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Conservatism: Toward a Traditionalist Normative Epistemology

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Abstract

Conservatism's core claim is that traditions play an important, if not essential, role in the acquisition of normative knowledge. However, that thesis has never been adequately defended. Three things are missing from conservative political thought: a traditionalist account of propositional normative knowledge, an explicit and sustained positive argument for traditions' role in the acquisition of normative knowledge, and deference to relevant work in other areas of philosophy, especially epistemology.

In this thesis, I provide an argument for conservatism which remedies each of these defects. I call it the Social Knowledge Argument. According to the Social Knowledge Argument, some beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society constitute normative knowledge, since deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. Deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies because traditions are the outputs of cultural evolution and the latter tends to produce traditions that capture the demands of normative domains such as morality.

The Social Knowledge Argument constitutes a traditionalist account of propositional normative knowledge, is an explicit argument for traditions' epistemic role, and utilises intellectual resources unavailable to previous generations of conservative writers. Specifically, the Social Knowledge Argument assumes a process reliabilist theory of knowledge, and these are of recent provenance, and while conservatives have always appealed to cultural evolution (consider Burke's claim that society develops organically or Smith's invisible hand analogy), I am able to draw on fully-fledged scientific accounts of cultural evolution which were unavailable to or neglected by previous conservative writers.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Ewan J. Burns

11th November 2019

Introduction

Conservatism first came to exist as an articulate political doctrine with the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Hamilton 2016; Kirk 1982: 4-6; O'Hear 1998a; O'Sullivan 1976: 9-10; Sigmund 2015). Its central claims have remained essentially unchanged since then. Conservatism stresses the moral imperfection of human beings, the limits of human reason, the importance of conserving, transmitting, and complying with societal traditions, the unforeseen bad consequences that can result from any social reform, however well-intentioned, the complex, organic nature of society, and the impossibility of effective large-scale social planning. The practical conclusion that conservatives draw from these theses is that there is a (defeasible) presumption in favour of the social and political status quo. The burden of proof is on the proponents of innovations, especially those innovations that threaten a society's basic structure.¹

The most important of conservatism's commitments is the principle that traditions ought to be complied with. There are two arguments for that principle, both of which are epistemological. The first is that any proposed social innovation can have bad unforeseen consequences, since the limits of human reason entail the impossibility of accurately predicting the results of change. The second is that traditions play an important, if not essential, role in the acquisition of normative knowledge, where normative knowledge is any knowledge that is pertinent to some area of life in which certain acts are required or forbidden. We can call such areas of life 'normative domains'. Morality, prudence, aesthetics, etiquette and epistemology are all normative domains.

There are, therefore, two distinct types of conservatism. The first was originally defended by Burke but has roots in Plato (Marquez 2016: 406-407; O'Hear 1998a).

¹ For a short overview of conservatism's main commitments, see Hamilton (2016), Muller (1997), O'Gorman (1986), O'Hear (1998a), Sigmund (2015), and White (1950). Scruton's (2001) book-length study is a classic longer overview of conservatism and his (2017) introduction is also highly useful.

It claims that wholesale or radical changes to the basic structure of society are almost never justified and there is a weighty presumption in favour of conserving existing institutions, customs and traditions (Brennan & Hamlin 2004; Brennan & Hamlin 2006; Brennan & Hamlin 2016b; Burke 2004; Marquez 2016: 405-406; Minogue 2012: 274-275; O'Hara 2011: 52-55, 86-87; O'Hara 2016; O'Sullivan 1976: 9-31; Rescher 2015; Stove 2003: 171-178).²

The reason for this is that we lack knowledge of the complexities of society (O'Hara 2011: 49-51). The absence of such knowledge makes any wholesale or radical change extremely dangerous, as its effects are unlikely to be fully understood before the change is brought about. Therefore, any proposed extensive changes risk unforeseen disastrous consequences.

Marquez, a contemporary defender of this argument, puts the case as follows: 'we have little knowledge about both the actual consequences of existing basic institutions and the potential consequences of alternatives' (2016: 407). He also argues that both our diagnoses of, and proposed solutions to, social problems 'are likely to be in error' (2016: 408). Therefore, it is rational to favour the status quo and to maintain it.

This is a sceptical argument for conservatism. Its core claim is that reliance on traditions is a 'second best' option; traditions should be complied with in the absence of a better alternative, namely optimal (or at least better) institutions, institutions whose creation would require greater knowledge (Brennan & Hamlin 2006: 289-290; Marquez 2016: 406). Thus, the burden of proof is on the advocates of proposed changes to demonstrate that they will not be harmful and will have the desired effects. I call this type of conservatism 'sceptical conservatism'.

The second form of conservatism was also first articulated in modern times by Burke but has its roots in Aristotle (Hamilton 2016; O'Hear 1998a; Quinton 2007;

² O'Hara's entire (2011) book could be read as a statement of this position, but I provide references to some representative passages here.

Scruton 2017: 42-43). It alleges that traditions transmit practical knowledge or wisdom (Burke 2004; Garry 2010: 35-39; Hayek 1988: 12; Hayek 2013: 488-490; Nisbet 1986: 29-34; Nyíri 1988; Oakeshott 1991c: 12-17; O'Hear 1998a; O'Hara 2011: 25-28, 109-111; Quinton 1978: 56-61; Scruton 2014: 21-22; Viereck 1962: 31-37).³ I call this non-sceptical form of conservatism 'traditionalist conservatism'.

Traditionalist conservatives understand practical knowledge as a form of irreducible ability-knowledge that cannot be (fully) captured in explicit rules or propositions (Arnhart 1998: 44-47; Arnhart 2005: 36-45; Gray 1993: 69-70; Hayek 1948b; Hayek 1967: 43-45; Hayek 2006: 21-27; Oakeshott 1991c: 12-14; Nisbet 1986: 31-34; Nyíri 1988: 23-24). Instead, practical knowledge is revealed, transmitted and acquired in a practice; it is 'embedded', so to speak, in practice (Casey 1978: 91-92; Hayek 1948b: 79-86; Nisbet 1986: 31-34; Nyíri 1988: 23-24; Oakeshott 1991c: 15; Scruton 2001: 31-32; Scruton 2014: 21). It is also often thought that the subject in possession of such ability-knowledge is not always able to articulate it, nor is she necessarily aware of possessing it (Gray 1993: 70; Hayek 1967: 44; Scruton 2001: 31-32; Scruton 2014: 21).

Advocates of traditionalist conservatism standardly contrast practical knowledge with theoretical knowledge. Unlike practical knowledge, theoretical knowledge can be captured in explicit rules, its possession does not entail practical competence in the relevant domain, and it can be acquired independently of practice, through reading, testimony, or the exercise of reason.

Consider the knowledge associated with cooking. Some culinary knowledge is theoretical in the sense defined above. Someone could come to know that if the pasta is to be *al dente*, it ought to be boiled for no longer than ten minutes, by reading a cookery book, listening to another's testimony, or (more elaborately) by deduction from scientific premises concerning which physical properties make

³ To be sure, the existence of traditions does not, in my view, require the existence or transmission of practical knowledge. That is, a tradition does not *necessarily* consist in the transmission of practical knowledge, though it may do so. This should become clear in Chapter Three.

pasta *al dente*, and how these properties are altered by the effects of boiling it in water.

However, such theoretical knowledge clearly does not exhaust culinary knowledge. There is knowledge which only a competent, well-practiced cook has, which enables her to cook successfully. This knowledge cannot be captured in propositions, is not possessed by everyone who has theoretical culinary knowledge, and it cannot easily be transmitted in the same way as theoretical culinary knowledge. These points are illustrated by a simple thought-experiment. Suppose it were possible to tell someone who is not a competent cook all of the rules governing and information that exists about cooking. This, by itself, would not automatically translate into culinary skill on her part (Oakeshott 1991b: 52). She could have all the ingredients and equipment necessary to produce a meal, together with the recipe for it, but those things are not jointly sufficient to enable her to cook the meal in question (Oakeshott 1991b: 52).^{4,5}

Why does the transmission of practical knowledge constitute a tradition?

Practical knowledge, according to traditionalist conservatives, is transmitted from generation to generation by demonstration and learned by imitating the demonstrator's example (Hayek 1967: 46-48; Oakeshott 1991c: 15; Scruton 2014: 21-22). It is inculcated by repeated engagement in the practice in question; competence in the practice and the associated practical knowledge thereby develops. Practical knowledge cannot, in the strict sense, be taught or learned

⁴ Oakeshott's example indicates an affinity between traditionalist conservatism and mainstream epistemology. Several writers in the literature on moral testimony deny that know-how can be easily transmitted by testimony. The reason for this is that the difficulty of transmitting know-how through testimony is one possible explanation for the *prima facie* oddity or wrongness of deferring to moral testimony. Moral knowledge's being a species of know-how, combined with know-how's not being transmissible through testimony, entails that moral knowledge isn't transmissible through testimony. For a discussion, though not endorsement of this argument, see Hills (2013: 553-554). (Hills accepts that know-how isn't transmissible via testimony, but denies that all moral knowledge is know-how).

⁵ Not all conservative writers use the terminology of practical and theoretical knowledge. Instead, they invoke one or more of a number of distinctions, such as the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that or the distinction between inarticulate (or tacit) knowledge and articulate (or explicit) knowledge. Nonetheless, the distinction between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge captures the points which many conservative writers are trying to make.

(Oakeshott 1991c: 15). While someone proficient in the practice can ‘impart’ practical knowledge insofar as she can supervise others and guide their repeated practice of the activity in question, the supervisee gains knowledge only through the practice she undertakes. There is no straightforward transfer of practical knowledge from teacher to student in the way that theoretical knowledge can be transferred through testimony (Oakeshott 1991c: 15). This process of transmitting practical knowledge from one generation to the next constitutes a tradition.^{6,7}

There are some problems with both extant forms of conservatism. First, there is no existing form of conservatism that sets out a theory of the role played by traditions in the provision of propositional normative knowledge. Propositional knowledge is the kind of knowledge whose object is a proposition. Such knowledge is paradigmatically attributed by sentences of the form ‘S knows that *p*’, where S is a knowing subject and *p* is a proposition (Ichikawa & Steup 2018). So, propositional normative knowledge is knowledge that *p*, where *p* is a normative proposition.⁸ Normative propositions concern what ought to be the case, as discussed. Thus, propositional normative knowledge is knowledge of what ought to be the case.

Sceptical theories fail to account for propositional normative knowledge because they deny that it is possible to fully know what the consequences of existing institutions are or to know in advance what the consequences of any proposed changes will be. Insofar as they acknowledge that whether we ought to maintain existing institutions or enact proposed changes might depend on the consequences of taking either option, they deny that we have normative knowledge of whether we ought to maintain or reform existing institutions.

⁶ Conservatives’ regarding practical knowledge as unarticulated ability-knowledge which is transmitted by tradition possibly indicates the influence of philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle (1946) and Michael Polanyi (1958: 53-54).

⁷ It is worth noting here that what some conservatives say about the transmission of practical knowledge is similar to Aristotle’s claims about the acquisition of virtue by habituation.

⁸ As is no doubt clear from these remarks, the theoretical knowledge mentioned in connection with traditionalist conservatism is a form of propositional knowledge.

Traditionalist conservatism also fails to account for propositional normative knowledge insofar as it tends to focus on non-propositional practical knowledge.

It is not immediately obvious why the failure of sceptical and traditionalist conservatism to account for the role that traditions play in the acquisition of normative propositional knowledge is a problem for these views. If the sceptical conservative's argument is sound, then there is no propositional normative knowledge and hence no role for traditions to play in its acquisition. Similarly, the traditionalist conservative may regard all normative knowledge as practical knowledge, or believe that while propositional normative knowledge exists, traditions play no role in its acquisition. Hence, I need to motivate the claim that there is plausibly propositional normative knowledge in whose acquisition tradition plays a role.

Consider some normative beliefs – beliefs whose objects are normative propositions – that relate to the British Constitution: that the Monarch ought to give Royal Assent to any Bill that is passed by both Houses of Parliament (T.R.S. Allan 2013: 58-59; Jaconelli 2005: 174), that the Monarch should appoint as Prime Minister whoever is best placed to command a majority in the House of Commons, that a government should resign if it loses a vote of no confidence, that ministers should resign from office after having mismanaged their departments (Jaconelli 2005: 149). Consider also some other normative beliefs that are relevant to politics: the belief that everyone has a right against unlawful arrest as enshrined in the Habeas Corpus Act and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, that everyone is entitled to a fair trial, that an accused person should be regarded as innocent of a crime until her guilt is proven beyond reasonable doubt (T.R.S. Allan 2013: 88-91, 93-101).

These beliefs could plausibly be formed out of deference to the traditions of British society. The constitutional rules mentioned above are purely traditional and are not codified in any way. For example, the Monarch is, in theory, entitled to refuse assent to any Bill that has been passed by Parliament. But, in practice, there is an established tradition which obliges her to give assent to all Bills that

have been passed by both Houses of Parliament (T.R.S. Allan 2013: 58-59, 64). The same is true of the principles governing the investigation and trial of crimes. There is a tradition requiring that citizens not be arrested without lawful basis and that everyone should have a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. The laws on these matters, it could be argued, simply enshrine the traditional principle (c.f. T.R.S. Allan 2013: 100-101).

Someone could acquire the beliefs discussed here simply by reliance on tradition. A British person could believe that the Monarch ought to give assent to any Bill that has been passed by Parliament, or that no one should be unlawfully arrested, simply because this is what the traditions of her society mandate.

Finally, these beliefs are plausibly true, and hence candidates for propositional normative knowledge. They are also, to my mind, sufficiently plausible that they are good candidates for knowledge. A subject plausibly knows that the Monarch ought to give assent to any Bill that has been passed by Parliament, that no one should be unlawfully arrested, and so on, even if she formed her beliefs about these matters simply by relying on tradition.

So, failure to account for propositional normative knowledge in whose acquisition tradition plays a role is a defect in sceptical and traditionalist conservatism.

Second, traditionalist conservatives do not tend to offer a sustained and explicit argument for their epistemological claims. The thesis that traditions play an important role in the acquisition of normative knowledge has only been expressed in metaphorical terms which are difficult to cash out, namely traditions' acting as repositories for or embodiments of the accumulated experience and wisdom of the political community. But a clear argument is needed, one which explains how we come to possess normative knowledge and the role played by traditions in that process.

Third, traditionalist conservatives generally do not appear to have consulted or drawn on epistemological theorising, even though, as some authors (Gray 1995:

160; O'Hara 2011: 24; Quinton 1978: 13) insist, epistemology is at the heart of conservatism. More specifically, while traditionalist conservatives assert the existence of practical knowledge that cannot be reduced to propositional knowledge, they have very rarely drawn on relevant epistemological theorising that supports this claim or situated their views within the relevant epistemological literature, except perhaps insofar as they have cited some philosophers of science (such as Polanyi) who have made similar arguments.

This thesis defends a form of conservatism that does not succumb to these problems. Most importantly, it develops a form of traditionalist conservatism on which there is both practical knowledge and propositional (or theoretical) normative knowledge that is acquired from traditions.

The core claim of this thesis is that some traditional beliefs constitute normative knowledge. I call this thesis the 'tradition principle'. By traditional beliefs, I mean a species of normative beliefs which are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. An agent defers to a tradition of her society in forming the belief that p just in case p captures the tradition in question and the agent forms her belief solely because p captures that tradition. For example, if there is a tradition in Smith's society which forbids stealing and Smith believes that it is wrong to steal solely because that tradition forbids stealing, then she has deferred to that tradition in forming her belief.

Traditions, in my view, are a species of social rules and the associated practices. For example, the tradition of the Monarch not interfering in politics is constituted by the practice of non-interference, combined with the rule forbidding interference in politics. Traditions, I argue, typically have three features: they are often complied with unreflectively, are reasonably old, and are evolved.

I call the argument for the tradition principle 'the Social Knowledge Argument'. The Social Knowledge Argument, in outline, is as follows. Deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in

some societies and traditional beliefs are beliefs that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. Importantly, in some societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation, some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true. Finally, a normative belief constitutes knowledge if and only if it is the output of a belief formation process that is reliable in respect of normative beliefs and is non-luckily true. Hence, some traditional beliefs are items of knowledge.

Deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies because traditions are the outputs of cultural evolution, which tends to produce traditions that capture the demands of normative domains such as morality, prudence, etiquette, and so on. I call such demands 'normative demands', for obvious reasons. Importantly, if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. (A process is reliable in respect of normative belief formation if and only if most of the normative beliefs in which it issues are true).

Cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands because it tends to produce cultural items and traits which enable a group's members to survive and reproduce. Furthermore, cultural items and traits enable a group's members to survive and reproduce only if they contribute to the fulfilment of human needs. Hence, cultural evolution tends to produce cultural items and traits that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs. Traditions are among the cultural items and traits that are shaped by cultural evolution in the direction of human need fulfilment. So, cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs. Traditions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs often capture normative demands because actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily right, as I argue later. Thus, rules that prescribe actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs mandate actions that are ordinarily right. And, of course, traditions are rules. Hence, traditions mandate

actions that are ordinarily right. Finally, rules that prescribe actions that are ordinarily right capture normative demands.

The argument for the premise that if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies, is this. If cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then there are societies most of whose traditions capture normative demands, because if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then most of the traditions of a given society will capture normative demands provided that some other causal influence does not prevent them from doing so. Furthermore, there are societies in which it is not the case that other causal influences have shaped traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands. So, if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then there are societies most of whose traditions are capture normative demands. And if most of a society's traditions capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in that society, since whenever one defers to a tradition that captures a normative demand one forms a true belief and processes that mostly leads to true normative beliefs are reliable in respect of normative belief formation.

What is the argument for the premise that in some societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation, some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true? I argue that there are some traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in respect of normative belief formation which satisfy two plausible anti-luck conditions on knowledge that have recently been proposed by epistemologists. These anti-luck conditions are sensitivity and safety. A subject's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, in the nearest possible world in which not- p , she does not believe that p (Pritchard 2014: 154-155). I contend that for some true traditional beliefs that p , the nearest non- p world is far-off, and, in such a world, the subject's society has different traditions,

traditions that are not captured by p . Hence, in the nearest non- p world, deferring to the traditions of the subject's society does not lead her to believe that p .

A subject's belief that p is safe if and only if, in nearly all (if not all) close worlds in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true, whether she continues to believe p or some non- p alternative, q (Pritchard 2005: 163). I argue that for some true traditional beliefs that p , there is no close world in which p is false. Hence, there is no close world in which the subject continues to form her belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe that p , but p is false. Similarly, for some true traditional beliefs that p , given the traditions which exist in the agent's society, there is no close world in which she forms her beliefs by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe any proposition other than p . Therefore, for some true traditional beliefs that p , there is no close possible world in which the agent continues to form a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe a false, non- p alternative.

There are two premises of the Social Knowledge Argument that I do not defend. The first simply states the definition of traditional beliefs – that traditional beliefs are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. The second states that a normative belief constitutes knowledge if and only if it is the output of a belief formation process that is reliable in respect of normative beliefs and is non-luckily true. This is a process reliabilist theory of knowledge that I assume throughout this thesis. Since it is assumed for the sake of discussion, I do not defend it at any length.

The foregoing, then, is the Social Knowledge Argument in outline. I call it the Social Knowledge Argument because cultural evolution is a social process. So, on my view, normative knowledge is social insofar as we depend on a social process for its acquisition. This is thoroughly in line with existing conservative political thought, which tends to treat normative knowledge as social in some sense. Indeed, conservative writers have always appealed to cultural evolution, albeit

using different labels, such as ‘the organic theory of society’ or the ‘invisible hand’, in making their epistemic arguments.

The Social Knowledge Argument fills each of the gaps in the conservatism literature that I discussed earlier, as is no doubt clear from the summary of the argument given above. Unlike previous conservative writers, I firstly give an account of how traditional beliefs can constitute propositional normative knowledge. The tradition principle is one way of cashing out the core idea of traditionalist conservatism – that traditions play an important role in the acquisition of normative knowledge – which allows that there is propositional normative knowledge that is acquired from traditions. Second, the Social Knowledge Argument is an explicit, sustained and non-metaphorical case for the tradition principle; so, I explicitly set out an argument for traditions’ role in the acquisition of normative knowledge that does not rely on metaphor. Third, the Social Knowledge Argument draws on previously untapped resources from epistemology, namely process reliabilist theories of knowledge.^{9,10}

My theory of conservatism is a more complete conservative normative epistemology than has hitherto been offered because it plugs these three gaps. There are two main reasons why no conservative theory which plugs these gaps has yet been offered. First, there are very few authors who have worked on conservatism.^{11,12} Second, it has often been thought that conservatism is not a proper object of philosophical inquiry.¹³

⁹ I also, to a lesser extent, draw on virtue epistemology. In Chapter Seven, I assess the prospects for a conservative virtue epistemology.

¹⁰ A reliabilist argument for traditional beliefs’ potentially constituting knowledge has already been suggested by Philip Kitcher (2001: 263-264). However, he does not tease out the political implications of his epistemological claims about tradition. So, a reliabilist case for conservatism has not hitherto been made. There are also conservative themes, such as the rejection of the *a priori* and an emphasis on history, in some of his other writings. See, for example, his paper ‘Epistemology without History is Blind’ (Kitcher 2011).

¹¹ Beckstein & Cheneval (2016: 333), Brennan & Hamlin (2016b: 336), Freedman (1996: 318-319), Kekes (1997: 351), and Tännsjö (1990: 5-6) have all made this point.

¹² The neglect of conservatism in the academic literature is something which appears to have remained virtually unchanged since it was first pointed out more than a century ago by C.D. Broad (1913: 396-397).

¹³ I refute this claim in Chapter Two.

Having set out the core claim of this thesis and outlined its contribution to the literature, I outline the chapters which follow.

In Chapter One, I offer my account of conservatism. I set out to identify the most *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigmatic conservative thinkers. I argue that the form of conservatism which satisfies this criterion is comprised of three principles. First, there is the tradition principle. Second, there is anti-rationalism, which says that there is no normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. Third, there is organicism, according to which society evolves and cannot be designed or shaped in accordance with human purposes to any great degree.

The argument of Chapter One is essentially an argument by elimination. I contend that there are three types of theory of conservatism. First, there are psychological theories, which reduce conservatism to a disposition to maintain the status quo. Psychological theories must be rejected because while they provide a good explanation of why people are drawn to conservatism, they do not provide an adequate account of what political conservatism consists in.

Second, there are the institutional theories, according to which conservatism is defined not by the content of its doctrines but by their function in being used to preserve existing institutions. Some institutional theories construe conservatism such that it is *prima facie* defensible and, in fact, overlap with the position that I advocate here. Thus, I have no quarrel with these institutional theories. However, some institutional theories, which I dub 'ideological theories', regard conservatism as a tool used by the ruling classes for the protection of their interests. Ideological theories identify conservatism with whatever doctrines the ruling classes believe can, in the circumstances in which they find themselves, be most effectively deployed in the defence of their privileges. Ideological theories should be rejected because they are either a genuine form of conservatism that is morally and intellectually dubious, and hence not worth defending, or a straw man that is contrived by conservatism's enemies. Therefore, ideological theories fail to be *prima facie* defensible.

Third, there are principled theories, which define conservatism as a set of principles. I argue that of these three types of theory, only the principled theories are strong candidates for being a *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigm conservative thinkers, given the flaws just discussed with the other types of theory. Importantly, of the principled theories, the account of conservatism on which the latter consists in the three aforementioned principles is the theory that best satisfies the criterion of being the most *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigm conservatives. Those principles capture the views of paradigm conservatives without reducing conservatism to something indefensible such as an internally inconsistent mixture of traditionalist or libertarian doctrines or wedding it to highly controversial doctrines such as pessimism about human nature.

In Chapter Two, I discuss conservatism's relationship to political theorising. It is commonly held that conservatism rejects political theorising. If that were true, then, assuming that arguing for deference to traditions is a form of political theorising, there could be no consistent form of conservatism like the one I defend in Chapters Four, Five and Six. I assess three arguments for this conclusion and reject each of them. The first claims that the conservative rejects rationalism, and since theorising about why traditions should be deferred to involves rationalism, she must reject theorising about the justification for deference to traditions as well, on pain of inconsistency. I call this the 'Anti-Rationalist Argument'. In response, I argue that the Anti-Rationalist Argument trades on an ambiguity. If 'rationalism' is interpreted as a doctrine that is incompatible with conservatism, such as belief in the existence of normative knowledge which is acquired through pure reason or a high degree of confidence in the power of human reasoning to solve social problems, then it simply is not true that theorising commits one to rationalism. By contrast, if 'rationalism' is interpreted as involving commitment only to having good arguments for one's views, then it is indeed true that defending deference to traditions in reasoned terms commits one to rationalism. However, conservatives need not and *should* not reject 'rationalism' in this sense.

