ever used the word relativism (Smith, 2005:11).

Thus, deconstruction can be understood as “a deeply affirmative mode of critique attentive to the way in which texts, structures and institutions marginalise and exclude ‘the other’” (Smith, 2005:12); or as Smith quotes from Derrida, as “a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates [for] it” (Smith, 2005:12).

So far I have briefly described the Derridian approach, i.e., deconstruction. I will turn to this theme in part 4.1, and will discuss certain ‘methods’ of a deconstructive reading there. But at present, we can focus on its relationship with ideology-critique. As described before, ideology-critique is the name of a tradition in political philosophy, which strives for emancipation through the problematisation of the relationship between the ideological and the real. Thus, in essence, it is a problematisation of metaphysics, or metaphysical claims on the ‘Real’. And without a doubt, this anti-metaphysical quest is related with the Enlightenment tradition. Therefore, it is better to uncover the link between the Enlightenment tradition and deconstruction before focusing on the more specific link between deconstruction and ideology-critique.

Even if it also demystifies the metaphysical assumptions of modernist philosophies, and calls for taking account of traditions other than the Enlightenment tradition, Derrida's deconstruction can be read as a part of the Enlightenment tradition. If the Enlightenment tradition is understood in essence as an epistemological project which tends to cultivate a subject who knows and controls, deconstruction is clearly in service of that project of cultivation: it claims to further our understanding on the conditions of knowledge, on the contextuality of knowledge. Thus, through deconstruction, the project of Enlightenment is enlightened about its own biases, metaphysical foundations, and limits. That is why there is no reason to deny that “deconstruction has an Enlightenment pedigree” (Smith, 2005:88).

In fact, deconstruction can be interpreted as a further step in the Enlightenment project, at which the project reaches its limits. The call of Derrida for a “new Enlightenment” (Smith, 2005:88), instead of developing the ‘old one’, can be understood in terms of this furthering of
the project. What makes deconstruction a tool of new Enlightenment is its utilisation of the old ‘Enlightenment logic’ for self reflection.

Derrida refers to the characteristic self-reflexivity of deconstruction as such:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it (Derrida, 1991:41).

For Derrida, there is not any structure-free view, and even the Cartesian and rational knowing-subject of the Enlightenment is the outcome of inhabiting a specific structure. Thus, it is not an ever-present absolute reality, but a context-bound phenomenon. Nonetheless, this does not necessitate the abolition of the Enlightenment project, but the evolution of the project towards a new level, where it can be more self-reflexive. In that self-reflexive stance, the 'new Enlightenment' of deconstruction will allow the 'other' to come to the scene, and will endeavour to take that ‘other’ into account.

But at this point, we can put forward a question: if we are unable to reach any absolute knowledge, if our knowledge will always be 'disrupted' by the context in which it emerges, if we can never be completely enlightened, what motivation do we have for such a new Enlightenment project?

This motive is emancipation, and it is this notion which links Marxism and deconstruction within the context of ideology critique. Derrida himself highlights this link in Spectres of Marx:

Now, if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never be ready to renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance (a consistent deconstruction must insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first word). It is even more a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation (Derrida, 1994:89).

And Derrida elucidates elsewhere in the same book that:

What remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice — which we distinguish from law or right or even human rights — and an idea of democracy — which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today (Derrida, 1994:59).
We can therefore argue that deconstruction is a critique of metaphysics, or of presence, with an emancipatory motive. It problematises the relationship between discourses and reality through criticising the metaphysics which dictate this dichotomy of the Real and the ideological, and interprets this as a discursive effect. Thus, it is entirely possible to read the Derridian approach as an ideology-critical gesture which takes the evolution of ideology critique, proposed by Gramsci and Althusser, to its logical end. In that sense, this contemporary form of ideology critique criticises the classical Marxist dichotomy of ideological and real, and shows that “for presence [i.e. real] to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite, absence [i.e. ideological]” (Culler, 1983:95). In other words, deconstruction argues that the real is as ideological as the so-called ideological, and vice versa.

This is why deconstruction's ideology critique ceases to define emancipation as a process of diagnosing and rejecting the ideological for the sake of the real: it denies the metaphysical link between ‘possessing absolute knowledge’ and ‘being in a state of freedom’. This requires a redefinition or a re-contextualisation of freedom. According to this new form, emancipation is understood as the awareness of the context-bound nature of human experience, the awareness about the availability of numerous others that are excluded by its presence. Emancipation is being on the side of deconstruction instead of metaphysics:

    No judgement is possible without the experience of aporia. Whether one recognizes this experience of aporia or not, whether one takes this experience into account or not, is another matter. The difference of not doing so and doing so develops the difference between metaphysics and deconstruction (Beardsworth, 1996:33).

And if we remember Derrida's description of deconstruction in the afterword of Limited Inc as “the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualisation” (Derrida, 1988:136), completion of the deconstruction process is impossible, and the very nature of deconstruction can itself be deconstructed. Culler explains the reasons for this infinity nicely:

    Deconstructive readings identify this paradoxical situation in which, on the one hand, logocentric positions contain their own undoing and, on the other hand, the denial of logocentrism is carried out in logocentric terms (Culler, 1983:155).

There will always remain a residue, an excluded, an other, that can (and must) be deconstructed. We can thus say that, there are and always will be an infinite number of
others. And because emancipation means getting acquainted with all excluded others of a text, emancipation ceases to be a state of being at which subjects can permanently achieve. Instead, in deconstructive ideology critique, emancipation is revealed to be something that is imperfectly experienced only while deconstructing. By this means, what deconstructive ideology critique urges us to do is to continue to interpret texts, solely for continuous signification of other; just this signification – during which we simultaneously signify the incompleteness of emancipation – is the situation in which we experience imperfect emancipation.

What is important in Derridian ideology critique is that it emancipates us by deconstructing the term emancipation: Deconstruction’s conclusion is that, we can only be emancipated by realising the impossibility of a fully emancipatory project. Derrida’s thinking deconstructs the dichotomy of freedom and slavery, like that of real and ideology, by showing that freedom is a kind of slavery for being slave to another context, and slavery is a kind of freedom for being free from other contexts. Thus, when we intend to move from one side of the dichotomy, e.g., ‘slavery’, to the other through deconstruction, we find ourselves in the exact point where we start. When, for the sake of freedom, we intend to get rid of the context that binds, defines, and determines us, we fall into the hands of another context. But while changing from one context to another, we can experience emancipation. So, emancipation emerges during the process and necessitates a continuous deconstruction; for instance, at the exact moment that we deconstruct a text, deconstructive ideology critique asks us to deconstruct our own deconstruction.

We can thus argue that Derrida’s deconstruction is an emancipatory project which does not see emancipation as a final end, but as something experienced as a mid-voice, or as a by-product of itself. Within this project, emancipation is reached by becoming aware of the metaphysical nature of the choice of ‘contextual presumptions’ within numerous equally legitimate alternatives. Maybe we can say that deconstructive ideology-critique does not free us from our links with the ideological field, but emancipates us through allowing us to see them. Hence, as Beardsworth reminds us, the desire for a total freedom instead of deconstruction’s imperfect one, would mean the death of humanity:

as all Derrida’s writings analyse, the desire for a reign of total freedom is the desire for that of total necessity. A kingdom (whether that of heaven, one of ends in the Kantian sense or, more simply but more profoundly, any normative principle taken to its end) would spell the death of man and of chance. This
account of the law of law in turn accounts for and endeavours to promote the possibility of singularities and events, just as it renders an account of why neither can be pure (Beardsworth, 1996:24).

Deconstruction's main strategy for this imperfect emancipation is to demonstrate the context-bound, metaphysics-based and contradictory nature of the text, and to re-contextualise it. What Derrida offers as a method of this re-contextualisation is diagnosing the conceptual dichotomies that have a foundational role in the text, and reversing them. In other words, this method is demonstrating that the border, the difference, and the opposition between the two terms of these dichotomies are not as obvious as it seems in the first glance, but a mere construction. This is a reversing act against the internal hierarchy of the text, as Derrida underlines in *Positions*:

In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy (quoted by Culler, 1983:85).

It is important to note that deconstruction is an internal attempt. It is a critique using the text's own terms to breach it from inside (Culler, 1983:86). And as Derrida puts, it must internally, “through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, put into practice a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions it criticizes and which is also a field of non-discursive forces” (quoted by Culler, 1983:85-86). This displacement will signify the constructed, metaphysical nature of the foundations of the text, and so mention the alternatives of the text. It will thus challenge the texts’ authority, negate their metaphysical transcendental claims, and reminds us that these texts are to be displaced. Derrida's claim, “deconstruction is justice” (Derrida, 1992a:14), can be understood in that context:

Deconstruction is justice because it remembers the future, remembers that justice has not yet arrived, and reminds us that we have not yet ‘arrived’; therefore the institutions and laws we have created fail to measure up, in all kinds of ways, to the vision of an institutional order ‘to come’ (Smith, 2005:68).

So far, we have tried to explain deconstruction, and its involvement in and relationship with the ideology critique project. To repeat very briefly: deconstruction is a kind of self-reflexivity which signifies infinite alternative contexts, the ‘others' that are repressed by all singularities, through showing an awareness to the contextuality of the texts and relativising
the metaphysical foundations of texts. It is carried out by showing the blurry nature of the so-assumed 'absolute dichotomies' that have a foundational role in the text, and by using the internal logic of the text. Thus, it shows the blank-points of the text, transgresses the text’s taboos, and reveals the metaphysical assumptions of it. An important feature of deconstruction is its indispensable failure: Deconstruction is carried out, not in order to achieve an absolute truth or to gain freedom from all metaphysical assumptions, but for the necessarily infinite – and thus destined to fail – attempt to take all others into account. As Derrida puts it, it is nothing but justice. And it is not something which can be reached at the end of that infinite process, but which can be imperfectly experienced during it. Because of its emancipatory character, deconstruction can be conceived of as a part of the Enlightenment, and the inheritor of the ideology critique project.

I can now demonstrate the connection between my thesis and deconstruction. My intention is to read conservatism with a deconstructive sensibility and see if, within the conservative canon, there are any ‘others’ repressed or ignored by the prevalent perception of the conservative politics. As deconstruction demands, I will not engage in an external critique of conservatism by employing concepts that are alien to it, nor will I deconstruct conservatism myself. As Derrida also asserts,

Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even of modernity. *It deconstructs it-self. It can be deconstructed.* [ça se déconstruit.] The “it” [ça] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity. *It is in deconstruction* (the Littré says, “to deconstruct it-self [se déconstruire]… to lose its construction”). And the “se” of “se déconstruire,” which is not the reflexivity of an ego or of a consciousness, bears the whole enigma (Derrida, 1991:274).

Consequently, what I intend is to demonstrate a glimpse of the deconstruction of conservatism, that already happens within itself. I will do this by focusing on the connection between radical and traditional conservatism. As I discuss in the previous chapter, no matter what extent their political agendas seems different from each other, these two political views share the same basic assumptions, dichotomies, conceptualisations, perceptions, and motives. As such, I argue that radical and classical conservatism do not belong to two distinct political philosophies, but are part of the same political philosophy. And what causes the considerable distinction between the political agendas of these two groups is not a difference in their political philosophies, but differences in interpreting the very same foundations. Moreover, I think that the differences in the policy proposals of these two types of
Conservatisms are not the result of a ‘misreading’ of a single authoritative principle or text, but of a structural and unavoidable imperfection of the conservative text in general. If radical conservatives base themselves upon the same conceptual background and share the same motives with traditional conservatives, but argue for apparently different policies, this does not indicate their intellectual deficiency, but rather the non-absoluteness of the main dichotomies of conservatism. In other words, it indicates that the claimed distinctions between conserving and altering, or natural social forms and artificially imposed ones, are not as obvious and clear as they are generally assumed. And thus, I insist that the availability of a ‘radical’ wing in conservatism is actually part of the deconstruction of the conservatism by itself: radical conservatism emerges because of the unavoidable failure of the metaphysical dichotomies that provide the basis for conservatism.

That is why, instead of engaging in an external critique of conservatism, in the previous chapter, I focused on demonstrating the validity of the radical conservative agenda in terms of mainstream conservative ideology, through pointing out the commonalities of their basic terms and understandings with that of traditional conservatives. By reference to radical conservatism, in the next chapter, I will now problematise the basic dichotomies of conservatism, or more precisely, conservative exceptionalism. My reading will be a “parasitic” reading, as all deconstructive readings are, which draws its “sustenance from within the flesh of the host” (Critchley, 1999:23). It will be a reading of conservatism against itself, and its main challenge will be demonstrating that radical conservatism is part of the conservative text.

I believe that this act of uncovering the deconstruction of conservatism, which is carried out by conservatism itself, will create space for the ‘other’ of conservatism. It will allow us to see what is concealed, what cannot be seen, but what is nonetheless available in the traditional conservative narrative: conservative assumptions are not as moderate as they seem in the traditional presentation of these arguments. They imply an ideal society, and thus, have an internal potential of oppression which is realised in both types of conservatism, but in different ways.

To briefly summarise, my main strategy is to uncover the essential link between radical and classical conservatisms, that is the trace of available inconsistencies and blank points in conservatism. Such a highlighting will provide us certain insights about the conservative ideology by allowing some space for alternative interpretations which are oppressed by the
prevalent reading of conservatism. Thus, my study can be regarded as a contribution to the ideology critique tradition, through which freedom can partly be experienced.
4 Challenging the Conservative Exceptionalism

In the previous chapter of the thesis, sketches of classical and radical conservatisms were presented, and the fundamental similarities that render the reading of the two as variants of a single weave of discourses called conservatism were discussed. This weave, or this ‘conservative canon’, is distinct from but not totally independent on the corpus of any single author, or the disposition of any specific politician. The conservative canon cannot be reduced to any of the particular elements with which it has a reciprocal relationship, even if it is true that the conservative canon is formed of the various individual texts. In accordance with Freeden’s insights about the morphology of ideology,41 one can think of the conservative canon as the semantic framework through which some political writings, speeches, policies or attitudes are differentiated from their counterparts, are perceived as ‘conservative’, and interpreted accordingly. This canon defines the fundamental conservative inclinations in political theory, and thus draws a sketch of conservative thinking. On the other hand, there are quite different interpretations that can fit within this sketch, as can be seen in the differentiation between classical and radical conservatisms, or between British conservative thinking and its continental counterpart. In this sense, conservative canon is not composed of a single, unique conservatism par excellence. We should think of it not as the final word of the conservative thinking, but as a ground which implies the possibility of many different conservatisms.

Now, in this fourth chapter, I turn my attention to this reflection with a deconstructive sensibility, in order to analyse the exceptionalist claims of the conservative canon. These claims are common in the conservative canon; and especially, but not exclusively, those authors who are sympathetic to conservatism like to suggest the existence of a categorical distinction between conservatism and other political ideologies. For instance Russell Kirk defines conservatism as the “negation of ideology” (Kirk, 1982:xiv), while Sir Ian Gilmour declares that whatever else it is, conservatism is “not an ideology or a doctrine” (Gilmore, 1980a:121). Even if he counters these views in his influential article Conservatism as an Ideology, Samuel Huntington still suggests a categorical difference between conservatism and other ideologies, claiming that the former is a non-ideational ideology while the rest of the ideologies are ideational (Huntington, 1957:458-460).

