The LSE Right's Conservative Realism: A Dying Breed or Shining Future?

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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has ignited a resurgence of conservatism, prompting discussions about the 'conservatism crisis' and its response to Western civilisation's challenges. This has led to debates over the core tenets and political goals of conservatism. These debates are evident in the contrasting visions for the Right's future put forth by David French (2019), advocating the retention of classical liberal ideals, and Sohrab Ahmari (2019), advocating their abandonment to salvage Western civilisation.

Post-war, the Right coalesced around its opposition to dominant collectivist ideologies of the post-war era (Schoenwald 2002). Key concerns included curtailing communism, safeguarding individual rights, and advocating limited government. Presently, the modern Right is united in its reaction to perceived challenges to Western civilisation's heritage and practices. As a result, the movement confronts issues like adept participation in the cultural conflict, nurturing a virtuous society, and utilising economic measures for marginalised groups.

These inquiries are not novel and have perpetuated ongoing conservative dialogues, particularly in the United States (Continetti 2022). Nonetheless, the Right's inability to safeguard fundamental Western values has spawned an alternate movement known as the global reactionary Right. Inspired by the French *Nouvelle Droite* and influenced by Gramscian hegemonic theory, this movement attributes modern-world shortcomings to liberalism and advocates a post-liberal world (Abrahamsen et al. 2020). The emergence of the global reactionary Right in intellectual and political spheres, coupled with its electoral achievements, has profoundly reshaped politics, sidelining certain conservative doctrines aligned with liberalism. Consequently, conservative strands or intellectual movement that value modernity, individualism, free markets, and their supporting social institutions are progressively marginalised in present-day discussions.

One of these diminishing strands of conservatism is 'The London School of Economics Right', a conservative intellectual movement identified by the conservative scholar Maurice Cowling (1990). The LSE Right advocated a distinct perspective on conservatism, which Kenneth Minogue labelled as 'conservative realism'. This brand of conservatism is characterised by scepticism towards grand schemes aimed at perfecting society, regardless of whether they originated from the left or the right. Couple with a realistic stance concerning on what can realistically be achieved through political action.

This paper intends to resurrect the disregarded legacy of the LSE Right's conservative tradition, which has been overlooked both in scholarly discourse and public conversations. Through an examination of its origins, intellectual attributes, and its pertinence as a conservative retort amid the ascent of the global reactionary Right. The initial section delves into the motivations behind Kenneth Minogue's efforts to delineate the uniqueness of the LSE Right's 'conservative realism'. Following that, the paper delves into the three prevailing themes of the LSE Right's conservatism—conservative individualism, scepticism, and limited politics. In the concluding section, the paper scrutinises the reasons behind the limited acceptance of the LSE Right's conservatism, while also presenting arguments advocating its potential to offer valuable insights for the future of conservative politics within the context of the reactionary global Right.

I: SPECIFYING A TRADITION

Maurice Cowling (1990), in discussing the academic intellectual movements central to the New Right, identified the LSE Right as one of them. However, Cowling failed to outline the conservatism of the LSE Right, other than specifying its similarities with the intellectual movement to which he belonged, the Peterhouse Right. The task of specifying the individuality of the LSE Right's conservatism fell on Kenneth Minogue, who introduced the label of 'Conservative Realism' for this purpose. Therefore, before delving into the principles and intellectual underpinnings of the LSE Right's conservatism, it is imperative to explore the rationale behind Minogue's impetus for specifying the nature of the LSE Right's conservatism.

A Tribute

Minogue initially introduced the label 'conservative realism' in connection to a conference he was tasked with organising by the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) in the spring of 1995. The central goal of this conference was to honour the legacy and intellectual contributions of Shirley Robin Letwin (1924-1993), a distinguished advocate and director at the CPS. However, Minogue opted to expand the conference's purview to encompass the commemoration of other notable LSE Right members who had also passed away in the 1990s: Michael Oakeshott (1901-1990) and Elie Kedourie (1926-1994). The event, which played host to other conservative intellectuals and politicians such as Margaret Thatcher, not only served as a tribute to the LSE Right members but also became a comprehensive discourse on the state of conservatism in the Anglosphere world.

The LSE Right constituted a cohort of scholars recruited during Michael Oakeshott's leadership of the government department at LSE. Among them were Minogue, Letwin, Kedourie, and Cranston, who shared a collective admiration for Oakeshott's viewpoints on history, philosophy, and the pragmatic application of politics (Skeffington 2021). The presence and influence of these scholars in the government department led to its characterisation as "the most right-wing government department in the West" (Newman 1981, p. 1).

The emerging Oakeshottian cohort, including future government department convenors, held a crucial role in 1970s London's political discourse on British conservatism, prominently within Shirley Letwin's salon (O'Sullivan 2013). Shirley's salons were crucial intellectual gatherings that played a significant role in shaping conservatism in Britain. These salons not only provided a platform for intellectual discussions but also played a pivotal role in supporting and strengthening Margaret Thatcher during her time in political leadership. Consequently, the LSE Right formed an exceptional assembly of scholars that solidified conservatism as a substantial academic and political influence in Britain.

The LSE Right significantly championed the New Right and exhibited their dedication through their robust support of the Thatcherite project. Firstly, their impact extended to the domain of public policy, with figures such as Kedourie, Letwin, and Minogue taking on leadership roles within the CPS and producing a range of policy papers. Secondly, the LSE Right actively and publicly advocated for Thatcherism, with Kenneth Minogue emerging as a prominent spokesperson for the New Right. Moreover, they offered a sustained intellectual defence of the New Right and Thatcher's conservative credentials, portraying the proj-

ect as a revival of the British way of life in the lineage of Lord Salisbury (Kedourie 1972; Letwin S. R. 1993; Minogue 1989).

Despite their endorsement of the Thatcher government, the LSE Right's approval was not without reservations. They voiced notable criticism of the inclination to centralise power in a bid to foster an entrepreneurial culture. Kenneth Minogue (1987, p. XVII), for instance, highlighted "the paradoxes of her period of rule that the project of diminishing government has often led to an actual increase in the range of governmental intervention." Likewise, Shirley Letwin (1996) cautioned against Thatcherism using the language of perpetual revolution. Moreover, the LSE Right vehemently contested Thatcherite policies in higher education. Elie Kedourie (1993), for instance, spearheaded a campaign against the Education Reform Act (1988), perceiving the rationale behind such reforms as subjecting universities to a system analogous to that of a central planning economy.