The second argument says that conservatives reject ideology and that all theories are ideologies; hence, the conservative rejects theory. I call this the 'Anti-Ideology Argument'. The Anti-Ideology Argument can be refuted in a very similar way to the Anti-Rationalist Argument. If 'ideology' is identical with 'theory', then conservatism does not reject ideology. For as I argue in connection with the Anti-Rationalist Argument, theory does not involve anything that is incompatible with conservatism. If 'ideology' is something that is incompatible with conservatism – such as a utopian plan for large-scale social change or a rationalistic theory involving *a priori* normative knowledge – then it is false that all theories are ideologies.

The third argument claims that conservatism is self-undermining because it has the paradoxical status of a theory which forbids theories. I call this the 'Anti-Theory-Theory Argument'. I reply that conservatism is indeed a theory that forbids theories, but there is no inconsistency in this once it is made clear what kind of theory conservatism is as opposed to the kind of theory it rejects. More specifically, the conservative opposes first-order theorising but does not oppose second-order theorising. First-order political theorising concerns substantive normative matters which are relevant to the political domain such as the justification of state authority and the proper distribution of resources. Second-order political theorising concerns more abstract matters such as the proper way to do first-order political theorising and where its epistemic and practical limitations lie, the sources of our normative knowledge, the nature of human beings and our societies, and so on.

Importantly, conservatives' rejection of first-order theorising is motivated by their adherence to the three principles that comprise their view, which are exclusively second-order, since they concern normative epistemology and the nature of society. Furthermore, these principles entail that first-order theorising ought to be avoided. They imply that instead of theorising about what ought to be done at a practical level in politics, we should rely on tradition in the absence of strong countervailing reasons. As such, conservatives do not typically endorse normative ethical theories such as utilitarianism or Kantian deontology,

nor would they seek to direct practical affairs by applying such theories. However, there is no inconsistency in having second-order reasons for forbidding first-order theorising.

Since I claim that conservatism is mostly concerned with second-order matters, my understanding of conservatism is unique. Unlike most conservatives, I take conservatism to be more abstract than other views insofar as its principles concern epistemological and metaphysical matters rather than directly practical matters. Conservatism's proponents, however, usually take it to be more concerned with concrete, practical matters and are distrustful of abstraction.

Chapter Three defends my account of traditions. I argue that there are two aspects to a tradition: an object which is transmitted from one generation to the next and the process of transmission itself. The objects of transmission, in my view, are rule-governed social practices which are characteristically complied with unreflectively, reasonably old, and evolved. I also discuss the relationship between traditions and other practices with which they overlap, such as habits, customs, rituals and ceremonies. Traditions differ from these related phenomena in virtue of being social, their longevity, and their evaluative and normative dimensions.

In regard to the transmission process, I contend that rule-governed social practices are transmitted by osmosis – the unconscious inculcation of beliefs, motives, norms, and so on, and the resulting behaviours. I argue that osmosis is a more plausible candidate for the transmission process for social practices than other possible transmission processes.

Chapter Four is the first of three chapters in which I defend the Social Knowledge Argument. In Chapter Four, I simply explain the Social Knowledge Argument and remind the reader of its contribution to the literature on conservatism. As discussed, the Social Knowledge Argument says that some traditional beliefs constitute normative knowledge because deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in

some societies, specifically those societies whose traditions generally capture normative demands. And, in some such societies, there are non-luckily true traditional beliefs. Furthermore, if a normative belief is reliably produced and non-luckily true, it is an item of knowledge. Hence, there are traditional beliefs that constitute knowledge.

Chapter Five defends the first premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, that there are societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. The argument for that premise has already been summarised above. It says that deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in societies whose traditions generally capture normative demands. There are societies whose traditions generally capture normative demands because traditions are the outputs of cultural evolution, which tends to produce traditions whose rules prescribe actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs, and such actions are ordinarily right. Moreover, rules that prescribe actions that are ordinarily right capture normative demands. Thus, cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands. Hence, provided that no other causal influences shape a society's traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands, deference to its traditions is reliable. And there are societies in which no other causal influences have shaped its traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands.

I discuss an objection to the first premise of the Social Knowledge Argument in Chapter Five. Buchanan and Powell (2018: Ch.8) argue that cultural evolution does not reliably produce traditions which capture normative demands because there is a range of causal influences on traditions that ensures that they fail to generally capture normative demands.

In response, I contend that assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of traditions that do not capture normative demands. I do not have space to make a sustained argument for relativism in this thesis. However, a limited form of relativism is plausible in light of the fact that, as discussed, acts

that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily right. This is because, as I will argue, some needs are universal while others are not. Moreover, even in respect of universal needs, there are plausibly multiple different types of social arrangements that can contribute to the fulfilment of these needs. Thus, some actions are universally right or wrong, while others are right or wrong only for members of a given society.

In Chapter Six, I argue for the third premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, which states that in some societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation, some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true. The argument for this premise has also already been summarised above. I contend that there are traditional beliefs that satisfy two plausible anti-luck conditions that have recently been advocated by epistemologists – sensitivity and safety – and these are formed in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable. I will demonstrate these points by offering several examples of true traditional beliefs that are drawn from different societies that satisfy both conditions.

I also consider the objection, in Chapter Six, that my view seems to imply the epistemic badness of multiculturalism by threatening the safety of traditional beliefs in multicultural societies. Recall, I argue that there are traditional beliefs that are safe because there is no close world in which the agent forms a belief by deferring to her society's traditions and comes to believe a different, false proposition from the one she believes in the actual world. However, one might argue that in multicultural societies, there are competing traditions from different cultures on any given normative question. So, when the agent forms a belief on some normative matter by deferring to the traditions of her multicultural society, she could easily have deferred to the tradition of another culture, which may be captured by a false proposition, and thereby come to believe a falsehood.

In response, I argue that in multicultural societies many of the traditions that are relevant to politics are adhered to by the members of many of the cultures

that exist in that society. Thus, on many normative questions there is no possibility of the agent deferring to the traditions of another culture and coming to believe a falsehood.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I assess the prospects for developing a conservative virtue epistemology. According to virtue epistemologists, knowledge is true belief that is formed out of intellectual virtue. Virtue epistemologists are standardly divided into two camps: those who define intellectual virtues as reliable innate faculties (virtue reliabilists) and those who define intellectual virtues as cultivated character traits (virtue responsibilists). I discuss one major virtue reliabilist account of knowledge, John Greco's, and one major virtue responsibilist account of knowledge, Linda Zagzebski's. I argue that deference to the traditions of one's society could be construed as an intellectual virtue on either a virtue reliabilist or virtue responsibilist picture of intellectual virtue. Therefore, there are some interesting prospects for developing a virtue epistemic form of conservatism, though doing so is a project for future research.

Chapter One: What Is Conservatism?

In this chapter, I set out the form of conservatism for which I argue in the remainder of this thesis. I contend that conservatism is comprised of three principles. First, there is the tradition principle, which states that some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge. Second, there is anti-rationalism, according to which there is no normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. Third, there is organicism – the thesis that society evolves and cannot be designed in accordance with human purposes to any great degree.

I first explain why it is necessary to give an account of conservatism, in §1.1. The reason is that there is significant lack of clarity concerning what conservatism consists in. Thus, stating that one is arguing for conservatism is insufficient to make clear the position which will be defended.

In §1.2. I explain the argument for my account of conservatism, which is essentially an argument by elimination. I seek to identify the most *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigmatic conservative thinkers. There are three types of theory of conservatism: psychological theories, which reduce conservatism to a disposition to maintain the status quo, institutional theories, on which conservatism is defined not by the content of its doctrines but by their function in being used to preserve existing institutions, and principled theories, which define conservatism as a set of principles. I argue that, of these three types of theory, only the principled theories are strong candidates for being a *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigm conservative thinkers and that, of the principled theories, the account of conservatism that I advocate here is the one which best satisfies that demand.

In §1.3. I defend the premises of the argument outlined above. In §1.3.1. I argue that psychological theories must be rejected because by reducing conservatism to a personal attitude, they tell us nothing about the nature of political conservatism. In §1.3.2. I argue that some institutional theories regard conservatism as an instrument for the protection of the interests of the ruling

classes. These theories identify conservatism with whatever doctrines the ruling classes believe can, in their society, be most effectively deployed in the defence of their privileges. I reject these institutional theories because they do not represent a form of conservatism that is worth defending. There are other institutional theories that overlap significantly with principled theories and they can therefore be accepted. Finally, in §1.3.3. I argue that the principles that I propose here constitute the most *prima facie* defensible position that captures paradigm conservatives' views; other principled positions reduce conservatism to something ridiculous, such as an internally inconsistent mixture of traditionalist and libertarian doctrines, or tether it to something highly contestable, such as religion or pessimism about human nature.

1.1. Why Is It Necessary to Define Conservatism?

I begin then by exploring why it is necessary to defend an account of conservatism. The reason is very simple: I need to make clear what position I am arguing for, and this is made difficult by significant lack of clarity concerning what conservatism is.

There are three principal sources of this unclarity. The first is the ambiguity of the term 'conservatism'. 'Conservatism' is used to refer to different and incompatible political views. As noted by several authors, there is a popular tendency to treat every view which is typically considered 'right-wing' as a form of conservatism (Brennan & Hamlin 2004: 676; Eatwell 1989: 18-20; Hamilton 2016; Minogue 2012: 272-273; O'Hara 2011: 207; Vannatta 2014: 1-3).

This tendency is also present in the academic literature on conservatism. Its principal exemplars are Eccleshall (1994: 67-73), Femia (2012: 223-224, 236-237), Greenleaf (1973), Honderich (2005: 15, 38-39, 69-70, 302-303), Meyer (1964), Robin (2011), and Willetts (1992).

Such ‘right-wing’ views include a range of incompatible positions, from those which emphasise authority and tradition through to right-libertarianism. Thus, the term ‘conservatism’ is ambiguous.^{14,15}

The second source of unclarity is conservatives’ unwillingness to state exactly what they stand for. The main reason for this is their fear that by giving a systematic account of their views, they will lapse into the rationalistic or ideological tendencies that they reject (Hearnshaw 1933: 8-10; Oakeshott 1991c: 26-27; O’Hear 1998a; Rossiter 1955: 20; Scruton 2001: 4-16; Scruton 2006: vii-x).¹⁶

The third reason for lack of clarity concerning conservatism is that conservatives’ attempts to articulate their position (often in response to worries about the other reasons for unclarity mentioned above) have generated a large literature in which one can find many competing accounts of conservatism and taxonomies of its various forms (Alexander 2013: 594-595; Allen 1981: 582-583). This, perversely, has exacerbated the unclarity concerning conservatism, given that no two authors in this literature agree on exactly what conservatism is.

Hence, simply stating that one is arguing for conservatism is insufficient to make clear precisely what the target notion is. It is therefore necessary for me to identify the form of conservatism that I seek to defend.

1.2. Overview of the Argument

This thesis seeks to defend the most persuasive form of philosophical conservatism that captures the views of paradigm conservatives. In pursuing this aim, I first seek to identify the most *prima facie* defensible form of conservatism

¹⁴ Each of these theorists regards conservatism as including the full range of incompatible right-wing doctrines because they endorse a theory of conservatism which tries to capture everything that is called ‘conservatism’ in common usage. I discuss the merits of that sort of approach in §1.3.

¹⁵ The cultural context can, of course, help clarify what is meant. In the USA, conservatives tend to be libertarians, whereas in other parts of the world, they may lean more toward authoritarianism. Nonetheless, the notion of conservatism remains in need of clarification.

¹⁶ This is something else to which I return later, in §2.2.

that captures the views of paradigm conservatives. I then assess whether it is ultimately defensible by considering what I take to be the strongest argument for it and evaluating objections.

This chapter undertakes the first of these tasks: identifying the most *prima facie* defensible form of philosophical conservatism that captures the views of paradigm conservatives. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, a theory of conservatism should characterise the latter so that it is *prima facie* defensible and should capture the views of paradigm conservative thinkers. The theory of conservatism which satisfies these criteria better than the other available theories is the one that should be accepted.

Let me clarify these criteria before proceeding. First, I say that an account of conservatism should be *prima facie* defensible. That remark should not be read as an attempt to build into the characterisation of conservatism that it is true or plausible. The point is rather that there is no good reason to discuss a form of conservatism that is either absurd or a misrepresentation. Again, I am seeking to identify the most defensible version of what conservatives actually believe.

Second, the three principles that I posit are not supposed to be an analysis of the concept CONSERVATISM. In other words, I do not seek to provide a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a view's constituting conservatism. Instead, the three principles of conservatism that I suggest are intended as a reasonable characterisation to which there may be exceptions. As will become clear, my objection to conservative views which do not involve the tradition principle, anti-rationalism, and organicism is not that they are not genuine forms of conservatism; it is that they are not forms of the view that are worth discussing. A related point is this. I do not argue that there are strict boundaries between conservatism and other views, such as liberalism or

libertarianism.¹⁷ I leave open the possibility that the boundaries between conservatism and other views are ‘blurred’.

Why do I aim to defend the most persuasive form of philosophical conservatism that captures the views of paradigm conservatives? The first part of this aim scarcely needs to be justified. There is little point in defending any form of conservatism other than the most plausible, and any criticism of conservatism that is not aimed at the most plausible form of the view is open to the accusation of attacking a straw man. I seek to defend a form of conservatism which captures paradigmatic conservatives’ views because I wish to argue for a form of conservatism that has discernible connections with the intellectual history of conservative thought. Moreover, a good test of whether some form of conservatism has discernible connections with historical conservatism is whether it captures the views of paradigmatic conservatives.

These points may seem obvious. However, as will become apparent in the sections below, they have been forgotten in the recent conservatism literature. Enemies of conservatism have defended reductive analyses of the view that make it appear to be intellectually and morally dubious. These analyses fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion. Some conservatives have offered theories of conservatism that fail to capture paradigm conservatives by wedding it to controversial doctrines that many paradigmatic conservatives reject, such as the view that religion is the basis of civil society or pessimism about human nature.

I now outline the argument for my account of conservatism. The thrust of the argument is that the three principles which I set out above satisfy the criteria on a good theory of conservatism better than the other extant theories. I first remind the reader of those principles and explain why they are plausibly regarded as a form of conservatism. I then demonstrate that they better satisfy the criteria on a good theory of conservatism than any other extant theory.

¹⁷ These are the two views with which conservatism most plausibly overlaps and whose relationship to conservatism is most frequently discussed. O’Hara (2011: Ch.7) provides a helpful discussion of this.

First, there is the tradition principle, which says that some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge. Traditional beliefs, recall, are normative beliefs that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. Second, there is anti-rationalism, according to which there is no normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. The third principle is organicism, according to which society evolves and cannot be designed or shaped in accordance with human purposes to any great degree.^{18,19}

These principles together form a coherent and recognisably conservative package. Conservatism's central thesis, the tradition principle, is supported by the other two principles (c.f. Quinton 1978: 16-18; Quinton 2007: 285-286). The organic evolution of society is what produces traditions, as I argue in Chapter Five. Hence, it is partly because organicism is true that the tradition principle is true; without traditions there can be no knowledge which is acquired by deference thereto. The connection between anti-rationalism and the tradition principle is that if the source of normative knowledge is not pure reason and yet we have normative knowledge, then there must be some other source of normative knowledge. Reliance on tradition is the conservative's proposed alternative to a rationalist normative epistemology.

They also support a conservative approach to politics. Together they suggest that, other things equal, existing political arrangements ought to be conserved; change is to be resisted and the burden of proof is on the innovator. The tradition principle supports that conclusion since radical plans to re-shape a society's social arrangements by destroying traditional norms and replacing them with new ones threatens to destroy the knowledge that we acquire from traditions, knowledge which, according to the conservative, we ought to make use of in shaping social policy. Anti-rationalism supports conservation of the

¹⁸ In deciding on these principles, I have been heavily influenced by Quinton (1978: 16-18, 56-61; 2007), who traces his own account of conservatism to Burke.

¹⁹ Since the term 'principle' is often reserved for normative claims, one might wonder why I call these conservative theses 'principles'. The reason is that firstly, this label nicely brings out the contrast between my sort of account of conservatism and those which reduce conservatism to an attitude or functional role. (I discuss these accounts shortly). Secondly, these conservative theses are principles in the broad sense that they are general philosophical claims.

status quo when plans for radical social change are predicated on rationalistic assumptions. Organicism supports conserving the status quo to the extent that if society is an evolving and highly complex entity, then human beings' capacity to shape it in accordance with our wishes may be limited. Hence, proposals for change ought to be met with some scepticism.

The argument for these principles' jointly constituting the most *prima facie* defensible account of conservatism that captures paradigm conservatives' views proceeds by elimination. I first identify the various types of theory of conservatism that have been offered. I then proceed to reject any theories which characterise conservatism as something that is too ridiculous to be worth defending. Finally, I assess which of the remaining *prima facie* defensible theories best captures paradigmatic conservatives' views.

There are three types of account of conservatism. The first is the sort of account on which conservatism is a psychological state such as the desire to conserve the familiar. I call these 'psychological theories'.

The second is the kind of account on which conservatism is defined by its functional role in defending existing social and political institutions, rather than by the content of its doctrines. I call these 'institutional theories'. A subtype of the institutional theories says that conservatism is whatever set of ideas are, in the society and circumstances in which they find themselves, conducive to the ruling elites' goal of preserving their privileges. These theories claim that conservatism is an ideology in the Marxian sense – it is a mask for and instrument of the ruling classes' self-interest. I call them 'ideological theories', for obvious reasons. I refer to non-ideological institutional theories as 'pure institutional theories'.

The third is the sort of account on which conservatism consists in a set of principles, which I call 'principled theories'. There are three subtypes of the principled theories. The first says that conservatism combines mutually incompatible doctrines. I call these 'incompatibility theories'. Most

incompatibility theories claim that conservatism is an unstable combination of traditionalist conservatism and right-libertarianism. The second claims that traditionalist and libertarian doctrines are compatible, and the differences between them are merely differences of emphasis. I call these ‘fusionist theories’ (c.f. Meyer 1964). The third posits principles that are intended to capture only traditionalist conservatism. I call these ‘pure principled theories’.

Psychological theories should be rejected because, while these theories may explain why people are attracted to political conservatism, they are defective accounts of political conservatism. They say nothing about the commitments of political conservatism, since they are simply about the wrong subject matter.

Pure institutional theories are unobjectionable. They posit conservative principles which do not attempt to construe conservatism as morally or intellectually indefensible, and they capture paradigm conservatives. They are essentially the same as principled theories except that they claim that it is the function, and not the content, of conservatism’s principles that makes them conservative principles.

Ideological theories can be rejected. They construe conservatism as the unprincipled pursuit of self-interest. Such an approach to politics is not even *prima facie* defensible. There is no point in evaluating a form of conservatism that is either genuine but abhorrent or a distortion of the view. Thus, even if there is indeed a form of conservatism which consists solely in the pursuit of self-interest, it is not a form of conservatism that is worth defending.

So, only the principled theories remain. Incompatibility theories can be rejected because they, like the ideological theories, represent forms of conservatism that are not worth defending and may be intended to caricature conservatism. In other words, incompatibility theories fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion. However, I will argue that the incompatibility theories are correct to assert the incompatibility of traditionalist conservatism and libertarianism. Thus, the

fusionist theories can be rejected because they attempt to reconcile incompatible doctrines.

Therefore, the theory of conservatism that satisfies the criteria on a good theory of conservatism must be a pure principled theory. Most pure principled theories characterise conservatism in a way that makes it seem *prima facie* defensible. However, many such theories fail to capture a significant number of paradigm conservatives, such as theories that allege conservatism's commitment to religion. As I demonstrate shortly, of the pure principled theories that satisfy the *prima facie* defensibility criterion, mine captures a larger range of paradigm conservatives than those that link conservatism to religion. Hence, it should be accepted.

Having summarised the argument for my theory of conservatism, I briefly discuss why several other types of theory characterise conservatism as *prima facie* indefensible. The explanation is that they try to capture everything known as 'conservatism' in common usage. Succeeding in that ambition requires that one posit features that are plausibly shared by all such views. However, the various principles that have been labelled as 'conservatism' in everyday discourse are incompatible. Hence, if one insists on capturing everything known as 'conservatism' in common usage by positing common principles, one will either have to say that conservatism is internally inconsistent, as incompatibility theories do, or deny the incompatibility of those principles, as fusionist theories do.

An alternative is to identify some common, underlying feature shared by all of those views that are commonly called 'conservatism' which explains why they are all (genuine) forms of the view. One candidate for this underlying feature is the function of the relevant principles in preserving existing institutions. It could be argued that incompatible sets of principles can be genuine forms of

conservatism because they share the same function of being deployed in defence of existing institutions, as argued by institutional theorists.²⁰

The relevance of these points is as follows. Since the attempt to capture all doctrines which are known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage leads to theories that fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion, it is not possible to propose a theory of conservatism which both presents conservatism as *prima facie* defensible and captures every view which goes by that label. Hence, I have sought only to capture *paradigm* conservative views rather than *all* conservative views. I seek to identify a defensible form of conservatism, and this means foregoing the ambition to offer a theory that captures every form of the view.

1.3. Theories of Conservatism

I now defend the argument sketched above. I begin with psychological theories before considering institutional theories. In both cases, I explain the type of account in question more fully before presenting objections. Finally, I discuss the principled theories and show that the set of conservative principles that I propose better fit the criteria on a good theory of conservatism than competing principled theories.

1.3.1. Psychological Theories

Let me discuss in more detail why psychological theories are not forms of conservatism that are worthy of discussion. According to psychological theories, conservatism is simply a personal attitude. There are two attitudes that have been identified by psychological theorists as (at least partly) constitutive of conservatism. The first is a disposition to conserve some treasured item(s), such as the status quo (Beckstein 2015; Brennan & Hamlin 2004; Clarke 2017),^{21,22} the

²⁰ O’Hara (2011: 7-14) has offered a similar argument to the one I make in this paragraph.

²¹ While the text suggests that he advocates a psychological theory of conservatism, remarks made by Beckstein in person suggest that he does not think of conservatism as consisting only in the disposition to conserve the status quo.

²² The conservative attitude is sometimes identified as a desire, preference, or bias rather than a disposition. This need not detain us here: desires are plausibly a type of disposition, and preferences are like desires.

particular things one values or to which one has a special relationship (Cohen 2011; McPherson 2019), whatever is well-established, such as political institutions and social customs (Tännsjö 1990), the familiar (Kekes 1998: 5-13; Oakeshott 1991a; White 1950: 1-3), the tried-and-tested (Oakeshott 1991a), the present (Müller 2006: 362-364), and existing inequalities (Cowling 1978: 9; Norton & Aughey 1981: 37-52).²³

The second attitude which has been identified by psychological theorists as constituting conservatism is fear of or aversion to change, risk or the unknown. Prominent exponents of this type of account include Brennan and Hamlin (2004), Clarke (2017), Cecil (1912: 9), Hearnshaw (1933: 16-19), Hayek (2006: 345),²⁴ Kekes (1998: 5-13), Oakeshott (1991a), and O'Hara (2011: 86-87).^{25,26,27}

Importantly, these positions are compatible. There are psychological theories that regard both a disposition to preserve the status quo and an aversion to change as required for being conservative (Brennan & Hamlin 2004; Clarke 2017: 551-552; Cecil 1912: 9-17; Kekes 1998: 6-9; Oakeshott 1991a: 407-412).

Here are some representative statements of recent and prominent psychological theories of conservatism. I begin with Michael Oakeshott's, since it is the most influential. Oakeshott argues that conservatism is not only 'a creed or a doctrine, but a disposition' (1991a: 407). He claims that being conservative

²³ Some psychological theories claim that being disposed to conserve the status quo makes one a (genuine) conservative only if one is disposed to conserve the status quo simply because it is the status quo, and not for the sake of some independent value it instantiates. See Beckstein (2015), Brennan and Hamlin (2004; 2016a; 2016b), Clarke (2017: 554), Cohen (2011), Huntington (1957), Oakeshott (1991c: 408), and Tännsjö (1990: 4-5).

²⁴ Hayek makes this point in the course of disavowing conservatism (2006: 343-355). However, since conservatives have been sympathetic to the overall tenor of his thought, I treat him, loosely, as a conservative hereafter.

²⁵ O'Hara does not regard conservatism as merely risk-aversion, since he also regards it as involving principles (2011; 2016).

²⁶ Hogg claims that conservatism is an attitude, without saying anything about the nature of that attitude or its objects (1947: 13-14).

²⁷ There is a third candidate for the attitude with which conservatism should be identified, though I do not discuss it at any length because there is only one prominent theorist who endorses it. Berki (1981: Ch.6, especially pp. 198-202) identifies conservatism with nostalgia, by which he seems to understand the psychological tendency to abstract certain elements of the (real, concrete) past and valorise them as a universal ideal. Hence, he terms conservatism the 'idealism of nostalgia'.

involves being ‘disposed to think and behave in certain manners’ (1991a: 407). He goes on to say that ‘to be conservative [...] is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, 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 utopian bliss’ (1991a: 408).

Geoffrey Brennan and Alan Hamlin argue that ‘conservatism [...] is a disposition that grants the status quo a normative authority by virtue of its being the status quo’ (2004: 676). The dispositional conservative, in their view, is somebody for whom the status quo has value simply because it is the status quo, regardless of its content (2004: 676-678). Thus, for the dispositional conservative, other things being equal, the closer a given possible state is to the status quo, the better it is, and the further a given possible state is from the status quo, the worse it is (2004: 678-680).