41 For a discussion of Freeden’s approach to the nature of ideologies, see chapter 3.4.
My intention in this chapter is to problematise this exceptionalism. I try to explore the sustainability of the self-perception of the conservative canon as distinct from any other political positions in its aim to constrain the destructivity of individuals through promoting a non-intrusive political approach. To do so, I expose and question two binary oppositions upon which two of the most important arguments of ‘conservative exceptionalism’ are founded. After proposing the failure of both, I will argue that the inevitable failure of the binary opposition between the natural and the artificial not only marks the weakness of the exceptionalist arguments but also provides an insight into the formation of the conservative ideology.

In accordance with this scheme, part 4.1 presents a brief introduction to the deconstructive reading which forms the theoretical framework of the rest of the chapter. Thereafter, in part 4.2, I first focus on the idea of ‘conserving’, the main theme of the conservative canon and of the most intuitive argument in favour of conservative exceptionalism. Here, I question the decontestation of ‘conserving’ as a binary opposite of ‘altering’, and conclude that the conservative canon cannot sustain this dichotomy, and that the two supposedly opposite praxes collapse into each other at many instances. Such merging and collapsing threatens the self-image of conservatism as a non-interventionist style of politics, an image that is the main constituent of the claimed categorical difference of conservatism from the alternative ways of doing or thinking politics.

Nevertheless, if the frequent appearance of the theme of naturalness in various conservative texts is taken into account as a response to the threat mentioned above, the conservative canon might utilise the concept of nature and explain any transformative aspect of the conservative politics either as a necessity of nature, or as a return to natural conditions. This argumentation attempts to hold the ideas of conserving and altering apart in a fundamental sense by reference to the natural, by perceiving genuine change as that which promotes artificial social forms as against natural ones. Part 4.3 then focuses on this possible line of defence of conservative exceptionalism and problematises the conceptualisation of nature in the conservative canon. In many instances where naturalness comes into play, it is used as a term that marks existence in a realm free from conscious individual agency. Against this common understanding, what is revealed here is that any definition of nature, not as a physical entity but a textual element, must necessarily be constructed textually. In other words, any conception of nature must have a conventional basis and so must be contestable. Therefore, as a concept that is part of the conservative canon, naturalness must be established.
in the realm of the ‘arbitrary’. In discussing these points, part 4.3 demonstrates that the understanding of nature in the conservative text cannot remain simply as ‘natural’; the term must fall back on the conventional that is the realm of artefacts. Thus, the strategy of identifying and praising some social transformations as conservative for promoting or re-establishing natural social forms is not as plausible as it might seem at first glance. It falls short of providing a justification of conservative arguments without referring to the imperfect reasoning capacities of the individuals.

To consider the problems that follow from the inadequacy of referring to naturalness as an objective point of reference, part 4.4 draws attention to the logocentrism of the conservative text, with Society as the logos, or Subject in the Althusserian sense, of the text, playing the most critical role within the text.\(^{42}\) In the first part of 4.4, Society with a capital ‘S’ is argued to function as the absolute authority, the final referent and indisputable position of legitimation. And as with the centre of any logocentric text, it is argued to stand outside the text, as a transcended reference. But having made this point, I argue that, for a simple linguistic reason, no textual element can really stand outside the text and can constitute an extra-textual point of reference for the text. As I have explained, Society as the logos of the conservative canon is not a reality that exists by itself, but a textual artefact and the ideal of the conservative ideology. Hence, contrary to its self-image, conservatism is an ideational ideology, and so is not exceptional in its approach to political thinking. What differentiates conservatism from other ideologies is not a fundamental difference in the conservative disposition against socio-political reality (i.e., a passivist disposition as contrasted with other activist dispositions), but the more ordinary difference that also exists between any ideology. As linguistic products, no ideological text corresponds to the Real as it is, and there always exists a gap between their textuality and the Reality. But for now, before clarifying the groundwork of these claims, I will present an overview of the deconstructive reading from which I benefit to a large extent in the rest of this chapter.

\(^{42}\) See part 3.3 on Althusser’s conception of Subject as a fundamental category of ideologies.
4.1 Deconstruction: The Quest to Read Non-Methodically

For Derrida, the term method “carries connotations of a procedural form of judgement. A thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, and is a functionary of the criteria which structures his or her conceptual gestures” (Beardsworth, 1996:4). Hence, a characteristic of these ‘methodical readings’ is their penetration into the text. Any method approaches the texts through the guidance of certain operative concepts, and subjects the texts to these concepts. Thus, methodical readings are repressive and distortive in essence. One can think of historical materialism as a typical example and even a method par excellence. It imposes a predefined socio-dynamic narrative that is the discourse of the determinacy of the relations of production, to construe the social phenomena or social texts in question, to pinpoint their meaning, and to identify their function. But all methodically extracted meanings and functions are inevitably extra-textual, as they are founded by and on the confrontation and subjection of the analysed social text to the method, such as the historical materialism. On their own, these texts will not provide sufficient theoretical material to form these methodical meanings, or even provide sufficient material to be confined on any specific meaning. That is to say, for instance, only when a text is subjected to the Marxist method and read through its operative concepts, can it bear the specific meaning and function that it is argued to bear by Marxists.

Take the case of the Marxist understanding of conservatism: For orthodox Marxism, conservatism is the ideology of the governing classes and essentially serves to preserve their socioeconomic privileges. According to this, behind the superficial layer of theory and argumentation, what is at stake in conservatism is a concern to reproduce the hierarchical social structure. In DeLeon’s words, its aim is “to conserve the power they now enjoy to live in luxury without work, to ride the proletariat, [and] to fleece the workers” (DeLeon, 1895). Burke’s critiques against revolution, Disraeli’s support for a parliamentary reform in the UK, or Schmitt’s longing for a neutral state that will ensure social integrity are all read and interpreted in terms of a given conceptual framework and linked with some underlying class interests. For instance, Sadie Robinson’s critique of the austerity measures of the coalition government led by the conservatives in Socialist Worker relies upon such a framework:

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43 For a general outline of this classical Marxist position, see Marx, 1977.
The Tories’ propaganda is simple. They ask: why should people who are relatively well off receive benefits from the state? If benefits were removed from these people, they say, they could be given to those who are genuinely in need. But this is a smokescreen. The Tories will not divert any savings to the poorest. Leopards don’t change their spots. The Tories mean government for the rich by the rich (Robinson, 2010).

Thus, through its operative concepts like base and superstructure, the Marxist reading pinpoints the meaning of conservatism as being a tool of dominant social classes and a discourse for the reproduction of socioeconomic injustice. Such an interpretation is obviously extra-textual. It does not confine itself within the limits of the conservative text. To make its point, it refers to the components of the conservative text – that is, the writings, policies and speeches of conservatives – but it also relies on a Marxist social theory and interprets conservatism through concepts such as class, base, and superstructure. Most conservative texts refrain to acknowledge the meaning and function attributed to conservatism by the Marxists. Indeed, as might be expected, self-perception of the conservative texts is generally the opposite, since they present conservatism as a project for the common good. Only by penetrating into the text and subjecting it to some extraneous concepts can Marxists extract their particular interpretation of conservatism. And as indicated before, such a penetration is the common feature of all methodical readings.

While proposing deconstruction as a distinct attempt of reading, Derrida underlines this characteristic of methodical readings and states that deconstruction is not a method in that sense (Derrida, 1985:3). Deconstruction, as the argument goes, does not function through subjecting the texts to some extra-textual elements. It “remains closely tied to the texts it interrogates, [and] never set up independently as a method or system of operative concepts” (Norris, 2000:31). Its aim is not to penetrate into the text but to read it carefully “to reveal [its] conflicts, silences, and fissures” (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:84). It is a parasitic reading in this particular sense (Critchley, 1999:23). It occurs within the text, uses only the resources of the text, and confines itself to be alert to textual resistance and to highlight the repressed parts and ignored contradictions of the text itself. In doing so, it seeks for the repressed alternative readings and possibilities that are immanent to the text, in order to challenge the ‘metaphysics of presence’ that promotes a naïve reading of the texts.

The metaphysics of presence, or the metaphysics of logocentric thinking, is defined in the Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism as the “determination of both meaning and Being in terms of an inherent, self-same, self-sufficient plenitude” (Encyclopaedia of Postmodernism, p. 92).
It is a project of reducing the fields of epistemology and ontology into singularities, which, in its most blatant form, is pursued by Plato in his theory of ideas (see Plato, 1992 [380 BC]:157-213). Such metaphysics has significant ethical and political ramifications, like attributing a normative value to the ‘objective presence’ – the realm of objectivity, or naturalness, if one prefers this term – which has an extra-textual existence. Most of Derrida’s later writings can be read as tracing these ethical and political ramifications of the metaphysics of presence, and looking for a way out of this metaphysics with the use of concepts such as hospitality and forgiveness (see Derrida, 2000; Derrida 2001). But within our limited scope, logocentrism, and the metaphysics of presence most importantly corresponds beyond these wider expressions to a presumption that “the word, the text, language, are self-evident, clearly delimited, independent, neutral media for the transmission of pre-given or pure concepts” (Grosz, 1990:94); and to an irrepressible desire for a transcendent signified (Derrida, 1997:49). It departs from an assumption on the existence of a fixed meaning in all words, ideas, and systems, taking its source from the authorising presence of some centre or Ur-speaker (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:313).

According to Norris, this logocentric metaphysics is essentially a persuasion of the singularity of truth and a craving for this truth (Norris, 2002:69); it is “a property of the West” (Spivak, 1997:lxxxii). Hence, texts that belong to the Western tradition mostly speak in the name of the truth, or logos. They present themselves as if having only one true interpretation, and therefore a single appropriate way of reading. Here, the assertion behind any logocentric text is providing an immediate, unmediated, or undistorted access, and the only such access to the phenomenal world is the realm of objectivity, or natural, in the name of logos. This logocentric craving for the singular truth, for the logos, leads to

an authorizing pressure, that spawns hierarchized oppositions. The superior term belongs to presence and the logos; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall. The oppositions between intelligible and sensible, soul and body seem to have lasted out "the history of Western philosophy," bequeathing their burden to modern linguistics’ opposition between meaning and word. The opposition between writing and speech takes its place within this pattern (Kamuf, 1991:lxx).

While providing this access, these texts operate through a number of binary oppositions like intelligible and sensible, natural and cultural, or speech and writing.44 These binary terms are thought to be opposites that absolutely exclude each other. They function to decontest the

44 Indeed, one of Derrida’s most appreciated works, Of Grammatology (1997), follows the traces of these three binary oppositions within the texts of Saussure, Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss.

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meaning of fundamental concepts of the text and repress its various hermeneutical possibilities in order to mould the text as generating a single authentic interpretation of the phenomenal world. Moreover, the terms of binary oppositions in logocentric texts are never of equal rank and one side of the dichotomy is always disfavoured and unapproved as compared with its opposite term. As Derrida puts it, what we have in these texts is “not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position” (quoted by Culler, 1983:85).

The aim of deconstructive reading is to challenge this whole logocentric structure and its particular metaphysics without itself turning into a method. This challenge is not to falsify logocentric texts and propose a proper and extra-textual substitute which would allow unmediated access to the phenomenal world. Such an intention would itself be logocentric. Instead, deconstruction attempts to reveal hermeneutical diversity of the text as a parasitic reading operating within the text, underlining ultimate contradictions and indecisiveness; thus, as it claims, it opens up space for individual freedom and responsibility.

To explain this last point in accordance with Derrida’s conception of freedom and responsibility, if logocentric approaches are accepted in principle, the scope of individual decision-making will then be reduced to a technical process of applying certain criterion to alternative texts in order to see which of these genuinely reflects the phenomenal world. Other than this merely technical comparison, individuals will subject themselves to the logos, i.e., the word of God, and live in certainty and clarity without making any real discussions and taking any real decisions or responsibility. In the existence of the perfect knowledge of absolute and immutable presence, there is no space for risk and individual initiative. As Niall Lucy puts it, “[i]f decisions were entirely calculable, they would not be decisions. For something to be a decision, it has to risk being wrong. This is why Derrida says that every decision, in order to be a decision, has to pass through what he calls the ‘experience and experiment of the undecidable’” (Lucy, 2004:149).45

45 This mutual exclusion between ultimate knowledge and freedom is mentioned before, by different thinkers. For instance, in his Essay on Catholicism, Liberalism and Socialism, first published in 1851, Donoso-Cortés argues that “[i]f the reason of man is infallible because it is sound (…) then all men possess the truth. (…) If all men possess the truth, (...) then all their affirmations and negations are necessarily identical. If all their affirmations and negations are identical, discussion is inconceivable and absurd” (Donoso-Cortés, 1970: 287-288).
Since the term praxis implies a decision taken by individuals with their own risks, the problem with the logocentric imagination can then be described in a more general scope as the impossibility of the emergence of praxis in this logocentric discourse. Here, Derridian perspective echoes Marx’s critique of the materialist tradition for failing to perceive the reality, that is reality and sensuousness, as subjectively through its link with the praxis, and generalising this Marxist critique to the Western thought. In the Theses on Feuerbach, “the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism” is named by Marx as “that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, praxis, not subjectively” (Marx, 1969). For Marx this failure is a fundamental barrier for emancipation. Those who fail to see the existential relationship between the so-called objective reality and the creative human practice would be alienated from the world, and from their true selves. They would thus remain totally ignorant to human praxis and would regard the world as given. Raising awareness of the creative aspect of human existence is therefore always a fundamental move for the Marxist ideology critique.46

In his appreciation of the link between praxis and emancipation, Derrida seems to be in line with Marx. What he alternatively underlines is that the failure of not conceiving the real through the concept of praxis is not peculiar to pre-Marxist materialism of Feuerbach, nor a result of simple failure in the reflections of certain thinkers. For Derrida, it is an inevitable consequence of logocentrism, and of the metaphysics of presence which assumes the existence of an extra-textual Real that can be signified through our perfectly transparent linguistic systems. This assumption renders praxis as a supplement at best, and as mentioned previously it reduces decision-making to a technical process. Derrida thus presents logocentrism as one of the main challenges to the problematic of freedom. And against this, “[b]y inaugurating the open-ended indefiniteness of textuality—by thus "placing in the abyss” (mettre en abîme), as the French expression would literally have it—[deconstruction] shows us the lure of the abyss as freedom” (Kamuf, 1991:lxxviii).

What deconstructive readings reveal in this problematic is that no existing text actually meets the logocentric criteria of being homogeneous, consistent, self-sufficient and transparent agent of the reality, nor can these criteria be met by any prospective texts. As such, it denies any claim of absolute authority and invites individuals to face the ultimate undecidability of life that is the main source of human freedom, justice, and responsibility (Smith, 2005:68). Hence, problematising logocentrism is seen as an emancipatory gesture, and deconstruction

46 For further discussion of Marxist ideology critique, see part 3.1.2.
emerges in close relation with the ideology critique. Derrida’s call for a new Enlightenment can be understood through this emancipatory intent of his project and through its proximity to the ideology critique (Smith, 2005:88).