The LSE Right played an essential role in shaping Conservative Party doctrine, leaving a lasting impression on the intellectual landscape of conservatism. Letwin's endorsement of the moral aspect and British individualism within Thatcherism, Kedourie's emphasis on pragmatic political strategies in third world policy, and Oakeshott's exploration of governmental authority and civic associations all formed essential components of this intellectual groundwork (Minogue 1996b). Nonetheless, with the conclusion of Thatcher's premiership and the passing of these influential thinkers, the prominence of the LSE Right's conservative realism gradually diminished. The conference provided Minogue with an opportunity to re-examine and underscore the importance of the LSE Right by commemorating the ideas and intellectual inclinations of Oakeshott, Kedourie, and Letwin. Yet, in a more holistic sense, by introducing the label of 'conservative realism', Kenneth Minogue not only paid symbolic homage to the LSE Right and their pivotal role in shaping conservatism during the 1980s, but also highlighted that the LSE Right constituted a unique intellectual school or movement of conservatism. Nevertheless, Minogue (1994c) acknowledged a certain decline in the momentum of the politics the LSE Right believed in during the 1990s. His aspiration was that the conference would rekindle the influence of LSE Right's politics and counteract the rising sway of ideals that deviated from them.

The waning of New Right Politics

Specifying the nature of the LSE Right's conservatism through the label of 'conservative realism' initially emerged as a homage to some of its members who had recently passed away. Yet, for Minogue, the purpose of the conference and raising of the LSE Right's 'conservative realist' banner was targeted at a broader concern. The collapse of Soviet communism during the 1990s and the prevalence of New Right politics in the capitalist West should have been a cause for celebration. Even Minogue (1990) exhibited a qualified sense of jubilation following communism's downfall. Nevertheless, this mood proved fleeting. After participating in a gathering of like-minded intellectuals, Minogue (1992a, p. 83) observed that "a sense of gloom was more palpable among the participants than any sense of triumph." The victory over Soviet communism failed to engender a more agreeable world; instead, the persistence of collectivist politics and emerging threats to the Western world cast a shadow of gloom.

According to Minogue (1996b), the successes of the New Right in the 1980s were being challenged by the emergence of collectivist politics rooted in communitarian ideals. This situation was exacerbated by the political landscape in the Anglosphere. The exit of Margaret Thatcher from leadership, succeeded by John Major, and the electoral defeat of George H. W. Bush to Bill Clinton, prompted Minogue (1994a, para. 2) to assert that "there is a pervasive sense, not only in Britain, that rulers have lost sight of what conservatism means, and indeed, lost sight even of sane and limited politics." The waning influence of the New Right during the 1990s, particularly in nations like Britain, impelled Minogue to synthesise the LSE Right's conservatism for public consumption.

In Britain, the British Conservative Party largely adopted New Right doctrine and politics during Margaret Thatcher's leadership (Williams 2021). The emergence of the New Right in Britain can be traced

back to Heath's leadership failures and governmental shortcomings. These events motivated intellectual figures who were wary of the dominant statist inclinations in British politics. After Heath's tenure, the New Right commenced shaping both political and doctrinal discussions (Gamble 1994).

The New Right's intellectual program was influenced by arguments propounded by post-war classical liberal critics of collectivism, such as Hayek, and their popularity within British conservative circles (Williams 2021). The New Right's sought to situate realism as the central element of political activity, giving precedence to it over visionary political projects. While the Conservative Party has traditionally embraced realism to strike a balance between political polarities, the realism of the New Right diverged from this tradition (Letwin S. R. 1993; Minogue 1987). The New Right ascent marked a resurgence of traditional realist politics that had been overshadowed by the postwar rationalism (Minogue 1987). Within the intellectual context of the New Right, the LSE Right's conservative realist politics, as outlined by Minogue (1993d), centred an emphasis on the cost of political commitments and the challenges confronting the welfare state in domestic policy. In international affairs, it entails resisting vacuous peace rhetoric, discarding moral equivalence, and affirming the significance of making moral judgments.

The LSE Right viewed Margaret Thatcher as the epitome of a practitioner of the conservatism they believed in (Minogue 1987). Nonetheless, as her tenure concluded and John Major assumed the Prime Minister's role, uncertainties emerged regarding the ongoing influence of the LSE Right's conservatism (Minogue 1991). With the progression of Major's premiership, Minogue (1994b) privately voiced criticism of his administration, branding it as 'un-conservative'. This critique was rooted in Minogue's conviction that Major had strayed from the Thatcherite heritage of advocating for free markets and the revival of the British way of life. Major's reliance on state regulation to address social and moral matters contradicted the principles of LSE Right conservative realist politics (Minogue 1993a).

The New Right's political influence experienced a global decline, notwithstanding its significant intellectual influence on political strategies across the spectrum, including Tony Blair's New Labour (Minogue 1996a). According to Minogue, beyond political events, the fading of New Right politics can be attributed to the success and appeal of Third Way ideology in political discourse and public policy. The Third Way ideology aimed to tackle globalisation challenges by adopting measures that combined free market advantages with an emphasis on social equity (Giddens 1998). However, Minogue (2000b) perceived this approach as a form of benevolent government intervention, characterised by subsidies and regulations supposedly aiding 'ordinary citizens'. In Minogue's (1996b) view, Third Way politics replaced collectivism with managerialism, endangering the ethical and political underpinnings of Western civilisation championed by the New Right.

Minogue (1996a, p. 2) voiced apprehension regarding the current state of Western politics, noting, "In spite of a century of bitter experience, the basic assumption of modern politics is still that salvation comes from the top." He bemoaned the persistence of societal engineering policies, despite the New Right's triumphs in elections and policy implementations. Such policies continued in various guises, embraced by stakeholders across the political continuum. Minogue specified the uniqueness of the LSE Right's conservatism as a catalyst for political self-reflection and the rejuvenation of New Right politics to address the challenges of the 1990s.