Relatedly, since the conservative attributes content-independent value to the status quo, conservatism does not specify any ideals or ends to be realised. Instead, conservatism is a risk-averse ‘posture’ that the conservative takes toward the realisation of her chosen end (Brennan & Hamlin 2004: 677). There are no limits – in principle – to what the chosen ends can be. Hence, according to Brennan and Hamlin, there are conservative libertarians, conservative utilitarians and even conservative egalitarians (2004: 679). The difference between a conservative who subscribes to a given ideal and a non-conservative who subscribes to the same ideal, they claim, is that the former is more responsive to considerations of whether a proposed plan for realising the relevant end is feasible given the limits of human knowledge (2004: 682-690). In other words, they are more attentive to practical limitations on the available means of realising their chosen ideal.

Torbjörn Tännsjö argues that conservatism is the disposition to preserve whatever is well-established simply because it is well-established. He begins by considering the definition of conservatism according to which conservatism is

the disposition to preserve existing institutions (1990: 3-4). He then argues that this definition is in one respect too inclusive and in another respect too exclusive. It is too inclusive because being disposed to conserve existing institutions is not sufficient to make one a conservative. Instead, one is a conservative only if one is disposed to conserve existing institutions simply because they exist (Tännsjö 1990: 4). This means that it is not conservative to be disposed to conserve the status quo only because one benefits from it (Tännsjö 1990: 4). The definition is too exclusive, though, because the focus on institutions is too narrow. There is no reason not to include ‘values and customs, as well as institutions’ (Tännsjö 1990: 4). So, Tännsjö concludes that conservatism is a disposition to preserve whatever exists as a well-established fact, merely because it is well-established (Tännsjö 1990: 4).²⁸

I now evaluate psychological theories. Psychological theories certainly have some advantages. First, they are plausibly good explanations of why people are attracted to political conservatism. This is because it is plausible that many people are disposed to maintain the status quo, and it may even be true that everyone is thus disposed to some degree, as maintained by some authors (Cecil 1912: 9-12; Cohen 2011: 204-205; Hearnshaw 1933: 16; Quinton 2007: 286; Scruton 2001: 10). If someone is disposed to preserve the status quo, then her adherence to political conservatism may be a manifestation of that disposition (Huntington 1957; Mannheim 1953: 94-101; Kekes 1998: 6, 13-26). Thus, there being a widespread disposition to preserve the status quo might explain the persistent existence and strength of conservative political movements.

Second, psychological theories can plausibly capture many paradigm conservative positions and perhaps all views that are called ‘conservatism’ in common usage. The vast range of positions and movements known as

²⁸ The reader may be thinking here that the advocates of psychological theories ought to give a justification for indulging the conservative disposition. This is correct. Some psychological theorists have in fact offered reasons for encouraging the conservative disposition. For example, several psychological theorists appeal to sceptical considerations such as the limits of human reason and the resultant risk of unforeseen or unintended consequences that accompanies any proposed plans for change (Brennan & Hamlin 2004; O’Hara 2011; Tännsjö 1990). Thus, dispositional theories overlap with the sceptical theories discussed in the Introduction. I discuss further the need for psychological theories to justify the conservative disposition in §2.2.

‘conservatism’ may all be manifestations of the same underlying disposition to preserve the status quo. For example, English conservatives might seek to conserve the uncodified constitution, the Monarchy, and the establishment of the Church of England. Conservatives in the United States might aim to conserve the written constitution, interpreted according to the intentions of the Framers, the free market, and the influence of religion in public life, etc. Psychological theories can capture the intuition that both of these groups are conservative, in spite of their having incompatible views and aims. They both plausibly manifest the disposition to maintain the status quo, which has different content in England than in the USA (c.f. Sigmund 2015).²⁹

There is, however, a serious objection to psychological theories of conservatism. As accounts of the content of political conservatism, psychological theories are extremely inadequate. The principal reason for this is that they are simply about the wrong subject matter. If one were to ask for an account of political conservatism and the answer given is that it is a disposition to preserve the status quo, one might think that the respondent had changed the subject or had answered the wrong question. Psychological theories tell us nothing about the policies or political and social institutions favoured by political conservatives. They tell us nothing about political conservatives’ beliefs or ethical values. So, psychological theories of conservatism fail as accounts of political conservatism.

Several writers in the conservatism literature have had similar worries. In response to Oakeshott’s dispositional theory, Honderich argues that the claim that conservatism is merely the defence of the familiar is of no ‘use in the enterprise of coming to understand conservatism’ (2005: 17-18). It tells us

²⁹ Incidentally, some commentators have noted that psychological theories capture views that are certainly not paradigm instances of conservatism, since the class of people who are disposed to maintain the status quo includes many people who are not paradigmatically political conservatives. For example, Honderich has argued that Oakeshott’s psychological theory of conservatism would classify ‘socialists, or the National Union of Mine Workers, or [...] the Pennsylvania Amish’ as conservatives (2005: 18). Similar points have been made by Alexander (2013: 603), Bourke (2018: 452-455), Grant (1992: 424), Harbour (1982: 1-2), Lewis (1953: 730), Pilbeam (2003: 8-9), and Scruton (2001: 10). I do not press this point further, since I claim only that a theory of conservatism should capture paradigm conservatives. There is no requirement that a theory of conservatism should *not* capture anyone who is *not* a paradigm conservative. Again, I am not seeking to delineate strict boundaries for conservatism. However, I mention this argument because it is the most common objection to psychological theories.

nothing about political conservatism's content. Thus, 'one may be led into supposing that [...] the conception of conservatism as an indiscriminating defence of the familiar [...] is not really the conception being proposed' (Honderich 2005: 17), since it 'reduces a sizeable tradition of political parties and loyalties, a tradition of some considerable rationality, to no more than an absurd defence of all that is familiar' (Honderich 2005: 17-18).

Similarly, Femia argues that psychological theories omit 'any attempt to show that all people who exhibit a conservative disposition actually embrace conservative ideology' (2015: 22). Psychological theories, he complains, tell us nothing about typical conservative beliefs. But, he argues, there clearly are beliefs that are typically held by conservatives, such as the moral imperfection of human beings, the limits of human reason, the reliance-worthiness of traditions, and the benefits of the market (Femia 2005: 23).³⁰

Eccleshall rejects psychological theories on the grounds that political conservatism is 'a cluster of ideas about the purposes of government and the organisation of society' (1994: 62). Since psychological theories fail to distinguish 'ahistorical' patterns of human motivation from ideas which first gained currency at a specific juncture of history and which are self-consciously subscribed to, they are, in his apt phrase, 'of negligible analytic value' (1994: 62).

In a similar vein, O'Sullivan points out that psychological theories do not distinguish between unconscious and universal patterns of motivation from self-consciously held beliefs. He argues that on psychological theories, the term 'conservatism' is one that 'could be applied just as well to the caveman who clung to stone-age practices, or to the rustic who instinctively and unthinkingly follows traditional usages' as to 'a highly articulate thinker like Edmund Burke' (O'Sullivan 1976: 9). But it is 'with conservatism as an ideology, and not as a subjective attitude [...] that we have to deal' in politics (O'Sullivan 1976: 9). And an 'ideology, unlike an attitude, requires a self-conscious attempt to provide an

³⁰ Alexander (2016a: 215-217) has endorsed Femia's objection to the psychological theories.

explicit and coherent theory of man, society and the world' (O'Sullivan 1976: 9).³¹

We have seen therefore that psychological theories define conservatism as a personal attitude, such as a disposition to preserve the status quo. While psychological theories may provide a good explanation of why people are attracted to political conservatism, they say nothing about its content, and hence are defective. Therefore, they can be rejected.

1.3.2. Institutional Theories

I now discuss institutional theories. Again, I first explain this type of theory before raising an objection. Institutional theories define conservatism as a kind of role played by various ideas and political movements. That role is defending existing institutions against challenges to their continued existence or authority. In other words, on these theories, conservatism is a function which takes as its inputs various existing conditions and has as its outputs judgements concerning what sort of policy will best maintain the status quo. It is the role played by ideas and political movements, not their content, that makes them forms of conservatism on institutional theories. Thus, we can think of institutional theories as being committed to a kind of functionalism about conservatism.

As with functionalism about other domains, such as the mind, institutional theories of conservatism sometimes invoke the idea of multiple realizability, though their proponents never use that term. There are institutional theories which claim that many different and incompatible doctrines can play the status-quo-preserving role. The doctrines playing the role at any given time are those which are thought to have most instrumental value in maintaining the status quo. This multiple realizability is what, in the minds of some institutional theorists, explains the diversity of doctrines known as 'conservatism'.

³¹ Mannheim (1953: 94-101) made the same point many years earlier, as did Livingston (1995: 153-154) many years later.

There are two subtypes of institutional theories. The first I call ‘pure institutional theories’. They simply claim that conservatism is defined by the role its doctrines play in preserving existing institutions, rather than their content. These theories typically do not invoke multiple realizability; they do not claim that there is a range of incompatible doctrines that can play the status quo-preserving role. The adherents of pure institutional theories are usually conservatives, not conservatism’s opponents.

The second, which I call ‘ideological theories’, regard conservatism as a mask for and instrument of the promotion and protection of the interests of the ruling class; they allege that conservatism is an ideology in the Marxian sense (c.f. Aughey 1989: 102; Tännsjö 1990: 5). Ideological theories typically invoke multiple realizability. Ideological theorists standardly begin by noting the diversity of, and surface-level tensions between, the various doctrines which have been labelled ‘conservatism’. They then explain the (apparent) internal inconsistency of conservatism by positing a self-serving motive which allegedly underpins the conservatives’ endorsement of incompatible principles at different times. Hence, according to ideological theorists, the conservatism role is played by whatever principles are thought by the privileged to be most effective in the circumstances for preserving arrangements which benefit them. Ideological theories, of course, are almost exclusively defended by conservatism’s enemies.³²

The most prominent proponent of a pure institutional theory is Huntington (1957). Some other writers, such as Hogg (1947: 13-15), have defined conservatism at least partly in terms of its function of preserving existing institutions.

Ideological theories of conservatism have been very popular among conservatism’s critics. Eccleshall (1977; 1990; 1994; 2000), Herzog (1998),

³² I say ‘almost exclusively’ because there is at least one conservative theorist, Lincoln Allison (1984: 6-9), who claims that conservatism is essentially the pursuit of self-interest.

Honderich (2005), Mannheim (1953), Müller (2006: 361), Pilbeam (2003: 9-10), and Robin (2011) are the main exponents.^{33,34, 35}

Other theorists have incorporated the idea that conservatism is essentially concerned with the protection of its adherents' self-interest into their discussions. Allen (1981: 593-595) and Auerbach (1959: 7-17, 224-225) are exemplars of this.³⁶

I now provide some representative statements of institutional theories. I discuss Huntington's pure institutional theory before considering ideological theories.

According to Huntington's 'situational' theory of conservatism, conservatism is 'that system of ideas employed to justify any established social order, no matter where or when it exists, against any fundamental challenge to its nature or being, no matter from what quarter' (1957: 455).

Huntington identifies these ideas as the beliefs that human beings are essentially religious and that therefore religion is the basis of civil society, that society is the product of organic evolution, that human beings are guided as much (or more) by 'instinct and emotion' than by reason, that duties have priority over rights, that, with the exception of moral equality, people are unequal, and that, finally, there is a presumption in favour of any existing government (1957: 456). Thus, Huntington concludes, 'the essence of conservatism is the rationalisation of existing institutions in terms of history, God, nature and man' (1957: 457).

³³ It should be noted that Müller does not regard all forms of conservatism as having this privilege-preserving function.

³⁴ Buchanan and Powell (2018, especially Chapter 8) and Hobsbawm (1983a; 1983b) can also be counted as ideological theorists. They do not directly address the question 'what is conservatism?', but they criticise conservatism and the appeal to tradition as an instrument of self-interest. The Marxian influence on Hobsbawm is especially clear. Geuss (1981: 12-44) could also be counted.

³⁵ Mannheim's and Pilbeam's institutional theories regard all genuine forms of conservatism as having their roots in the same historical event: the aristocratic reaction to the French Revolution. Others, such as Eccleshall's and Honderich's, do not. Huntington (1957: 454-457, 461-470) explicitly denies that all genuine conservatisms have their origins in the aristocracy's reaction to the French Revolution, claiming that there are forms of conservatism that cannot be traced to the defence of aristocratic interests.

³⁶ Auerbach traces conservatism's defence of the ruling elite back to Plato's *Republic*.

What makes conservatism 'situational', in Huntington's view, is that it is not tied to the interests of any specific social group or to any specific historical epoch (1957). But neither does it posit timeless, universal, substantive ideals concerning the character of a good political order (1957: 454-457). Instead, conservatism always emerges in response to a recurring historical event, namely, fundamental challenges to the status quo (1957: 455, 458-461, 468, 471-472). And, as the ideas outlined above do not recommend any particular set of institutions, in Huntington's view, they can be used to justify any social order whatsoever (1957: 457). Therefore, according to Huntington, conservatism lacks a 'substantive ideal' and is concerned only with the preservation of existing institutions, whatever they may be (1957: 457).

I now discuss Honderich's ideological theory of conservatism. He argues that conservatism is merely a mask for the selfishness of its adherents, who benefit from the status quo (2005: 302). After discounting several theories of conservatism, he concludes that 'conservatives are selfish' and that 'they are nothing else' (2005: 302). He argues that their 'organised selfishness is the rationale of their politics, and they have no other rationale' (2005: 302).

This, he thinks, explains conservatives' political commitments. For example, he claims that conservatives only support changes that are in their interests, which is why, contrary to their claim that they oppose all changes, conservatives support some changes and not others (Honderich 2005: 302). Conservatives defend the free market, he argues, since they are in greater possession of private property (2005: 302). He argues that conservatives resist 'social freedom', equality, and big government, because they are selfish (2005: 302). In sum, Honderich's approach to conservatism is to take its self-professed commitments and argue, by process of elimination, that the only thing which could possibly unite them all is selfishness or 'naked class interest' (2005: 302).

In a similar vein, Robert Eccleshall argues that conservatism is essentially a defence of inequality (1977; 1990; 1994; 2000). He claims that 'conservatives have often been robust and unambiguous in vindicating inequality' (2000: 278).

Eccleshall takes the conservatives' claims about the need for hierarchy as evidence of this: 'common to the varieties of conservatism has been an affirmation of the need for an orderly, disciplined and unequal society which benefits from appropriate leadership. Differences have tended to focus on how leadership should be exercised' (2000: 277).^{37,38}

The crucial phrase here is 'common to the varieties of conservatism'. Eccleshall argues that whatever their apparent differences, paternalistic or patrician forms of conservatism and free market conservatism have in common the commitment to inequality (2000: 278). What they differ over is how they conceive of the relationship between those at the top of the hierarchy and those who are further down. Where patricians envisage a social order in which the upper classes enjoy inherited privileges but must discharge paternal duties to those who are less fortunate, the free marketeer envisages a competitive social order in which the successful and enterprising rise to the top and their hard-earned wealth trickles down to the poor (1990: 14-15; 2000: 278).^{39,40}

Having explained the institutional theories, I evaluate them. Institutional theories certainly have the advantage of capturing paradigm conservatives. Conservatives seek to preserve existing political institutions and they often appeal to the principles attributed to them by institutional theories in attempting to do so. Conservative political rhetoric is replete with references to the organic evolution of society, and hence its complexity, which makes reform difficult, the moral and intellectual imperfection of human beings, which cast doubt on our ability to make successful and implement plans for change, the *prima facie* rightness of established political and social arrangements, which places the burden of proof on the innovator, the benefits of the free market,

³⁷ See also his 1990 paper, pp. 10-11.

³⁸ Interestingly, Eccleshall does not seem to recognise that his view is of the same sort as Huntington's. He criticises Huntington's situational theory in the paper in which his ideological critique of conservatism is, to my mind, most clearly and powerfully expressed (1977).

³⁹ Like Auerbach, Eccleshall (1977: 65-66) traces the conservatives' defence of inequality to Plato.

⁴⁰ Contrary to ideological theorists and conservatives such as Cowling, O'Hara (2011: 168-171) argues that while conservatives reject attempts to bring about any specific societal goals, including the eradication of inequality, they are not necessarily debarred from opposing inequality and must do so if it threatens to precipitate revolutionary change.

and the impossibility of all forms of equality except moral equality and equality before the law.

What then is the objection to institutional theories? Huntington's pure institutional theory is unobjectionable. It posits conservative principles that do not characterise conservatism as something *prima facie* indefensible and it captures paradigm conservatives, since many conservatives subscribe to the principles that he attributes to them. Indeed, his theory is quite similar, as will become clear, to mine. The only significant difference is that according to Huntington, it is the *function* of conservatism's principles that makes them conservative, rather than their content.

The objection to ideological theories is that they do not satisfy the *prima facie* defensibility criterion on a good theory of conservatism. The untrammelled pursuit of self-interest, especially at the expense of those in greater need than oneself, is not even *prima facie* an intellectually or morally defensible political position. The conservative, as characterised by the ideological theorist, recognises no moral constraints on the pursuit of her own interests. Furthermore, she does not recognise intellectual standards such as the demand that one's views be supported by good reasons and that they be internally consistent. She will appeal to whatever doctrines she judges to be best deployed in the defence of her own interests, regardless of whether there are good arguments for them, and she will happily endorse incompatible principles to defend her privilege. But this is hardly a position worth endorsing.

Again, the point here is not that conservatism must be true. That clearly is not the case, and I am not entitled to beg the question in conservatism's favour. The point is rather that, in this thesis, I seek to identify the most compelling form of conservatism that captures paradigm conservative views. And, of course, ideological theories are not compelling forms of conservatism at all.

I briefly comment on why ideological theorists characterise conservatism as a set of internally inconsistent doctrines that are united only by their function as a

weapon of self-interest. They arrive at this conclusion by attempting to capture *all and only* those positions that are known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage, as O’Hara (2011: 6-14) points out. He calls this method ‘definition by enumeration’ (2011: 10). The basic strategy is to compile a list, so to speak, of canonical conservative thinkers’ positions and to seek features that they all share (O’Hara 2011: 10-14). The list ‘is paramount’, and nothing should ‘disturb’ it (O’Hara 2011: 10-11). Thus, once the list is decided, the claim of any other thinker to conservative status is assessed by comparing him or her with the figures on the list. In other words, the author using this method decides in advance who is a conservative, and the definition of conservatism is tailored to capture the views of those who appear on the list. The possibility of revising the list is excluded at the outset (O’Hara 2011: 10-14).⁴¹

This method leads (some of) its adherents into endorsing an ideological theory because a vast range of different and incompatible principles have been known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage. There is no way to capture all of those positions by positing principles, unless, of course, one is willing to say that conservatism is comprised of incompatible principles.⁴² If one has arrived at that conclusion, the obvious question is ‘how did conservatism come to consist in a range of incompatible principles?’ A good answer to that question is that they shared some unifying feature. A strong candidate for such a feature is a common purpose to which they are put. Since conservatives typically seek to preserve the status quo, it is tempting to infer that the function of conservative doctrines is to preserve the status quo. The next obvious question is what motive the conservative might have for seeking to preserve the status quo, and a good, if cynical, answer is that the preservation of the status quo is in conservatives’ interests (O’Hara 2011: 10-14).

⁴¹ The obvious question here is ‘how do enumerators decide who to include on their list of conservatives?’ This is something about which they are rarely explicit. However, in many cases it appears that the criterion for inclusion is self-ascription of the label ‘conservative’ or endorsing views that would be labelled ‘conservative’ in common usage, regardless of self-identification.

⁴² I return to this point in §1.3.3.

Eccleshall's ideological theory provides a clear example of this. As discussed, he notes the tensions between the individualist and collectivist elements in conservatism (1990: 14-18; 1994: 61, 69-73; 2000: 276-277).

He then argues that the diversity of competing conservative views – from collectivist positions, such as Disraelian One Nation conservatism, to individualistic views, such as Thatcherism – have a single underlying rationale, namely the preservation of the ruling classes' interests (1977; 1990; 1994; 2000). Collectivist and individualist arguments have been employed as and when required, by different conservatives in different times and circumstances, in the service of preserving inequality (Eccleshall 1990: 18-19).

In sum, then, Eccleshall arrives at the conclusion that conservatism is essentially the defence of inequality in the following way. He assumes that the vast range of views which have been called 'conservatism' are indeed genuine forms of conservatism. From here he searches for something which could unite this vast range of views, which is split into roughly two camps – collectivism and traditionalism as against individualism and free market economics – and finds that the commitment to inequality is the thing which, in his view, most plausibly underwrites both. Hence, the core of conservatism is the defence of inequality.⁴³

Thus, the most charitable interpretation of ideological theories is that they result from an honest attempt to capture every view that is commonly labelled 'conservatism'.^{44,45}

⁴³ Honderich also uses enumeration in his criticism of conservatism. He acknowledges this in two replies (1992a; 1992b) to reviews of the original 1989 edition of his (2005) book. Interestingly, in the latter paper, he inadvertently articulates an argument against enumeration: 'it is a general truth that to foreclose issues in advance by definition does not aid inquiry' (1992b: 147). Enumeration, of course, forecloses the possibility that some of those who are commonly called conservatives do not deserve that label.

⁴⁴ O'Hara (2011: 10-14) also discusses Eccleshall and Honderich in connection with enumeration, and my criticism of their views is indebted to his.

⁴⁵ A less charitable interpretation is that ideological theories deploy enumeration to make it appear impossible that there could be a morally and intellectually respectable form of conservatism. They may seek, in other words, to make conservatism appear to be definitionally bad (c.f. O'Hara 2011: 10-14). I return to this in §2.2.

The relevance of these points here is as follows. Ideological theories fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion because they utilise enumeration. It is the desire to capture everything that is known in common usage as ‘conservatism’ that motivates the ideological theorist to claim that conservatism is a mere instrument of self-interest, as discussed. Importantly, the other theories that fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion do so because they too try to capture everything that is known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage, as will become apparent in §1.3.3.

So, a common thread running through failed theories of conservatism is the attempt to capture all common forms of the view. The desire to formulate a theory of conservatism that characterises the latter as *prima facie* defensible and the desire to capture every view that is commonly called ‘conservatism’ are in tension. Satisfying the former means foregoing the latter (and vice versa). This is another reason that I aim to capture only *paradigm* conservative views.⁴⁶

1.3.3. Principled Theories

Having refuted psychological and institutional theories, I assess the principled theories of conservatism. I first explain the principled theories in general terms. Second, I refute two subtypes of the principled theories, namely those that assert the internal inconsistency of conservatism and those that try to fuse traditionalist conservatism with libertarianism. Finally, I argue that, of the remaining principled theories, the set of principles that I suggest – the tradition principle, anti-rationalism, and organicism – best satisfy the criteria on a good theory of conservatism.

Principled theories of conservatism include any account which asserts that conservatism consists in some set of principles. Typical conservative principles include the moral imperfectability of human beings (often called ‘pessimism’), the limits of human reason, trust in the accumulated wisdom of the community

⁴⁶ Some theorists have argued against enumeration on the grounds that it is not possible to compile a list of principles that all conservatives subscribe to (O’Sullivan 1976: 13-14; Pilbeam 2003: 9).

as embodied in history and tradition, the complex and organic nature of society, the view that burden of proof is on the innovator and belief in the socially beneficial role of religion.^{47,48}

Prominent among conservatives endorsing principled theories are Arnhart (2005), Burke (2004), Cecil (1912), Garry (2010), Harbour (1982), Hearnshaw (1933: 22-33), Hogg (1947), Kekes (1997; 1998), Kirk (2001: 7-9), Nisbet (1986), O’Gorman (1986), O’Hara (2011; 2016), O’Sullivan (1989), Quinton (1978: 16-17; 2007), Rossiter (1955), Scruton (2001), Stove (2003: 171-178), Tännsjö (1990), White (1950), Willetts (1992), and Wilson (1951). Non-conservatives, too, sometimes endorse principled theories (Femia 2012; Öszel 2015).

The principled theories have three subtypes. The first claims that conservatism is an internally inconsistent doctrine because it combines incompatible principles. I call these ‘incompatibility theories’. The second tries to fuse traditionalist conservatism and libertarianism by suggesting that they differ only in emphasis: they have the same content, but some conservatives place more emphasis on tradition and others place more emphasis on freedom. I call these ‘fusionist theories’, following Meyer’s (1964) terminology. Finally, there are principled theories which try to capture only traditionalist conservatism. I call these ‘pure principled theories’.⁴⁹

I now discuss the incompatibility theories. There are different views among incompatibility theorists about which of conservatism’s elements are incompatible with each other. As discussed, the most prominent incompatibility

⁴⁷ For an overview of these principles’ role in conservatism and particular proponents, see Hamilton 2016.