But what should be done to reveal that no existing text actually meets logocentric criteria? Here, deconstructive reading focuses on specific texts or canons, rather than constructing a more extensive argument, and highlights the ambivalences in the foundational binary oppositions of these. It tries to reveal that the two sides of any proposed opposition, rather than being oppositional, could actually be a pair of intermingling concepts. Against the widely accepted ordering of these dichotomies, deconstruction also points at the equal reasonableness of their reversed order, and thus digs out repressed interpretations that challenge the logocentric self-image of the texts. But it would be wrong to consider such reversals as an amendment or correction of the initial formation of the text. As Moran warns us;

[t]here is a tendency among some of Derrida’s followers to diagnose all Western thought as logocentric, and then to reject all oppositions (temporal/eternal, darkness/light, matter/form, falsity/truth) as belonging to this logocentrism. (…) Derrida himself, however, does not attempt to overturn all oppositions, since this would be simply to put in place another order of signs with their own hegemony. He wants rather to force us to question why we valorise them as we do (Moran, 2000:449).

Hence, deconstructive reading does not propose “a strategic reversal of categories which otherwise remain distinct and unaffected, [but] seeks to undo both a given order of priorities and the very system of conceptual opposition that makes that order possible” (Norris, 2000:30-31). For a given text, deconstructive reading does not desire to prove that the reversed form of binary opposition would be more accurate, but argues that the opposition itself may not even be a proper opposition composed of two absolutely distinct terms. It thus threatens the logocentric thinking founded on definite, clear, and hierarchical binary oppositions by showing that; (1) all textual dichotomies are potentially reversible, (2) the boundary separating the two sides of any dichotomy is always vague, and therefore (3) these binary oppositions are always questionable.

This is the main strategy of all deconstructive readings of Derrida. For instance, while criticising Claude Levi-Strauss’ structural anthropology, which favours the natural over the

47 See part 3.5.
cultural, Derrida questions the ordering of this distinction and shows that the arguments of Levi-Strauss may also lead one to favour the cultural over the natural. Moreover, he takes this a step further and underlines the blank points, silences, and *aporias* that are necessary to sustain the terms of nature and culture as distinct and oppositional. To repeat once more, the aim here is not to point at some appropriate way of thinking of these two terms or to have an accurate understanding of the text at hand. Instead, by chasing every singular meaning of the text to its aporias, he “seeks to demonstrate its dependence on that irreducible alterity which refuses it further passage” (Taylor and Winquist, 2001:93).

On the other hand, from his earliest works, Derrida acknowledges that any such reading cannot totally disengage from logocentrism, for a critique of logocentrism must itself be founded on the same logocentric metaphysics, at least to some extent:

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. (...) We cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. To pick out one example from many: the metaphysics of presence is attacked with the help of the concept of the sign. But from the moment anyone wishes this to show, as I suggested a moment ago, that there is no transcendental or privileged signified and that the domain or the interplay of signification has, henceforth, no limit, he ought to extend his refusal to the concept and to the word sign itself-which is precisely what cannot be done. For the signification "sign" has always been comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified. If one erases the radical difference between signifier and signified, it is the word signifier itself which ought to be abandoned as a metaphysical concept (Derrida, 2002:354-355).

Deconstructive readings are therefore bound to operate and remain within the logocentric coordinates. Every deconstructive attempt will inevitably devolve into a methodical reading and betray the ethos of deconstruction.

As Derrida puts it, ‘in every proposition or in every system of semiotic research . . . metaphysical presuppositions coexist with critical motifs’. Deconstruction is therefore an activity performed by texts which in the end have to acknowledge their own partial complicity with what they denounce (Norris, 2000:47).

That is why, every deconstruction is itself deconstructible. Nevertheless, the impossibility of a deconstruction attempt that does not betray itself does not render the attempts worthless. Rather, it urges us to grasp deconstruction as an ongoing activity which does not reach a

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48 See *Of Grammatology* (1987), and part 3.5.
conclusion or produce authoritative end-products, but continuously strives to open up spaces
for individual freedom and responsibility:

What remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as
undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain
experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a
structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without
messianism, an idea of justice (Derrida, 1994:59).

Here, what is important is not the incompetence of any single moment, but continuity of all
such moments. Each moment contributes to this emancipatory project, provided that they
acknowledge their own deficiency, and define themselves as open to their own
deconstruction. Derrida’s deconstructive readings of different thinkers and ideas – ranging
from Plato (see Derrida, 1981) to De Man (see Derrida, 1981), and from the European
identity (see Derrida, 1992b) to the idea of justice (see Derrida, 1992) – present many
moments of this stream. And following in Derrida’s footsteps, many others have also
endeavoured to deconstruct different texts and to challenge the self-images and metaphysical
foundations of those texts.

Bearing these ideas of Derrida in mind, I approach conservatism - or more precisely, the
conservative exceptionalism – with a deconstructive sensibility in the upcoming parts of this
study. I firstly focus in parts 4.2 and 4.3 on the dichotomies upon which the most important
arguments of the exceptionalist claims of the conservatives are founded. I try to demonstrate
that the terms that are presented as binary oppositions in these dichotomies always
intermingle, and that the terms cannot be differentiated from each other easily. In 4.4, I then
demonstrate that the failure of these dichotomies, and of the exceptionalist claims of the
conservative canon, provides us an insight about the structure and certain qualities of the
conservative canon. I also refer to the term logos, as the term understood in the
deconstructive studies, and try to challenge the logocentrism of the conservative canon. But
in the end, the aim of this chapter is to be neither approving nor disapproving of the
conservative canon, but to reveal the operations of certain terms fundamental for the
conservative discourse to decontest each other semantically, and thus reaching a deeper
understanding of the conservative ideology.
4.2 Conserving and Altering

Conservatism conserves. This is the most intuitive, and probably banal, statement about conservative politics. This theme of conservation appears very frequently within the conservative canon, and is utilised to underlie the fundamental difference between the conservative politics and its alternatives. While other ideologies attempt to transform the status quo, or the existing state of things, so goes the argument, conservatism aims to preserve it. A conservative, therefore, should be the “protector”, not the “innovator” (see Johnson, 1980:129). He is the one who has “a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be” (Oakeshott, 1991:a). From this intuitive perspective, all other ideologies urge for the realisation of some socio-political ideal, and are therefore ideational ideologies, whereas conservatism is a non-ideational ideology, if indeed it can be defined as an ideology at all (Huntington, 1957:457-458). This exceptional status of conservatism is thought to be grounded in the conservative scepticism about Enlightenment as a form of thinking which is seen as the cradle of all other ideologies. As can be seen in Edmund Burke's declaration of his fear from “a mind, which has no restraint from a sense of its own weakness, of its subordinate rank in the creation” (Burke, 1982:6), that is his “first indictment of the hubris of Enlightenment man” (Kramnick, 1977:21) - and written when he was only twenty-eight - a scepticism against the Enlightenment is indeed one of the oldest themes in the conservative canon.

Relying on this sceptical stance against the ambitions of Enlightenment thought, many scholars and self-confessed conservatives locate a fundamental difference between conservatism and other forms of socio-political thinking. They associate conservatism with preservative policies and a moderate style of politics that puts emphasis on the preservation of existing socio-political forms, instead of transforming these in accordance with an abstract design. For instance, Reginald J. White defines conservatism as “preserv[ing] the method of nature, [and] discover[ing] the order inherent in things rather than to impose an order upon them” (1950:3). Likewise, Sir Ian Gilmour, a conservative politician and Secretary of State for Defence in the Edward Heath government, describes the 'British Conservatism' he argues for as having “balance and moderation [as] important element[s] in it” (Gilmour, 1980:xi). O'Sullivan’s remark of “the defence of a limited style of politics” also indicates a similar understanding of conservatism (1976:11-12). And Eccleshall explains how this most intuitive understanding of conservatism promotes the conservative exceptionalism:
The commitment of some conservatives to a politics of imperfection has prompted the claim that conservatism is qualitatively distinct from other ideologies. At its silliest, and usually within a British context, the equation of the doctrine with traditionalism has led to the suggestion that conservatives are not ideologues at all, which at face value implies that they are incapable of coherent thinking about the nature of a sound polity. The message, of course, is that ideologues indulge in an ‘alien’ form of knowledge because of their conviction that the political order can be analysed, and subsequently transformed, according to the certainties of science. Ideologues seek refuge from the contingencies of a settled way of life in rationalism. Because of their sensitivity to the crooked timber of humanity, however, conservatives are suspicious of promises to steer the ship of state to some island paradise. Their scepticism about utopian projects inclines them to a non-programmatic, un-ideological form of politics which takes its bearings from the peculiarities of a particular culture rather than from some dogma about the universal needs of humanity (Eccleshall, 2000:282).

But is this most intuitive argument on the exceptionality of conservatism in line with the rest of the conservative arguments or themes? Is there a more substantial difference between conservative and non-conservative forms of political thinking, than the differences between any two of these non-conservative positions? Can there really be an ideology that is non-ideational and non-interventionist? In this and the coming two parts, I answer these questions through an analysis of two of the most important arguments with which conservative exceptionalism can be defended.

At this stage, a rather interesting fact may serve as my departure point in this undertaking: Despite the mentioned centrality of the theme of conserving to conservative thought, the corpuses of conservative thinkers rarely propose a clear or detailed definition for it. Apparently, they take the meaning of conserving as being quite obvious, and conceptualise it simply as being the binary opposition of altering. According to this, conservative politics is essentially the not-doing of non-conservative politics. If other ideologies seek for extensive socio-political reforms and the cultivation of individuals in a specific way, what conservative politics promises is not doing so. Even when plans for change are at the table, so to speak, conservatives should be attempting “to preserve (…) the substance of the historic establishment” (Chapman, 1967:173). Given that liberals, Marxists, and other groups think of politics as being like directing a ship to a specific harbour through a predefined route, conservatives define it as an activity limited to ensuring the sailing of a ship in the middle of the ocean without any safe harbour to go to. As in Oakeshott’s famous statement, in political activity “men sail a boundless and bottomless sea: there is no harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place not appointed destination” (Oakeshott, 1991:60). Here,
conserving, the fundamental characteristic of conservative politics, is conceptualised as mainly a passive or negative act, as the act of not altering. And in the same manner, Burke regards social and political reforms as means of conservation, since these reforms do “not change (...) the substance or in the primary modification of the object” (Burke, 1970:50).

This use of the pair terms conserving and altering in order to suggest a categorical distinction between conservative and non-conservative forms of politics, and to promote conservative exceptionalism as such, has a prerequisite. Only if conserving and altering are perceived as a binary opposition, as mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive categories rather than a continuum with a quantitative metric or a vague but still useful convention, can conservatism fundamentally be differentiated from the other ideologies. Only if this precondition is met can conservatism distinguish itself as an unintrusive, limited style of politics unlike its ambitious and ideational political alternatives. But if no absolute contrast between conserving and altering can be established within the conservative canon, then the negative or passive conception of conserving will fall short of decontesting the terms dichotomously and of providing the ground for the exceptionality of conservatism. Non-alteration will then fail to be the definite feature of the act of conserving, at least within the borders of the conservative canon, since the two terms will eventually intermingle. And in that case, the conservative canon should either give up the theme of the exceptionality of conservatism, or present a further argument that, while acknowledging the area of convergence between these two terms, argues for another axis of difference which might ground the claim of exceptionality. Before turning to this latter option, I present in the remaining part of 4.2 the reasons for which a simple dichotomous distinction between conserving and altering falls short of grounding conservative exceptionalism and clarifying the meaning of conserving as the term used in the conservative canon.

To begin with, there is no single form of conservative politics, but a great diversity in the conservative canon in this sense. And most of these different colours of conservatism recommend some changes in political structure, social policies, or economic strategy of the country. The agenda defended by conservative thinkers or politicians nearly always includes some changes in the status quo. In a sense, this is not so surprising. One who is totally happy with current inclinations in society will not develop an interest in politics, and thus, will not be a conservative thinker or politician. And moreover, being conservative and defending preservation is equalised by very few, if any, as calling for a full stop to changes in society.
Indeed, as Vincent notes, many conservatives would themselves be very uncomfortable with such a definition of conservatism (Vincent, 1994:210).

Actually, the longing for minor changes or reforms that can be found in most of the conservative texts do not necessarily challenge the claim for a binary opposition between conserving and altering, and the exceptionalist arguments relying on it. As Burke wrote in a letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, one may even think of change as the means of the conservation of the natural (Burke, 1990:146). Nevertheless, longings and calls for, or justification of, extensive changes in social forms also appears frequently within the conservative canon, and this cannot be explained so easily without casting a shadow on the claims of moderation and without blurring the dichotomy between conserving and altering.

As presented in the previous chapter, radical conservatism – as a variant of the conservative ideology – urges for significant socio-political transformations in order to realise conservative political aims and create, or perhaps recreate, the conservative society (see part 2.2.3). Thinking that radical conservatism is an odd but insignificant exception in the interpretation of the conservative precepts would be oversimplifying the problem of the act of conserving as it is conceptualised as a guide in politics. I believe that the case of radical conservatism, far from being insignificant, is an indication of a fundamental instability of the conservative text: The mere existence of the radical conservatives, or revolutionary conservatives as they are sometimes known, proves the possibility of interpreting extensive social transformations, if not outright revolutions, as conservative phenomena. It thus marks the width of the hermeneutical field within the conservative text, and conservative politicians frequently enjoy this width and proudly proclaim their intent to realise a real change in the name of conservatism. For instance, as the newly appointed Prime Minister of UK, David Cameron proudly declared in the 2010 annual conference of the Conservative Party:

We are the radicals now, breaking apart the old system with a massive transfer of power from the state to citizens, politicians to people, government to society… [Gone will be the] the old ways of doing things: the high-spending, all-controlling, heavy-handed state… In its place will come a total transformation from unchecked individualism to national unity and purpose, from big government to the big society (quoted by Lyall, 2010).

For this width of hermeneutical possibilities, conservatism cannot confine itself in the field of ‘conserving’ and moderation in the lexical sense of the word. By utilising these possibilities available within the conservative text, nearly every social alteration, no matter how extensive it is, can be interpreted as a form of conserving, while any preservative policy can well be
interpreted as actually corresponding to the promotion of social transformations. In Table 1, for each of these possible interpretations I present two exemplary arguments, one pro-active and one re-active, in order to demonstrate the width of interpretation, especially when the dichotomy is imagined to have simply an exclusionary nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A - PROACTIVE ARGUMENT</th>
<th>1 - ALTERING AS CONSERVING</th>
<th>2 - CONSERVING AS ALTERING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1A: “a change to prevent any further changes”</td>
<td>2A: “a strict pro-establishment policy that will trigger revolution, chaos, and possibly a social collapse”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B - REACTIVE ARGUMENT</td>
<td>1B: “a change to cure damages of non-conservative policies and to put society back to its natural course”</td>
<td>2B: “a status-quoism in favour of arbitrary, unnatural elements of society that hamper some other natural elements”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this table, (1) a proposal for social alteration can be presented as part of a conservative project either because (1A) it prevents further or more substantial changes in the future, or because (1B) it puts society back on its natural track where it would be if only non-conservative policies had not distorted its natural course in the past. Likewise, (2) any pro-establishment policy can be perceived as being essentially non-conservative either because (2A) any orthodox insistence on the establishment will end up in social collapse, extreme instability and fundamental socio-political transformations, or because (2B) that policy preserves arbitrary and unnatural social forms.