The collapse of the New Right Intellectual consensus in Britain

The New Right was not one single movement but a coalition of different traditions that coalesced around their apprehension about the ascendancy of collectivism in the post-war era. Andrew Gamble (1994) has argued that the New Right was composed of two distinct factions: liberal and conservative. The liberal faction of the New Right emphasised limited government and a free-market economy (Gamble 1994). Within this faction, we may find the LSE Right; however, it would be a mistake to equate this conservative movement with classical liberalism or Hayekian liberalism. For example, the LSE Right's conviction concerning the inherent value of practices in moulding individuals' moral identity contrasts with the instrumental value

placed on them by liberals (Minogue 1986a). Moreover, the LSE Right contends that a free market demands a more comprehensive spectrum of values, potentially differing from those classical liberals might acknowledge or prioritize (Letwin S. R. 1993). Thirdly, the LSE Right harbours scepticism regarding the attainable accomplishments of politics, an attitude classical liberals might not consistently apply to their own political pursuits (Kedourie 1992; Minogue 2002; Oakeshott 1962). Fourthly, while the classical liberal sees authority as a kind of necessary evil to avoid conflicts between individualists, the LSE Right sees authority as a prerequisite for the individualist disposition (Letwin, 1978a). Lastly, the classical liberal perspective fails to recognise the distinctiveness of Western civilisation in shaping the evolution of an individualistic way of life (Letwin S.R. 1982; Minogue 2013).

The other faction of the New Right was the conservatives, which prioritised the revival of societal, political, and moral authority (Gamble 1994). This faction understood the dangers facing the West to include external enemies such as the Soviet Union, and internal enemies such as the erosion of institutional and civil societal authority (Gamble 1994). On this front, the LSE Right shared strong affinities with this faction; concerning external threats, they were equally opposed to Soviet communism. Regarding internal enemies, the LSE Right would affirm, as we shall see, the importance of authority but display a sort of optimism that authority embedded in these institutions and civil society could survive. Indeed, social and cultural issues central to the conservative faction received little treatment in LSE Right literature. It would not be until after the collapse of communism that the LSE Right, particularly Kenneth Minogue, focused on social and cultural themes.

Despite both factions' apprehensions of post-war collectivism, worries showcased in Maurice Cowling's *Conservative Essays* (1978), which features contributions from both the liberal faction with LSE Right figures such as Minogue and Letwin, and representatives of the conservative faction, including Roger Scruton and Edward Norman, there was an inherent tension between both factions. This tension became evident, as exemplified in Peregrine Worsthorne's (1980) critique of the free-market advocates as more radical than the Labour Party. These internal tensions within the New Right underscore the diverse spectrum of right-wing individuals who converged to shape political dialogue. Hence, the reference to a New Right intellectual consensus does not imply a homogeneous intellectual lineage but rather denotes a political movement aligned with an anti-collectivist agenda.

Thatcher's leadership and the ensuing election provided the New Right an opportunity to redefine the Conservative Party's principles and priorities. Despite certain political and intellectual reservations about Thatcher's governance from figures aligned with the one-nation tradition, the New Right's accomplishments and sway within the party and administration maintained the wide-ranging coalition. Nonetheless, fractures surfaced following Thatcher's ousting and the subsequent leadership contest, as conservatives questioned the conservative authenticity of Thatcherism. New Right adherents like John Gray began to scrutinise the conservative legitimacy of Thatcherism, triggering initial fractures and eventual dissolution of the coalition.

The criticism directed at Thatcherism was rooted in the assertion that it abandoned notions like community and authority in favour of individualism and free markets (Gray 1993). Despite Thatcher and her adherents asserting their embodiment of conservatism and its intellectual heritage, they faced accusations of neglecting the essential tenets of tradition, authority, and culture in their actions. The conservative faction contended that the liberal faction, in pursuing their agenda, failed to acknowledge the inherent tension between promoting free-market principles and upholding conservative values concerning cultural and social matters. John Gray (1990, p. 98) underscored that "the New Right failed to perceive the dependency of individualist civil society on a dwindling but real patrimony of ideas, beliefs, and values."

John Gray's critique of the Thatcherite project serves as a significant illustration of the erosion of the intellectual unity within the New Right. Gray's transformation from an initial supporter of the liberal New Right platform to an unwavering critic amplifies his significance. Early in his intellectual journey, influenced by Hayek, Gray perceived social engineering and state planning as misguided outcomes of the Enlightenment (Colls 1998). However, as the liberal New Right principles gained momentum and were en-

acted in Britain, Gray (1993) came to believe that established institutions and customs were jeopardised. The ethical restoration of institutions crucial for market functionality was missing, as the liberal New Right overlooked moral considerations crucial to the conservative faction. Gray (1995) attributed this absence of a moral agenda to what he termed market fundamentalism, a term he aligned with diverse Enlightenment undertakings like Marxism.

The conservative faction contended that the perspective of the liberal faction, which perceived policies and individuals through the prism of free markets and individualism, was not inherently conservative but rather aligned with Hayekian liberalism. This brand of liberalism prioritised liberation from state control and collectivism; however, in practice, it undermined or disregarded the significant associative traditions of Britain. Hence, the liberal faction "concerned itself very little with the cultural or social conditions of a stable restoration of market institutions" (Gray 1993, p. 275).

Moral critiques of the liberal New Right agenda were not novel to Minogue. Indeed, throughout the Thatcher era, Minogue's (1987) central intellectual emphasis resided in asserting that the crux of Thatcherism lay not in liberal economic notions, but in the rekindling of the British individualistic way of life. Yet, his concern arose from the fact that these critiques were emerging from within the New Right coalition itself, rather than from anticipated sources. These conservative criticisms caused the disintegration of the New Right's intellectual accord and prompted the genesis of the conservative realist label as both a safeguard for the Thatcher era and the legacy of the LSE Right conservatism.

Minogue specified the uniqueness of the LSE Right's conservatism with the label of 'conservative realism' to safeguard the conservative credentials and moral foundations that underpinned of the liberal New Right and Thatcherism. This defence becomes evident in Minogue's counter to Gray and his endorsement of Thatcherism. Firstly, Minogue (1986b) contends that Thatcherism wasn't a rationalist agenda; instead, it was a rejection of prior rationalist endeavours, reaffirming the imperfect and individualistic fabric of society. Consequently, detractors misconstrue the essential tenets of Thatcherism, which centre on morally restoring British individualism through fostering 'vigorous virtues' (Letwin S.R. 1993). Secondly, Minogue (1997) critiques Gray for departing from his Hayekian leanings and embracing communitarian ideals. Thirdly, he probes the intellectual coherence of Gray's ideas (Minogue 1997) and asserts that Gray's advocacy for culture and authority translates into endorsing governmental control of the market (Minogue 1997).