⁴⁸ There have been many different views about the number of conservative principles. Among those writers arguing for a small number of conservative principles we find Garry (2010: 32) and O’Hara (2011; 2016), who advocate only two, Gray, who advocates three (2007: 158-165), Kekes, who advocates four (1997; 1998), and Wilson, who posits five (1951: 12). Arguing for a medium-sized range of conservative principles is Hearnshaw (1933: 22-33), who posits twelve. Finally, Rossiter (1955: 60-62) advocates the largest number, at twenty-one.

⁴⁹ As is perhaps already clear, the two forms of conservatism mentioned in the Introduction, namely sceptical conservatism and traditionalist conservatism, are pure principled theories. This is also why some psychological theorists are cited here as principled theorists: by incorporating elements of sceptical conservatism into their theory, they effectively define conservatism as consisting in both a disposition to conserve the status quo and a set of principles.

theories state that conservatism combines incompatible collectivist or traditionalist elements, on the one hand, with individualist and free market elements, on the other (Auerbach 1959: 39-40, 304-314; Femia 2012; Nelson 2009). Some incompatibility theories locate the inconsistency in conservatism's both opposing revolutions and accepting their results (Alexander 2013). There are incompatibility theories which claim that conservatism combines sceptical reasons for preserving the status quo with the claim that the status quo ought to be preserved because it instantiates some universal ideals, and these are incompatible (Muller 2000).⁵⁰

Joseph Femia's position is probably the most representative incompatibility theory. He attributes five central theses to conservatives. The first is pessimism about human moral nature, which is expressed in the doctrine of original sin. The second is the idea that 'human individuals are enmeshed in a web of social attachments that define their identities and ways of seeing the world' (2012: 223). The third is traditionalism, which 'values established identities, praises habit and respects custom' and which regards the universalist outlook of the Enlightenment as 'anathema' (2012: 223). Fourth, there is scepticism about human reason. Fifth, and finally, there is a commitment to individual freedom, specifically economic freedom, predicated on 'hostility to state intervention [...] underpinned by a conception of society as a mere aggregate of individuals, with no 'will' of its own' (2012: 223).

Femia says that the inconsistency of these doctrines should be obvious, without elaboration. He seems to locate conservatism's inconsistency in the tension between collectivist and individualist elements. He argues that 'some conservatives are holists, for whom society is prior, both morally and epistemologically, to the individual; whereas others are individualists, for whom collective nouns such as 'society' or 'community' are nothing more than convenient abstractions, devoid of objective reality' (2012: 223). So, he seems

⁵⁰ Alexander (2016a) and Gray (1995) are also prominent exponents of incompatibility theories.

to regard the second, third and fourth conservative theses as inconsistent with the fifth.

The reader has no doubt noticed that there are similarities between incompatibility theories and the ideological theories discussed earlier. Both attribute internal inconsistency to conservatism; both attempt to capture everything that is known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage; and, relatedly, many theories of each type try to capture both traditionalist conservatism and libertarianism. There are, of course, some differences. Incompatibility theories do not seek some underlying reasons for conservatism’s apparent internal inconsistency and therefore do not claim that conservatism is a mere instrument of class interests. Incompatibility theories regard conservatism as a principled – if inconsistent and mistaken – position.

Incompatibility theories capture a wide range of paradigm conservatives, since paradigmatic conservatives have included both defenders of tradition and defenders of individual freedom. However, they do so at the cost of attributing inconsistency to conservatism. As discussed in connection with the ideological theories, a cluster of incompatible doctrines is hardly a *prima facie* defensible position. Thus, incompatibility theories can be rejected because they fail the *prima facie* defensibility criterion. Even if there are forms of conservatism of which incompatibility theories are accurate characterisations, they are simply not worth defending.⁵¹

Furthermore, like the ideological theories, incompatibility theories often arrive at the conclusion that conservatism is internally inconsistent by attempting to capture everything that is commonly called ‘conservatism’.

Femia’s theory is a clear example of this. He attributes to conservatives the five principles that he thinks characterise their position only because he is trying to

⁵¹ Another objection to incompatibility theories, though I do not explore it any further, is that they are designed to suit anti-right-wing argumentative purposes. It is easier to attack a single inconsistent target than two separate, internally consistent right-wing positions (O’Hara 2011: 211).

capture the views of thinkers whose doctrines are radically different. He expressly states that he wishes to include in the conservative fold both traditionalists and classical liberals or free marketeers, on the grounds that to reject classical liberals' claims to being genuine conservatives is 'arbitrary' since 'an ideology is not a timeless Platonic form, it is ultimately defined by those who espouse it' (2012: 222).

Femia's view therefore provides a clear example of how a theorist of conservatism can be led into characterising the view as something that is not even *prima facie* defensible by attempting to capture all forms of conservatism. This, as discussed, is one reason for seeking only to capture paradigm conservatives, rather than all (supposed) conservatives.

It has, of course, been claimed that traditionalism and libertarianism are compatible. Several conservative theorists have argued that conservatism is a fusion of traditional and libertarian elements. Buckley (1964), Greenleaf (1973), Letwin (1978), Meyer (1964) and Willetts (1992; 1997) are the principal exponents of these 'fusionist' theories. Freeden (1996: Ch.9) is a prominent non-conservative advocate of this type of theory.

Meyer, for example, claims that far from being incompatible, traditionalist conservatism and libertarianism are simply different aspects of a single, unified tradition of political thought which he calls the 'tradition of the West' (1964: 9). Traditionalism, in his view, emphasizes 'value, virtue and order', whereas libertarianism stresses 'freedom and the innate importance of the individual person' (Meyer 1964: 8). The difference between these doctrines, he claims, is merely one of emphasis (Meyer 1964: 8-20). The traditionalist stresses the aspects of the Western tradition that focusses on tradition, order, virtue, and human beings' ultimate ends. Libertarianism instead places greater weight on the importance of freedom and the dignity of the individual.

These views are, however, according to Meyer, complimentary positions. He claims that traditionalism implies the value of freedom, and freedom

presupposes the constraints of tradition (1964: 8-10). He writes: ‘the belief in virtue as the end of man’s being implicitly recognises the necessity of freedom to choose that end; otherwise, virtue could be no more than a conditioned tropism’ (1964: 9). He goes on to assert that ‘the raising of order to the rank of an end [...] subordinating the individual person would make of order [...] the rule of totalitarian authority, inhuman and subhuman’ (1964: 9). Finally, he argues that ‘without the acceptance of an absolute ground of value [...] freedom would be only a meaningless excitation and could never become the serious goal of a serious politics’ (1964: 9).

The problem with fusionist theories is that while it may be true that freedom ought to be constrained by tradition, the libertarian does not recognise that it should. Instead, the libertarian believes in maximum personal freedom for all, even if this means the destruction of traditions and the uprooting of the communities which adhere to them (c.f. Gray 1995).⁵² In other words, traditionalist conservatism and libertarianism make competing, incompatible claims. The traditionalist claims that tradition should constrain and, at times, take precedence over freedom. By contrast, the libertarian argues that freedom trumps tradition and so they do not recognise the claims of tradition to limit personal freedom. Thus, fusionist theories fail.⁵³

Having refuted incompatibility theories and fusionist theories, I argue that for my theory of conservatism.

Recall the three principles which, I argue, comprise conservatism: the tradition principle, according to which some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge, anti-rationalism, on which there is no normative knowledge whose source is pure

⁵² Gray is an interesting case, as he appears to endorse fusionism in one (1993) book and an incompatibility theory in a later (1995) chapter on ‘the undoing of conservatism’. In both works he seems to think that freedom should be constrained by tradition. The change in his view appears to concern whether he thinks the fusion of tradition and freedom constitutes a single, stable view that can be labelled as ‘conservatism’. For a discussion of whether the change in Gray’s view is more apparent than real, see Burns’s (1999) paper.

⁵³ A second objection to fusionism is that, like incompatibility theories, they are contrived to suit certain argumentative purposes. Those on the political right might seek to conceal ideological divisions by asserting the unity of traditionalism and libertarianism (O’Hara 2011: 211). I mention this only for interest and press it no further here.

reason, and organicism, which claims that society evolves and cannot be designed or shaped in accordance with human purposes to any great degree.

These principles, I contend, satisfy the demand of being the most *prima facie* defensible principles that capture paradigm conservative views. First, I argue that they capture the views of paradigm conservatives. I then contend that they comprise a more *prima facie* defensible account of conservatism than other pure principled theories.

The tradition principle as I formulate it here is not found in the literature. However, authors endorsing close relatives of the tradition principle include Arnhart (2005: 38-41), Burke (2004: 119-121, 181-184, 193-194), Garry (2010: 32-38), Hayek (2006: 55-62), Hearnshaw (1933: 18, 22-23), Hogg (1947: 11), Kekes (1997: 355-357, 363-368), Kirk (2001: 41-43), Nisbet (1986: 23-34), Nyíri (1988), O'Hara (2011: 109), Oakeshott (1991b; 1991c), Quinton (1978: 16-18; 2007), Rossiter (1955: 22, 48-49, 71-73), and Scruton (2001: 30-37; 2014: 21-22; 2017: 41-47).

Here are some representative quotes to illustrate this point. In describing the character of English people Burke argues:

We know that we have made no discoveries; and we think that no discoveries are to be made, in morality; nor many in the great principles of government, nor in the ideas of liberty, which were understood long before we were born, altogether as well as they will be after the grave has heaped its mould upon our presumption, and the silent tomb shall have imposed its law upon our pert loquacity. (2004: 182)

He then goes on to say:

We are generally men of untaught feelings [...] instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are

prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them. (2004: 183)

Finally, he claims that people should ‘avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages’ (2004: 183). For in prejudice there is ‘latent wisdom’; it ‘engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue’, and does not leave one ‘sceptical, puzzled and unresolved’ (2004: 183).

Similarly, Quinton argues that ‘political knowledge [...] is collective and historical, to be found, above all, in institutions which have survived for a long time, modified to fit the changing circumstances of those who live under them by innumerable concrete and detailed adjustments [...]’ (1978: 60). Elsewhere he argues that ‘the kind of knowledge that is needed for the successful management of human affairs’ is to be found ‘in the historically accumulated experience of the community as a whole. It is embodied, above all, in the deposit of traditional customs and institutions that have survived and become established [...]’ (1978: 16-17). Thus, traditions are to be accepted since tradition, in his view, ‘incorporates the accumulated practical wisdom of the community’ (1978: 16).

Finally, Scruton argues that traditions are ‘answers that have been discovered to enduring questions. These answers are tacit, shared, embodied in social practices and inarticulate expectations’ (2014: 21). Traditions, he argues, constitute a form of social knowledge; someone who has not adequately absorbed the lessons of the tradition is ‘rightly described as ignorant’ (2014: 22).

Anti-rationalists include Arnhart (2005: 41-45), Brennan and Hamlin (2004: 682-684), Burke (2004: 150-154, 183), Frohnen (1993: 15-17, 19-24), Hayek (2013: 9-15), Hearnshaw (1933: 18-19), Kekes (1998: 28-31), Kirk (2001: 41-43), Letwin (1978), Nisbet (1986: 23-34), O’Hara (2011: 16-17, 52-53), O’Hear (1998a),

Oakeshott (1991c),⁵⁴ Quinton (1978: 16-18; 2007), Scruton (2001: 32-33; 2010: 125-126; 2014: 21-22; 2017: 45-47), and Vannatta (2014: 3, 9-10).

Again, I present some representative quotations. According to Burke:

The science of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it [...] is not to be taught *a priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science; because the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate; but that which in the first instance is prejudicial may be excellent in its remoter operation; and its excellence may arise even from the ill effects it produces in the beginning. (2004: 152)

Quinton argues that ‘true political knowledge is to be acquired only through experience, indeed by a long and directly practical experience, of the actual workings of a political system’ (1978: 60). This, he says, constitutes an ‘empirically sceptical theory political knowledge’ on which the abstract, theoretical plans for change which have been devised *a priori* are to be regarded with suspicion, and the collected wisdom of the community as embodied in traditions is to be trusted (1978: 59-61).

Finally, Scruton says, with evident approval, that ‘Burke was explicitly contrasting the form of reasoning that emerges through custom, free exchange and ‘prejudice’ with the *a priori* principles of the revolutionaries, which they attributed to the abstract reason which is supposedly everyone’s inheritance’ (2017: 45). He then goes on to cite the French revolutionaries’ rationalism as the cause of the evils which resulted from the Revolution (2017: 45-47).

Conservatives endorsing organicism include Arnhart (2005: 16-19), Burke (2004: 120, 194-195, 281-282), Hayek (2013: Ch.1, Ch.2, Ch.10), Hearnshaw (1933: 23),

⁵⁴ While Oakeshott endorses traditionalism and anti-rationalism, he distances his view from several of the commitments that are sometimes taken to be essential to Burkean conservatism, such as original sin, organicism, monarchism, and Anglicanism (1991c: 423). The upshot of this is that, unlike many of the authors cited here in connection with traditionalism and anti-rationalism, Oakeshott is not a Burkean conservative. Franco (1990: 108) confirms this interpretation.

Hogg (1947: 24-30), Huntington (1957: 456-457), Nisbet (1986: 23-34), Quinton (1978: 16-18; 2007), Rossiter (1955: 27-31), Scruton (2001: 10, 14, 19-30, 34-35; 2014: 19-30, 42, 57, 66-67), White (1950: 8-9), Wilets (1992: 96-97), and Wilson (1951: 12-15).

As with the other two principles, I provide some representative quotations.

Burke argues that:

Political arrangement, as it is a work for social ends, is to be only wrought by social means. There mind must conspire with mind. Time is required to produce that union of minds which alone can produce all the good we aim at. Our patience will achieve more than our force [...] I have never yet seen any plan which has not been mended by the observations of those who were much inferior in understanding to the person who took the lead in the business [...] we are enabled to unite into a consistent whole the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of men. From hence arises [...] an excellence in composition [...] it is from this view of things that the best legislators have often been satisfied with the establishment of some sure, solid and ruling principle in government; a power like that which some philosophers have called a plastic nature; and having fixed the principle, they have left it afterwards to its own operation. (2004: 281-282)

In Quinton's view, society is a 'unitary, natural growth, an organised, living whole, not a mechanical aggregate' (1978: 16). He goes on to say that society 'is not composed of bare abstract individuals but of social beings, related to one another within a texture of inherited customs and institutions which endow them with their specific social nature' (1978: 16).

Finally, Scruton argues:

It is because we cooperate in societies that we enjoy the security, prosperity, and longevity to which we have become accustomed, and which were unknown, even to the minority of aristocrats, before the

twentieth century. The way in which our activities are woven together, binding the destiny of each of us to that of strangers whom we shall never know, is so complex that we could never unravel it. The fiction of a social contract fails to do justice to all the relations [...] that bind the members of a society into an organic whole. (2001: 42)

Importantly, these principles capture paradigm conservatives better than some other principled theories. On some principled theories, conservatism is essentially linked with religion. Several conservatives have argued that religion is the basis of civil society or that it is useful in fostering social cohesion or beneficial customs (Burke 2004: 186-187; Gray 1993: 49-51; Harbour 1982: Ch.1; Hayek 1988: Ch.9; Hearnshaw 1933: 27-28; Hogg 1947: 16-23). Burke (2004: 187) and Huntington (1957: 456) argue that human beings are essentially religious. Kirk (1982: 7; 2001: 8) and Wilson (1942) assert the centrality of belief in the divine origins of human morality to conservatism. Cecil argued that no one could subscribe to English conservatism unless she is fundamentally happy with the establishment of the Church of England (1912: 100-117).⁵⁵

It is certainly true that many conservatives have believed in the truth and/or social benefits of religion. However, to wed conservatism to belief in the truth or benefits of religion is to implausibly exclude from the ranks for conservatism certain paradigm conservative thinkers who reject religion, such as Flew, Gray, Oakeshott, Quinton, and Stove. Indeed, the secular tradition of conservative thought is plausibly no less well-established than the religious one, having its roots in the thought of David Hume (Quinton 1978: 10-12). Furthermore, even conservatives who regard religion as beneficial have been attentive to the potential of religious zeal to cause civil unrest. Burke's critique of religious 'enthusiasm', which was inspired by Hume, and whose ultimate roots can be traced back to Hobbes's contention that religious disagreement is the main

⁵⁵ This, to be sure, does not mean that Cecil regards Roman Catholics, Jews, Muslims and other religious minorities as being excluded from being conservatives. He does not assert the necessity of adherence to Anglicanism for subscription to English conservatism. His point is merely that adherents of minority religions cannot be conservatives unless they accept the establishment of the Church of England, whatever their personal beliefs.

source of civil unrest, is a prime example of this (Muller 2000: 53; Quinton 1978: 10-11). So, it is simply implausible that conservatism involves an unqualified commitment to religion's truth or utility.

Similarly, some forms of conservatism endorse pessimism. Pessimism is the doctrine that human nature is defective in some way. There are many ways of cashing this out. Perhaps the most modest is to argue that human beings are morally or intellectually imperfect (Harbour 1982: 32-38, 47-49; Kirk 1982: 9; O'Hara 2011: 24-25; O'Sullivan 1976: 11-31; Quinton 1978: 10-23). More robust forms of pessimism assert the moral wickedness of human beings (Kekes 1998: 41-42) or identify pessimism with the doctrine of original sin (Hogg 1947: 12-13; Rossiter 1955: 21).

The more robust forms of pessimism clearly exclude certain paradigm conservatives from the conservative fold. Non-religious conservatives do not, of course, subscribe to the doctrine of original sin. And many conservatives' pessimism does not consist in affirming human moral wickedness. Instead, many conservatives' pessimism – including the pessimism of religious conservatives – focusses much more on the imperfection of human beings and more on our intellectual than moral imperfection (Quinton 1978: 11-16). Moreover, it might be thought that conservatives *ought* to focus on human beings' intellectual imperfection. Tethering conservatism to controversial philosophical and religious claims such as the wickedness of human beings or original sin seriously limits the constituency to whom conservatism could hope to appeal and makes the argumentative burden conservatives must bear unnecessarily heavy (O'Hara 2011: 18-20, 24-25; O'Sullivan 1976: 26-31). Thus, it is not in conservatives' interests to tether conservatism to such contestable doctrines.

Finally, the principles I posit here do not characterise conservatism in a way that makes it fail to be even *prima facie* defensible. For together they constitute a principled and action-guiding doctrine. On my account of conservatism, the latter does not reduce to a mere personal attitude or an instrument of self-interest. Instead, conservatism consists in principles which make practical

recommendations for action. Foremost among these is, unsurprisingly, the prescription that in forming political policies, we should make use of traditional knowledge and, other things equal, maintain the status quo, rather than indulging the hubristic and immodest enterprise of attempting to build a better society in accordance with some blueprint for how we should organise ourselves. Thus, the tradition principle, anti-rationalism, and organicism form an account of conservatism's content that captures the views of paradigm conservatives and characterises conservatism such that it is *prima facie* defensible; my theory of conservatism therefore satisfies the criteria on a theory of conservatism set out earlier. So, we should accept that conservatism is comprised of the tradition principle, anti-rationalism, and organicism.

1.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that conservatism is comprised of the tradition principle, anti-rationalism, and organicism. These principles constitute a theory of conservatism on which the latter is a *prima facie* defensible doctrine, and they capture the views of paradigm conservatives. Unlike theories which reduce conservatism to a personal attitude or an instrument of self-interest, my account is one on which conservatism is a principled and action-guiding doctrine. Unlike other principled theories, my account does not exclude paradigm conservatives by tethering conservatism to contestable religious and philosophical doctrines that do not have wide currency.

Chapter Two: Conservatism and Political Theory

It is a commonplace that conservatism is hostile to political theorising. Arguments for conservatism's opposition to political theorising have been built on each of the theories of conservatism discussed in Chapter One. In this chapter, I discuss several such arguments, which I dub 'anti-theory arguments'.⁵⁶

I first discuss why it is necessary to refute anti-theory arguments, in §2.1. The reason is obvious: if any anti-theory argument is sound, then there can be no viable arguments of the sort that I offer in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

In §2.2. I argue that I have effectively already refuted two anti-theory arguments in Chapter One. The first claims that conservatism is merely a personal attitude, and since personal attitudes are not theories, conservatism is not a theory. The second claims that conservatism is the ideology, in the Marxian sense, of the ruling class and is therefore not bound by the constraints of systematic theorising. Since I have refuted the psychological and ideological theories of conservatism, I have also thereby refuted the anti-theory conclusions which are deduced from them.

Finally, in §2.3. I discuss three anti-theory arguments that assume a principled theory of conservatism. The first claims that the conservative rejects rationalism, and since theorising about why traditions should be deferred to involves rationalism, she must reject theorising about the justification for deference to traditions, on pain of inconsistency. I call this the 'Anti-Rationalist Argument'. The second says that conservatives reject ideology, and all theories are ideologies; hence, conservatives reject all theories. I call this the 'Anti-Ideology Argument'. The third argument claims that conservatism is self-undermining because it has the paradoxical status of a theory which forbids theories. I call this the 'Anti-Theory-Theory Argument'.

⁵⁶ Hereafter I treat 'theory' and 'political theory' as synonymous.

I contend that each of these anti-theory arguments trades on an ambiguity. Once the ambiguity is diagnosed, it becomes clear that however the premises are disambiguated, one of them comes out false.

In respect of the Anti-Rationalist Argument, the relevant ambiguity concerns 'rationalism'. If 'rationalism' is interpreted as involving something which is problematic for conservatism, such as acceptance of normative knowledge whose source is pure reason, or a high degree of confidence in the power of human instrumental reasoning to solve social problems, then it is simply false that theorising commits one to rationalism. If 'rationalism' requires only having good reasons for one's views and engaging in open-ended, reason-driven dialogue (if rationalism commits one only to rational thought, in other words), then it is indeed true that defending deference to traditions commits one to rationalism. But the conservative need not, does not, and *should* not reject 'rationalism' so understood.

The Anti-Ideology Argument can be refuted in a similar way to the Anti-Rationalist Argument. If 'ideology' just means 'theory', then conservatism does not reject ideology, since, as I argue in connection with the Anti-Rationalist Argument, theory does not involve anything which the conservative would seek to reject. If an 'ideology' is something which is problematic for conservatives, such as a utopian plan for large-scale social change which assumes *a priori* normative knowledge, or high confidence in human instrumental reason, then it is simply false that all theories are ideologies.

Finally, in reply to the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument, I contend that while the conservative is opposed to theorising about first-order normative matters, this does not debar her from having theoretical reasons for forbidding theorising at the first order. Thus, once the kind of theory which conservatism exemplifies is distinguished from that which it opposes, it becomes clear that conservatism is not self-undermining vis-à-vis theory (c.f. Quinton 1978: 12-13).

It is true that conservatism's principles, most obviously the tradition principle, suggest that instead of theorising about first-order normative matters, such as the justification of state authority and the just distribution of resources, we should rely on tradition in deciding what to do. But the conservative has second-order reasons, namely those concerning the sources and limits of normative knowledge and the nature of society, for forbidding theorising at the first order. In other words, conservatism's principles and the arguments for them are a second-order theory that prohibits first-order theorising.

It is worth noting in connection with this that there is one respect in which the conservatism I argue for here is unique. All other extant forms of conservatism regard conservatism as being inimical to abstraction and concerned with the concrete realities of political life. By contrast, I regard conservatism as more abstract than other views. For while liberalism, socialism, and anarchism may prescribe certain outcomes concerning what sort of social arrangements ought to exist, conservatism eschews such prescriptions in favour of epistemological and metaphysical principles whose relevance to practice is indirect.

2.1. Why Is It Necessary to Refute Anti-Theory Arguments?

There are three reasons why it is necessary to refute anti-theory arguments. First, conservatives' accepting anti-theory arguments explains the gaps in the literature which this thesis seeks to plug. I want to further demonstrate the need for the kind of arguments that I offer in Chapters Four, Five, and Six by showing that those arguments rest on mistakes. Second, and relatedly, anti-theory arguments effectively function as pre-emptive objections to the project that I pursue in the remainder of this thesis. I therefore want to show that they are unsound before proceeding. Third, many anti-theory arguments betray intellectual dishonesty of some kind. Some anti-theory arguments are attempts by conservatives to make their position irrefutable by fiat. Opponents of conservatism too have tried to discredit the latter by undermining its status as a theory. It is worth diagnosing and criticising these tendencies. They, along with some of the trends in the literature mentioned in Chapter One, are the reason

why many characterisations of conservatism construe it as *prima facie* indefensible.

I now take these reasons in turn and discuss them further. As I noted in the Introduction, the conservatism literature is rather sparse, and conservatives have often failed to provide sustained arguments or to draw on relevant epistemology. There are several reasons for this which are related to conservatives' endorsement of anti-theory arguments. For example, some conservatives have held that conservatism is a disposition, and hence is not a theory. Some conservatives have feared that theorising would mean lapsing into the rationalistic or ideological tendencies which they reject. (These points were discussed in Chapter One). Insofar as arguing systematically for their position could be construed as theorising, they have therefore also neglected to provide systematic and sustained arguments for conservatism.