The history of conservatism provides us with examples of each of these hermeneutical possibilities, as well as many others. For instance, some Edwardian conservatives who “argued that the best way to alleviate poverty and social distress was for the government to introduce a strongly progressive fiscal structure, and redistribute wealth to the poor in the form of social reforms” (Green, 2002:15) make use of argument 2A. Similarly, Peel, a famous conservative Prime Minister in 19th century Britain, uses argument 1A and describes his abolition of the established Corn Law as “the most conservative act of his life”, for it reduced the cost of living in the country and allowed Britain to sustain its social integrity at a time when other European societies were faced with the danger of revolution (Gash,
1977:98). The pro-reform position of conservative constitutional theorists in the later part of the 1970s also exemplifies 1A, since, “what they seek in the first place is protection against radical social change facilitated by political practices and constitutional conventions which no longer impose much restraint on governments” (Johnson, 1980:129). Again, Edmund Burke's interpretation of 1688 as “a revolution not made but prevented” (Stanlis, 1986:237), and his claim that the “American Revolution was likewise a rebellion of subjects who wished to preserve their political and constitutional rights against the arbitrary and absolutist pretensions of a king” (Stanlis, 1986:237) shows that it is even possible to interpret revolutions as genuinely conservative happenings (1B). And in the same time, the Burkean outlook to American revolution presents an example of 2B, since, “[a]ccording to Burke, the real rebels during the decade before 1775 [are] not the colonies, but George III and his Tory ministers” (Stanlis, 1986:237).

It should be remembered that this table is far from being an exhaustive illustration of interpretative opportunities within the conservative text. It is intended only to give a hint about their width and to underline that, irrelevant of their specific content, a wide range of policy choices in a given situation can be perceived either as conservative or non-conservative, depending on the theoretical framework through which these options are perceived. There is enough hermeneutic space within the conservative text for such diversity, and so, there are many actual and potential instances in which the concepts of conserving and altering intermingle. That is why radical tendencies in the conservative canon, if the former term is understood as favouring extensive social transformations, cannot be seen as peculiar to self-professed radical conservatives. Even when one conceptualises conserving and altering as a simple, self-explanatory contraction in need of no further reference point, any practice of conserving can still be perceived as a practice of altering from a different point of view or on a different scale, and vice versa. Therefore, any claim on the conservativeness of certain policies, is highly doubtful if the claim relies merely upon a dichotomous and intuitive conception of conserving and altering, and the theme of conservation or non-alteration is implausible as grounds for conservative exceptionalism.

The ambivalent nature of the dichotomy between conserving and altering is also evident in the corpus of prominent conservative thinkers. Not only is a change of limited scope approved in these texts, but more strikingly, the theme of ‘justified extensive transformation’ appears in most of them, albeit with the excuse of exceptional conditions. The first and foremost example of this theme is radical conservatism. While presenting themselves as “too
conservative to not to be radical” (Hermann, 1971:241), radical conservative writings obviously utilise the ambiguity between conserving and altering to locate itself within the conservative text. But even in most of the classical conservative writings which supposedly argue for stability, modesty, and conservation as the dichotomous opposite of alteration, the theme of justified extensive transformation is noticeable. No matter how hard the texts try to keep alteration and its cognates out of their own socio-political project, it always haunts the project, mostly in the disguise of exception. For instance, in the attempts of De Maistre and Burke, the two founders of the modern conservative thinking, to grasp and interpret the French Revolution, we witness the presence of the concept of 'orderly revolution', or 'revolution as a part of the order'. If the divine order is designed and ruled by God, and if God is by definition omnipotent, then should not French Revolution be the will of God? Should not social catastrophe also be a part of the divine plan? Both De Maistre and Burke answer these questions affirmatively (Femia, 2001:30). They admit the possibility of interpreting a revolution which seems in the first glance like destroying order, as part of a broader or higher order. Thus, the writings of Burke and De Maistre testify the impossibility of locating any absolute borderline between order and revolution, or between conserving and altering.

Hence, if the distinction between conservative and non-conservative policies will rely upon the conservation or alteration of the establishment, then that distinction will always be ambiguous. In Burke's case, provided that he is omnipotent, God as the founder of the order can also be the God of the revolutions and wish his order to be what one sees as a disorder. Revolutions can therefore be absorbed in the Burkean thinking by the so-called divine plan and the absoluteness of the distinction between order and change fades. And as Freeman explains, Burke was aware of this possibility long before the French Revolution:

The concept of God as revolutionary was not an invention of Burke's despairing old age. It can be found in his early Abridgement of English History (1757), in which he wrote that “we are in a manner compelled to acknowledge the hand of God in those immense revolutions by which at certain periods He so signally asserts His supreme dominion and brings about that great system of change, which is, perhaps, as necessary to the moral as it is found to be in the natural world”. And in the Reflections itself he wrote of kings “hurl’d from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama, and become the objects of insult to the base, and of pity to the good”. (…) The God of order is also the God of revolution (Freeman, 1980:26).

Burke is not the only conservative whose works or political stance provide an example of this haunting. The policies of conservatives nearly always include a transformative aspect that can
be as substantial as any ‘non-conservative revolution’. As is admitted by Scruton, there is nothing strange in conservatives adopting the way of revolution in “times of extremity” (Scruton, 2001:11). And for some conservatives like Kirk, this transformative aspect has been the main focus for conservatives of the last century: “(t)he twentieth-century conservative is concerned, first of all, for the regeneration of spirit and character (...) the restoration of the ethical understanding and the religious -sanction upon which any life worth living is founded” (Kirk, 1987:472).

This haunting, or the return of alteration to the conservative project, can be noticed in the writings of even the most unlikely conservative thinkers. Oakeshott’s understanding of conservatism, for instance, seems in the first glance to have no place for the justification of extensive social transformations. In the beginning of his influential article “On Being Conservative” (1991a), Oakeshott declares his preference to approach conservatism not as an elaborate theory on socio-political thought, but as an easily discernible, pro-establishment disposition. According to him,

> [t]he general characteristics of this disposition are not difficult to discern, although they have often been mistaken. They centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was, or what may be (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

As he states, these dispositions flourish out of the feeling of being attached to the establishment merely for its actuality, rather than any favourable features of the present:

> What is esteemed is the present; and it is esteemed not on account of its connections with a remote antiquity, nor because it is recognized to be more admirable than any possible alternative, but on account of its familiarity: not, Verweile doch, du bist so schön, but, Stay with me because I am attached to you (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

Hence, in Oakeshott's depiction, the conservative 'disposition' does not need an elaborate theory about the desirability of certain social forms. It is only being in favour of conservation of the establishment and being against its alteration. The intuitive understanding of a clear and exhaustive dichotomy between conserving and altering resurfaces here as well. Oakeshott discusses neither the meaning of conserving nor the nature of the relation of the term with its supposed counterpart with any elaborativeness. He seems to perceive the two as perfectly separate and contradictory alternatives, and defines conservatism through the favoured term of the binary opposition, that is to conserve. But despite this general approach of the article,
because of the mentioned width of interpretative opportunities, it is still possible to witness the intermingling of the two terms just a few paragraphs after the words quoted above.

There, in parallel to his general stance, Oakeshott begins by referring to conservatism as an inclination toward the familiar and stable: “To be conservative,” says Oakeshott,

is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to the utopian bliss (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

But even though he refers to this inclination as a temperament (Oakeshott, 1991a:412), and a part of the human nature in this sense, he also notes that “if the present is arid, offering little or nothing to be used or enjoyed, then this inclination will be weak or absent” (Oakeshott, 1991a:408). After this notification, in the next sentence he raises this assertion into a new level, and we witness the intermingling of conserving and altering in the thinking of Oakeshott: “If the present is remarkably unsettled,” says Oakeshott, “[the disposition] will display itself in a search for a firmer foothold” (Oakeshott, 1991a:408).

Here, Oakeshott’s argument could even be more radical than the argument 1B presented in table 1. That is because it is not clear if “the search for a firmer foothold” is actually a search for the social forms that were enjoyed in the past, or if the search can end up in totally new social forms that really deserve to be conserved for their capacity to ensure an 'attachable' present. But what is certain is that the theoretical possibility of thinking of ‘conserving’ and ‘altering’ as a compatible pair of terms is reluctantly recognised and the theme of justified extensive transformations is there in the writings of Oakeshott who is supposedly one of the most non-radical conservative thinkers. Oakeshott admits, albeit between the lines, that changing for conservative ends or urging for conservative alterations is perfectly possible.

To turn to the problematic presented at the beginning of this part, this intermingling of the terms ‘conserving and altering’ is a threat for the conservative exceptionalism. If conservatism is to be argued as fundamentally different from all other ideologies, the phrase ‘conservatism conserves’ is incapable to ground this claim conclusively. If some socio-political transformations can be regarded as conserving alterations while some preservations are regarded as non-conservative status quoism, then there exists an area of convergence in the relation of the terms conserving and altering, which blurs the fundamental distinction between the conserving ideology and other ideologies. Therefore, the intervention of another
pair of terms, or another binary opposition, which may introduce another axis of difference that divides this area of convergence between the two poles, is necessary to reclaim the exceptionality of conservatism. Only with the existence of this second axis can conservative text claim that, even though there is some discursive space within the conservative thinking for justified socio-political transformation, the conservative transformations differ from the non-conservative ones in a fundamental sense, and therefore conservatism still remains categorically different from all other ideologies for its non-intrusive, moderate, and conserving style of politics. In other words, this new axis is necessary to propose a distinction between the genuinely conservative and the non-conservative alterations.

In the next section, I will discuss the opposition between natural and arbitrary, a dichotomy that is very frequently utilised within the conservative canon, and that is the primary, if not only, candidate for this second axis. Here, I will see if that binary opposition, in the form they appear in the conservative text, can do any better than the conserving-altering opposition in providing a ground for the exceptionality of the conservative ideology.
4.3 Natural and Arbitrary

The alternative dichotomy that can be called upon by the conservatives to provide a satisfactory explanation for the existence of the theme of justified extensive transformations, and to secure the exceptionality of conservatism is the one between the natural and the arbitrary. This dichotomy is utilised through the argument that conservatism is distinct from ideational political positions; not for its preservation of the status quo, but for its preservation and promotion of specifically natural social forms, e.g., organically developed traditions and the inherited political institutions of a society. Transformative aspects of conservatism thus explained for their intent to preserve the natural order, and serve the conservative cause. This rhetoric can be witnessed in certain instances at which conservatives argue for a change. For instance, Kersbergen and Kremer notes that the conservatives who argue for the welfare state “legitimates [state] intervention by [their] intention to preserve the natural order” (Kersbergen & Kremer, 2008:86). Likewise, conservative support for aristocracy, underlines Huntington, does not mean the promotion of aristocracy in all times and places, but only the promotion of natural aristocracy (Huntington, 1957:462).

Once naturalness is used as the measure of conservativeness of policies, non-conservative policies are vilified for their non-naturalness, and even for their 'monstrosity'. This can be seen in Burke's critique of Protestant dissenters in his *Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians*, which was delivered in the House of Commons in May of 1792. There, he “condemn[s] the dissenters for their failure to keep to their natural place. They transcend their God-given size, their place in His creation. Their monstrosity was the defilement of nature. It was the ambition of the bourgeois radicals that he indicted” (Kramnick, 1977:36).

These insect reptiles, whilst they go on only caballing and toasting, only fill us with disgust; if they go above their natural size, and increase the quantity, whilst they keep the quality, of their venom, they become objects of the greatest terror. A spider in his natural size is only a spider, ugly and loathsome; and his flimsy net is only fit for catching flies. But, good God! Suppose a spider as large as an ox, and that he spread cables about us; all the wilds of Africa would not produce anything so dreadful (from Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians, quoted by Kramnick, 1977:36).

Through the utilisation of this dichotomy, attribution of non-naturalness to other political ideologies, and reservation of the natural exclusively for the conservative, the transformative aspect of the conservative canon ceases to blur the fundamental difference between conservative and non-conservative politics. Since promoted forms are natural, since these are not arbitrary products of individual intellect but are developed organically through centuries
in accordance with the universal and transcendent laws of nature, promoting these forms turns out to be the defence of the natural inheritance of society against the ambitions of the modern ideologies.

In this conservative interpretation, nature is the “substratum of history” (Chapman, 1967:124), and natural social forms are thought to emerge in the due course of history in accordance to these laws of nature (Schuettinger, 1970:51). Since these social forms emerge free from deliberate human practice, the defence and promotion of these natural forms cannot be seen as genuine interventions and distortion of individuals in social reality (see Kersbergen & Kremer, 2008:86). Thus, provided that a particular socio-political change empowers or re-establishes natural social forms, it can still be regarded as essentially a conservative alteration. The distinction between natural and arbitrary social forms thus clarifies the area of convergence between conserving and altering, and reclaims the ground to argue for the exceptionality of conservatism.

One thing that is interesting about this conservative strategy is that it implies the rejection of a distinction proposed by ancient philosophers between physis and nomos. Originating in the pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, physis and nomos denotes an ontological and epistemological distinction between the plane of universal reality that is the subject of objective knowledge, and the plane of segmented and particular reality the knowledge of which is conventional and subjective. As Strauss explains in The City and Man:

> it is the first things and the coming into being attending on the first things which these men mean by “nature” [physis]; both the first things and whatever arises through them, as distinguished from human action, are “by nature”. The things which are by nature stand at the opposite pole from the things which are by nomos (ordinarily rendered as “law” or “convention”), i.e. things which are (…) only by men holding them to be or positing that they are or agreeing as to their being (Strauss, 1964:14).

In the widespread comprehension which originated in the sophistic philosophy, physis corresponds to the physical reality which is the subject of natural sciences, while nomos corresponds to the laws and social norms, or socio-political reality which is the subject of humanities. The pair, once used in its pre-Socratic sense, therefore operates to define the social forms and cultural beliefs as purely conventional phenomena lacking any universal and final truth as their grounding. For sophists, the distinction is particularly useful to make their claims on utmost social and ethical relativism (see Groarke, 1990:49-52).
But against such extremely relativistic views, conservative claims on the existence of natural social forms can be understood as the rejection of a clear-cut epistemological and ontological distinction between physical and social phenomenon as is proposed by the dichotomy between *physis* and *nomos*. The conservative cannon, at least in the instances where the dichotomy between natural and artificial is utilised, do not see social forms as purely conventional phenomena that cannot be categorised with reference to any transcendent and non-conventional truth. Instead, for social forms and changes, it suggests a distinction between natural and arbitrary. For instance, there are unnatural, arbitrary transformations that “result from humans competing with nature,” as well as the natural transformations (de Bruyn, 1996:232-233). Likewise, Burke is the supporter of only “a natural aristocracy, not an artificial aristocracy” (Huntington, 1957:462).

To talk in terms of this distinction, if *physis* stands for the field of objective reality and universal truth, then for the conservative canon it cannot be seen as exclusive to the physical, extra-social reality. There are some objective laws or universal historical dynamics that determine the natural emergence and organic development of these conventional social forms. This is not to deny the significance of conventions in social relations, but for conservatives there are some fundamental realities about the individual and social existence. For instance, the ontological imperfection of individuals, existence of a hierarchical order in societies or the accumulation of practical experiences into traditions are not conventional beliefs but objective conditions and dynamics (see de Maistre, 1970:274-275; Kramnick, 1977:30; Strauss, 1970:170-171; White, 1994:3; and part 2.1.4). They are natural in the sense that their emergence is not the consequence of intentional human design and practice.