II: THE PRINCIPLES OF THE LSE RIGHT'S CONSERVATISM

A comprehensive and unified body of literature offering a complete portrayal of the LSE Right's conservatism does not exist. None of the LSE Right members discussed in this paper have authored an entire treatise solely focused on this subject. This absence of a systematic exploration is unsurprising, as Kedourie (1990) observed that the examination of conservatism frequently appears disjointed, relying on an assortment of works reacting to various political and societal circumstances. Nevertheless, their conservative convictions can be delineated as follows:

> scepticism about what politics can accomplish…[not] concerned with enforcing right opinions or a moral codes, and it does not work for a theodicy… suspicious of the impulse to use politics for accomplishing the good, since the results of action, however well meant, are unpredictable (Kedourie 1992, p. 6).

This characterisation of conservatism is one that very few within the conservative realm would disagree with. The apprehension towards radical transformations has long constituted a core facet of conservatism, exemplified by Edmund Burke's critique of the French Revolution. Nonetheless, the LSE Right assert that their strain of conservatism possesses distinctive attributes (Minogue 1996a). The distinctiveness of the LSE Right conservative tradition can be comprehended through three principal themes ingrained in their thinking: scepticism, sceptical politics, and conservative individualism.

Scepticism

The sceptical orientation of the LSE Right originates from a lineage of thinkers like Hume and Montaigne who challenge the assertions of comprehensive knowledge based solely on reason (Minogue 1967; Oakeshott 1962). However, their scepticism diverges from other traditions. For instance, they contrast with Hayek's scepticism of collectivist ideologies. While the LSE Right acknowledges the value of Hayek's critique of rationalism (Letwin S. R. 2003; Minogue 2000b), they critique his omission of the same scepticism when it comes to the free-market doctrine he promotes (Minogue 1986a; Oakeshott 1962). Indeed, the LSE Right's critique of Hayek is that in his defence of Western liberty and civilisation, he embraced rationalist and ideological presuppositions. Kenneth Minogue (1986b, p. 22) encapsulates this critique by asserting that "[what] distinguishes Hayek from a conservative is his propensity to turn the advantages of a free market exchange economy into a scientific truth beyond the scope of politics." Thus, the scepticism of LSE Right extends to any political project asserting indisputable truth about political questions.

The scepticism ingrained in LSE Right's conservative realism propels their unrelenting critique of rationalist doctrines that disregard human experiences and practices in favour of incontrovertible political truths. However, this sceptical disposition doesn't imply that the LSE Right embrace nihilism (Letwin S. R. 1999). On the contrary, they possess a keen awareness of the perils associated with unchecked scepticism, which has contributed to the disintegration of contemporary culture (Minogue 1999). Consequently, the sceptical inquiry undertaken by the LSE Right pertains specifically to rational claims of indisputable truth. Nevertheless, if there is no rational source for indisputable truth, the LSE Right is tasked with the intricate challenge of elucidating the coexistence of order while safeguarding the individuality of human beings.

The LSE Right's rejoinder commences by asserting that their scepticism doesn't insinuate a deficiency in individuals' capacity for reasoning. In fact, Michael Oakeshott's (2011) critique of Hans Morgenthau's tragic politics underscores the LSE Right's conviction in a positive interpretation of rational conduct. As per the LSE Right, rational conduct is a context-sensitive response that emerges as individuals engage with their inner and outer experiences. Rather than being propelled by preordained objectives, individuals tap into their personal human experiences as a wellspring for rational conduct (Oakeshott 1962). In this perspective, the LSE Right don't elevate reason above individuality nor do they exacerbate the disconnect between individuals and reason. Instead, this comprehension of reasoning furnishes individuals with benchmarks to contemplate their conduct without enforcing uniformity upon them (Letwin S.R. 2005). As a result, this rational comportment accommodates the observed variety in human actions and doesn't imply irrationality in human nature.

The second pivotal facet of the LSE Right's response to the sceptical quandary is encapsulated in the concept of practice, as delineated by Oakeshott. According to Oakeshott (1975, p. 55), a practice encompasses "a set of considerations, manners, uses, observances, customs, standards, canons, maxims, principles, rules, and offices specifying useful procedures or denoting obligations or duties which relate to human actions and utterances." Practices furnish individuals with an array of benchmarks upon which they can rely when contemplating human conduct. What proves paramount about the notion of practice in addressing the sceptical predicament is that individuals voluntarily embrace these conventions, as opposed to being coerced (Letwin S. R. 1982). In this vein, practices mold the entirety of human actions without imposing a single conception of the 'correct' course of action.

A quintessential exemplar that the LSE Right employs to elucidate this notion is language. Language establishes prerequisites for individual involvement in communication, devoid of enforcing the content of communication. Consequently, individual reasoning isn't impelled by a preconceived objective, but by shared practices (Letwin S. R. 2005). The conception of practices, as embraced by the LSE Right, averts nihilism by striking an equilibrium between reason and individuality, thus accounting for our structured existence. Moreover, the idea of practice underscores that the individual isn't an artificial construct, but rather contingent upon the myriad practices that govern human conduct (Kedourie 1984b; Oakeshott 1975).

The sceptical standpoint of the LSE Right contests the idea of a universally applicable human conduct that could serve as a basis for far-reaching, assertions of indisputable truth. This viewpoint is likely to strike a chord with numerous conservatives, given that scepticism is a concept that fosters cohesion, particularly within the Anglo-Saxon tradition (O'Sullivan 1976). However, when extended to the domain of politics, this scepticism yields a unique comprehension of the political arena.

Sceptical Politics

The LSE Right's interpretation of the political realm is more confined than what certain elements within the conservative tradition might deem acceptable. This becomes conspicuous in the LSE Right's hesitance to embrace Cowling's (1978) call for a broader scope of conservative politics. An illustration of this reticence is evident in Minogue's (1986c) brief critique of Scruton's conservatism, which Minogue perceived as divergent from Oakeshott and evocative of the radicalism of the 1960s. Consequently, cultural and social subjects garner limited attention within the literature of the LSE Right.