However, as I shortly argue, these arguments rest on mistakes. Conservatism is not a mere disposition and, in any case, its being a disposition does not eliminate the need to justify it. Moreover, theorising does not involve either rationalism or ideology in any sense that is problematic for conservatives. So, even if we grant that conservatism is a disposition or that it rejects rationalism and ideology, there is still scope for conservative theorising. The obvious task for such theorising is to provide arguments for conservatism. Therefore, there is a need for the kind of systematic argument that I provide later in this thesis.

The second reason for seeking to refute anti-theory arguments is that if the conservative is persuaded by them, however mistaken they may be, she will not be inclined to even consider the Social Knowledge Argument. Someone persuaded of any anti-theory argument might worry that making a case for conservatism which deploys undoubtably theoretical resources from epistemology, such as reliabilism, is inconsistent with conservatism's anti-theoretical spirit.

However, the goal of this thesis is to offer to the conservative the strongest argument for her position that has yet been made. In other words, the Social Knowledge Argument is supposed to be an argument which the conservative could utilise as the basis for her position. It clearly fails in this goal if it should be rejected because it is not a genuine form of conservatism on account of its theoretical nature.

That said, the Social Knowledge Argument itself could be seen, in part, as an answer to anti-theory arguments. If the Social Knowledge Argument is sound and its claims are consistent with conservatism's principles, then this is evidence enough that anti-theory arguments fail. In other words, the Social Knowledge Argument's being a self-consistent form of conservatism would be sufficient reason for doubting the persuasiveness of anti-theory arguments.⁵⁷ Indeed, part of the motivation of this thesis, of course, is to demonstrate that there can be philosophically respectable defences of conservatism.

However, it is still worth refuting anti-theory arguments here. They involve mistakes that are so obvious that they are not even *prima facie* plausible. Specifically, anti-theory arguments rest on obvious equivocations which, once diagnosed, completely blunt their force, as will become clear (and is perhaps already clear from the short summary of the arguments presented above). Yet anti-theory arguments have had wide currency within the conservatism literature. Indeed, it is somewhat bizarre that such arguments have been so widely accepted. But they have been widely accepted and their potential to discredit my position is sufficient to justify clearly refuting them. There is no need to wait until I have made the principal arguments of this thesis to see that the anti-theory arguments sketched above are unsound. They fail on grounds which are independent of the arguments I offer for conservatism and can be refuted regardless of the quality of those arguments.

⁵⁷ Kekes (1998: 2-3) has also claimed that the best way to defend conservatism against the accusation that it cannot be defended using systematic arguments is to simply defend it systematically.

This leads to the third reason for rejecting anti-theory arguments. They have been defended in bad faith by both conservatives and conservatism's opponents. For example, the argument made by some conservatives that conservatism is a mere disposition and hence is not a theory could be seen as an attempt to protect conservatism from rational scrutiny. The claim that conservatism is not a theory because it is an ideology whose sole aim is the preservation of elites' privilege could be an attempt to cheaply discredit conservatism by construing it as something morally abhorrent. The idea that conservatism is opposed to rationalism can also be used by conservatives to make their position seem immune from criticism. Conservatives can argue, on the basis of anti-rationalism, that the only way to deal charitably with their view is to accept their failure to provide a fully-fledged conservative theory. Likewise, conservatives' anti-rationalism can be used by the view's enemies to give the impression that the conservative is opposed to rational thought and is therefore intellectually irreputable. Let me now explore these points more fully.

2.2. Psychological and Ideological Anti-Theory Arguments

In this section, I show that I have already given reasons for rejecting two anti-theory arguments. The first deduces conservatism's opposition to theory from the latter's (allegedly) being a disposition, the second deduces conservatism's opposition to theory from its (apparently) being an ideology in the Marxian sense.

There are two objections to both arguments. The first is that, as discussed in Chapter One, any form of conservatism that is worth defending is not merely a disposition or an ideology in the Marxian sense. Thus, any form of conservatism which is vulnerable to anti-theory arguments from the psychological or ideological theories of conservatism is one that we already have reason to reject.

The second is that these anti-theory arguments could also be construed as involving intellectual dishonesty. The argument from the psychological theory of

conservatism is arguably an attempt to protect conservatism from rational scrutiny. The argument from the ideological theory of conservatism could be construed as an attempt to discredit conservatism by using an ideological account to manufacture the conclusion that conservatism is intellectually (and morally) unsophisticated. I now discuss these points more fully.

Psychological theorists of conservatism might be inclined to argue that conservatism is a personal attitude, and personal attitudes are not political theories; therefore, conservatism is not a political theory.

However, as I have already argued, while psychological theories may explain why people are attracted to political conservatism, they do not provide a good account of what political conservatism itself consists in.

Since I am seeking to defend a principled form of political conservatism, I reject the psychological theory of conservatism and the anti-theory argument which depends on it.

Moreover, and crucially for present purposes, the reduction of conservatism to a personal attitude by its proponents could be used as an attempt to shirk the burden of providing arguments for their views and policies. They could contend that arguing for conservatism, supplying a 'theory' or 'philosophy' of conservatism, is unnecessary if the latter is a mere attitude. On this type of view, conservatism, like the established institutions and customs it defends, is simply given; it cannot and need not be justified by appeal to reasons.

That argument, however, is clearly unsound, as Quinton has pointed out. He argues that the conservative disposition issues in 'practical choice' and that, as he aptly puts it, 'dispositions which issue in practical choice need justification' (Quinton 1978: 12).⁵⁸ Conservatism's being a mere disposition does not entail that there is no need to justify conservatism. Clearly, questions concerning the rationality and virtuosity of the conservative disposition remain open. Indeed,

⁵⁸ This view has been echoed (slightly) more recently by Norton & Aughey (1981: 16-19).

adherents of psychological accounts often acknowledge this, at least implicitly (Brennan & Hamlin 2004: 676-677; Cohen 2011: 210; Hearnshaw 1933: 18; Kekes 1998: 6-12; Tännsjö 1990). Thus, even if conservatism were a mere disposition, this would not mean that it does not need to be argued for. So, the attempt to immunise conservatism from rational scrutiny, like the psychological account of the latter on which it depends, should be rejected.

Let me now consider the ideological argument for conservatism's opposition to theory. According to ideological theories, conservatism is an instrument for the defence of vested class interests. Ideological accounts also maintain that, since the function of conservative arguments is to preserve existing privilege, conservatives will appeal to whatever doctrines are, in their judgement, effectively deployed in the service of preserving the status quo. This, according to the ideological theorist, is what explains the internal inconsistency (they think) they have detected in conservatism. Since there are a range of doctrines which can serve as instruments of class interest in different contexts, there is no pressure, says the ideological theorist, for the conservative to offer a coherent or well-argued set of views, except to the extent that their not being coherent or well-argued might undermine their effectiveness in preserving the status quo.

So, on ideological theories of conservatism, conservatism does not constitute a coherent, plausible, or well-argued account of human beings' nature, our societies, the kind of political arrangements which are desirable, the demands of justice, and so on. The ideological theorist of conservatism simply does not credit conservatives with being in the business of attempting to offer a coherent, reasoned, and sincere set of answers to political questions.

Like the psychological argument for conservatism's opposition to theory, I raise two objections to this argument. First, no form of conservatism worth defending is a mere ideology for the defence of class interests. Thus, any form of conservatism which is vulnerable to anti-theory arguments which take the ideological theory of conservatism as their first premise can be rejected.

Second, there is reasonable suspicion that ideological theories, and the anti-theory arguments that rest on them, are deliberately contrived to make conservatism appear to be unrespectable or inferior to other positions. I argued in Chapter One that theories of conservatism which accuse conservatism of internal inconsistency usually try to capture everything that is known in common usage as ‘conservatism’. The conclusion that conservatism is internally inconsistent follows because there are a vast range of positions which have been known as ‘conservatism’ in everyday usage. The attempt to capture all views which are described as ‘conservative’ in common usage may be motivated by a sincere conviction that a viable theory of conservatism must do so. However, it may also be motivated by the desire to discredit conservatism. It is possible to manufacture the conclusion that conservatism is internally inconsistent by compiling a list of incompatible positions which have been known as ‘conservatism’ in common usage, and refusing to revise it, on the pretext that the everyday use of the term ‘conservatism’ ought to be taken seriously (O’Hara 2011: 10-14).

Ideological theories may be guilty of this, as discussed in §1.3.2. If that is the case, then ideological theories quickly and cheaply dismiss conservatism by falsely reducing it to something intellectually and morally disreputable. This, however, is itself a disreputable way to argue against conservatism.

So, arguments which attempt to show that there can be no conservative political theory which proceed by reducing conservatism to a disposition or to whatever doctrines are deployed in defence of the status quo can be rejected.

2.3. Three Principled Anti-Theory Arguments

In this section, I refute three anti-theory arguments that assume a principled theory of conservatism. I discuss the Anti-Rationalist Argument in §2.3.1. I reply to the Anti-Ideology Argument in §2.3.2. And I consider the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument in §2.3.3.

2.3.1. *The Anti-Rationalist Argument*

According to the Anti-Rationalist Argument, there can be no internally consistent conservative theory, including one which seeks to defend deference to traditions, because theorising entails indulging the rationalism that conservatives reject. The argument can be stated as follows.

P1: Conservatives reject rationalism.

P2: If conservatives reject rationalism, they cannot engage in a rationalistic enterprise without inconsistency.

P3: Theorising about why traditions should be deferred to is a rationalistic enterprise.

C: Therefore, conservatives cannot engage in theorising about why traditions should be deferred to without inconsistency.

It is quite easy to see how the Anti-Rationalist Argument presents a *prima facie* threat to the project that I pursue in this thesis. On the assumption that defending deference to the traditions of one's society by appealing to reliabilism constitutes theorising, it is impossible – if the Anti-Rationalist Argument is sound – for the Social Knowledge Argument to be reconciled with anti-rationalism.

There is no need to rehearse the arguments for the first and second premises of the Anti-Rationalist Argument. I have effectively already given the argument for the first premise by documenting the conservative's self-professed anti-rationalism. The second premise cannot reasonably be denied.

The argument for the third premise goes something like this. Theorising about why traditions should be deferred to involves giving reasons for deferring to traditions. However, giving such reasons is to implicitly acknowledge the validity of the demand that all social practices must be justified by appeal to positive

reasons for continuing them; they cannot simply be taken as given or accepted because they are well-established. The assumption that a social practice is justified only if there are positive reasons for continuing it is a rationalist assumption. And, if an activity involves a rationalist assumption, then it is a rationalist enterprise. Therefore, offering a reasoned defence of deference to traditions is a rationalistic enterprise (c.f. Oakeshott 1991c; O’Hear 1998a).

The Anti-Rationalist Argument has been endorsed by conservatives and non-conservatives alike. Its conservative defenders include Gilmour (1977: 109-120), Harbour (1982: Ch.3, Ch.6), Oakeshott (1991c: 26-27), and O’Hear (1998a). It is also attributed to Kirk, Viereck and Voeglin by Claes Ryn (2007: 538, 541), though he provides a reference only in the case of Viereck and at least some passages in Kirk suggest that its attribution to him is an error. (This should become clear in the discussion of the Anti-Ideology Argument in §2.3.2.).⁵⁹

Alexander (2016a), MacIntyre (1988: 7-8, 353-354), Spitz (1976: 339-342) and Wood (1959: 660-662) are the principal non-conservative defenders of the Anti-Rationalist Argument.^{60,61,62}

O’Hear provides a clear expression of the Anti-Rationalist Argument. He writes:

Conservatism is an approach to human affairs which mistrusts [...] a priori reasoning [...], preferring to put its trust in experience and in the gradual improvement of tried and tested arrangements [...].

⁵⁹ More generic anti-theory sentiment has been expressed by other conservatives, most notably Rossiter, who argued that the very desire to construct a conservative theory is an unconservative desire, and Hearnshaw, who thought that defending conservatism required no theory (Freedman 1998: 317-318).

⁶⁰ The Anti-Rationalist Argument is merely implicit in MacIntyre’s remarks concerning Burke, but I think it can safely be attributed to him.

⁶¹ Tate (1997) discusses this argument, attributing it to Habermas, but he does not endorse it.

⁶² Feser’s (2008) discussion of traditionalist conservatism’s critique of libertarianism seems sympathetic to the Anti-Rationalist Argument. Feser claims that traditionalist conservatives regard libertarianism as just another form of utopianism that puts its faith in the same sort of ‘bloodless and rationalistic abstractions’ (2008) as socialism and fascism, albeit less problematic abstractions than those endorsed by the other non-conservative views.

Many strands of thought make up conservatism [...]. The protean and, to the intellectual mind, untidy character of conservatism is, however, part of its essence. Indeed, it is an important aspect of what distinguishes conservatism from other ideologies [...]. For conservatism is an approach to human and, more specifically, to political affairs which mistrusts the power of human reason. Its temper is sceptical and empirical. It places more faith in tried and tested arrangements than in ideas, however brilliant [...].

The conservative position is one that is better unarticulated not, as its opponents might insist, because it is intellectually threadbare, but because its preference is for the harmony which arises from an unquestioning and untroubled acceptance of settled ways of doing things [...]. In making articulate what is better left unsaid, conservatism is, from its own point of view, in danger of lapsing into ideology, into the erection of principle and dogma over practice and habit. (1998a)

My objection to the Anti-Rationalist Argument is that it trades on a failure to distinguish rationalism from rational thought. Theorising about why we should defer to traditions requires only the latter and not the former. More specifically, I argue that 'rationalism' is ambiguous and, depending on how it is disambiguated, either the first or the third premise of the Anti-Rationalist Argument is false.

One can unpack the term 'rationalism' in such a way it refers to something offensive to the conservative. For example, 'rationalism' could be used to refer to the thesis that there is normative knowledge whose source is pure reason or the view that human instrumental reason has extensive, if not limitless, power to solve social problems. But then while the first premise of the Anti-Rationalist argument comes out true, the third premise comes out false: defending deference to traditions using reason is not rationalistic in any sense that conservatives reject. Alternatively, one can unpack 'rationalism' such that that term refers to something which is acceptable to the conservative, such as simply

arguing for one's position in a way that conforms with the standards of rational thought. In that case, the first premise comes out false and the third premise comes out true. And, importantly, there is no sense of the term on which both the first and the third premises come out true. So, the Anti-Rationalist Argument is unsound.

Let me explore this objection in more detail. There are two types of rationalism which conservatives typically reject. The first should already be familiar from my account of conservatism. In setting out the principles of conservatism, I characterised conservatives as rejecting rationalism – the thesis that there is normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. I now label that doctrine 'Epistemic Rationalism'.⁶³

The second type of rationalism which the conservative is inclined to reject has hitherto been mentioned only in passing. I call it 'Practical Rationalism'. Practical Rationalism is tremendous confidence in the power of human reason to diagnose and devise solutions to social problems. The Practical Rationalist is not averse to large-scale social planning and tends to regard existing political arrangements as justified only if some positive justification can be given for them. The Practical Rationalist desires, in Oakeshott's words, to bring 'the social, political, legal and institutional inheritance of his society before the tribunal of his intellect' (1991c: 8) and rejects anything that does not pass the test of rational assessment. Practical Rationalists tend toward utopianism: believing in the unlimited power of human beings to improve their societies, there is no place in their politics for merely satisfactory social and political arrangements. Instead, they view politics as an instrument for bringing about an idealised society, and current arrangements are to be judged by how closely they approximate the ideal (Oakeshott 1991c: 5-11).⁶⁴

⁶³ It should be noted that while conservatives reject normative knowledge whose source is pure reason, they may accept the existence of other forms of knowledge, such as knowledge of the principles of valid reasoning or mathematical knowledge, whose source is pure reason.

⁶⁴ There are different views concerning what sort of anti-rationalism is in play in Oakeshott's writings. Some authors think that he rejects what I call Practical Rationalism (Grant 1990: 25-27, 50-64; O'Hear 1998a). Others think he rejects Epistemic Rationalism (Looker 1965: 302; O'Sullivan

Suppose we interpret ‘rationalism’ as referring to what I label Epistemic Rationalism. Then the first premise of the Anti-Rationalist Argument says that conservatives reject Epistemic Rationalism. In other words, it claims that conservatives reject the existence of normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. This much is true, as I argued in Chapter One.

However, on the same interpretation, the third premise is false. It simply is not the case that offering a reasoned defence of deference to traditions commits one to the existence of normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. Quinton points out that the principles of conservatism, and anything one might infer from them, do not need to be regarded as knowable through the activities of unaided reason. Instead, conservatism may be ‘empirically founded’ (Quinton 1978: 13).

Quinton does not say exactly what it means for conservatism to be ‘empirically founded’. However, I suggest that the following interpretation is reasonable. Conservatism can be empirically founded in the sense that it is ultimately based on empirical premises. That is, if an argument for conservatism makes deductions from premises which are supported by empirical evidence, then it is empirically founded. Indeed, some of Quinton’s later writings (2007: 294-298) support this interpretation. The form of conservatism that I defend in this thesis is empirically founded in this sense. The Social Knowledge Argument, is, at bottom, empirical. As should become clear in Chapter Five, the Social Knowledge Argument teases out the implications for normative epistemology of empirical accounts of cultural evolution.

Importantly, the conservative need not claim that her theory is unique in being empirically founded. Some conservatives do seem to accuse liberal and socialist theories of not being empirically founded; it is quite routine that a conservative will reject other theories for being too rationalistic and stake the superiority of

1992: 140). I think that both Epistemic Rationalism and Practical Rationalism are present in Oakeshott’s work and that they are connected. The thrust of his position is that we should not begin with some *a priori* blueprint, so to speak, for how society should be ordered and then use politics as a tool to make society conform with it.

her own theory on its being grounded in experience.⁶⁵ But conservatives do not need to say this. Asserting the apparently rationalistic nature of other political theories may be rhetorically useful for the purposes of criticising them, but it is not necessary for providing the positive case for conservatism.

Suppose now that we take ‘rationalism’ as referring to what I have called Practical Rationalism. Then, as with Epistemic Rationalism, first premise of the Anti-Rationalist Argument comes out true, but the third premise comes out false. On this interpretation, the first premise states that conservatives reject the thesis that human reason has extensive, if not limitless, power to diagnose and solve social problems, and the utopianism which can stem from believing it. This is indeed true of many conservatives, most notably Oakeshott (1991c).

However, defending deference to traditions in rational terms clearly does not presuppose extensive confidence in the power of human reason to solve practical problems. Indeed, the conservative’s motive for arguing for deference to traditions is precisely that given the limits of human reason, the attempts at improvement and large-scale social planning of which the Practical Rationalist is fond are likely to misfire and bring about results which are bad, which make worse the problem which the actors are trying to solve, or which are otherwise unintended. So, if ‘rationalism’ refers to Practical Rationalism, the third premise of the Anti-Rationalist Argument is false.

Alternatively, one can unpack ‘rationalism’ as something which need not and should not be offensive to conservatives. But then while the third premise comes out true, the first comes out false: defending deference to traditions in reasoned terms does not necessarily involve the kind of rationalism which is rejected by the conservative.

For example, one might unpack ‘rationalism’ as meaning something like ‘committing one to standards of good reasoning in arriving at one’s views, and to

⁶⁵ The writers cited in connection with anti-rationalism in the previous chapter are the principal exemplars of this. See, in particular, Arnhart (2015), Burke (2014), Kirk (1982; 1984), Letwin (1978), O’Hara (2011), O’Hear (1998a), Quinton (1978: 16-18), and Oakeshott (1991a; 1991c).

the exchange of reasons with others in debate'. In other words, let us assume that 'rationalistic' means 'committing one to the standards of rational debate and inquiry'.

On this interpretation, the third premise of the Anti-Rationalist Argument is true. Offering a reasoned defence of deference to traditions of course involves providing reasons for one's view, considering objections, and generally committing oneself to standards of rational evaluation.

However, on this same interpretation, the first premise is false. Conservatives do not, and need not, reject the standards of rational evaluation. That is not to say that conservatives never fail to live up to these standards: they are no less liable than socialists, liberals, anarchists, or anyone else to transgress against them.

But most conservatives are no less committed to these standards than their political opponents. The very fact that conservatives write books and papers in which they provide arguments for deference to traditions should be sufficient to prove this point. Otherwise, conservatives' motives for going to such lengths to argue for deference to traditions would be utterly mysterious, or even incomprehensible.

Crucially, the Anti-Rationalist Argument is sound only if there is an interpretation of 'rationalism' on which both the first and the third premises come out true. However, there is no understanding of rationalism of which I'm aware that is both rejected by conservatives (and therefore on which the first premise is true) and involved in political theorising (and thus on which the third premise is true). It is not clear that doing political theory commits one to *any* form of rationalism other than general adherence to standards of good reasoning. But, as discussed, the conservative can accept this kind of rationalism. Thus, on the only available interpretation on which the third premise is true, the first premise is false. Hence, the Anti-Rationalist Argument fails.

Incidentally, it is not clear that this second interpretation of 'rationalism' is really something worth calling 'rationalism'. If rationalism is simply the commitment to good standards of reasoning, then virtually anyone whose view is worth considering is a rationalist. So, defining rationalism as commitment to standards of good reasoning has the effect of trivialising the notion and of obscuring what separates conservatives from their opponents.

Several authors, both conservative and non-conservatives, have already argued that the conflation of rationalism and rational thought is a mistake, and that the conservative opposes only the former (Franco 1990: 110, 249-250; Freedman 1998: 317-319; Meyer 1964: 10-13; Hayek 2006: 61-62; Hayek 2013: 28-33; Muller 1997: 14-15; Ryn 2007: 538-539). Indeed, this mistake was first pointed out by Hume (c.f. Livingston 1995: 154-157).

So, the objection I make here is by no means novel. It is, however, a clear and powerful one that exposes the obvious mistake in the Anti-Rationalist Argument.

Since the mistake involved in the Anti-Rationalist Argument is obvious and has been diagnosed by many authors, one might wonder why it has had such wide currency in the literature.

One possible explanation for this is that conservatives who defend the Anti-Rationalist Argument are attempting to make conservatism appear to be immune from criticism. In other words, the Anti-Rationalist Argument, like psychological theories, can be used to shirk the burden of justifying conservatism. The conservative can play on the ambiguity of the term 'rationalism' to provide herself with an excuse for failing to offer arguments. By inveighing against Epistemic Rationalism and Practical Rationalism and creating the false impression that one must endorse one or both of those doctrines to argue for one's political views, the conservative can resist the pressure to offer arguments for her position. Conservatives are not unique, of course, in being disingenuous. But their use of this tactic can create the impression that the only way to deal

charitably with conservatives is to accept their refusal to provide arguments. As I have shown, this is simply not the case.

A second possibility is that the opponents of conservatism who defend the Anti-Rationalist Argument seek to make the latter appear to be intellectually inferior to other views by creating the impression that it rejects rational thought.⁶⁶

It is possible, then, that rather than making an honest mistake about conservatism's relationship to theorising, both conservatives and their enemies are trading on ambiguity to suit their argumentative purposes.

I cannot hope to prove that this is the case. However, the ulterior motives described above would explain why such an obvious error could be relatively widely endorsed among otherwise sophisticated thinkers.

In this section, then, I have refuted the Anti-Rationalist Argument. According to this argument, conservatives cannot engage in political theorising without committing themselves to the rationalism which they reject. Thus, conservatives theorise on pain of inconsistency. In reply, I argued that theorising does not commit one to rationalism in any sense which is problematic for conservatism. Specifically, theorising does not commit one to the thesis that there is normative knowledge whose source is pure reason or to belief in the extensive power of human instrumental reasoning to solve social problems. Instead, theorising commits one only to rational thought, which the conservative does not and should not reject.

2.3.2. *The Anti-Ideology Argument*

The Anti-Ideology Argument states that conservatism rejects ideology and that if it rejects ideology, it should reject political theorising. Thus, conservatism should reject political theorising. The argument can be set out as follows.

⁶⁶ If this is true, they may have been inspired by Mill's famous quip about conservatives being the 'stupid party', as Freedman (1998: 317-318) points out.

P1: Conservatives reject ideology.

P2: If conservatives reject ideology, then they must reject political theorising.

C: Therefore, conservatives must reject political theorising.

As with the Anti-Rationalist Argument, on the assumption that defending deference to traditions by appeal to reliabilism constitutes theorising, the Anti-Ideology argument presents a *prima facie* problem for the arguments I make in Chapters Five and Six. If the Anti-Ideology Argument is sound, it is impossible for the Social Knowledge Argument to establish the truth of the form of conservatism that it is intended to support.

The most crucial concept in this argument is IDEOLOGY. An ideology, according to defenders of the Anti-Ideology Argument, is a blueprint for a radically improved – or even utopian – society. Ideologies are comprised of two main elements. The first is a specification of some valuable end-state to be realised. The valuableness of the end-state to be realised is usually thought to consist in it instantiating some allegedly universal values or ideals, such as freedom or equality (c.f. Oakeshott 1991b: 48-49). The second element is a plan for bringing about that end state through political action. It is this second element that reveals the thoroughly instrumental character of ideologies. The ideologue views politics as a means of bringing about a better world and recognises few (if any) constraints on what the state may do in the service of her chosen ideals.⁶⁷

Ideologies are often thought by the adherents of the Anti-Ideology Argument to involve Epistemic Rationalism or Practical Rationalism, and quite possibly both. Ideology often involves Practical Rationalism because the ideologue frequently does not recognise any limits to the power of human instrumental reasoning to

⁶⁷ It is for this reason that some conservative critics of ideology have argued that ideologies have trouble accommodating the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate states, insofar as a state's legitimacy depends on it observing certain non-instrumental limits to the exercise of its power (O'Sullivan 1992: 139-141).

realise her ideals. Ideology may also involve Epistemic Rationalism if the ideals in question are supposed to be discoverable through the exercise of pure reason.