If the distinction between *nomos* and *physis* is to be used at all, then the social environment should be seen as being conditioned by the *physis* to remain in line with the conservative canon, and thus is located somewhere between these two poles of that binary opposition. To explain: first, there are some fundamental realities about the human condition and the dynamics of social life, such as the inherent anti-social inclinations of human beings (Stanlis, 1986:168) or the universal dynamics of the market (Burke, 1999:51). Their existence or validity is not subjected to conventions. They are 'natural', and therefore they should be seen as belonging to the *physis*. These fundamental truths can be called the First Nature (FN). This FN conditions social forms; it shapes and determines those healthy, natural, and sustainable social forms. If one uses the distinction proposed by Hume in his *Treatise of Human Nature* between the artificial and the arbitrary, even if these forms are artificial in these sense that
they can only exist in a social environment, they are not arbitrary as they “proceed immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflexion” (quoted by Wilkins, 1967:50-51). These social forms - and only these – that are conditioned by and compatible with the FN, can themselves be regarded as natural. Indeed, in the conservative canon these non-arbitrary forms are sometimes labelled as the Second Nature (SN) of individuals (see White, 1994:35), and are regarded as categorically superior to arbitrary social forms imposed by non-conservative ideologies.

This second nature should not be taken mistaken as if denoting any social forms which are appropriated by individuals. Instead, the term always implies a selective approach to social forms. Some social forms are vilified as unnatural, arbitrary, or even monstrous. Burke, for instance, denotes equality as “unnatural, a ‘monstrous fiction’” and claims that “any attempt to implement it will be about as productive (and disgusting) as attempts to cross-breed men and sheep” (Femia, 2001:25). Hence, conservatism should thus be defined not as the defence of any particular status quo but as the promotion of the SN. As Schuetttinger underlines,

It is all but meaningless to say that a conservative is someone who believes in the status quo or who [end of p. 26] favors gradual change. If this were so, doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist in some countries would be “conservatives,” as would democratic socialists in Sweden as well as supporters of the free enterprise system in the United States. Obviously, such widely divergent political factions cannot be said to share a common philosophy of government, no matter how broadly defined. The term “conservative,” if it is to be of any use at all, must mean someone who wishes to conserve certain selected principles from a particular tradition... (Schuetttinger, 1970:26-27) [Emphasis added]

In the first glance, the use of that binary opposition between natural and arbitrary seems sufficient to demonstrate the fundamental difference between conservatism and ideational ideologies, and to exceptionalise conservatism; while all non-conservative ideologies identify a utopia and intervene in the status quo in order to implement arbitrary social forms to realise that utopia, conservatism simply promotes the natural social forms without urging a speculative utopia. Customs, traditions, and other social forms promoted by the conservatives derive their legitimacy from their relationship with the FN, or the plane of physis. From the time of Burke, one of the main suggestions of conservative thinkers is following nature in social and political matters (Wilkins, 1967:1387-139). Therefore, the normative value of these forms is independent of human appraisal, just as their foundation is independent of human intention. Conservative politics can thus be said to be founded within the plane of...
physis, and to be categorically different from the rest of the ideologies, which disregard natural social forms and attempt to promote alternative or artificial ones.

This distinction between natural and arbitrary can be seen in the texts of the Weimar radical conservatives. They reject liberal capitalist forms of Weimar Germany as they lack “a historical or organic connection” with the German culture (Muller, 1991:703). Hence, despite their intent to transform society extensively in order to re-establish so-called authentic German social forms, they did not think of themselves as equal to other revolutionaries who promote a utopian view formulated through abstract theorising. Rather, they were simply urging to resurrect the natural way of things and substitute them for the artificially created liberal socio-political forms of the Republic. Their intent was nothing but to “restore the virtues of the past [through] radical or revolutionary action” (Muller, 1987:19). Likewise, classical Burkean line also assumes the distinction between natural and arbitrary, and promotes the former against the latter. As Femia quotes from the Reflections,

What is natural is healthy and enduring; what is unnatural is corrupt and decadent. Government must therefore follow ‘the pattern of nature’. Just as the physical traits of plants and animals and human beings are passed down from one generation to another, so we should ‘transmit our government and our privileges’ in the same manner. This will ensure that our ‘political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world’ (Femia, 2001:23) [Emphasis added].

The dichotomy between the natural and artificial is thus utilised by the conservative corpus to underline conservative exceptionalism: either through literal conservation or through socio-political transformation, conservatives always argue for the promotion of natural social forms, or the SN. And these natural forms are not designed by imperfect individual intellect but are the outcomes of objective, universal social dynamics and principles. Conservatism differentiates from all other ideologies at this crucial point. It does not seek to impose the visions of an arbitrary utopia emerged from the theoretical mind. Conservatism is essentially modest in this particular sense. The intention of conservatives is always to resurrect and never to invent. As Kirk accurately claims, they perceive themselves as concerned for “the regeneration of spirit and character – with the perennial problem of the inner order of soul”, or for “the restoration of the ethical understanding” (Kirk, 1987:472).

Such arguments surely raise many questions about the epistemological status of the conservative subject, the specific content of SN, and the ways in which it is integrated into conservative policies. For instance, once the epistemological imperfection of individuals is
accepted, how can conservatives know for sure the validity of the distinction between natural and arbitrary social forms? Even if the possibility of individuals obtaining this knowledge as well as the full content of the set of natural social forms is accepted, how can the knowledge of the proper way to empower or re-create these natural social forms be actively gained? Provided that the so-called natural social forms are not constructed artefacts but organically developed entities, is it possible to intentionally (re-)construct something that is essentially organic? All these questions beg for comprehensive investigations. Nevertheless, I regard one problem related to the epistemological status of the conservative subject as deserving more attention than the others. This problem is the possibility of the conservative canon to sustain the distinction between natural and arbitrary forms while maintaining its non-intrusive stance that refrains from any reference to the theoretical and speculative mind. In the remaining parts of 4.3 I thus reflect on one simple question: can the conservative canon utilise the distinction between the natural and the arbitrary without violating its so-called exceptional status?

This question surely has a deconstructive dimension. Unlike the other mentioned questions which ask for an evaluation of the conservative arguments in relation to some external criteria, the question I intend to reflect upon focuses on the internal operation of the conservative corpus to decontest the SN, or the 'natural social forms'. In this sense, the question begs for a parasitic reading, or for a reflection on the operation of the term nature within the conservative canon. And beyond being a deconstructive question, this particular problem is significant in the context of assessing the plausibility of conservative exceptionalism. If the conservative canon fails to refer to the concepts of nature and natural social forms without utilising the theoretical mind, and consequently falling into the speculative arbitrariness or into the sphere of nomos, then the self-image of conservatism as an exceptional ideology will be groundless, and conservatism will be unable to diversify from other modern ideologies with its so-called non-intrusiveness.

Any given form of the conservative canon includes some socio-political suggestions. For instance, Burke’s Reflections suggests that the French people should abolish Jacobean rule and implement a different constitution (Stanlis, 1986:101-102); radical conservatives in Weimar argued to restore the virtues of the past (Muller, 1987:19); Robert Peel abolishes the established corn laws (Gash, 1977:98), Neoconservatives advise to re-empower the traditional authorities against the prominence of liberalism (Halper & Clarke, 2004:55) and David Cameron declares his agenda for the “Big Society” (Cameron, 2010). All these
suggestions, whatever their differences from each other, employ the same conservative strategy of referring to the term *nature* to ground their plausibility. In other words, these suggestions are all argued, against their non-conservative alternatives, to be the superior choices for their affirmative relation with nature or the natural way of things in society. They are seen either as corresponding to the natural social forms which are present or should already have been present had the over-ambitious modern mind not intervened, or they are seen as empowering these natural social forms as against the arbitrary ones.

For instance, Burke’s call to the French people to abolish Jacobean rule and to focus on their particular inheritance in order to establish a French constitution is imagined to be plausible for proposing the natural way. According to this, the constitution desired by Burke for France is the constitution that should already be in effect had the French revolutionaries not abolished it or disrupted the natural changes leading to it (Blakemore, 1988:7). And even if they introduce a change in the *status quo*, the repealing of the Corn Law was a plausible conservative policy, for it supposedly ensured the preservation and promotion of social harmony and cooperation, which is regarded by conservatives as the natural features of any healthy society. In this sense, there is nothing incomprehensible in Peel’s describing the repeal of the Corn Laws as “the most conservative act of [my] life” (Gash, 1977:98). Likewise, while arguing the “Big Society” as a plausible alternative to the “Big State” of the labour party, Cameron points at the derivative effects of the latter to the natural social bonds, and suggests a remake. In a speech he delivered in 2009, Cameron argues that;

> The paradox at the heart of big government is that by taking power and responsibility away from the individual, it has only served to individuate them. (…) The once natural bonds that existed between people - of duty and responsibility - have been replaced with the synthetic bonds of the state - regulation and bureaucracy.

> (…)

> Our alternative to big government is the big society. But we understand that the big society is not just going to spring to life on its own: we need strong and concerted government action to make it happen. We need to use the state to remake society (Cameron, 2009).

As is seen here, conservative policies cannot be limited with a literal conservation of any establishment; instead, the main definitive axis of the conservative policies lies in their affirmation and promotion of the natural social forms.
To further clarify the affirmative relationship between ‘nature’ and the social forms suggested by the conservatives, we must underline once again that in the conservative canon these forms are labelled as the second nature for individuals, and argued to be categorically superior to the arbitrary and merely conventional social forms. The distinctive feature of natural social forms is their exclusive relationship with the first nature, or the fundamental non-conventional realities about the human condition and social dynamics. They are not 'synthetic'. In the conservative canon, these arbitrary social forms - such as slavery, same-sex marriages, or a liberal German state - may only have a conventional foundation at best.\(^{49}\) Unlike the natural social forms which emerge organically, these arbitrary forms can only be imposed on a society (de Bruyn, 1996:232-233). Even if these arbitrary forms may be defended by some theoretical arguments, they lack any firm link with the practical experiences and objective reality, and are in contrast with the universal truths on human condition. They are thus bound to remain essentially contestable, and are unable to sustain long term social stability. They are arbitrary in this particular sense.

But natural social forms, unlike their arbitrary counterparts, are those traditions, political structures, and cultural beliefs emerged by, and in harmony with, the first nature. These social forms are, for instance, compatible with the epistemological and ontological imperfection of individuals, as they provide a fixed and limited semantic field to individuals and, keep their destructive inclinations under control (Disraeli, 1970:226-227). Empowered intermediary social institutions like family or church, or the existence of a state signified as paternal figure of authority, are examples of such natural social forms (Schuettinger, 1970:15). One thing should be noted here: compatibility with the fundamental characteristics of the human condition is not the only feature of these natural social forms. Limiting the individuals and providing them a secure epistemological foothold is not sufficient for the conservative canon to label a belief, culture, or behaviour pattern as natural. Along with the necessity of being compatible with universal truths of the human condition, natural forms are those which supposedly shaped, at least in the first place, as a result of organic development processes. These forms are thought to “arise from a thousand nameless circumstances, produce a tact that regulates without difficulty, what laws and magistrates cannot regulate at all” (Burke, 1999:45).

\(^{49}\) Of course the specific social forms that are regarded as unnatural is subject to change from one conservative to another. I highlight the problematic that underlies this diversity in the coming pages.
This is where conservatism somehow differentiates itself from an outright authoritarianism. Authoritarian policies and socio-political forms, no matter how well they may function to put limitations and to provide footholds for individuals, cannot be precisely seen as natural forms if they are fabricated or constructed by individuals. Natural forms that are promoted by conservatives should initially be shaped by the dynamics and processes that are universal, valid for all societies, and therefore regarded as a part of the First Nature. Hence, they must develop organically through a kind of natural selection process in the first place. In Burke’s words, these natural forms, the real traditions, customs, constitutions of societies are the ones that have passed the ‘test of time’ (Stanlis, 1986:162). A natural social form should be treated “with respect due its age” (Kramnick, 1977:25).

To sum up the argument to this point: as I demonstrated in 4.2, the validity of exceptionalist claims on the non-ideational, moderate, and non-intrusive character of conservative ideology are questionable against ‘justified extensive transformations’ which can be witnessed in most of the variants of the conservative conservatism. But still, one dichotomy that is commonly utilised in many conservative arguments, albeit implicitly, can provide an explanation of the appearance of the referred theme while preserving the exceptionality of the conservative way of doing politics. Through the utilisation of this dichotomy between natural and arbitrary, the ever present transformative aspects of the conservative canon can be explained by suggesting that conservatism is in favour of promoting the natural social forms, and thus it conserves the natural form of society and politics even with rather radical and transformative means. These forms, promoted for being natural and making up our Second Nature, are regarded as such for being in an affirmative relation with the First Nature in two important senses: (a) These natural social forms are compatible with some fundamental truths about human conditions, and (b) these forms emerge as a consequence of the result of universal social dynamics.

This argumentation on distinguishing the natural and arbitrary social forms clearly depends on a preceding knowledge of the First Nature. In other words, promoting some social forms for their naturalness necessitates having the knowledge on the mentioned fundamental truths and universal dynamics. For instance, in order to argue for a fundamental difference in terms of naturalness between the existing uncodified constitution of Britain and (for example) a republican proposal for its substitution with a codified constitution, one must already have the knowledge that the universally valid and natural way for the emergence of a social form which – in this case, the constitution that denotes the fundamentals of the political structure – is an organic development that occurs only through the accumulation of the experiences of
successive generations. Likewise, in order to claim a difference between heterosexual marriages and same-sex marriages, one must already have the knowledge of the human nature with which same-sex marriages supposedly contradict. Otherwise, that claim on the arbitrariness of same-sex marriages will itself be arbitrary. In order to utilise the dichotomy between natural and arbitrary while sustaining the exceptionality of conservatism as a non-intrusive ideology despite its transformative themes, the knowledge of the First Nature must therefore precede the knowledge of the Second Nature. The latter, that is the knowledge of the natural social forms, should be underpinned to the knowledge of the former.

Nevertheless, in grounding its fundamental difference from other ideologies with the use of natural-arbitrary dichotomy, conservatism distances itself from the arbitrariness of the abstract reasoning and refers to practical experiences as the ultimate epistemological grounds for conservative claims. It is again Burke in whom we can witness the first example of this distrust of such “abstract rational speculation”:

Burke required an intimate knowledge of details, amounting to empirical verification, before he would say anything of political plans or constitutional arrangements: ‘I must see with my own eyes, I must, in a manner, touch with my own hands, not only the fixed but the momentary circumstances, before I could venture to suggest any political project whatsoever.’ (Stanlis, 1986:101-102).