The LSE Right's perception of the political domain is encapsulated in Minogue's (2000a, p. 1) characterisation of politics as "the activity by which the framework of human life is sustained; it is not life itself." According to this definition, the LSE Right perceives politics as a balanced, pragmatic, delimited, and conflict-prone endeavour, rather than an all-encompassing process that permeates every facet of human existence (Letwin S. R. 1998). It is not preoccupied with abstract theorisation, the pursuit of an overarching societal plan, or an exclusive concentration on troubleshooting societal problems, which often dominates modern political science education (Minogue 2004a).

In this context, the scepticism of the LSE Right becomes apparent as they dismiss the notion of a technical approach to politics that prescribes a *telos* to guide political action. Instead, they contend that politics ought to be informed by the actual experiences of engaging with others and the established practices of the political community. By negating the existence of a *telos* in politics, the LSE Right conceive politics as a triangular conversation where conservatism, liberalism, and socialism—the three major Western traditions—interact. This triangular model, akin to an equilateral triangle, implies that these traditions are equally significant and do not possess indisputable truth when it comes to political activity.

According to the LSE Right politics can be conceptualised as the process of persuading fellow citizens about the framework of rules that facilitate the harmonious cohabitation of diverse individuals within a society. The term 'persuasion' acknowledges the intricate fabric of societies, wherein individuals harbours diverse preferences and moral identities. Moreover, persuasion entails the imperative of garnering consensus among others concerning the framework of laws of the society. Lastly, the process of persuasion hinges on an appreciation of societal practices to evaluate existing or proposed alterations to the framework.

Viewing politics as persuasion underscores the core of LSE Right politics. This perspective becomes clearer when we delve into the examination of the two distinct forms of human association within the state: civil and enterprise. In an enterprise association, individuals are compelled to pursue a collective objective, irrespective of their personal agreement (Oakeshott 1975). Politics in this kind of association seeks to impose a uniform belief among the members of the polity, guided by a *telos*. However, the LSE Right rejects enterprise politics for three key reasons. Firstly, it contends that enforcing uniformity of belief diminishes individuality. Secondly, their sceptical perspective challenges the viability of achieving a shared end to guide society, as there exists no universal ideal or infallible wisdom for politics. Such rationalist aspirations are prone to failure as they disregard the insights gained from political reality (Kedourie 1989). Lastly, the pursuit of enterprise politics would necessitate state coercion and undermine institutional checks on government power.

In contrast, the civil association state is characterised by individuals adhering to a set of laws while pursuing their self-determined objectives (Oakeshott 1975). It is within this type of association that LSE Right politics give precedence to procedural considerations concerning legal frameworks. Politics within a civil association revolves around procedural aspects, concentrating on the establishment of a framework of

laws that empowers individuals to pursue their individual well-being (Letwin S. R. 2005). Accordingly, the role of government is to safeguard the pursuits of individuals while managing conflicts that inevitably arise within the boundaries of the rule of law. In this context, the government functions as an impartial referee, ensuring the enforcement of rules that facilitate the smooth operation of the game.

The emphasis on the legal framework of the civil association also encompasses the LSE Right's constitutionalism. A well-balanced constitution with effective checks and balances is deemed crucial for nurturing individualism within the civil association. Consequently, any proposals for constitutional innovations are expected to meet a high burden of proof. This commitment to constitutionalism is clearly evident in Kedourie's writings (1984a, 1984c), who expressed concern over the Conservative party's shift away from a balanced constitution in favour of popular sovereignty and an unchecked executive. Additionally, the perceived departure from a balanced constitution in both Britain and, to some extent, the Western world, has led, according to the LSE Right, to what they describe as a 'constitutional mania.' This phenomenon is characterised by attempts to identify problems and suggest remedies through constitutional changes (Minogue 1993b).

LSE Right politics and its constitutionalism do not advocate for a minimalist government. It recognises the necessity of a robust government to maintain the order required for the pursuit of felicity and moral identity, while avoiding excessive power that could endanger these pursuits (Oakeshott 1961). As highlighted by Shirley Letwin (2005, p. 344), "a community worthy of its name is bound to set certain limits." Furthermore, the LSE Right acknowledges a role for government in addressing the health and welfare needs of its citizens, but underscore the importance of preserving individuals' freedom of choice and minimizing taxation (Kedourie 1984a).

Conservative Individualism

The term 'individualism' is not commonly associated with conservatism, as it implies rebellion and dissent against established institutions, customs, and traditions. The LSE Right acknowledged the inherent conflict between individualism and maintaining social order (Letwin S. R. 1978b). They argued that unchecked individualism could lead to licentious conduct and the rise of ideologies like Nationalism (Kedourie 1970; Minogue 1988). However, they saw no contradiction in advocating for a conservative individualism, envisioning a mutualistic relationship between individual freedom and a moral order to restrain it (Letwin S. R. 1978b). According to the LSE Right, order is a necessary prerequisite for individualism (Letwin S.R. 1980). They also attributed the distinctiveness of the Western way of life and the modern world to this narrative of conservative individualism.

The emergence of individualism, according to the LSE Right, can be traced back to the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, particularly during the Italian Renaissance (Oakeshott 1961). They recognise the significant influence of Christianity and humanist sceptics in shaping this development. The LSE Right acknowledges the role of Christianity in promoting individualism, emphasising concepts such as the uniqueness of the soul, individual salvation, and the notion of individual will (Letwin S. R. 1976; 1977). Additionally, they highlight figures from the humanist sceptic tradition, like Montaigne, as important intellectual proponents of this emerging individualistic disposition (Oakeshott 1975, 1996).

Despite the significant influence of these intellectual factors, the emergence of individualism for the LSE Right was not tied to a specific event or philosophical revolution but rather stemmed from individuals' desire to seek felicity and moral identity. This inclination arose as people began questioning established norms in Western society, fostering a sceptical and critical outlook on traditional order (Minogue 2012a). This shift allowed individuals to explore new perspectives and understandings of themselves and the world.

The intellectual influences, combined with a critical and sceptical outlook, led to the 'discovery' of the individual. This discovery marked a transition from traditional societies based on established order to modern societies where individuals explored new ways of understanding themselves and the world, pursuing their own chosen paths. The LSE Right sees the development of the individualist disposition as the core of

modernity, enabling remarkable advancements (Minogue 2000a). The LSE Right vision of modernity rejects the homogeneity of traditional societies and instead embraces the diversity and conflicts arising from individuals freely pursuing their felicity and moral identity. In this sense, the LSE Right's perspective on modernity loosely aligns with what Rengger (1995) describes as 'modernity as mood'—a mood that recognises the importance of individual felicity and identity as the driving force behind the development of the modern world.