However, the Anti-Rationalist Argument and the Anti-Ideology Argument are not identical. While many adherents of the Anti-Ideology Argument regard ideology as involving Epistemic Rationalism or Practical Rationalism, ideology does not necessarily involve either. An ideology in the sense which is relevant here is a bundle of ideals in accordance with which one might seek to reform society. Ideology in this sense does not entail Epistemic Rationalism. One need not think that the ideals constituting one's ideology are discoverable through the exercise of pure reason. Ideology also does not entail Practical Rationalism, though it is usually accompanied by it. One might seek to reform society in accordance with a set of ideals even while believing that there are limits to human instrumental reason and hence limits to the degree of success that can be expected.

The argument for the first premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument is that conservatives accept ideology only if they have ideals, because ideals are an essential component of ideologies. But conservatives do not have ideals. Therefore, conservatives do not accept ideology. And, of course, conservatives either accept ideology or they reject it. Therefore, conservatives reject ideology.⁶⁸

To be sure, conservatism does not entail the non-existence of moral values; it is not a form of moral nihilism. Instead, conservatives dispute only that there are universally valuable ends that ought to be instantiated in every society. In other

⁶⁸ Some authors who endorse the first premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument, and this argument for it, do not accept the Anti-Ideology Argument's second premise or conclusion. They believe that while conservatism rejects ideology, this does not require its rejection of political theory (Graham 1986: 181-186; Harbour 1982: 7-8; Kirk 1984). I discuss this more fully below. Furthermore, some writers accept that conservatism lacks ideals without accepting the first premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument. They think that conservatism can lack ideals without failing to be an ideology (Brennan & Hamlin 2004: 677-678; Huntington 1957; O'Hara 2011: 5-7; Quinton 2007: 288-289). As Beckstein (2015: 8) and Clarke (2017: 554) have pointed out, the dispute between those who say that conservatism is not an ideology in virtue of lacking ideals and those who deny this is merely verbal: it boils down to whether we define 'ideology' in a way that involves ideals.

words, the conservative, unlike the ideologue, lacks an image of a better society that all societies (supposedly) ought to reflect (Oakeshott 1991a: 425-428).

The difference between conservatives and ideologues concerns how they conceive of the existence and epistemology of moral values and their role in political action. The ideologue begins with some allegedly universal ideals. These ideals are supposed to be tradition-independent. The ideologue then seeks to assess the current state of her society by considering how closely it approximates these ideals. If her society falls far short of her ideals, and it probably does, the ideologue seeks to reform it through political action. In other words, the ideologue begins from an image of how all societies ought to be and seeks to make her society reflect that image.

The conservative, by contrast, begins with her society as it actually exists and seeks to discover the values that are instantiated by its social and political arrangements. These values are discoverable through reliance on a society's traditions. A conservative assessment of a society's current state proceeds not by comparing that society to a pre-determined blueprint but by assessing the extent to which those values and the arrangements by which they are instantiated are coherent with each other (Oakeshott 1991b). So, when it is said that the conservative rejects ideals, what is meant is that she rejects any utopian visions of what an ideal society would look like, not that she rejects all moral values or principles.

The argument for the second premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument is that there is a reliable connection between theory and ideology. Political theorising involves articulating and defending a set of political commitments. A conservative political theorist is likely to seek to describe and defend the political and social arrangements of her society. However, in describing and defending the political and social arrangements of one's society, it is easy to come to view those arrangements as universally ideal.

This is because any attempt to articulate and defend one's political commitments involves a certain amount of simplification, abridgement, and abstraction. The complexities of a society's political arrangements and the practical knowledge on which their success depends cannot be fully captured in propositions.⁶⁹ Thus, in trying to defend the political arrangements of her society, the conservative risks divorcing them from their practical context and makes them seem to be good for, and practicable in, other societies.

In other words, the worry is that in attempting to articulate and defend conservatism's political commitments, the conservative theorist risks elevating those commitments to the status of universal ideals which constitute a blueprint or plan for a better society: an ideology. So, if the conservative rejects ideology, then she should reject theorising as well, for fear that in attempting to theorise, she will produce an ideology.

The Anti-Ideology Argument has been defended by several authors. Allison (1984: 7-9, 54-55), Casey (1978), Gilmour (1977: 121, 132-143), Harbour (1982: Ch.3, Ch.6), Oakeshott (1991a; 1991b; 1991c), and O'Hear (1998a) are its main exponents.^{70,71} The Anti-Ideology Argument is discussed by Freedman (1998: Ch.9), O'Hara (2011: 5-7) and Quinton (2007: 288-289), though they do not endorse it.

Oakeshott provides a useful expression of the Anti-Ideology Argument. He complains that ideology has taken hold even among defenders of tradition. He comments that 'how deeply the rationalist disposition of mind has invaded our

⁶⁹ This point, of course, has already been discussed in the Introduction.

⁷⁰ Some of these writers (for example, Allison and Casey) do not mention ideology by name. However, I think it is fair to attribute the Anti-Ideology Argument to them. They both claim that conservatism lacks a 'theory' or 'philosophy' on account of its rejecting ideals or blueprints for a better society.

⁷¹ Oakeshott does not mention ideology directly in connection with conservatism. However, he certainly rejects it. Moreover, he attributes rejection of ideology to the conservative without using that term when he claims that conservatives disavow seeking to direct political affairs in accordance with ideals of a better world (1991a: 425-428). Finally, while Oakeshott does not reject political theorising *per se*, he argues that its goal should only be to understand existing political ways of life, rather than to direct practical affairs; the proper role of theory is explanatory, in his view, rather than prescriptive (Nardin 2016). In a sense, then, there can be no conservative political theory on Oakeshott's view. The conservative rejects (and should reject) political ideals and therefore she should reject any theory that attempts to direct practical affairs.

political thought and practice is illustrated by the extent to which traditions of behaviour have given place to ideologies [...]’ (1991c: 26). Oakeshott takes Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* as the prime example of this and argues that its ‘main significance’ is not ‘the cogency of his doctrine, but the fact that it is a doctrine’ (1991c: 26). He continues:

A plan to resist all planning may be better than its opposite, but it belongs to the same style of politics. And only in a society already deeply infected with Rationalism will the conversion of the traditional resources of resistance to the tyranny of Rationalism into a self-conscious ideology be considered a strengthening of those resources. It seems that now, in order to participate in politics and expect a hearing, it is necessary to have, in the strictest sense, a doctrine [...] and the sanctity, which in some societies was the property of a politics piously attached to traditional ways, has now come to belong exclusively to rationalist politics. (1991c: 26-27)

Oakeshott understands an ideology as a set of principles, ideals rules, doctrines, etc. concerning which ends are to be pursued in politics which constitute an abridgement of and abstraction from a society’s political tradition. He argues that proponents of ideologies frequently seek to direct political affairs solely in accordance with their chosen ideology, but such an aim is misguided. For those who seek to direct political activity in accordance with ideologies often mistakenly believe that the ideology is formulated in advance of and independently of political activity. Instead, it is political activity which exists first, and from which the ideology is abstracted later. Thus, attempts to guide political activity in accordance with ideologies will tend to fail or misfire since the ideology is only a partial and simplified summary of a society’s political tradition (Oakeshott 1991b: 48-60).

We can clearly discern the connection between Practical Rationalism and ideology for Oakeshott. The ideologue is a Practical Rationalist. She believes in the power of human reason to effect large-scale plans for social change in

accordance with some set of principles, ideals or doctrines (an ideology). Moreover, the spirit, if not the letter, so to speak, of Epistemic Rationalism can be detected in the ideologue's attitude as well. It is the ideologue's belief in the extensive power of reason, divorced from the political tradition of her society, that leads her to engage in the simplification and abstraction which produces ideologies, and which explains her failure to realise that it is a mere abridgement of that tradition (Oakeshott 1991b: 51-53; Oakeshott 1991c: 8-9).

The Anti-Ideology Argument can be refuted in a similar way to the Anti-Rationalist Argument. Specifically, the Anti-Ideology Argument does not distinguish ideology, in the sense discussed above, from theory. Conservatism rejects only the former. It does not, as we have already seen, reject the latter. The argument appears to be plausible because of the ambiguity of the term 'ideology'. However, once the term is disambiguated, it becomes clear that there is no interpretation on which both premises are true. Hence, the Anti-Ideology Argument fails.

I now explore this objection more fully. Suppose that an 'ideology' is a plan to reform society so that it reflects some utopian, universal ideals. On this interpretation, the first premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument is true. As is no doubt clear from the preceding discussions in this section (and in §2.3.1.), conservatives do indeed reject utopian social planning and the rationalism on which some of them believe it rests.

However, in that same sense of 'ideology', the second premise is false. Theorising does not involve ideology of the kind that conservatives reject. A political theory need not specify ideals to be realised through political action. All that political theorising requires is the reasoned, systematic defence of one's political views. And the fact that a set of views does not specify some ideal to be realised through political action does not entail that it cannot be systematically defended (Graham 1986: 181-186; Kirk 1984; Quinton 2007: 288-

289; O'Hara 2011: 5-7).⁷² Thus, rejecting ideology in the sense that is problematic for conservatism does not require the rejection of theory.

As an illustration of this, consider the following passage from Russel Kirk's discussion of ideology. He argues that political theory is not identical with ideology. By 'ideology' he understands utopian political views according to which it is possible to establish a 'Terrestrial Paradise through the operation of positive law and planning' (1984: 348). Such views are often dogmatic and display overconfidence in human reason (Kirk 1984: 349-352). Crucially, he argues, to do political theory is not to commit oneself to overconfidence in the power of human reason, either as a source of knowledge or as an instrument for transforming society. He claims that 'ideology' should not be treated as synonymous with 'political theory' since 'this assumption suggests that any theoretical foundation for politics [...] must be involved with [...] social utopianism' (1984: 351) and that 'the twentieth-century ideologue, after the manner of Robespierre, thinks that his secular dogmas are sustained by the Goddess Reason; he prides himself inordinately on being [...] "rational"; and he is convinced that all opposition [...] is selfish obscurantism [...]' (1984: 351).⁷³

Kirk points out that ideology is in fact inimical to political theorising since it is often dogmatic. Ideology replaces the pursuit of truth, and the careful, reasoned, open-minded examination of political principles which accompanies it, with a simplification which is supposed to spare one from careful thought. This simplification says that there could be no compelling principled reasons resisting social change. Thus, anyone who opposes change is a self-interested reactionary. The reasons for promoting social change are unassailable. Hence, there is no need to examine carefully the objections to one's ideology or the reasons in favour of alternative views (Kirk 1984: 351-352). Kirk argues that 'real thinking is a painful process; and the ideologue resorts to the anaesthetic of social

⁷² A clarification is in order here. Quinton and O'Hara claim say that conservatism is an ideology. However, they use 'ideology' to mean 'theory' and they explicitly argue that conservatism rejects utopian universal prescriptions. So, the distinction between my argument and theirs is merely verbal.

⁷³ It is worth noting here a difference between Kirk and Oakeshott's views. Both reject ideology, but where Oakeshott draws an anti-theoretical implication from this, Kirk does not.

utopianism [...] by giving his adherence to a perfect dream-world of the future' (1984: 351).

Like Burke before him, Kirk's style is often overwrought. But he clearly vindicates the possibility of political theory without the elements of ideology that are problematic for conservatism.

Suppose instead that 'ideology' refers only to political theory. In that case, the second premise of the Anti-Ideology Argument is true. But it is also trivial. It boils down to this: 'if conservatism rejects political theorising, then conservatism rejects political theorising'. Moreover, on this interpretation, the first premise is false. As discussed in connection with the Anti-Rationalist Argument, the conservative does not reject political theory. Finally, the only sense of 'ideology' in which the conservative must reject ideology is the sense in which it involves planning to reform society in accordance with universal ideals. Thus, the Anti-Ideology Argument fails.

2.3.3. The Anti-Theory-Theory Argument

I now consider the final anti-theory argument, which claims that conservatism is indeed a political theory, but it is the kind of theory which is opposed to theories. Hence, conservatism is self-defeating. This is the 'Anti-Theory-Theory Argument', which can be presented as follows.

P1: Conservatism is a theory that prohibits theories.

P2: If conservatism is a theory that prohibits theories, then it is self-undermining.

C: Therefore, conservatism is self-undermining.

The relevance of this argument to my project is that even if the foregoing objections to the Anti-Rationalist Argument and the Anti-Ideology Argument are sound, their success only puts the problem of conservatism's relationship to

theory back a stage. This is because if those arguments are sound, the form of conservatism that I argue for in this thesis is indeed a theory. However, it is a form of conservatism which, given its insistence on deference to tradition and the limits of human reason, would seem to support the rejection of theorising. It would therefore be self-defeating in regard to theory.

Let us accept the second premise of the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument for now. The argument for the first premise is that the tradition principle implies the uselessness or perniciousness of theorising. If tradition is the source of normative knowledge, then we ought not to theorise about normative questions. The true answers to such questions are not found in the arguments of philosophers, but in traditions (Quinton 1978: 16-17). And, if the true answers to normative questions are found in traditions, then consulting theories is apt to lead us to false beliefs. Thus, theorising has no useful epistemological role to play and may be epistemically disvaluable because it leads us to false beliefs.

Similarly, if the tradition principle is true, in deciding what to do in political and social life, we should consult tradition, rather than following the guidance of political theories.

So, it appears that the tradition principle forbids theorising. However, if the foregoing arguments are sound, then the tradition principle, along with conservatism's other principles and the arguments for them, are a theory. So, it would seem that my conservatism is a theory that condemns theories.

Anthony Quinton discusses the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument when he considers what he calls the 'paradox of conservatism as a theory prohibiting theories' (1978: 12). He notes that ascertaining the 'fundamental conservative principles is made difficult by the anti-theoretical tendency of conservatives generally' and that it is futile to look for a systematic political theory in the writings of those who disavow political theory as 'dangerously unreliable' (1978: 12). This, he argues, has been used as a *reductio ad absurdum* of conservatism. Conservatism

is (apparently) self-defeating because it suffers the ‘disabling paradox’ of being a political theory on which all political theories are false (Quinton 1978: 12).⁷⁴

Quinton argues that the way to avoid this paradox is to formulate the conservative’s anti-theory position more clearly. He reports (though doesn’t obviously endorse) the idea that this can be done by use of the term ‘abstract’. The conservative rejects abstract theorising, but she can accept theories whose principles are not abstract, such as those principles which, as earlier discussed, are ‘empirically founded’ (Quinton 1978: 12-13).^{75,76}

I do not endorse Quinton’s argument. But it is the inspiration for my response to the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument. Like him, I argue that the paradox of conservatism can be dispelled by removing ambiguity. Unlike him, I do not think that the relevant distinction is between abstract and empirical theories.

I argue that the Anti-Theory-Theory argument trades on an ambiguity concerning the *level* of abstraction exemplified by conservatism as against other types of theory. As with the other anti-theory arguments, once this ambiguity is diagnosed, it becomes clear that there is no interpretation on which every premise is true.

The relevant difference is between first-order and second-order theorising. This takes some unpacking. First-order political theorising is theorising about substantive normative matters which are relevant to the political domain. Such matters include the ideal constitution of a state, the permissible limits of state power, the source and justification of state authority, the proper distribution of resources and welfare, whether it is morally permissible to hold private property, what rights should be recognised under the law, the limits of

⁷⁴ Probably the most recent author to advocate the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument is Freedman (1998: 324-326).

⁷⁵ Graham (1986: 181-186) also discusses this paradox and makes a similar response.

⁷⁶ Quinton (2007: 288-289) discusses this argument more recently.

toleration, and the various other topics which constitute the subject matter of political philosophy.

Second-order political theory is concerned with more abstract matters. Second-order matters might include methodological questions about the proper way to do first-order political theorising and where its epistemic and practical limitations lie, the relation between politics and other domains, the relationship between political theory and other forms of political inquiry, the sources of political knowledge and justification for political beliefs, the nature of society and its relation to the individuals who are its members, and so on.

In reply to the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument, I contend that conservatives are in favour of second-order theorising but against first-order theorising. Thus, if the first premise of that argument is supposed to say that ‘conservatism is a second-order theory that forbids first-order theories’, it is true. On this same interpretation, the second premise would state that ‘second-order theories which forbid first-order theories are self-undermining’. That claim, however, is false. There is no inconsistency in claiming that there are epistemological and metaphysical reasons for forbidding theorising about substantive practical matters. In fact, those second-order reasons might *require*, on pain of inconsistency, that one refrain from first-order theorising.

Crucially, there is no other interpretation on which the first premise is true. Conservatism is not a first-order theory. So, it cannot be a first-order theory which forbids first-order theories, although such a position would indeed be self-defeating. Similarly, conservatism is not a second-order theory forbidding second-order theories, though again such a position would be self-undermining. Thus, the only interpretation on which the first premise of the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument is true says that conservatism is a second-order theory forbidding first-order theories. But on this same interpretation, the second premise is false.

Let me explore this in more detail. Conservatives are opposed to theorising about such first-order matters. The reason for this is simple. If, in respect of such matters, we ought to defer to tradition, then, other things equal, there is no legitimate place for first-order political theory. In deciding what to do in politics, we should rely on tradition, rather than following the guidance of political theories. Political theory has no useful role either in respect of political epistemology or in respect of action-guidance. To this extent, the conservative does indeed endorse an anti-theory position. An entailment of the tradition principle is that we ought not to theorise about first-order matters.

However, this anti-theory argument leaves room for conservative second-order theorising. The reason for this is that while the tradition principle forbids first-order theorising, it and the other principles of conservatism constitute answers to the second-order questions mentioned above concerning the nature of society and political epistemology. These principles, together with the arguments for them, are a second-order political theory. Indeed, one might think that the conservative *must* endorse political theorising of this sort. For while the tradition principle may rule out first-order theorising, we cannot accept it on faith. We need some reasons for believing the tradition principle. In other words, while it may be the case that, if the tradition principle is true, we do not need arguments for complying with particular traditions, we do need arguments for the general policy of deference to, and compliance with, traditions. Such arguments constitute a second-order conservative political theory.⁷⁷

It could be objected that distinguishing between first-order and second-order theorising does not eliminate the worry about self-defeat. Conservatives allow theorising about second-order matters, as discussed above. But suppose that second-order matters are practical matters and that theorising about second-order matters is *a priori* theorising. Then it looks as if the conservative allows *a priori* theorising about practical matters. However, the conservative also claims

⁷⁷ Similar points have been made by O'Hara (2016: 429-431, 435).

to forbid *a priori* theorising about practical matters. So, conservatism's stance toward theorising is still seemingly inconsistent.

In reply, I argue that second-order matters are not practical in any sense that would generate an inconsistency in conservatism's stance toward theorising. First-order matters and second-order matters are both practical in that they have some bearing on practice. However, only first-order matters are directly practical. Second-order matters are only indirectly related to practice. They do not make prescriptions concerning what sort of political or social arrangements a society ought to have. The relevance of that distinction is as follows. The conservative need only oppose *a priori* theorising about first-order or directly practical questions; she need only oppose *a priori* theorising whose goal is the discovery of what sort of political and social arrangements a society should have.

This is because only first-order *a priori* theorising is in tension with the tradition principle and anti-rationalism. If the tradition principle and anti-rationalism are true, then we ought to rely on traditions in seeking the answers to normative questions. Pure reason is not a reliable source of answers to such questions and we should instead rely on traditions, which are a reliable source of the answers to normative questions. Hence, in respect of first-order normative matters, we should eschew *a priori* theorising in favour of reliance on tradition. However, this does not mean that there are no *a priori* reasons in favour of the tradition principle or anti-rationalism.

In any case, the second-order theorising that I pursue later in this thesis is not fully *a priori*. As discussed, the assumptions on which the Social Knowledge Argument rests are ultimately empirical. So, this objection fails.

Finally, there is one feature of my account of conservatism which is worth commenting on here. My account is unique in recognising the abstractness of conservatism. Consider Quinton's account in comparison with mine. While Quinton argues that conservatives typically reject abstract theorising in favour of theorising which is empirical in nature (a claim which is indeed true), I argue

that conservative theorising is in fact *more* abstract than other political theories. In fact, it is almost *entirely* abstract. Conservatives do not provide first-order political theories the kind of which are common in political philosophy. Instead, when they theorise, they focus exclusively on second-order questions, in particular epistemological questions.⁷⁸

The abstractness of conservatism has been obscured, I think, by the fact that it is in a sense true that conservatism is opposed to abstract theorising. Conservatives reject first-order theories, but these might still be thought to be at least somewhat abstract. Conservatives reject the attempt to direct political affairs in accordance with abstract first-order political theories. But this does not change the fact that their theories are more abstract than first-order political theories.

In this section, I have refuted the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument, according to which conservatism is self-defeating because it is a theory forbidding theories. I objected that conservatism is a second-order theory, rather than a first-order theory. And, importantly, there is no inconsistency in endorsing a second-order theory which prohibits first-order theorising. This also reveals a unique feature of the conservatism for which I argue in this thesis. Conservatism, as I understand it, is more, rather than less, abstract than other political viewpoints.

2.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have refuted three arguments for the conclusion that conservatism rejects theorising. According to the first argument, theorising commits one to rationalism, and since the conservative disavows rationalism, she cannot theorise without inconsistency. In reply, I argued that theorising does not involve any form of rationalism to which the conservative is opposed. The second argument states that conservatives reject ideology, which requires her to

⁷⁸ Interestingly, Quinton (1978: 13) argues that conservatism is essentially an epistemic doctrine on the very same page where he argues that conservatives are opposed to more abstract theorising. He seemingly fails to realise that it is more abstract in virtue of being concerned with epistemology.

reject theory too. In response, I objected that theorising does not entail endorsement of ideology. So, the rejection of ideology does not require the rejection of theory. Finally, I considered the argument that conservatism is self-defeating because it is a theory prohibiting theories. I responded that this seeming inconsistency dissolves on closer examination. The conservative is opposed only to first-order theorising but accepts second-order theorising, and there is no inconsistency in this.

Chapter Three: What Are Traditions?

In this chapter, I defend my account of traditions. In general terms, a tradition is the handing down or transmission, by one generation to the next, of some valued item(s). Thus, every tradition has two elements: the items or objects transmitted and the process of transmission. ‘Tradition’ is therefore unhelpfully ambiguous, since it can label both a transmission process and the items transmitted (Alexander 2012: 20-23; 2016b: 2-3; Armstrong 1981: 91-97; Beckstein 2016: 5-6; Congar 2004: 9-10, 45-47; Dinan 1991: 445; Kitcher 2001: 263-264; Nyíri 1988: 31; Pieper 2010: 37; Scheffler 2010: 290; Shils 1981: 12-13).⁷⁹

I have hitherto used the term ‘tradition’ to refer to items handed down, namely rule-governed social practices. However, it could be argued that ‘tradition’ primarily picks out transmission processes and only ‘derivatively’ refers to the items transmitted (Dinan 1991: 445). In any case, it is quite natural to use ‘tradition’ to refer to transmission processes and is in some contexts more natural. For the sake of clarity, I therefore propose some terminological stipulations. In respect of any given tradition, I refer to the items handed down as its ‘transmission objects’ and the process of handing them down its ‘transmission process’. This way of putting things, while less natural and elegant than it might be, should prevent any potential confusion concerning the relevant sense of ‘tradition’.⁸⁰

Like Beckstein (2016: 6) and Shils (1981: 12), I acknowledge that there are in principle no restrictions on what kind of item’s being transmitted could constitute a tradition. Possible transmission objects include material objects, beliefs, teachings, customs, practices, procedures, institutions, and so on

⁷⁹ It is for this reason that there is a conceptual connection between tradition and authority. To faithfully receive that which is transmitted is to submit to or obey its transmitters (Oakeshott 1991c: 15; Pieper 2010: 9-11, 23-25; Polanyi 1958: 53; Nyíri 1988: 18).

⁸⁰ Notwithstanding these terminological stipulations, hereafter I will sometimes use ‘tradition’ to refer only to the transmission objects or transmission processes which partly constitute a tradition when the context makes it clear which sense is intended. So, for example, ‘traditions are practices’, ‘traditions are partly constituted by practices’, and ‘traditions’ transmission objects are practices’ should be treated as equivalent.

(Beckstein 2016: 6; Scheffler 2010: 290; Shils 1981: 12). Similarly, different transmission processes are appropriate for different transmission objects. The nature of the transmission process plausibly constrains the range of possible transmission objects because there are only certain kinds of things that can be transmitted through certain processes (Turner 1994: 44). That said, there are perhaps some transmission objects that can be transmitted in more than one way. Hence, there are several types of objects and ways of transmitting them that could constitute a tradition.