In other words, the binary opposition between natural and arbitrary, at least in the way it operates within the conservative canon, necessitates the derogation of the theoretical knowledge as against the practical one. And that is why the opposite of the argument proposed above should also be true: since conservative claims refuse the use of arbitrary theory as their epistemological ground, the knowledge of the universal truths that form the First Nature should be derived from our daily experiences of the natural social forms, or the Second Nature. The notions that are claimed to be universal truths, such as the ‘normality’ of heterosexual marriages and ‘abnormality’ of same sex marriages should be derived from practical experiences rather than speculative argumentation. The conservative corpus is otherwise bound to refer to the “abstract rational speculation” (Stanlis, 1986:102), and hence will fail to distinguish itself from non-conservative ideologies at any fundamental level. But leaving aside the philosophical difficulty in distinguishing between the knowledge derived

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50 That is why Burke “ridicules the reformers for their belief in natural right” and claims that “[a]rguments from a natural right of self-government have no limits”. According to him, “[t]hey are metaphysical abstractions oblivious to and subversive of the real basis of right which is history as the codifier of national experience and tradition” (Kramnick, 1977:25).
from practice and knowledge obtained through theoretical reasoning, a more peculiar paradox of the operation of the term *nature* within the conservative canon surfaces here: provided that it abstains from utilising the theoretical mind to obtain the knowledge of First Nature which is to be used as the main referent in distinguishing the arbitrary from the natural social forms, the conservative canon needs a preceding knowledge of the latter, the natural social forms, so that the experience of these natural forms, and not the arbitrary ones, can be valued when defining the First Nature. Then, to abstain from any 'abstract rational speculation', the knowledge of First Nature and Second Nature must reciprocally precede each other.

To grasp the reason for this apparent paradox, one should remember that First Nature does not totally determine or perfectly condition all aspects of social life. In other words, the causal relationship between the shaping of natural social forms, and the universal truths about human condition and social dynamics, is not absolute and definitive. Despite the universality of certain truths, such as human imperfection or the accumulation of the practical experiences of generations in traditions, societies are not composed only of the so called natural forms that are in an affirmative relation with those underlying universal truths. Societies may have certain norms, behaviour sets, beliefs, or political systems that do not correspond with the First Nature. Indeed, all societies represent a heterogeneous formation in this regard. It is actually the raison d’être of the conservative ideology. If there was a direct and unmolested determination of the social forms by the First Nature, then there would be no need for, and no possibility of, a politics that promotes natural social forms against the arbitrary ones. In this perspective, the mere existence of the conservative ideology marks the existence of arbitrary social forms next to the natural ones. And the problem that comes to the surface with the acknowledgement of this heterogeneity is: since identifying the natural social forms is key not only to determining which forms to promote but also to reach an understanding of the First Nature, and if natural and arbitrary forms coexist in every society, how can conservatives distinguish one from the other if not with the help of imperfect individual intellect, the ‘abstract rational speculation’ they decry?

While the knowledge of Second Nature should be preceded by the knowledge of the First Nature in order to ensure the refrain of conservatives from the utilisation of the theoretical mind, the knowledge of this First Nature also necessitates a preceding knowledge of the Second Nature to be able to distinguish natural from arbitrary social forms and promote the natural ones. As this paradoxical situation demonstrates, the utilisation of the opposition between natural and arbitrary, and the attribution of naturalness to the forms promoted by
conservatives, necessitates a theoretical grounding. Against Burke, who denounces the constitution of the revolutionary France for being “modelled on an abstract and theoretical interpretation of reality” and praises its British counterpart for it is “constituted in the natural order of things,” and therefore “reflects the harmonious order of the cosmos” (Blakemore, 1988:16), it should be remembered that the suggestion of deriving the knowledge of the natural – exclusively from practical experiences – is highly problematical.

Exceptionalist claims relying upon the supposition that conservatism promotes nature and the natural, or the knowledge of which is derived from the practical experiences of real people rather than ‘abstract rational speculation’, leads us to a dead end with contradictory conclusions. To overcome these contradictions, it should be granted that every claim on nature and naturalness needs a theoretical framework or an abstract foundation to operate.

This is the main reason why the strategy of obtaining knowledge of First Nature through practical experiences is ill fated. The naturalness attributed to the beliefs, behaviour patterns, or political organisations that are promoted by the conservatives preclude conservatism to secure itself from the sort of arbitrary and speculative thinking that is regarded as imperfect, interventionist to the status quo, and disruptive. As I demonstrated in this section, the operation of the term nature within the conservative canon must depend on a speculative distinction between natural and arbitrary social forms. We can argue that the natural is always founded within the arbitrary, and conservative politics, though neither through literal conservation of the status quo nor through the promotion of the natural social forms, can be differentiated from other political ideologies on any fundamental level. Just like the liberals, socialists, or fascist, conservatives not only intend to conserve some social forms in the lexical sense of the word, but also intend to alter some others. And their promotion of some social forms for their naturalness is founded on abstract reasoning, just as the reasoning of socialists or liberals are within their own promotion of other social forms.

If we take the simple claim that ‘conservatism conserves, others alter’ as the first and poorly established line of defence of the conservative exceptionalism, the second line of defence that relies upon a binary opposition between the natural and the arbitrary also seems not to be well established. This second line also fails to confine the conservative ideology within the field of ultimate moderation and pure conservation as against the theory-based transformative politics of the non-conservative ideologies. Instead, conservatism appears to be a weave of discourses that is developed theoretically from some ethical-political decisions, like any other ideology.
This means that conservatism is ready to preserve only those social forms which are seen as worthy of being conserved. And the criterion that determines the worth of social forms is textual, and therefore speculative and contestable. If the distinction between *physis* and *nomos* is to be employed here, one can say that the basic referent of the conservative canon is within the *nomos* rather than the *physis*.

As I will try to demonstrate in the next part, the inadequacy of the assertions to confine conservatism within the sphere of literal conservation as against alteration, and defining it as the promotion of the natural social forms as against abstract interventionist politics, does not simply indicate the need to formulate another assertion based on a third dichotomy, which can provide the groundwork for conservative exceptionalism. Instead, I will attempt to show how conservative exceptionalism is destined to fail, and that conservatism must always remain as an ideational and transformative canon, because of the epistemological position of ideologies. I will suggest in the next part that the necessary failure of conservatism should remind us of a fundamental common feature of all ideologies.
4.4 A Deconstructive Reading of the Conservative Ideology

As discussed in 4.2, the most intuitive argument of conservative exceptionalism defines conservatives as those who preserve, and denounces others as those who recklessly transform the established social forms. This exceptionalist claim is founded on the belief of a mutually exclusive dichotomous relationship between conserving and altering, or better, between conservation politics and transformation politics. But as I have argued, once the whole conservative canon is taken into account, this imagined dichotomy fails to sustain itself by identifying a clear cut differentiation between conserving and altering. Instead, transformative themes appear time and again in the conservative political prospects.

As a possible response to this failure of a rather naive exceptionalism, the dichotomy between natural and arbitrary social forms can be utilised in order to draw a clear borderline between the politics of conserving and the politics of altering, and to throw the theme of transformation back out of the conservative canon. Through proposing a distinction between the natural and arbitrary social forms, an objective presence and a solid ground of legitimacy can be attributed to certain social forms. These forms are marked as belonging to the physis and shaped by universal laws – or divine will - emerged organically without the need for intentional human agency. A fundamental difference is then argued between these natural forms and artificial ones that are shaped by the imperfect reasoning of the individuals; transformative themes in conservative politics are explained through this differentiation. Conservative approval of – or even desire for – certain transformations is legitimised with supposed promotion of the natural social forms through these extensive socio-political changes. Here, any policy, including certain forms of alteration, are regarded as conservative insofar as they intend either to conserve or to restore society in its natural form.

Nevertheless, as is discussed in part 4.3, the distinction between natural and arbitrary is itself problematic, at least in the way it is utilised in the conservative canon. Contrary to the imagination of the conservative canon, this distinction between the two is incapable of marking a categorical difference between conservative and non-conservative transformations. That is because distinguishing the natural from the arbitrary social forms is necessarily a theoretical intervention of the individual reasoning to the external, objective world. It is an intervention of the so-called speculative human intellect to the collection of phenomena that is labelled as ‘society’. In order to propose a distinction between natural and arbitrary social forms, individual reason should define the borders of the society, attribute some universal
laws governing the existence of this society, and categorise that society’s inherent formations as natural and arbitrary in accordance to these laws. This interventionist nature of the individual reasoning hampers the possibility of using this dichotomy to ground claims for conservative exceptionalism. That distinction necessarily relies upon individual reasoning, and thus fails to attribute an indisputable objective presence to the so-called natural social forms. It is incapable of signifying society’s natural order whose normative value stems from its separateness to the individual will. Conservative exceptionalism therefore cannot be grounded by presenting those conservative transformation policies as genuinely conservative for being in favour of the natural social order that transcends human intellectuality and holds objective presence and normative value.

In part 4.4, I focus on the inability of the dichotomy between the natural and arbitrary social forms to attribute an objective presence and normative value to some of the social forms. I argue that this failure, or better the utilisation of this dichotomy for a role that it is incapable of fulfilling, may serve as the foundation of a deconstructive reading of the conservative canon. That is so since the discourse of naturalness plays a significant role in the functioning of what might be called in a Derridean sense ‘the centre of the conservative canon’, and thereupon in the formulation of a conservative political project out of the core beliefs of conservatives, through the utilisation of that centre.

To understand this significance of the theme of naturalness and its eventual failure, we should turn to Derrida’s writings about the centre and its function. In Structure, Sign and Play, Derrida notes that a structure without a centre “represents the unthinkable itself” (Derrida, 2002:352). Every text assumes a central position in order to sustain its claim of unity, or its claim of existence as a text. Therefore, in every text or canon there is an attributed centre operating as the privileged referent. Here, the centre does not simply mean the minimal core of the text or the collection of common themes among diverse readings of the text. There may be a common core between different texts as well. But the centre, unlike a core, is the discursive element by which it arguably establishes the correspondence of the text to the extra-textual reality is established. The centre, as Derrida puts it, “reduc[es] the structurality of structure”, and it is the premise of “attempts to conceive of structure on the basis of a full presence which is beyond play” (Derrida, 2002:353). Centre, in other words, has a fixed meaning that is beyond linguistic ambiguities. It rests outside the text, and is the absolute

51 For a discussion on these core beliefs, see part 2.3.2.
epistemological guarantee for all textual claims as well as the supposed bridge between the text and the extra-textual reality, or the full presence. In the final analysis, all other suggestions are thought to derive their epistemological value from their reference to the centre. The centre is a structural necessity in this sense, and all logocentric discursive structures should have a discursive element that stand for the centre.

Read in light of these remarks about the centre as a structural necessity, what could be the discursive element that is closest to bearing the role of centre in the conservative canon? Since the core of conservative politics conceptualises individuality as an epistemologically and ontologically imperfect state, unlike some liberal texts for instance, claims of the conservative canon cannot be grounded in or justified by the individual reasoning. Insofar as human rationality is regarded by those liberal texts as the sole reliable means to fully comprehend the real and unveil the ultimate truth, referring to individual reasoning may be argued by the liberal canon, or by a part of it, to ensure the correspondence of its textual claims to the extra-textual reality. But conservatism needs another discursive element to meet this function, and I believe this element to be Society, as I will try to demonstrate in the following pages.

While disregarding the capacity of individuals in epistemological and ontological senses, conservative canon refers to a discursive element that supposedly marks an extra-individual existence while transcends individuality as the single source of truth available to human perception. As Russell Kirk notes, it sometimes “‘approaches very nearly to a theory of collective human intellect, a knowledge partially instinctive, partially conscious, which each individual inherits as his birthright and his protection’ and warns of the perils of ignoring ‘this enormous bulk of racial knowledge’” (quoted by Wilkins, 1967:59).

This discursive element which I call Society functions as the epistemological anchor of conservatism and the justifier of conservative arguments. And the capital ‘S’ of the term underlines the suggested extra-individual nature of it. This discursive element sometimes appears in Burke's writings under the banner of established, ancient constitutions; and for Blakemore, these constitutions are regarded as transcendent, sacred entities:

Burke ultimately envisions the ancient constitutions as an analogue of the mystical body of Christ, incorporating and uniting Christendom in and through the Church. In this context he imagines the Constitution's individual members united into their corporate body, re-fleeting and reaffirming their part in the mysterious whole. The implicit metaphor is suggestively Trinitarian. Thus, to
tamper with the ancient Constitution was to tamper with reality as God constituted it through man to tamper or change it was to commit political sacrilege (Blakemore, 1988:8).

Hence, what should be noted here is that in different variants of conservatism, different names such as constitution, state, culture, community, society or nation can be given to this centre (see Blakemore, 1988:8; Disraeli, 1970b:228; Femia, 2001:29; Muller, 1991:700). Nevertheless, these are all different names belong to a single discursive element that meets the same function in these different conservative texts: An interwoven web of organically developed values, norms, social forms and behaviour sets that determine our self-perception, world-view, and daily interactions. Conservative canon personifies this interwoven web, treats it as a subject-in-itself;\(^5\) it is this subject, this Society, which is seen to be the only reliable alternative to the imperfect human reasoning for being the centre of the canon.

This Society is thought to contain a type of knowledge that is separate from the one cultivated rationally and consciously in the minds of individuals. This knowledge is assumed to be embedded in traditions, customs, prejudices, and other social forms, and is argued to be categorically superior to the knowledge originated in the individual reasoning. The following remarks of Russell Kirk leaves no doubt about this aspect of the conservative canon:

Human beings, said Burke, participate in the accumulated experience of their innumerable ancestors; very little is totally forgotten. Only a small port of this knowledge, however, is formalized in literature and deliberate instruction; the greater part remains embedded in instinct, common custom, prejudice, and ancient usage. Ignore this enormous bulk of racial knowledge, or tinker impudently with it, and man is left awfully afloat in the sea of emotions and ambitions, with only the scanty stock of formal learning and the puny resources of individual reason to sustain him (Kirk, 1987:38).

The distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge, which is openly suggested by some conservatives like Oakeshott (see Oakeshott, 1991c:12) but implied in the rhetoric of many, can also be read as underlining this epistemological primacy of the Society. Perceived as the counterpart of the practical knowledge which is acquired “simply through experience, through direct exposure to life” (Nisbet, 1986:31-32), theoretical knowledge is thought to have an indirect relation with its object as it springs from the human intellect, or reached

\(^5\) “To Burke the relationship most proper for a citizen and his state was analogous to that of a son toward his father; the state was the social father of each citizen. This kinship was particularly evident when Burke considered the weaknesses of the state. He believed that citizens ‘should approach to the faults of the state as to the wounds of a father, with pious awe and trembling solicitude’. Burke's feeling of ‘filial reverence’ toward the state was no mere ornamental figure of speech. It was the natural consequence of his conception of the state as a divine instrument given to man for his social salvation” (Stanlis, 1986:210).
through self-reflection. Theoretical knowledge is thought to be “acquire[d] from the textbook, from learning about something that can be presented in the form of abstract or general principal, something that is susceptible to prescriptive formulae” (Nisbet, 1986:32). Although not seen as totally invaluable, theoretical knowledge is believed to be subjected to certain limitations due to the epistemological imperfection of individuals, and consequently, incapable of being the primary guide of human behaviour. As Kramnick explains, for the conservative thinking,

“Our naked, shivering nature,” is weak, inadequate, inclined to evil, and much too limited in rational capacity to allow one to cope without external crutches. Mankind needs ancient ideas, prejudices, and ancient prescriptive institutions, like monarchy, aristocracy, and the Church to clothe and cover its nakedness (Kramnick, 1977:153).