However, the LSE Right emphasise that the rise of individualism and the advent of modernity are specific to Europe. As Minogue (2012a, p. 259) points out,

> The basic "secret," one might say, is that modern European states differed from other cultures by the moral practice of individualism, in which the wants and beliefs of individuals are recognized not as disruptive, but as valuable themselves. Intellectually speaking, individualism led to a revolution in the way in which Europeans thought about the world.

The LSE Right's perspective on individualism diverges from that of liberalism, as they emphasise the uniqueness and historical context of the individualist way of life. While liberalism emphasises individual rights and autonomy, LSE Right argues that this narrative fails to elucidate the origins of individualism in Europe (Minogue 2012b). The LSE Right's view acknowledges the intricacies of the narrative, considering factors like Christianity and specific conditions that contributed to the evolution of individualism in Europe, distinguishing it from other civilisations.

However, the LSE Right's narrative of individualism offers more than just a means of distinguishing it from liberal individualism; it introduces a more crucial distinction, that of individualism as a moral practice. The central concept revolves around a moral practice, signifying a way of life guided by prescribed conditions that individuals must subscribe to in order to engage in a specific activity (Oakeshott 1975). Within this moral practice framework, the LSE Right emphasise that the pursuit of individualism relies on authoritative conditions. These conditions can be classified as formal, informal, and inner.

Formal authority, in the perspective of the LSE Right, is linked to the idea of the rule of law, which can be defined as "an authoritative prescription of conditions to be subscribed to in acting, and its counterpart is an obligation to subscribe to these conditions" (Letwin S. R. 2005, p. 318). The rule of law encompasses a set of mutually agreed-upon rules that individuals are expected to subscribe to. These rules are not meant to dictate or constrain every facet of conduct, but rather to provide guidance while preserving individuals' liberty to pursue their own felicity. Freedom is compromised only when the law is transformed into a command that imposes an externally determined objective upon the individual.

Informal authority finds expression within social institutions like the family and marriage, addressing the gaps that legal frameworks may have in accommodating the diverse facets of human life. These institutions derive their authority from several sources. Firstly, there's the argument of practicality—a society can't function effectively if these institutions are constantly under challenge. Secondly, they embody long-standing practices that have stood the test of time. Lastly, individuals maintain a moral commitment to these institutions. There are two categories of commitment that individuals might have. The first is a deliberate commitment, wherein individuals recognise the significance of these institutions in fulfilling their own desires or contributing to communal interests. The second category of commitment arises from one's inherent circumstances at birth, such as being born into a particular family or community.

The final authoritative condition for individualism is inner authority, which steers actions and decisions through internal and external experiences. This moral compass necessitates self-discipline, integrity, respect, personal accountability, and other virtues as individuals strive for their own well-being and moral identity (Letwin S. R. 1997). The archetype of the English gentleman exemplifies an individual with an intrinsic moral framework that values the welfare of both oneself and others (Ibid.). As a result, inner authority moderates the process of deliberating human conduct, guiding individuals through intricate choices.

Hence, individualism necessitates adherence to these conditions, and the LSE Right puts forward a three-fold rationale to support this perspective. Firstly, individuals demonstrate moral integrity by honouring the commitments they have made to themselves, societal institutions, and the governing authority. Secondly, individuals exercise autonomy by willingly abiding by these regulations, fostering an environment conducive to self-driven felicity and identity. Lastly, within a civil association that encompasses a variety of individuals, this adherence nurtures a sense of civility vital for the collective welfare of the polity.

These authoritative conditions delineate the essence of conservative individualism, which is characterised as "the disposition to recognise imagining, deliberating, wanting, choosing, and acting not as costs incurred in seeking enjoyments, the exercise of a gratifying self-determination or personal autonomy" (Oakeshott 1975, p. 236). This ethos of individualism is motivated by self-interest in the pursuit of the good life, as defined by each person. For the LSE Right, the concept of the good life corresponds with the Hobbesian pursuit of felicity—the perpetual passion, pursuit, and fulfilment of individual aspirations (Hobbes 1651/2014).

Nevertheless, embracing Hobbesian felicity does not entail irrational or unrestrained pursuit. In this context, the LSE Right draws a pivotal distinction between desire and impulse. The former signifies rational passion, shaped by the commitments an individual has entered into and the reality of coexisting with fellow individualists who also pursue their desires (Minogue 2012b). On the other hand, the latter, characterised by irrational passion, neglects rational conduct and the established practices of the political community (Minogue 2001). The LSE Right advocate for prioritising desires over the irrationality of impulses when navigating the intricate landscape of human conduct.

Indeed, the pursuit of felicity is only one facet of human conduct; the other crucial aspect is the preservation of a moral identity or self-enactment. Self-enactment pertains to the underlying motivations driving actions and the implications they carry for one's moral identity (Oakeshott 1975). The concern for moral identity introduces a layer of intricacy to human conduct, as individuals endeavour to maintain their sense of self in the process of deliberation. Minogue (1992b, p. 12) delves into this profound moral dimension, affirming, "choice is a much deeper idea, because it includes consideration not only of what satisfactions different courses of action may give, but also the sense of moral identity revealed in choosing whatever we may choose."

Within the framework of conservative individualism, the LSE Right proposes a reconciliation between the tensions of order and individualism. They view individualism as a valid recognition of self-determined desires and identity. However, this recognition is not a *carte blanche* but rather a moral commitment that demands fidelity to the authoritative conditions that facilitate this manner of existence. Shirley Letwin (1978b) astutely noted that adopting this way of life involves relinquishing the allure of uniformity in human conduct. Yet, in doing so, it enriches and amplifies the richness of both internal introspection and external interactions that constitute the human experience.

III: DYING BREED OR SHINING FUTURE?

The limited acceptance of the LSE Right's conservatism within the wider conservative community can be attributed to several factors, including the relatively niche appeal of Oakeshottian ideas, which forms the foundation of this specific brand of conservatism (Himmelfarb 1975; Quinton 2001). Moreover, the LSE Right's strong association with Thatcherism and the liberal faction of the New Right, a doctrine and faction that faced criticism even from within conservative circles, has likely contributed to its reduced popularity, particularly following Margaret Thatcher's departure from office. Given the prominent role that the LSE Right has historically held within the British conservative landscape, I intend to delve deeply into my argument that the LSE Right's conservatism is a dying breed.