Assuming that tradition-types are individuated by the kinds of objects transmitted and the process for transmitting them, there are therefore many different types of traditions. Religious traditions might involve passing on doctrine through testimony, artisanal or professional traditions might involve passing on crafts and skills by training apprentices, familial traditions might involve handing down a family heirloom, the traditions of private clubs might involve the continuance of initiation rituals, and so on (c.f. Dinan 1991: 446; Ruben 2013: 40).

However, societal traditions are most relevant to my defence of conservatism. For it is deference to the traditions of one's society that, as I will argue in Chapter Five, is a reliable process for normative belief formation. Therefore, I focus on societal traditions in the remainder of this chapter. By societal traditions, I mean any traditions that belong to some society.

Note here the distinction between 'societal' and 'social': not all social traditions are societal. Most traditions are social in at least one sense and many are social in two senses. Most traditions are social in the minimal sense that they necessarily involve more than one individual, since most traditions involve the transmission of some item from one generation to the next. Even traditions in which there is just one transmitter and one recipient for every act of transmission are social in this sense (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 95-96). Consider, for example, a father who hands down his favourite watch to his son, who in turn passes it to his son, and so on (Beckstein 2016: 6). Many traditions are also social

in the more robust sense that they involve multiple transmitters and multiple recipients in each generation (Armstrong 1981: 95-96; Beckstein 2016: 6-7). Religious, artisanal and private clubs' traditions fall into this category. However, while these traditions are social, they are clearly not the traditions of a society.⁸¹

I argue that the transmission objects of societal traditions are rule-governed social practices which are characteristically, though not essentially, (a) such that compliance with them is often unreflective, (b) relatively old, and (c) evolved. I defend this claim in §3.1. I argue that the transmission process for societal traditions is osmosis, the unconscious imitation of others' behaviour, in §3.2.

Before moving on, I explain how my characterisation of tradition relates to other extant theories of tradition. There is no account of tradition exactly like mine in the current literature. However, there are similarities between my account and other theorists' accounts.

The theory of traditions that I defend here is most similar to Armstrong's. He argues that traditions are typically complied with unreflectively and that they are evolved (1981: 89, 98-101). He also claims that traditions' transmission objects are transmitted through imitation (1981: 97-99). So, he and I have similar views concerning the paradigmatic features of traditions. Another similarity is that like me, Armstrong (1981: 91-92, 100-101) argues that the main difference between traditions and related phenomena such as habits, customs and rituals is that traditions are regarded as reason-giving by their adherents, whereas habits, customs and rituals may not be. However, there are some differences between my account and his. First, he does not claim that traditions are typically old. Second, he does not regard traditions as a species of practices.

Finally, there are many other theorists who have attributed to traditions one or more of the features that I claim are characteristic of paradigm traditions.

⁸¹ I discuss this more fully in §3.1.1.

Rather than situating my account relative to theirs here, in what follows, I cite the relevant theorists in connection with each feature. In any case, no extant account of traditions attributes all three of the features that I ascribe to them in this chapter.

3.1. Traditions as Objects of Transmission

I begin then by defending my account of societal traditions' transmission objects. As discussed, I argue that the transmission objects of societal traditions are rule-governed social practices which are characteristically, though not essentially, (a) such that compliance with them is often unreflective, (b) relatively old, and (c) evolved. I first explain the notion of rule-governed social practices, in §3.1.1. In §3.1.2. I argue for traditions having features (a), (b) and (c). I then consider how traditions differ from related phenomena such as customs, rituals, and ceremonies, in §3.1.3.

Before proceeding, a clarification is in order. The definition proposed here is not an analysis. None of the features (a), (b) or (c) is supposed to be individually necessary for a social practice's being a tradition, and they are not supposed to be jointly sufficient. Instead, the definition I propose here is intended to capture paradigm traditions. So, (a), (b) and (c) are supposed to be paradigmatic, but not necessary, features of traditions. Thus, there are societal traditions which do not have features (a), (b) and (c).

3.1.1. Rule-Governed Social Practices

I now discuss the first element of my account of societal traditions' transmission objects, namely rule-governed social practices. I first explain the notion of practices. A practice is a repeated pattern of behaviour which has several interconnected elements. These elements include physical and mental activity, objects, and associated forms of (often implicit) understanding and know-how, without which the agent could not successfully engage in the pattern of behaviour in question (c.f. Reckwitz 2002: 249-250, 251-254). Crucially, a practice cannot be reduced to any one of its elements (Reckwitz 2002: 250).

Examples of types of practices include cooking, consuming, working, and looking after people (oneself and others) (Reckwitz 2002: 249-250).

To take a specific example, consider the practice of baking a cake. This practice is constituted by the physical actions and techniques which go into producing the cake, the requisite mental activities, such as the planning involved in assembling the various ingredients, the understanding required, such as understanding of what temperature to bake it at, and the relevant know-how, such as how to combine the various ingredients. The practice of baking a cake cannot be reduced to any one of these elements: without each of them, it does not exist.

This definition of practices has the advantage that is broad enough to capture a wide range of distinctive but overlapping phenomena which plausibly fall under the heading of 'practices'. These phenomena include habits, routines, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and traditions. They are distinct but overlapping in the sense that none of these types of phenomena is identical with any other, yet some members of one type belong to one or more of the others. For example, some rituals are also traditions, and many ceremonies are rituals (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 95-97). (Again, I discuss this more fully in §3.1.3).

The argument for societal traditions' being social practices has two stages. First, there is the argument for the conclusion that traditions are practices. Second, there is the argument that such practices must be social. It may seem trivial that societal practices are social, and this is true. But there are also non-trivial reasons for thinking that traditions in general are social practices, and it is worth exploring the reasons for this, since they have a bearing on the arguments that I make later concerning how traditions differ from related practices.

The argument for societal traditions' being practices is that all traditions are partly constituted by repeated patterns of behaviour, and every repeated

pattern of behaviour is a practice. Therefore, all traditions, societal or otherwise, are partly constituted by practices.⁸²

Let me discuss the premises of this argument in reverse order. Every repeated pattern of behaviour is a practice because a practice is a combination of a repeated pattern of physical and mental behaviour and the associated understanding and know-how. And a repeated pattern of behaviour cannot exist without the relevant understanding and know-how since, as discussed, without that understanding and know-how, agents could not reliably engage in the behaviour in question. So, the existence of a repeated pattern of behaviour entails the existence of the relevant understanding and know-how, and these two elements partly constitute, and entail the existence of, the practice.

The reason for thinking that a tradition's existence requires a repeated pattern of behaviour is that traditions cannot exist purely as mental states; they must involve action (Morin 2011: 47-50). Adherence to traditions involves mental states such as recognising a pattern of behaviour's being worthy of continuance or valuing it because it is well-established. This, as I argue shortly, is why traditions are partly constituted by rules. Recognising the continuance-worthiness of a pattern of behaviour or valuing it effectively creates a rule mandating it. However, the existence of such rules is insufficient for the existence of a tradition. Instead, the rule must be reliably complied with, where reliable compliance entails that the action demanded by the rule is almost always, or at least frequently, performed in the appropriate circumstances.

Consider the rule that when a ship is in distress, men should forego seats on the lifeboats in preference to women and children. This rule has rarely been complied with, notwithstanding notable exceptions such as the R.M.S. *Titanic* and H.M.S. *Birkenhead* (Elinder & Erixon 2012).⁸³ Instead, women and children generally have the lowest survival rates in maritime disasters, behind crew

⁸² I use 'patterns of behaviour' here in a restricted sense to refer only to intentional actions that require understanding and know-how. Some repeated patterns of behaviour – reflex actions such as blinking, for example – are clearly not practices.

⁸³ The latter's sinking is the origin of the 'women and children first' drill (Elinder & Erixon 2012).

members, captains and male passengers (Elinder & Erixon 2012: 13222).^{84,85} Thus, while there is a rule demanding that women and children board lifeboats first, there is in effect no such tradition (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 90-92).

Alternatively, take the rule that men must not wear hats indoors. While this rule was reliably complied with at one time, many men now habitually wear hats indoors, but some continue to comply with the rule forbidding them from doing so. Hence, the rule forbidding men wearing hats indoors is not complied with frequently enough to constitute a tradition, or, at least, this tradition is dying (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 90-92).

Therefore, traditions are practices because their existence requires the repeated patterns of behaviour which constitute practices, even though a repeated pattern of behaviour is insufficient for a tradition's existence.

The reader may be wondering how the foregoing sits with the claim that I made in the opening of this chapter that a tradition's transmission object could be something other than a practice, such as a material object or teaching. The answer is that in cases where a tradition's transmission object is seemingly a material object or teaching, it is really the practice of passing on these items that is the transmission object. The material object or teaching itself is obviously passed on as part of the practice, but these items are not themselves the transmission objects. This sort of tradition therefore has two elements of transmission: the transmission of a practice that involves the passing on of some item and the handing on of the item itself. Relatedly, this type of transmission

⁸⁴ These findings also cast doubt on the existence of similar maritime traditions such as the captain going down with the ship and the crew members assisting the passengers to escape before saving themselves (Elinder & Erixon 2012: 13223). The romanticised story of the *Titanic* is probably the reason why people have come to believe in the existence of these maritime traditions (Elinder & Erixon 2012). Instead, the tradition that is actually observed in maritime disasters is 'every man for himself' (Elinder & Erixon 2012).

⁸⁵ Whether the 'women and children first' protocol is followed, and hence the survival rates for women and children, depends on the captain. Survival rates improve when captains enforce the women and children first drill (Elinder & Erixon 2012: 13223-13224).

may involve two transmission processes: the process that transmits the practice and the process that transmits the relevant item.

Consider again the example of men in a family passing on a watch to their sons. It is the practice of passing the watch on, rather than the watch itself, that is the transmission object of the tradition (Beckstein 2016: 6). Thus, this tradition involves the transmission of both the practice of handing on the watch and the watch itself. The practice of handing the watch on may be received by the son by his imitating his forefathers' example and the watch is obviously simply physically handed over.

In light of these arguments, all traditions' transmission objects are practices, but some traditions involve the transmission of some additional items.

One might also worry here about a possible problematic implication of my view. I draw a connection between traditions and normative demands, and I argue that a tradition exists only if the rule that partly constitutes it is reliably complied with. Hence, my view might seem to imply that a normative demand exists only if it is reliably complied with. The problem is that this has further bizarre implications concerning the normative status of certain actions. For example, at one time, very few people in the South of the USA complied with the moral rule forbidding holding slaves. There was therefore no tradition against slave holding in the South of the USA at that time. But it would clearly be wrong to conclude from this that it was not morally wrong to hold slaves in the USA at that time. It has always been, and will always be, wrong to hold slaves.

My view, however, does not imply that an act's being wrong (or right) requires that the normative demand forbidding (or permitting) that act has wide currency. We can distinguish between a normative demand's existence in the factual sense and its existence in the normative sense. A normative demand exists in the factual sense just in case it has wide currency among a group of people. A normative demand exists in the normative sense if and only if it is a valid or genuine normative (moral, prudential, aesthetic or epistemic) demand.

A normative demand's being valid does not require that it exists in the factual sense and a normative demand's existing in the factual sense does not entail that it is valid. An act that is wrong remains wrong regardless of how many people comply with the rule that forbids it; and a right act remains right regardless of how many people comply with the rule that permits or obliges it. In other words, an act's normative status does not depend on how widely the rules that govern it have currency (c.f. Copp 1995: 22-26).

My view captures this crucial difference. While I argue that traditions can capture normative demands, I do not argue that an act's normative status depends on whether it is permitted or forbidden by the traditions of one's society. Traditions play an epistemic role in helping us discover normative demands, but they do not play a constitutive role in determining what the demands of any normative domain are. Instead, I claim that normative demands exist, in the normative sense, tradition-independently because they depend on facts about human needs. I discuss this further in Chapters Five and Six.

Having established that societal traditions are practices, I now argue that they are social practices. This is, of course, trivially true. Societal traditions are social entities. Thus, if societal traditions are practices, they are social practices. And, as I have argued, societal traditions are practices. So, societal traditions must be practices.

However, there are non-trivial reasons for thinking that societal traditions are social practices, namely that traditions in general are social, whether they are the traditions of a society or not. The reasons for this have a bearing on arguments that I make later. So, let me explore these reasons further.

First, traditions are generally intergenerational; most traditions' transmission objects are transmitted from one generation to the next, including when the relevant transmission object is a practice. Crucially, this process of transmitting objects from one generation to the next is social in a minimal sense: it involves multiple people. So, most practices that are the transmission objects of some

tradition are social practices insofar as they are objects of intergenerational transmission (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 95-97).

Second, many traditions are social in the fuller sense that there are many people at any given time who subscribe to that tradition and its transmission object has multiple transmitters and multiple recipients in each generation (Beckstein 2016: 6-7). This is just as true of traditions whose transmission object is a practice as it is of those traditions whose transmission object is something else. Hence, in respect of many of those traditions whose transmission objects are practices, the relevant practice is adhered to, transmitted, and received by many people in each generation.

The idea of a practice being rule-governed is rather simple. A practice is rule-governed if and only if there is some rule either mandating or forbidding it. So, for example, if there is a practice of the Monarch not interfering in politics and there is a rule mandating that she does not interfere in politics, then the practice of monarchical non-interference is rule-governed.

The reason for thinking that traditions must be rule-governed social practices is that a practice is a tradition only if its being well-established is recognised by its adherents to be a reason to continue it (Armstrong 1981: 100-101; Kekes 1997: 365; Letwin 1978: 62; O'Hear 1998b; Pocock 2009: 190; Scheffler 2010: 287-288, 291; Tate 1997: 75-76; Wall 2016: 139). Thus, practices that are not recognised by their adherents as being worthy of continuation in virtue of their being well-established are not traditions. Importantly, recognising a practice's longevity as a reason to continue it is essentially to imbue it with rule-governed status. If the members of a group regard some practice as being obligatory or forbidden in virtue of the relevant performance of forbearance being well-established, then there is effectively a rule in that group requiring or forbidding the relevant action (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 100-101).

For example, if there is a practice in a university department of going to a certain pub for Friday night drinks, and if this practice's being well-established

is recognised by the members of the department as a reason to continue it, then there is effectively a rule among them that they go to the pub in question on Friday nights.

Some clarifications are in order. First, the rules need not be absolute. In the case of the tradition regarding choice of pub, there may be permissible exceptions. For example, if a particularly prestigious speaker is visiting, a more salubrious location may be desired.

Second, the relevant rule may be unwritten. Again, the university department's choice of pub is an example of this. In fact, social practices governed by unwritten rules are plausibly stronger candidates for being traditions than those which are mandated by written rules. Some writers have even gone as far as suggesting that traditions are only found in non-literate societies (Nyíri 2016: 444; Pocock 2009: 203).⁸⁶

Third, the claim that traditions are rule-governed in virtue of being recognised as worthy of continuance because of their longevity might seem to sit uneasily with the thesis that traditions are typically complied with unreflectively. However, recognition of a practice's normativity is not necessarily self-conscious or reflective (Scheffler 2010: 294-295).

Consider recognition of the law's authority. Many people's compliance with the law is not merely habitual, though habit may play a role. Similarly, most people do not comply with the law only because and when its demands reflect their moral obligations, though its doing so may be part of the reason for their compliance. Instead, many citizens comply with the law out of recognition of its (alleged) authority. This recognition, however, need not be the result of self-conscious reflection on the reasons or arguments supporting the law's authority. It is instinctive, sub-conscious and inexplicit.

⁸⁶ Some writers, such as Alexander (2016b), deny this.

Given the foregoing arguments then, we can conclude that societal traditions are rule-governed social practices.

3.1.2. Unreflectiveness, Longevity, Evolution

Let me now discuss why societal traditions are typically complied with unreflectively, old, and evolved. I take each of these features in turn and explain them, before arguing for their being features of paradigm traditions.

A rule is complied with unreflectively by an agent if she does not comply as a result of conscious reflection on, and finding adequate, the reasons that justify compliance. Complying with a rule unreflectively involves taking its compliance-worthiness for granted, in other words. For example, if Smith complies with a rule which forbids stealing without searching for and finding reasons why the rule is worthy of compliance, then she complies with it unreflectively.

Why should we think that traditions are typically complied with unreflectively? The answer is that if asked, many adherents of traditions cannot give reasons why the tradition should be complied with (Scruton 2001: 30-31). Indeed, many adherents of traditions do not feel the need to have positive reasons for compliance with them. When they do feel the need to have positive reasons for compliance, the proposed justification is usually that a tradition's longevity is evidence that it serves some (possibly unknown) useful function or that continuing it is the appropriate way to respect the previous generations who transmitted it. Thus, adherents of a tradition often stake its normativity on the authority of the past or the personal authority of those who transmitted it. This is why it is typical that, when asked for a justification of some traditional practice, the adherents of the tradition will simply say 'this is how we have always done things'. Furthermore, the assumption that a practice's longevity is reason to continue it is not always made self-consciously or explicitly. So, traditions are often endorsed unreflectively.

This argument might raise some questions about how I conceive of the relationship between reason and tradition. It is a commonplace that reason and

tradition are opposed (Alexander 2016b: 7-9; Looker 1965: 301; Nyíri 1988: 24; O'Hear 1998b; Popper 1949: 162; Tate 1997).⁸⁷ What I say about the unreflectiveness of traditions, given the connection I draw between reflectiveness and reasons, might suggest that I think of traditions as opposed to reason.

This, however, is not the case. It is true that a person can comply with traditions unreflectively. An agent might never reflect on the reasons for compliance with a given tradition. Indeed, she might simply comply with every tradition that she follows unreflectively, without seeking reasons which justify compliance with it. In this sense, reason and tradition are opposed.⁸⁸ However, someone can adopt the general policy of compliance with traditions on the basis of having reflected on, and found persuasive, the reasons in favour of adopting such a policy. So, while followers of traditions may not seek reasons for compliance with specific traditions, instead trusting that their being traditions is sufficient reason to comply, they may have reasons for adopting the general policy of compliance with traditions. That's not to say that every follower of tradition reflects on the reasons for the general policy of compliance. Many people's compliance with traditions is entirely unreflective. However, it is at least possible that tradition-followers could have reasons for adopting a general policy of compliance with traditions and that many of the more reflective followers of tradition do in fact have such reasons.^{89,90}

⁸⁷ I do not argue that these writers endorse the claim that reason and tradition are opposed. I argue only that they recognise that claim to be commonly believed.

⁸⁸ Indeed, perhaps in cases where the agent does not reflect on the reasons for compliance with a tradition, she can still be said to comply with the reasons for compliance. Suppose that an agent complies with a reason just in case her patterns of behaviour and judgement reliably covary with that reason. Something like this idea of compliance with reasons is found in Chapter Five of Tappolet's (2016) book. An agent's patterns of behaviour and judgement can reliably covary with the reasons for complying with a tradition without her reflecting on the reasons for compliance. Thus, even supposing that traditions are complied with unreflectively, this might not mean that the agent cannot be said to have reasons for compliance with the tradition.

⁸⁹ This argument is similar, of course, to my response to the Anti-Theory-Theory Argument.

⁹⁰ Adherents of the claim that traditions are complied with unreflectively include Acton (1952: 2-6), Alexander (2016b: 11-14), Armstrong (1981: 89), Dinan (1991: 448), Kendall and Carey (1964: 407), Pieper (2010: 37), Pocock (2009: 190-191), and Popper (1949: 164-165).

I now discuss what it means for traditions to be 'relatively old' and why they should be thought of as usually having this feature. The concept of oldness requires no explanation. However, there is an obvious question that needs to be addressed: how old must a rule-governed social practice be in order to qualify as a tradition? Like others who have written about tradition, I argue that the oldness condition is irreducibly vague (Ruben 2013: 40-41; Shils 1981: 15; Tännsjö 1990: 6-7). It is not possible to say exactly how old a social practice must be in order to constitute a tradition and any firm stipulation regarding this matter would risk being arbitrary.

However, it seems reasonable to think that traditions will generally last for several generations. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, an element of every tradition is the transmission of some treasured item. The person handing down the transmission object is generally older than the person receiving it and, indeed, old enough that they belong to a previous generation.⁹¹ Furthermore, social practices which have been handed down only one or two generations are plausibly not traditions, or, if they are, they are very short-lived. Thus, traditions are generally old enough to have lasted several generations (Shils 1981: 15-16).

Importantly, though, generations are not necessarily biological. There are social generations. Consider the traditions of a school. Some rule-governed social practices that are passed down from one generation of students to the next are plausibly traditions, though there are fewer years separating these generations than the number of years separating biological generations (Acton 1952: 3; Shils 1981: 15). Interestingly, Shils (1981: 35-36) argues that the length of a generation is irreducibly vague. Just as there is irreducible vagueness surrounding how old a practice must be to constitute a tradition, so too is the number of years required to separate one generation from the next irreducibly vague. This raises the possibility that the irreducible vagueness of how old a practice must be to constitute a tradition is due in part to the irreducible vagueness of the length of a generation. While traditions are intergenerational,

⁹¹ There are, of course, exceptions to this, as pointed out by Pieper (2010: 11).

this provides no clear answer to how old a practice must be to constitute a tradition, since the length of a generation is itself vague.

It could be objected that there are many traditions that merely appear to be several generations old when in fact they are not. Eric Hobsbawm (1983a) is the main exponent of this view. He argues that this is because traditions can be invented and hence can be made to appear older than they are. He thinks that traditions can be invented in two senses. First, a new practice can be introduced along with a false history which makes it appear to be very long-standing. Second, an already-existing practice can be given a false history in order to make it seem older than it actually is. So, inventing traditions is a matter of inventing false histories for practices and thereby imbuing them with traditional status, whether the practice itself already exists or not (Hobsbawm 1983a: 1-2). In both cases, the purpose of inventing a practice's traditional status, accord to Hobsbawm, is to legitimise it by giving it 'the sanction of precedent' (1983a: 2) and one purpose for attempting to legitimise practices in this way is to reinforce unequal social relations (1983a: 9-10).^{92,93}

In reply, I argue, firstly, that there are of course traditions whose longevity is exaggerated and whose history is fabricated. However, this does not entail that there are many new traditions. So, while there may be new traditions, this does not entail that traditions are not generally old.

Second, Hobsbawm's position itself suggest that genuine traditions are not invented. There are passages in the text which indicate that he regards invented traditions as being pseudo-traditions (Hobsbawm 1983a: 3-4). Moreover, Hobsbawm's argument seems to presuppose that invented traditions are not genuine traditions. The thrust of his position, as I understand it, is that practices which reinforce inequality command people's allegiance because of their false histories. However, Hobsbawm argues that the invention of a practice's false

⁹² It is no doubt clear that there are similarities between Hobsbawm's position and the ideological theories of conservatism discussed in §1.2.2.

⁹³ Morin (2011: 37-41) makes arguments that are similar to Hobsbawm's, albeit without the explicitly Marxian elements.

history constitutes inventing its status as a tradition. Furthermore, arguing that a practice's traditional status is fabricated is tantamount to saying that it is not a genuine tradition. Hobsbawm's position can be reduced to the claim that it is by making a practice *appear* to be a tradition when it is not that people can be made to accept it and it can perform its inequality-preserving function. Importantly, that pseudo-traditions are of recent provenance does not entail that genuine traditions are not old.⁹⁴

Let us now consider what it means for traditions to be evolved and why we should think that they generally are evolved. For traditions to be evolved means that they are the result of a process of cumulative change and modification which happens gradually, over a long period of time. Social rules are modified and passed on to the next generation, who in turn make further modifications and pass the modified rule to the next generation, and so on. This process involves many people's actions. So, traditions are the results of many different people's actions. Moreover, the changes in question are not always the thing at which the actions in question are directly aimed. So, if traditions are evolved, they are not solely, or directly, the result of any individual's invention. Putting this together, traditions are evolved if they are the cumulative by-product of many different people's independent actions over a long period of time, through a process of gradual modification and transmission of social rules (c.f. Scruton 2001: 31).

Scruton is a prominent exponent of the evolution condition. He argues that traditions, 'like those cognitive abilities that pre-date civilisation [...] are *adaptions*, but adaptions of the community rather than of the individual organism. Social traditions exist because they enable a society to reproduce itself. Destroy them heedlessly and you remove the guarantee offered by one

⁹⁴ Those endorsing the claim that traditions are typically old include Acton (1952: 2-9), Beckstein (2016: 2), Bevir (2000: 39-41), Clark (1983: 37-40), Pocock (2009: 190-191), Ruben (2013: 40), Scheffler (2010: 290), Shils (1981: 15-16), and Wall (2016: 139). It should be noted that while Wall (2016: 139) regards longevity as a characteristic of political traditions, he seems to suggest that it is not a defining characteristic of non-political traditions.

generation to the next' (2013: 219, original emphasis).⁹⁵ Traditions perform this civilisation-preserving function because they enable the reconciliation of the competing interests of society's members (2001: 31-32; 2014: 21).