Indeed, for Burke, “[i]t is a sad symptom of disorder and trouble when people turn to theorizing about government. It is the eternal longing of the conservative for the elimination of rational thought from politics which Burke proclaims here” (Kramnick, 1977:23). While degrading theoretical knowledge as such, conservative canon praises practical knowledge for not relying upon imperfect individual rationality but is thought to be derived from an unmediated, direct experience of the object in question.53

Once this epistemological distinction is applied to socio-political thinking, the advantage of practical knowledge over its theoretical counterpart corresponds to the superiority of the knowledge of Society over the rational knowledge on it. Efforts to develop a socio-political theory and formulate rational policy proposals are categorically refused, as they are choosing an indirect approach to society that reaches the knowledge of it via the distortion of imperfect rationality of individuals. For the conservative thought, “it is best when ideology and theory are not applied to social questions” (Kramnick, 1977:23). Instead of theorising on society and trying to ‘invent’ a new knowledge, conservatives suggest finding out the knowledge that already exists within the social forms, and utilising it in formulating socio-political policies. That is the thinking behind Burke's proud announcement that, “I put my foot in the tracks of our forefathers, where I can neither wander nor stumble” (Burke, 2005:55). The significance of this practical approach in providing an epistemological foothold for the conservative canon is to such an extent that Walter Elliot argues conservatism to be based on “an observation of life and not a priori reasoning” (quoted by Green, 2002:3). Lincoln Allison defines

53 For an analysis of this conservative epistemology see part 2.1.2.
conservatism as a “political anti-philosophy” (Allison, 1984:2). And going even one step further, Scruton argues conservatism to be founded in the individual’s sense of his society and its will to live (Scruton, 2001:10).

Here, society is no longer a mere object of socio-political thinking in the way it is utilised within the conservative canon. The difference between individual and society is not a difference of scale, but a truly fundamental one. Society becomes a subject-in-itself that accumulates human experiences and contains some form of knowledge that comes into existence without the need of human rationality. Thus, society turns into Society and becomes the epistemological foothold of the conservative ideology. Conservative canon, relying on this foothold, proclaims itself as respecting the Society, defending it and promoting the wisdom embedded in it against the ambitions of ‘modern ideologies’ to reshape society with the guidance of abstract reason. In this sense, Society holds an exceptional place in the conservative argumentation. Referring to Society is regarded as the ultimate manoeuvre for justification. Rationally constructed theories are countered by concrete facts of Society, and theoretical knowledge on society is countered by practical knowledge of Society. An indication of this 'realism' is Burke's praise of the virtuous man for not being naïve and idealistic like the liberal but “compromising his ideals with the realities of the world” (quoted by Kramnick, 1977:31). Likewise, praising the British conservatism against other variants, Lord Ian Gilmore proudly announces British conservatism not to be systemic but a political movement that is empirical and that takes circumstances into account (Gilmore, 1980b:xi-xii). Therefore, in the conservative canon, Society is the bridge between the text and the extra-textual reality. It is for this reason that I suggest Society to be the centre of the conservative canon.

Centrality of Society and the compensation of individual rationality with this centre is a cure for not only the epistemological imperfection of individuals, but also their ontological shortcomings. If, as the core of conservative politics presumes, individuals are ontologically imperfect and have an anti-social drive naturally (see part 2.1.4), then they need the knowledge of morality, and of virtues such as altruism, hospitality, obedience, and temperance, in order to sustain their existence. And since imperfect human rationality and its theoretical argumentations are incapable of providing an objective and solid ground for such knowledge, the sole reliable source is again Society and its organically developed natural social forms, such as traditions, customs, and established social values. Therefore, besides
being an epistemological foothold, Society as the centre of conservatism is also an ontological guarantee of our existence.

The traces of this ontological role of Society can be found in many conservative writings. Criticising the policies of French revolutionaries, de Maistre argues for the divine roots of Ancien Régime and warns that by separating himself from God and from the social order formed in accordance to His will, man “does not cease to be powerful, for this is a privilege of nature; but his action [becomes] negative, and tends only to destroy” (Schuettinger, 1970:281). And more than a century later, German radical conservative Freyer underlines the same relation between individuals and Society, and notes that “individuals [can] only escape the limitless flux of subjective life by internalizing the delimiting purposes provided by culture” (Muller, 1991:700). As is apparent in both of these remarks, besides being the centre of the conservative canon, or better because of this central role, Society is also the grounds for our existence in its physical sense. In Wilhelm Röpke’s words, once individuals escape this interwoven web of organically developed values, norms, and behaviour sets, and lose “the sense of tradition, principles and history (...) together with [our] social roots,” they become radicals who are “the prey of the moment’s whims and [who] passion into ephemeral slogans and inflammatory speeches” (Schuettinger, 1970:72). Therefore, it is nothing but traditions and other social forms which “prevent chaos and (...) provide the resources and boundaries for [people’s] future activities” (Devigne, 1994:17).

But if Society is the centre of the conservative canon and operates as I suggest above, then it should have a dual function. As Derrida highlights, when understood in a rather traditional way, the centre of the text should also put a limit on this by forbidding any free play within itself, while still allowing the free play of concepts, metaphors and definitions within the text (Derrida, 2002:352). And this second function of forbidding the free play marks the exceptional position of the centre in comparison to other discursive elements of the text. If the centre differentiates itself from other discursive elements with its fixity, then its relationship with the text should be a unique one. To explain, if text is the room, then the centre of the text must be the hallway, the solid and rigid passage that is not part of the room but that links the room to the outer world. For its exceptional and external position, the centre of a text has to rest outside that text rather than being in the centre of the text (Derrida, 2002:352). Actually, the centre owes its ability to function as a centre and an epistemological foothold to this externality. If the centre is located by the text to its very centre, the centre would then be reduced to just another discursive element that is essentially contestable. Only
in such an external position can any discursive element remain immune to textual fluctuations, operate as a permanent reference point, attribute an epistemological value to the text, and render the text possible with its all alternative readings.

This general claim on the externality of the centre is valid for the relation between Society and the conservative canon as well. Since the writings of Burke, conservatives are aware that if Society is to be the justifying referent in their argumentation, and to compensate the epistemological and ontological imperfection of individuals, it should be defined as a self-sufficient whole with a fixed, fully decontested meaning. If Society is not defined as a subject-in-itself that is external to the text, but perceived as a mere human artefact subject to change and different interpretations, then any political argument grounded in Society will be ambiguous, contestable, and unconvincing. As Burke acknowledges,

> [s]ociety requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individual, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can be done only by a power out of themselves (quoted by Kirk, 1987:60).

Considering the points explained in part 4.1, it is easy to see that with its external position and central role, Society operates as the logos of the conservative canon. It stands for the ultimate, transcendent, and extra-textual truth; it stands for the Real. Society marks the field of objective presence not subjected to the decontestation of individuals, and assumed to be the anchor tying conservative canon to the absolute real. In this privileged role, it functions as the ultimate reference for the justification of conservative arguments and the critique of non-conservative ones. Conservative canon emphasises an affirmative link between its claims and the wisdom of traditions, or the will of Society to live (see Burke, 2005:55; Scruton, 2001:10). It formulates itself to be in harmony with Society and to ensure the healthy development and survival of natural forms of the Society that are the only reliable hallways to the Real and to the objective knowledge of communal life. For instance according to Burke, “[a]ll that men can do through politics (...) is to provide the means of change that will bring society into harmony with the moral law” (Stanlis, 1986:112). On the other hand, conservative canon criticises its alternatives for being disregardful of and harmful for

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54 In particularity of Burke, Blakemore confirms this suggestion. For Burke, he claims, “[t]he British Constitution (...) is constituted in the natural order of things: it reflects the harmonious order of the cosmos. In contrast to the new French Constitution modelled on an abstract and theoretical interpretation of reality, the British Constitution is an expression of the Logos” (Blakemore, 1988:16).
Society. Thus, while non-conservative policy proposals intending to change society in accordance to a political imagination are criticised for being abstract and speculative constructs detached from reality, conservatism marks itself as a set of political and social claims that rely upon the knowledge embedded in Society itself. And since the centre of the conservative canon is Society rather than rationality, it is not even necessary for conservatives to present elaborate theoretical explanations on the utility of each tradition, custom, or prejudice while presenting its arguments in favour of social forms. Conservative canon primarily seeks the justification of its claims in Society itself. Even if we may not fully comprehend the utility of certain social forms such as a seemingly odd tradition, the mere fact of its existence as a part of the Society is assumed to be a sufficient ground for the knowledge of the utility of that tradition. As Burke defends the commons against those seeking for a reform in its structure, “Rather than bring the Commons before the bar of speculative theories of natural right, one should treat it with the respect due its age” (Kramnick, 1977:25)

The reason for the significance of the theme of naturalness within the functioning of the centre of the conservative canon should, by now, be obvious. In the logocentric structure of the conservative canon, signifying Society as the centre of the text necessitates the discourse of naturalness. Society is externalised through marking it as a subject-in-itself. And this is done by presenting Society as emerged without the need of intentional human action, naturally and with its natural social forms in accordance to the transcendent laws that govern social existence. Traditions and other social forms to be promoted are perceived and praised as natural entities that develop in accordance to a peculiar evolutionary process during which individual experiences of individuals accumulate and turn into these forms. Thus, by explaining the existence of Society through universal laws, Society is given a ground of objective existence and transcendence. It is thought to have its historicity that is external to, and separate from, the subjective and desultory experiences of individuals.\textsuperscript{55} By attributing naturalness to Society, conservative canon reverses the prevalent modern thinking that perceives individuals as a natural entity and Society as an artefact. As Ted V. McAllister states, conservatives “consider it a gross distortion of the nature of things to think of social and political institutions as being created by individuals” (McAllister, 1996:266-267). They think of Society as a natural entity and conceptualise the relationship between individual and society in such a way that society holds the creative power rather than the opposite. “For

\textsuperscript{55} The perspective I present here highlights the link between Hegelian philosophy and the conservative canon. And this particular instance is where the Hegelian thinking becomes most obvious.
Burke, society improves man and man’s condition”, says Freeman, and the “task [of society] is creative and dynamic,” rather than vice versa (Freeman, 1980:59). This perception of Society as bearing the creative role in the emergence of the individual can be witnessed in the writings of De Maistre:

[T]here is on earth no man as such. I have seen... Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc. Thanks to Montesquieu I even know that one can be Persian, but I declare that never in my life have I seen a man – unless indeed he exists unknown to me (quoted by Nisbet, 1986:27).

And for those who may think of this reversed understanding as in contrast with certain individualist variations within the conservative canon, Scruton shows the possibility of formulating an individualism within the conservative canon despite the latter’s Society-centric argumentation:

The condition of mankind requires that individuals, while they exist an act as autonomous beings, do so only because they can first identify themselves as something greater – as members of a society, group, class, state or nation, of some arrangement to which they may not attach a name, but which they recognize instinctively at home (Scruton, 2001:24).

To emphasise the importance of marking Society as a natural entity instead of a human artefact, we should further underline that such a discursive manoeuvre is necessary in order to formulate a fully-fledged conservative political project out of the core beliefs of conservative politics. As is explained in the previous chapter of this thesis, at the core of conservative politics lays the belief of a two-dimensional imperfection of individuals. Individuals and their theoretical argumentation capacities are depicted as insufficient and incapable from the very beginning of the conservative argumentation on politics and society (see part 2.1.4). But if one criticises the theoretical capacity of all individuals, including your own, how can one secure herself to be reduced into a stance of ultimate passivity and succeed in developing a political project other than against the wide complexity of human societies? The answer of this question is hidden in the discourse of naturalness. If a political discourse is to be constructed out of a belief in the epistemological imperfection of individuals, the canon must refrain from so-called theoretical reasoning as much as possible, and refer to a logos that is not an artefact but a natural entity; it is a subject-in-itself that is external to individuality and that is therefore immune from its imperfections. In this way, the prevalent Enlightenment conception of ‘society as a malleable artefact and the individual as a natural being and primary unit of political thought’ is a threat to the very existence of the conservative political
project. Conservatives must believe in the naturalness of society and social forms, and thus must find the justification of their arguments within the notion of Society perceived as a subject-in-itself.

But even this road may not be totally safe to follow. As explained in 4.3, the theme of naturalness comes with a baggage of problems. Each distinction between the natural and artificial must be founded upon a specific theoretical framework. Therefore, utilising the term nature to suggest a fundamental distinction between so-called natural and artificial social forms is essentially a theoretical or, if one prefers, speculative undertaking. In other words, it is impossible to claim the naturalness of Society and of certain social forms without utilising abstract reasoning and falling back into the position of the so-called ‘men of letters’. Then, the theme of naturalness cannot be utilised to externalise the centre from the conservative canon. It cannot establish a non-theoretical epistemological foothold for conservative arguments and policies to rely upon. Natural Society and natural social forms are theoretical claims par excellence. Society as a natural entity is only a theoretical construct, a re-interpretation of the non-textual real, or Real. Hence, the centre of the conservative canon is not external to the text but is itself a textual construct.

The idea of Society then ceases to be a short-cut to the extra-textual reality, or a non-distorting sign of the Real. Instead, once the problematic baggage of the dichotomy between natural and artificial is acknowledged, the gap between the extra-textual society and the Society that is the centre of the conservative canon becomes apparent. But this gap does not merely exist because of a simple deficiency in the comprehension of the Real by the conservative canon.

The reason for the gap is more fundamental and related to a general logocentric fallacy. Like most of the texts that belong to the western tradition of philosophy, conservatism necessitates a centre external to itself; this need presupposes a linguistic misunderstanding that signs adequately represent their signified meanings, and that language is a transparent window on reality (Moran, 2000:448). Based on this, truly extra-textual and extra-individual entities such as Society are believed to be able to appear within the text without distortion. These are thought to be able to function as external centres and to form a transparent window to the Real. But signifiers, at least since the studies of Ferdinand Saussure on linguistics, are widely understood to be unable to signify extra-linguistic elements which will ‘seal’ their meaning and prevent any semantic displacement. Instead, Saussure showed that the signified is
inseparable from the signifier, that they are two faces of the same phenomena. He also stated that “it is impossible for sound alone, the material element, to belong to the language,” and “[in its essence the linguistic signifier] is in no way phonic” (Saussure, 1959:118). In this modern approach to linguistics, starting with Saussure, languages are perceived as closed systems of a “differential network of meaning” (Norris, 2002:24). They are unable to signify an extra-textual reality, or the unchanging logos, in an unmediated way. In a linguistic system, there are numerous ‘signs,’ each of which is composed of the signifier and the signified. But a signified of any of these signs is also a signifier by itself. In other words, in any sign, a signifier only signifies to some other signifier. Therefore, in these closed systems, meaning can never be exactly fixed or externally anchored, and “texts always overflow their supposed intentions and contexts” (Moran, 2000:454). Since a signifier signifies other signifiers in an infinite sequence, there is always an under-determination of meaning in the practice of signification. Connotations, metaphors, and analogies are all dependent on this excess meaning.