A Threatened Species

The LSE Right's conservatism lacks broad support within the conservative community, and this might be attributed to its association with liberalism. The LSE Right's alignment with liberalism originates from its emphasis on individual-focused political and intellectual discourse, as opposed to community-centred approaches. As a result, they were critical of any attempts to shift this discourse towards prioritising community values over individualism (Minogue 1996b). Furthermore, the LSE Right's adoption of the civil association concept shares similarities with the liberal understanding of the state. Firstly, both underscore the individual or will as the cornerstone of the state (Oakeshott 2000). Secondly, they acknowledge the significance of the rule of law (Letwin S. R. 2005). Lastly, they value the flourishing of individualism within the context of civil association (Letwin S. R. 1978b).

Nevertheless, the LSE Right's inclination towards liberalism was tempered by a robust critique of its ideological inclinations. For instance, Kedourie (1989) criticised liberalism for its idealism and evasion of the intricacies of human conduct. Minogue (2001) questioned liberalism's scepticism towards authority and its proclivity to pursue salvation. Oakeshott (1962) scrutinised the abstract and universalist notions within liberal thought. Despite their criticisms of liberalism, certain thinkers within the LSE Right would not hesitate to identify themselves or be categorised as liberals (Letwin S. R. 1988; Minogue 1988).

The precarious position of the LSE Right's conservatism can also be attributed to their endorsement of free market economics. They have played a pivotal role in offering intellectual, public, and practical endorsement to the principles of the liberal New Right and free markets (Minogue 1995). In practical terms, they advocate for market liberalisation through their policy initiatives at the CPS, promoting solutions aligned with free markets (Letwin W. 1991). On the intellectual front, their support for free markets is evident in their critiques of welfare-collectivism and state planning (Kedourie 1984a; 1984d). In the public sphere, they actively champion free market ideas, exemplified by Kenneth Minogue's hosting of the TV documentary "The New Enlightenment" on Channel 4.

The third factor contributing to the vulnerability of the LSE Right's conservatism is their relative disregard for cultural and social themes in their political discourse. Instead, as mentioned previously, the LSE Right demonstrated a sense of optimism about civil society's capacity to counteract liberal ideologies (Minogue 2001). Their primary focus was on the civil association state during the post-war era of collectivism, rather than addressing cultural and social matters (Kedourie 1984a).

A final factor contributing to the diminished prominence of the LSE Right's conservatism lies in its secular nature. The LSE Right contends that conservatism can be comprehended without recourse to religious or metaphysical realms (Oakeshott 1962). They argue that conservatism should derive its conclusions from scepticism and the practices of the political community (Kedourie 1992). Nevertheless, they do recognise the significance of the Judeo-Christian religion concerning practice and individualism (Letwin S. R. 1977; Minogue 2012a). Their view on the role of religion in politics is evident in their admiration for Lord Salisbury's conservatism, which eschewed religious belief as a prerequisite for sound political action (Kedourie 1984c). Thus, the LSE Right asserts that "Conservatism need have no connection at all with religious belief" (Minogue 1967, p. 196).

In light of the expanding reactionary global Right, these factors lend credence to my assertion that the LSE Right's conservatism is progressively waning. The reactionary global Right is a political and intellectual movement that has emerged in the past decades, adopting the vocabulary and language of reactionism and radicalism to challenge the dominance of liberal ideas in Western civilization (Drolet and Williams 2021). The LSE Right's support for liberal ideas and free market are unlikely to resonate with these reactionaries who envision a futuristic utopian world beyond the purview of liberalism and its underpinning free-market economics (Varga and Buzogány 2022). While the LSE Right has also scrutinised liberalism and its inclination to divorce free markets from political considerations, the pivotal distinction lies in the LSE Right's aim to establish a *modus vivendi* with liberalism, whereas the reactionaries regard it as irredeemable. Hence, it is unsurprising that the literature of these reactionaries offers the most potent critique of free-market capitalism and liberalism (Williams 2022).

Additionally, the reactionary global Right has embraced Gramscian concepts as the bedrock of their counterhegemonic endeavour aimed at supplanting liberal culture (Abrahamsen et al. 2020). These 'Gramscians of the Right' are dedicated to repossessing control over civil institutions, viewing this as pivotal in restoring and upholding political influence and power, seen as essential for safeguarding Western civilisation (Drolet 2020). Consequently, their discourse, both public and intellectual, centres on identifying threats to cultural and national identity, along with the preservation of Western civilisation (Bar-On 2018). The LSE Right's comparatively limited emphasis on cultural and social concerns leaves it with little to contribute toward restoring the traditional facets of Western civilisation. This predicament is compounded by their recognition that conservatives are left with no recourse except silence when the familiar gives way to the unfamiliar (Minogue 2004b).

Furthermore, the secular nature of the LSE Right's conservatism diverges from the prevailing narrative within the reactionary global Right. This narrative places strong emphasis on the revival of Judeo-Christian religion as the primary guiding force across all facets of human conduct and cognition (Minkenberg 2018). Neoconservatives have also critiqued the LSE Right's conservatism for its secular disposition (Kristol 1996). This departure from the sentiments of reactionary and traditional conservative circles regarding the role of religion is another contributing factor to the relative neglect of the LSE Right.

Towards a Shining future

Despite the factors I've outlined, which have led to the limited recognition and acceptance of the LSE Right's conservatism, I contend that this tradition holds valuable insights that could beneficially influence the trajectory of conservatism and its political landscape. These insights are in line with O'Sullivan's (1976) identification of shared elements in conservative traditions: a sense of scepticism and an emphasis on restrained politics. As such, my intention is to underscore the contributions of the LSE Right, pointing towards a potentially promising direction for the future of conservative politics.

The initial significant insight pertains to a nuanced perspective on modernity, steering clear of conservative tendencies towards radical restoration of traditional Western practices. The LSE Right's take on conservative individualism plays a crucial role in bridging the ideological divide between left and right ideologues. This approach embodies what I term 'content with modernity', recognising both the hurdles posed by the contemporary world and the enriching and exploratory dimensions it has introduced to human life.