Hence, independent from the question of the existence of Society as a natural entity in the realm of the Real, the notion of organically developed natural Society – which appears within the conservative text as its centre – cannot be an undistorted, pure, and perfect sign of the one which supposedly exists in the Real. Society is bounded to remain within the text and become subject to semantic displacements, at least since the studies of Ferdinand Saussure on linguistics. Precisely for this reason, the extra-textual centre, while a requisite of the text, can exist only as a possibility or a promise within the text. Every single claim for that privileged position is only a substitute of it. But here, “[t]he substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it” (Derrida, 2002:353). Insofar as this privileged position is a sine qua non for all texts, the textual substitute-centre is the possibility of the text. But,

it [is] necessary to begin thinking that there [is] no center, that the center [can] not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center [has] no natural site, that it [is] not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play (Derrida, 2002:353-354).

Therefore, the substitute-centre signifies a lack, and an unbridgeable gap between the text and the Real which gives way to unlimited semantic possibilities. And in this sense, it also indicates the impossibility of the text.
It is for this reason that the existence of the gap between extra-textual society, and Society that lies at the centre of the conservative canon, is not the result of an inadequate comprehension of the extra-textual truth. The notion of Society as an organically emerged natural entity cannot be a transcended signified, or a transparent window on reality. It can never be an ultimate referent which says the last word and seals meaning, functioning as the ultimate measure and justifier of the conservative policies. Instead, it is bound to rely upon the theoretical mind for its construction, bound to remain textual and speculative, and subject to semantic displacement. Since it is necessarily a pseudo-centre, conservatism calls for the preservation of natural social forms are necessarily transformative calls. As the notion of Society will never perfectly correspond to the Real, but will define an imagination, a political aim, or utopia to be realised, conservatism is always an intervention with respect to the Real. Therefore, contrary to the claims of Huntington mentioned in part 2.3.2, insofar as conservatism intends to preserve the so-called natural Society or natural social forms - which will never fully correspond to the Real - conservatism must be seen as an ideational ideology seeking social and political transformations towards a specific ideal, just like other ideologies. Even if it might not be recognised as such by conservative thinkers and politicians, conceptions of a natural form of Society, or any imagined distinction between natural and artificial social forms are, and must be, largely theoretical constructs.
5 Conclusion

As is mentioned in the introduction, conservatism is not a popular subject in political theory. For most people, conservatism is more about an attachment to the present, a love for the establishment, a defence of the status quo, or a discursive cover for the promotion of class interests. In this sense, conservatism seems to present very little to be subjected of scholarly analysis. Defining Marxism can be a problem that is worth to tackle with; or locating the borderline which differentiates a liberal from a social democrat can also pose a real challenge, and therefore an interesting topic to focus on. But conservatism seems to not to pose such attractive problems for scholars. At the first glance, it is all too easy to define conservatism: conservatism is to conserve; conservatives are those who intend to conserve the establishment rather than to transform it. If you wish to conserve the socio-political establishment, then you are a conservative; if you argue for socio-political transformations, for sure, you must be something other than a conservative.

Against this simplistic understanding, I took a quote of Bertrand Russell as my starting point to analyse the conservative canon. In The Philosophy of Logical Atomism Russell defines the point of philosophy as “to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it” (Russell & Slater, 1986:172). In line with this quote, in this thesis I philosophised on conservatism starting from the most banal and intuitive suggestion about conservatism, and asked a simple question: If conservatism means to conserve, how can there be the revolutionary conservatives of the Weimar period? Is not there a fundamental commonality between the radical conservative thinking and its classical, Burkean counterpart?

In chapter 2, I tried to answer these questions. There, I first focused on the classical conservatism. After describing its emergence in the 18th century in response to the French revolution, in 2.1.2 I highlighted the epistemological outlook of this classical conservatism. There, I argued conservatism as not only a response to Enlightenment politics but also to the Enlightenment epistemology. In other words, I suggested that it is entirely possible to read classical conservatism as a defence of anti-Enlightenment epistemology which relies upon the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge, and which attributes primacy to the former. Then, in 2.1.3 I explained this epistemology’s implication to the conservative understanding of society. According to this, while emphasising practical knowledge against
the theoretical one, conservatives also praise society for accumulating this practical knowledge in social forms such as customs and traditions. And this praise is integrated with the critique of the Enlightenment’s conception of the ‘perfect’ individual. As is explained in 2.1.4, for the classical conservative conception, individuals are imperfect beings that are not only intellectually dependent on the practical knowledge accumulated in customs and traditions, but also morally dependent on social coercion.

After that part on classical conservatism, in 2.2.1, I turned to radical conservatism and explained the emergence of these revolutionary conservatives in the Weimar period due to the concerns of German conservatives about the loss of their authentic social forms. Afterwards, in the following part, I clarified these radical conservatives’ critiques toward global liberalism which is supposedly imposed to the German society to substitute its genuine German customs, traditions and conceptions. Then in part 2.2.3, I present the basic themes of the radical conservative political agenda which attempts to resurrect those social forms under threat.

After pointing at the persistence of the radical conservative position in a number of different countries around the globe in 2.2.4, in part 2.3, I changed my focus to the initial questions of the study: Can we think of radical conservatism as a genuinely conservative political position? Is it an interpretation of conservative cores, or is it simply a distortion of some conservative arguments?

To answer these questions, after discussing some possible drawbacks of developing a definition for any ideology, I focused on the problem of the definition of conservatism in 2.3.2. There, I discussed a number of different views on the definition of conservatism. After refusing the views of pro-conservative thinkers on the impossibility of defining conservatism as an ideology, I noted a second group of thinkers who tend to define conservatism by departing from its socioeconomic basis. This definition, while having its use and value, would fall short of meeting the requirements of this study for my intention is to focus only on the theory of conservatism, not its foundations in class relations, or in any other socioeconomic phenomena. Therefore, I turned to the definitions which focus on the theory of conservatism, and argue that O’Sullivan’s and Quinton’s suggestion to define conservatism through the theme of imperfection seems plausible. On the other hand, I noted that since the theme of imperfection falls short of differentiating conservatism from the political views of certain post-modern thinkers, we should further specify the particularly
conservative conception of this theme. Hence, I conclude that, rather than a general, one-dimensional imperfection, an epistemological and ontological imperfection lies in the core of conservative thought.

Relying upon this definition, in 2.3.3, I demonstrate that radical conservatives share this conservative core with classical conservatives, and hence, radical conservatism can be regarded as a part of the conservative ideology. Moreover, in the same part, I suggest to comprehend radical conservatism as a political position that is evolved from the basic conservative precepts under certain sociocultural and political circumstances which can be labelled as modernism.

These conclusions of chapter 2 lead us to some further questions: how come conservative precepts allow to such distinct interpretations? What are the limits of these interpretive possibilities? If conservative precepts can justify such extensive social transformations argued by radical conservatives, can claims on the exceptionality of conservatism still be defended?

Answering these questions necessitates reading exceptionalist claims of conservatism with a deconstructive sensibility, and locating the Althusserian Subject of the conservative ideology. Hence, before dealing with these questions, a theoretical framework should be laid. With that point in mind, in chapter 3, I focused on the history of ideology critique. In that chapter, within a historical narrative on the use of ideology as a critical term, I explained Althusser’s understanding of ideology, and the Subject’s role within it. Moreover, again in that chapter, I discussed Freeden’s morphological approach to ideologies and explained Derrida’s deconstructive reading through his critique of logocentrism.

After establishing the theoretical framework in that chapter, in the first part of chapter 4, I further explained the details of the deconstructive reading I follow in the next three parts of that chapter. And with this solid theoretical ground, in 4.2 I turned to the questions mentioned above. At that point, I made took a decision of critical importance and in order to clarify the range of interpretive possibilities in the conservative canon, I used exceptionalist claims of the conservatives as a departure point.

Conservative exceptionalism can be described very briefly as the arguments which claim the existence of a categorical difference between conservative and non-conservative views. During the analysis, I located two lines of defence of this conservative exceptionalism. The
first line argues the non-existence of the justification for any extensive, radical socio-political transformations in the conservative canon. According to this, while conservatives may argue for moderate, evolutionary change from time to time, they never argue for extensive social changes. And this, as conservative exceptionalists argue, is the fundamental difference between conservative and non-conservative views: while the former tends to preserve, or resists substantial socio-political transformation, the latter is always ready for such radical schemes if necessity arises. But as I discussed in part 4.2, these arguments are pretty weak and a theme of ‘justified extensive social transformations’, in other words a conservative revolution, can be located even in the writings of the conservative thinkers whose approach to politics is thought to be utterly anti-radical.

But then, in part 4.3, I introduced the second line of defence according to which the categorical difference of conservatism is not in its blind insistence in non-alteration of socio-political forms, but in its promotion of natural social forms against their arbitrary alternatives. According to this line of defence, while all other ideologies promote arbitrary socio-political forms and intend to realise their socio-political ideals, conservatism preserves natural society and its naturally developed, organic traditions. Hence, even if conservatives argue for extensive social changes from time to time, they do this only to promote the natural social forms, not to realise some arbitrary, modernist utopia.

Nevertheless, as I explained in the following discussion on 4.3, this conception of ‘natural social forms’, or more generally the theme of naturalness, is necessarily a theoretical and speculative construct. Therefore, as I claimed there, conservative attempts to promote the natural social forms are not less utopian or less arbitrary than their non-conservative counterparts.

By relying upon these analyses, part 4.4 states that conservative exceptionalism is a dead-end. Instead, conservatism, just like any other ideology, is an ideational political thinking. There is a conservative conception of ideal society, and since conservatives promote this conception, a transformative aspect is always there in almost every instance of conservative thinking and politics.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that the ideational nature of conservatism, and the existence of transformative aspects in the conservative canon, do not indicate a theoretical defect on the side of conservatism. The analyses presented in this study are not a critique of conservatism per se. Analysed from the same perspective, all ideologies are textual
constructs, and none can perfectly correspond to the Real and become the true word of God, or logos.

In this textual understanding of the ideologies, we are not very far away from a post-foundational approach to ideologies as ever-contestable claims to reality, and as attempts to close the discursive field of politics. In this outlook, ideologies “bring about the closure that structures discourse and desire itself, but it simultaneously makes that closure imperceptible” (Lefort, 1986:235). They thus have a metaphoric formation. Oliver Marchart implies this metaphoric formation in his *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, by arguing that ideology is bound to remain as an unsuccessful trial to “conceal its own political nature, and thus its own contingency, historicity, conflictuality and ungroundable status” (Marchart, 2007:161). In a similar vein, Laclau argues that through certain closing operations, “discursive forms construct a horizon of all possible representation within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is ‘sayable’ are going to be necessarily figurative” (Laclau, 2006:114). Laclau calls this closing operation as ‘ideological’ (Laclau, 2006:114).

Here, politics is thought to happen within a discursive field. In that context, different discourses, or ideologies, are argued to exist for realising differing substantial changes: each try to seal their own meaning and establish themselves as the ultimate paradigm. Politics is nothing less than a struggle of different discourses to realise this status as the dominant paradigm. This is the goal of all ideologies.

Depending on these post-foundational insights, one can argue that all ideologies are, by definition, transformative. Insofar as they are ‘political’, they must make a claim, a promise for closure, and hence, for change. As their centre will never fully correspond to the Real, it is not possible for ideologies to be non-ideational, or to not to promise any socio-political transformation at all. Ideologies will always make a case for change. Even conservatism, which argues to preserve the so-called natural social forms, would not have emerged as a political ideology, if there were not concerns for the future of these natural social forms.

In an article analysing the problem of the definition of conservatism, Allen emphasises the need for some form of ‘cultural alienation’ for any status quoism to transform into a genuine, ideological conservatism:

> By cultural alienation I mean a strong sense of disaffection from existing society, a disaffection which is frequently coupled with an urge to reorder society to provide a more satisfying, harmonious life. That such a sense of alienation should form a characteristic component of conservative ideology sounds paradoxical, yet
nonetheless alienated conservatives are not hard to find. Indeed, it may well be
that the transition from traditionalism to conservatism could not have been made
without some alienation, for the capacity to conceive of society as an independent
entity which can be shaped by human effort -a prerequisite of ideological
thought- cannot be attained without the ability to distance oneself considerably
from one's own society and see alternatives to it (Allen, 1981:598-599).

It is precisely this need for alienation which renders conservatism, in the lexical sense of the
word, a highly problematic task for conservatism. The alienated conservative subject fills the
gap between her and the society through theory. Hence, her relation with the society is no
fundamentally different from a liberal or a Marxist. In a similar vein with the latter, she
approaches the society through the mediation of theoretical knowledge, and hence, perceive it
not ‘as itself’, but as a theoretical construct. Therefore, there is no perfect correspondence
between society as it is, and conservatism’s conception of society as a natural entity. This
conception is necessarily an ideal. And since the gap between ‘actual’ and conceptualised
societies is an onto-epistemological condition and a prerequisite of political thinking, the
political quest for conserving will always correspond to a transformative force in politics, just
as any other ideology. Ideologies are necessarily transformative, and conservatism is no
exception.

What one can then suggest is that conservatism is founded upon its own impossibility. It
stands for practical knowledge as against theoretical knowledge; it claims to promote stability
or non-alteration, at least in a particular way; and it defines itself to be a non-ideational
ideology, if an ideology at all. But precisely because it is an ideology, it is a text on society,
and it argues for some policies as against others, conservatism must be a non-conservative
ideology that contributes to socio-political transformation to realise its own conception of
ideal society.

But to repeat the important reminder, this non-conservatism of the conservative ideology is
not a substantive critique in itself. As Freeden rightly points out, an ideology should not be
seen nor evaluated as if it is an epistemological theory (Freeden, 1996:36-37). Ideologies
have many dimensions, including non-rational, if not irrational, ones. Not only concepts and
definitions, but images and artworks can also have a central part in an ideology. Formations
of ideological texts are also continuously re-shaped by particular necessities of different
circumstances, and by changing conditions of political rivalry. Thus, ideologies are not best
understood as purely rational constructs. One must not expect an ideology to be devoid of
contradictions. There are many contradictions that can be observed in any ideology, and this by itself does not serve to provide a particular critique of any specific ideology.

What is revealed from this perspective is not the weakness or deficiency of conservative ideology itself, but the necessity of rejecting conservative exceptionalist claims that suggest a categorical difference between conservatism and other ideologies. It seems more plausible to accept the lack of any such categorical difference, and perceive all ideologies as ideational constructs. This may provide us with a new perspective within which we can approach conservatism and analyse different conservative movements comparatively with other ideologies. If all ideologies are ideational constructs that come with a promise of change, then focusing on their ideals may be a plausible strategy to discern the main differences among variations of a specific ideology, as well as to uncover similarities between different ideologies. This perspective is especially useful in positioning certain ‘hybrid’ movements such as radical conservatism, Thatcherism, or anarcho-liberalism within the classical typology of ideologies. These hybrid variations, while departing from core principles of particular ideologies, may share some features of their conception of an ideal society with another ideology. Apart from this use, if all ideologies are accepted as being ideational texts, then a way to evaluate them normatively might be to analyse their respective conceptions of ideal society. Such an analysis may not provide us with a single answer. Still, once carried out by paying attention to numerous variations within each ideology, it may provide a new dimension in which ideologies can be compared with each other.
6 Bibliography


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