The concept of 'content with modernity' serves as a counterpoint to the reactionary global Right's misconstrued view of individualism as the exclusive source of modernity's challenges. In contrast, the LSE Right acknowledges individualism as an integral and ingrained facet of Western civilisation. The reactionary Right's misunderstanding of this issue originates from their inability to distinguish between conservative individualism and liberal individualism. The former is rooted in authority and the safeguarding of traditional ways of life, whereas the latter aims to liberate individualism from its authoritative constraints.

The reactionary global Right's misguided focus on modernity's challenges propels them toward an impractical pursuit of a utopian future. In contrast, the LSE Right's second valuable insight draws from their scepticism and approach to politics, which offers a more pragmatic path forward. While the reactionaries advocate for a rationalist blueprint enforced universally, guided by a predefined *telos*, the LSE Right, in their sceptical stance, refute the feasibility of such a teleological agenda to steer political endeavours. They acknowledge the constraints in establishing a fixed *telos* to shape political activity.

Furthermore, teleocratic politics diverges from the principles of sceptical and restrained politics, necessitating coercive measures to enforce predetermined objectives on individuals. Pursuing a *telos* would signify the end of politics, as its conflictual nature contradicts the envisioned utopian harmony (Minogue 2000a). In contrast, the LSE Right endeavour to dissociate conservative politics from endorsing a teleocratic notion of a homogenised conservative world. They instead prioritise nurturing the framework of rules within the civil association. This approach advocates for a limited state that safeguards the conditions con-

ducive to the individualist way of life, bolstered by constitutional checks to curb arbitrary authority and maintain equilibrium.

The third insight towards a viable future for conservatism involves receptiveness to the concerns of the global Right. The LSE Right's conservatism exemplifies this by initially providing a critique of liberal salvationism. This critique revolves around the rationalisation of human conduct by liberal salvationism, which overlooks the intricacies of political experience (Kedourie 1989). The peril of liberal salvationism lies in its negation of the chasm between envisioned teleocratic deliverance and the intricate realm of political reality (Kedourie 1989). This disregard for the gap between sought-after salvation and political reality poses hazards, nurturing a faith in governmental deliverance at home and neglecting a well-balanced international order in favour of nationalist inclinations (Kedourie 1984e; Minogue 2012b).

Another domain that underscores the receptivity of the LSE Right is their critique of internationalism, advocating for the supremacy of international organizations and agreements over state institutions. The LSE Right presents a dual-edged critique of internationalism. Primarily, they contend that internationalism leads to the erosion of national sovereignty, which elucidates their Eurosceptic standpoint on Britain's affiliation with Europe (Letwin S. R. 1996). Secondly, they posit that internationalism seeks to institute supranational entities through these organisations, ultimately subverting national identity in favour of a fresh international identity (Minogue 1993c). It is noteworthy that the LSE Right doesn't idealise the nation-state; in fact, they express reservations about it (Kedourie 1961). The critique of internationalism is rooted in concern for national sovereignty and the historical growth of nations rather than an attachment to the nation-state.

The LSE Right further displays its openness in its concern for preserving the traditions of Western civilisation. While their literature didn't extensively delve into cultural and social aspects, Minogue later acknowledged the impact of ideology on the authoritative conditions essential for the individualistic way of life (Minogue 2001). Minogue (2012a, p. 264) mourned that "[o]ur time has thus been a graveyard of inherited conventions." It's important to note that Minogue refrained from outlining a specific blueprint for restoring these traditions, as his conservatism restrained him from doing so. Nevertheless, the incorporation of these themes into Minogue's intellectual discourse suggests that conservatives can address these concerns without resorting to radical measures.

The final insight from the LSE Right is its contemporary relevance to conservative politics. Lord Willetts (2021) argues that ensuring a sustainable future for conservative politics entails finding equilibrium between freedom and belonging. In the current landscape, conservative politics faces a challenge due to an excessive focus on belonging at the expense of freedom. This imbalance has arisen alongside the surge of communitarian politics, which reacts to the 'unrestrained individualism' advocated by the New Right (Minogue, 1996b). The remedy to this imbalance is provided by the LSE Right's conservatism, which reintroduces the concept of conservative individualism. This idea incorporates both freedom and belonging, enabling individuals to pursue felicity and moral identity while subscribing to authoritative conditions. The sense of belonging is anchored in the historical origins and distinctiveness of this way of life, as well as the practices that sustain it. Hence, the initial facet of this insight involves contextualising and refining this equilibrium in the context of the modern world.

The secular essence of the LSE Right's conservatism provides the second facet for shaping the future of conservative politics. Given the declining religious affiliation among individuals in the Western world, it becomes increasingly challenging for conservative approaches deeply rooted in religious themes or ideas to garner widespread electoral support. As illuminated in this article, conservative politics can reach conservative conclusions without necessitating metaphysical foundations or a theo-political vision. Consequently, the LSE Right's conservative realism emerges as a form of conservatism that holds appeal for both non-religious voters and those who cherish the religious traditions and practices of the West.

CONCLUSION

Despite influencing the New Right and the British political landscape, the conservative realism of the LSE Right remains relatively obscure. This paper aims to rectify this by introducing readers to LSE Right's conservatism, examining its origins, principles, and potential implications for the future. Through a comprehensive review of the LSE Right's literature and analysis, the article emphasises its significant importance within the broader conservative framework. It underscores the need for greater recognition, not only of its less-prominent thinkers but also of its influential role in shaping British political discourse.

While the paper offers initial insights into the LSE Right's defence of Thatcherism, its policy impact, and its implications for the Conservative party's future, it does not extensively delve into these aspects. Additionally, it doesn't fully contextualise the LSE Right's conservatism within the wider political thought landscape. Further research is required to thoroughly explore these areas, contributing to the effort of bringing LSE Right's conservative realism to prominence and highlighting its significance in political discourse.

In the context of the expanding reactionary global Right and ongoing debates surrounding the future of conservative politics, the importance of this introductory examination of the LSE Right's conservative realism is heightened. Amidst discussions among conservatives and reactionaries on preserving Western civilisation's practices, and deliberations among liberal-minded individuals on appropriate responses, the LSE Right's conservatism emerges as a pertinent and meaningful tradition. It offers valuable insights for effectively navigating the ship in the boundless ocean filled with contemporary political challenges.

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