Scruton gives a helpful analogy to illustrate this. He writes:

A real tradition is not an invention; it is the unintended by-product of invention. Our musical tradition is one astounding example of this. No single person created it. Each contributor built on previous achievements, discovering problems and solving them through the steady expansion of the common syntax [...] no single person could ever have discovered the knowledge of the human ear and the human heart which these practices contain, any more than a single person could discover a language. (2001: 31)⁹⁶

The reason for thinking that traditions are evolved is that firstly, there is some empirical evidence of this. Cultural items, such as practices, skills, institutions, norms, and so on are shaped by evolutionary pressures (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Specifically, evolution shapes cultures such that their cultural items are adaptive: they contribute to survival and reproduction (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Importantly, traditions are among the cultural items and traits shaped by evolutionary forces (Arnhart 2005; Dennett 2001; Morin 2011; Richerson & Boyd 2005). I discuss this further in Chapter Five.

Second, I would argue that either most traditions are evolved, or most traditions are created. And, crucially, most traditions are not created. Therefore, most traditions are evolved. The difference between a tradition's being evolved and its being created is roughly this. Creating a tradition involves designing and popularising the relevant rule-governed social practice in order to fulfil some pre-ordained purposes. An evolved tradition, by contrast, does not arise through

⁹⁵ This same passage and other similar passages are found elsewhere in Scruton's writings (2014: 21; 2017: 41).

⁹⁶ Similar points are made by Arnhart (2005: 16-19) and Hayek (1988: 146-147; 2006: 51-58; 2013: 36-37).

deliberate design and its fulfilling its function is no part of the intention of those people whose actions contribute to its development. Those actions are of course intentional. But the intention they are performed with is not the production of the tradition. Instead, as discussed, the tradition is a by-product of such actions.

Either most traditions are evolved, or most traditions are created, because there are broadly speaking only two ways in which a tradition can come to exist: either by evolution or by being created. Therefore, for any given tradition, it is either evolved or created. Importantly, while there could be an equal number of evolved and created traditions, this isn't likely. It is also obviously impossible for most traditions to be evolved and for most traditions to be created simultaneously. So, (it is at least most likely that) either most traditions are evolved, or most traditions are created.

The only way to ascertain for sure whether most traditions are evolved or created is to count the number of traditions and establish their aetiology. This is obviously something which cannot be done as part of a philosophical inquiry. But it is also unlikely that most traditions are created. This is because paradigmatic traditions are evolved. Consider again the example of the musical tradition mentioned above. There are other illustrative examples as well. Customary systems of measurement (such as the British Imperial System), conventions regarding which clothes are to be worn for which purposes, the common law, and parliamentary procedures are all traditions which are evolved (Scruton 2014: 22).

Importantly, it is unlikely that paradigm traditions would be evolved if most traditions were created. Hence, (it is most likely that) most traditions are not created.

One might object here that there are invented traditions, as discussed already in connection with traditions' longevity. Recall that according to Hobsbawm, some traditions are practices of recent invention which are given false histories to make them appear to be older than they are. As an example, he gives the

Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge, which is held every year on Christmas Eve (Hobsbawm 1983a: 1). Perhaps many traditions, like this one, are invented.

I reply that there are indeed invented traditions. However, it is not clear that they constitute the majority of traditions. Furthermore, as I argued in connection with traditions' longevity, Hobsbawm's argument seems to assume that invented traditions are not genuine traditions. But pseudo-traditions' being invented does not imply that genuine traditions are also invented. So, this objection fails.⁹⁷

In this section, I have argued that traditions are typically old, unreflectively complied with, and evolved. Traditions are typically complied with unreflectively because agents who follow them often take their compliance-worthiness for granted and do not see fit to reflect on the reasons for continuing them. Traditions are typically old because paradigm traditions last several generations, though the generations in question may be social rather than biological and how old a practice needs to be in order to qualify as a tradition is irreducibly vague. Traditions are typically evolved because they are usually the outputs of cultural evolution, though there are, of course, some invented traditions.

3.1.3. Traditions and other Practices

Societal traditions differ from other practices such as habits, customs, rituals and ceremonies. I now discuss how traditions differ from these other practices. I first discuss how traditions differ from habits, before comparing them to customs and rituals, and I finish by distinguishing traditions from ceremonies.

⁹⁷ Advocates of the claim that traditions are evolved include Acton (1952: 3-4, 15-20), Armstrong (1981: 98-101), Arnhart (2005: Ch.1, Ch.2), Beckstein (2016), Clark (1983: 36-49), Hayek (1967: Ch.4, Ch.6; 1948a; 1988: 11-17; 2006: Ch.4; 2013), O'Hear (1998b), Popper (1949: 166-168, 177-182), and Scruton (2001: 30-37; 2010: 125-127; 2013: 219-222; 2017: 41-47).

Traditions differ from habits in three ways. First, while habits are purely personal, societal traditions are obviously social (Armstrong 1981: 95-97, 100; Turner 1994: 57-60). Second, habits lack the normative and evaluative significance of traditions. A practices' being a habit, however long-standing, is not usually thought to be a reason to continue it (Armstrong 1981: 100-101).⁹⁸ Third, habits, unlike traditions, are not unreflective. This might seem odd, since it is definitional of habits that they are behaviours which people engage in unthinkingly. They have, so to speak, a 'grip' on people, such that they automatically do whatever the relevant behaviour is. For example, if someone is in the habit of going to a certain café for lunch, then she may do so without devoting any thought as to why she should go there for lunch rather than somewhere else.

However, the kind of grip that habits have on people is different from the kind of 'grip' which traditions have on people. This is connected with the point about habits lacking the normative and evaluative dimensions of traditions. A habit is a practice which is engaged in unthinkingly or automatically. Habits might be engaged in unreflectively, but, unlike traditions, they are not complied with unreflectively. There is no question of compliance given that they are not normative. Thus, habits are unreflective only in the sense that the relevant behaviours are done without thought. The unreflective disposition to comply with traditions, on the other hand, constitutes unconscious or tacit recognition of the tradition's normativity (Scheffler 2010: 294). Traditions, we might say, unlike habits, command allegiance (c.f. Armstrong 1981: 100-101; Scruton 2001: 30-37).

Distinguishing customs from societal traditions is more difficult. Customs and traditions have many of the same features. Customs are social practices.⁹⁹ Customs can be rule-governed and, relatedly, they are recognised as reason-

⁹⁸ Jaconelli (1999; 2005) argues that constitutional conventions, including those traditions discussed earlier such as that concerning the Monarch's role in politics, differ from habits in the same way: they are normative, but habits are not.

⁹⁹ Although we might loosely speak of an individual's 'custom' of going to a certain café, for example, individual customs are basically personal habits, as pointed out by Armstrong (1981: 96, 100).

giving by their adherents.¹⁰⁰ This recognition can be given unreflectively, and customs plausibly have the same aetiology as traditions, namely, being evolved. Thus, many customs are traditions.

Consider, for example, the now extinct Dinka custom of burying tribal leaders called ‘spear-masters’ alive as they near the end of their lives (Kekes 1993: 125-127). When a spear-master was old and natural death was approaching, he was placed, usually at a time of his own choosing, into a deep hole in the ground and, amidst a range of religious rituals, the assembled people threw cattle dung, which is not repulsive to the Dinka, but is thought to have healing properties, into the hole until the spear-master suffocated to death (Kekes 1993: 125-126).

The significance of this custom to the Dinka was that the spear-master’s life sustains the life of his people. Life here is understood not as the operation of biological processes, but as a sort of animating force. If the spear-master dies a natural death, he takes this life-force with him. Thus, the spear-master’s dying a natural death would diminish the vitality of his people (Kekes 1993: 126). By contrast, the spear-master’s live burial was thought to transmit, as it were, his life-force to his people, thereby preserving the Dinka’s vitality (Kekes 1993: 126-127).

This Dinka custom was plausibly a societal tradition, for the following reasons. It was a social practice possessed by a society. It was also rule-governed, in virtue of being considered obligatory. It was therefore recognised by its adherents as reason-giving and was possibly complied with unreflectively. Furthermore, it may also have evolved.

However, many customs are not long-lived enough to qualify as traditions. This is most typically true of the customs of small, close-knit kin groups, such as families, and groups of friends (Ruben 2013: 40-41; Scheffler 2010: 290). For example, consider a family’s custom of eating at a certain restaurant when celebrating a special occasion. This custom may not be continued by future

¹⁰⁰ Some writers, such as Armstrong (1981: 100-101), deny this.

generations of the family (Scheffler 2010: 290). Indeed, it may be discontinued during the lifetimes of the family's current members. Thus, it plausibly fails to be a tradition.

Traditions can also be distinguished from routines. One relevant difference has already been discussed in connection with the difference between habits and traditions. There is a normative and evaluative dimension to traditions which is lacking in the case of routines (Hobsbawm 1983a: 3). A routine need not be regarded by its adherent as reason-giving or as having any special significance. It may be something which the adherent repeatedly does without thought – like a habit – or may be done from convenience, or whatever.

There are also other, more important, differences. While routines, like traditions, may be followed unreflectively, they often have in common with the customs of small groups the feature that they will not typically be old enough to constitute a tradition (Ruben 2013: 40; Scheffler 2010: 290, 295, 304-305). Consider someone's personal routine of going for a walk by the river on Saturday afternoons (Scheffler 2010: 290). This routine may not be inherited by the individual or passed on by her to future generations. Thus, it is not a strong candidate for being a tradition.

Traditions are distinct from rituals too. Rituals can be brand new, invented or both. But new or invented rituals are plausibly not traditions. This is not to deny that some rituals are traditions. The point is rather that not all rituals are traditions. The difference is that the rituals which are traditions are old and evolved.

Consider the sacraments of August Comte's Religion of Humanity. These are of relatively recent invention, having been devised by Comte in the nineteenth century in his attempt to create a non-theistic religion to fulfil the cohesion-sustaining function of traditional religious worship (Bourdeau 2018). These sacraments are quite plausibly not traditions.

By contrast, the pre-1970 form of the Roman Mass was codified in 1570 by the Council of Trent and has elements that were incorporated long before then. It has undergone several further developments since 1570 and was most recently codified in 1962. Its content and structure were not designed but shaped by the adoption of different elements at different times and places. Some of its features, such as the posture of the congregation (standing, sitting, or kneeling) are purely customary, having no official sanction in the liturgical books. Thus, the pre-1970 Mass developed in a piecemeal fashion over centuries and is not the direct product of anyone's intentional design (Jungmann 1959; Reid 2004).

Lastly, I consider the difference between ceremonies and traditions. I make similar points to those made in respect of rituals. There is sufficient similarity between rituals and ceremonies for the considerations that were relevant to distinguishing rituals from traditions to be relevant to distinguishing ceremonies from traditions. Principal among these is that like rituals, new or invented ceremonies are plausibly not traditions.

The coronation ceremony of a British monarch, for instance, is of quite recent invention (Cannadine 1983; Hobsbawm 1983a: 10; Hobsbawm 1983b; Scruton 2001: 31).¹⁰¹ Hence, it is plausibly not a tradition. By contrast, the ceremony of dragging the Speaker of the House of Commons to the Speaker's Chair on his or her election is much older. It was also a spontaneous response to the reluctance of newly-elected speakers to take the role, since, at the time, the Speaker's role was to communicate Parliament's wishes to the Sovereign, which might result in his or her death if the Monarch was displeased by the message conveyed (Armitage 2010: 326-327). This ceremony, then, is a strong candidate for being a genuine tradition.

In this section, I have argued that societal traditions are rule-governed social practices which are characteristically, though not essentially, (a) such that compliance with them is often unreflective, (b) relatively old, and (c) evolved. I

¹⁰¹ Interestingly, Scruton cites *The Invention of Tradition* when he says that the British Coronation Ceremony is invented. Thus, his remarks could be read as a concession to Cannadine and Hobsbawm's arguments.

contended that traditions must be rule-governed social practices for three reasons. First, they must be practices, since they are not purely mental phenomena and exist only if their adherents undertake the relevant action. Second, traditions are social insofar as they are generally transmitted from one generation to the next and adhered to by multiple people in each generation. Third, traditions should be thought of as rule-governed because a distinctive feature of traditions, as opposed to social practices generally, is that they are thought of as normative by their adherents. Finally, traditions should be thought of as characteristically unreflectively complied with, relatively old, and evolved; this enables us to distinguish traditions from related phenomena such as habits, customs, rituals and ceremonies.

3.2. Traditions as Processes of Transmission

Having defended my view concerning societal traditions' transmission objects, I now discuss their transmission process. In §3.2.1. I consider two candidate transmission processes – testimony and osmosis – and argue that osmosis is the more plausible possibility. Finally, in §3.2.2. I consider why the hypothesis that osmosis is the transmission process for societal traditions provides better prospects for developing a conservative normative epistemology than the idea that it is testimony. I also discuss why identifying the transmission process as osmosis makes more sense than the claim, endorsed by many conservatives, that traditions are storehouses or repositories for the collective experience of the political community. This should lay the groundwork for the discussion of the Social Knowledge Argument in the following chapters.

3.2.1. Testimony or Osmosis?

There are two main views in the philosophical literature on tradition concerning the process by which traditions' transmission objects are transmitted. The first is that the process of transmission is testimony. The second is that the transmission process is osmosis. Osmosis is the unconscious assimilation of ideas

and rules from others, especially elders, through observation and imitation of their behaviour.

I first explain the idea of testimonial transmission more fully, before rejecting it. I argue that identifying the transmission process as testimony does not allow us to explain how the transmission of social practices could constitute a tradition. It is difficult to see how testimony can reliably transmit social practices, especially given that the latter are partly constituted by know-how, which, as is widely accepted, is difficult to transmit by testimony. Second, I explain osmosis more fully and show that it does not suffer from the defects of testimonial transmission.

Before doing that, let me explain why the nature of the transmission process for societal traditions matters. The reliability of deference to the traditions of one's society for normative belief formation partly depends on the reliability of the transmission process for societal traditions. Recall, deference to a tradition of one's society means forming the belief that p , where p is a proposition which captures a tradition of one's society, solely because p captures that tradition. Thus, Smith defers to the tradition of her society which forbids stealing just in case she forms the belief that it is wrong to steal solely because the tradition forbidding stealing is captured by the proposition that it is wrong to steal.

Deference to the traditions of one's society reliably leads one to form true normative beliefs only if the societal traditions that have been transmitted to one generally capture normative demands. Furthermore, the societal traditions that have been transmitted to one generally capture normative demands only if the process which transmits them reliably transmits traditions that mostly capture normative demands. Thus, deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in respect of normative belief formation only if the transmission process for societal traditions mostly transmits traditions which capture normative demands. Most importantly, whether the transmission process mostly transmits traditions which capture normative demands depends on what the transmission process is. So, the transmission process for societal traditions is relevant to the

reliability of deference to the traditions of one's society for normative belief formation.

The prospects for developing a conservative normative epistemology therefore partly hinges on what the conservative identifies as the transmission process for societal traditions.

Let me explain the idea that the transmission process is testimony. Testifying is the act of asserting some proposition (Adler 2017). A tradition's transmission process being testimony therefore means that the transmission objects are transmitted through the act of asserting some proposition. Recall, I argue that the objects of transmission in the case of societal traditions are rule-governed social practices which are characteristically complied with unreflectively, somewhat old, and evolved. Thus, for the transmission process of societal traditions to be testimonial would mean for such rule-governed social practices to be transmitted by the assertion of propositions.

This raises an immediate difficulty: it is far from clear whether and how the assertion of propositions can transmit rule-governed social practices. Indeed, on the face of it, it seems rather obvious that if the transmission process is identified as testimony, then the range of possible transmission objects is limited to propositional entities: propositional knowledge, beliefs (justified or otherwise), stories, histories, myths, legends, and so on (c.f. Pieper 2010: 9-10).

I need to make a concession here. I am not aware of anyone who identifies the transmission object of societal traditions as social practices who says that their transmission process is testimony. Instead, testimonial transmission is typically advocated in the context of discussing traditions whose transmission objects are propositional, namely traditions whereby religious teachings are transmitted. (Congar 2004; Pieper 2010; Schwenkler 2014).

Importantly, even in respect of those traditions which involve transmitting propositional entities, the transmission of these entities constituting a tradition also requires transmission of the practice of transmitting them, as discussed in

§3.1.2. So, it may appear that a purely testimonial account of any type of tradition's transmission process is a non-starter.

However, there is a *prima facie* case that rule-governed social practices could be transmitted by testimony, albeit indirectly. What I mean by that is this. If one testifies to another that 'it's wrong to steal', this can inculcate the belief that it is wrong to steal. It can also be part of the process by which the hearer internalises the rule forbidding stealing. That rule, once internalised, will motivate the subject not to steal. Thus, on the face of it, it appears that testimony can inculcate motives to engage in social practices and thereby effectively transmit them.

So, there is a possible testimonial account of the transmission processes for rule-governed social practices, whether such a view is actually defended by anyone. I call it the 'testimonial view'. Let us now explore the prospects for such a position.

I argue that even if the testimonial view is *prima facie* persuasive, it ultimately fails. The basic thrust of the argument against testimony's being the transmission process for societal traditions is that it mystifies how the handing on of social practices could constitute a societal tradition. For while the testimonial view can explain how one might acquire the motive to engage in the behaviours which are partly constitutive of social practices, it cannot so easily explain how one would acquire the know-how which is partly constitutive of social practices.

More fully, the argument is this. Social practices are partly constituted by know-how. So, testimony reliably transmits social practices only if it reliably transmits know-how. But testimony does not reliably transmit know-how. Therefore, testimony does not reliably transmit social practices. However, the transmission of social practices can constitute a societal tradition. And the transmission of social practices constitutes a societal tradition only if the process that transmits them is reliable. So, there must be a process that reliably transmits social

practices. But, given the foregoing, that process cannot be testimony. Hence, testimony is not the transmission process for societal traditions.

We can accept that practices are partly constituted by know-how. It is part of the definition of practices with which we have been operating that they involve know-how. Furthermore, it is not clear how a subject could engage in any pattern of behaviour without relevant know-how. For example, it is not clear how someone could ride a bike without knowing how to do so (Nyíri 1988: 19; Polanyi 1958: 49-50). So, if practices consist in patterns of behaviour, then they also require the associated know-how. For any pattern of behaviour, without relevant know-how, that pattern of behaviour is not a practice. And, practices obviously do require and partly consist in patterns of behaviour. So, they require and partly consist in know-how as well.¹⁰²

I now argue that know-how is not reliably transmissible by testimony because in many cases where an agent is told how to do something, she fails to acquire the relevant know-how.¹⁰³

I have already discussed some examples that illustrate this. Consider again the cycling example. Suppose that someone is learning how to ride a bike. The person teaching her could tell her what to do (Hills 2013: 554), or more elaborately, give her mathematical information concerning the required adjustment of the ‘curvature of one’s bicycle’s path in proportion to the ratio of one’s imbalance over the square of one’s speed [...]’ (Nyíri 1988: 19). She may fail, however, to acquire knowledge of how to ride the bike (Hills 2013: 554; Polanyi 1958: 49-50; Poston 2016: 869; c.f. Carter & Pritchard 2015: 805). Indeed, there are other ways in which someone could more easily learn how to ride a bike, such as demonstration or trial and error (Nyíri 1988: 19).

¹⁰² This point has already been made, of course, in §3.1.1.

¹⁰³ Several authors have made this sort of argument in the recent literature. Hills (2013: 553-554), Hopkins (2007: 618-620), Poston (2016) and Carter and Pritchard (2015) are some of the most prominent. Importantly, and as mentioned in the Introduction, this indicates an affinity between conservatism and contemporary epistemology. Traditionalist conservatives have often regarded practical knowledge as irreducible know-how that cannot be transmitted by testimony.

Similarly, suppose that someone is learning how to cook a meal or bake a cake. Simply supplying her with the necessary ingredients and telling her what to do probably will not transmit to her knowledge of how to cook the meal or bake the cake in question. She will probably fail to produce the meal or cake through lack of the relevant know-how.¹⁰⁴

There are other examples that illustrate this point as well. If one is learning to swim, simply being told what to do may not by itself translate into the ability to swim (Hills 2013: 554). Similarly, simply telling a trainee doctor what the symptoms of a given disease are may not by itself translate into ability to reliably diagnose the disease. The ability to reliably diagnose a given disease requires that the doctor be able to distinguish cases in which the symptoms are definitively present and cases in which they are not. This is plausibly best attained through extensive experience and practice and usually cannot be imparted through testimony (Polanyi 1958: 54-55). Thus, it appears that know-how cannot easily be transmitted through testimony, which casts doubt on the idea that social practices – which are partly constituted by know-how – can be reliably transmitted through testimony.¹⁰⁵

Finally, we can also safely conclude that the transmission of social practices can constitute a tradition. Take, for example, the rituals and ceremonies mentioned earlier, such as the pre-1970 Roman Mass or dragging the Speaker of the House of Commons to the Speaker's Chair. These are plausibly traditions, yet they are practices. It is true that they are not societal traditions, but they demonstrate the point. In any case, we can find examples of the transmission of social practices which constitute a societal tradition. Consider again the Dinka custom

¹⁰⁴ I mentioned this cookery example earlier, of course, in the Introduction.

¹⁰⁵ To be sure, I do not claim that testimonial transmission of know-how is strictly impossible. There are some plausible examples of know-how being transmitted through testimony. Stephen Grimm gives several cases. I discuss one for the purposes of illustration. You ask a friend how to open a pickle jar, whose lid is stuck. Your friend replies: 'run the lid under hot water, which will cause it to expand, then twist it'. You now know how to open the jar (Grimm, forthcoming). However, I think that the cases discussed above show that the know-how involved in practices is difficult to transmit purely by testimony.

of live burial. It is a practice, and its transmission is plausibly a tradition. So, the transmission of such practices can clearly constitute a tradition.

Thus, the process by which social practices are transmitted is not testimony. There is a *prima facie* case for thinking that testimony could indirectly transmit social practices by inculcating the beliefs and motives which might cause a subject to engage in the relevant practice. However, on closer inspection it turns out that social practices are not reliably transmitted by testimony. Practices are partly constituted by know-how and the latter is not easily transmissible through testimony. Hence, a testimonial view of the transmission process cannot explain how the transmission of social practices could constitute a societal tradition.

Having rejected the testimonial view of the transmission process for societal traditions, I now discuss osmosis. Osmosis is the unconscious inculcation of beliefs, motives, norms, and so on, and the resultant behaviours. In other words, osmosis happens when another's behaviour is unconsciously observed and imitated. The others in question are often, though by no means necessarily, one's elders. One acquires a tradition's transmission object, on this sort of view, by 'absorbing' it, so to speak, by simply being around those who possess it (G. Allan 1986: 84-89; Armstrong 1981: 97-101; Arnhart 2005: 19-20, 40-41; Dinan 1991; Hayek 1967: 46-48, 66-81; Hayek 1988: 11-17, 21-28; Hayek 2013: 18-20, 73-5, 488-490; Nisbet 1986: 29-34; Nyíri 1988: 17-19; Oakeshott 1991b; Oakeshott 1991c; Polanyi 1958: 53-55; Quinton 2004: 36-40; Scruton 2014: 21-22).^{106,107}

The transmission and reception of transmission objects by osmosis need not be deliberate or intentional (Quinton 2004: 36). Relatedly, that which is

¹⁰⁶ I follow Scruton (2014: 21-22) in using the term 'osmosis' for this type of transmission.

¹⁰⁷ It is perhaps worth noting here that osmosis is similar to what Aristotle called 'habituation'. The influence of Aristotle on conservatives' claims concerning the transmission process for traditions and the associated knowledge has been acknowledged by several authors, as discussed in the Introduction (Hamilton 2016; O'Hear 1998a; Scruton 2017: 42-43). Furthermore, several commentators on Oakeshott's theory of practical knowledge assert the influence of Aristotle on his views (Franco 1990: 110; Nardin 2016; Smith 2012: 137).

transmitted by osmosis cannot, strictly speaking, be taught or learned. Instead, it is merely imparted and acquired in a non-intentional manner (Oakeshott 1991c: 15). A tradition's transmission process is osmosis then if its transmission objects are transmitted and acquired, albeit possibly without the intent that this should happen, through the observation and imitation of others' behaviour, and in particular by the observation and imitation of the old by the young. This is why Scruton speaks of traditions and the attendant knowledge being acquired 'by immersion in society' (2014: 21-22).

The prospects for osmosis are somewhat better than for the testimonial view. Unlike testimonial transmission, there is no mystery as to how practices can be transmitted through osmosis. It is quite clear that many practices are 'absorbed' or 'picked up' unconsciously from others and especially one's elders. Language provides a helpful analogy here. No one begins, obviously, to learn their native language by being taught about its alphabet or grammar, or by being taught lists of words which can then be used later on (Oakeshott 1991b: 62).¹⁰⁸ Instead, we begin to learn our native language by hearing others speak and copying the sounds they make. We do not learn by being taught but by observation and imitation. We begin learning our native language 'in the cradle' before any formal education begins, and by learning 'words in use' rather than learning them from teaching (Oakeshott 1991b: 62). Thus, language is acquired through imitation, observation and practice.

It could be argued that the social practices which partly constitute societal traditions are also transmitted in this way. Take the many practices that constitute a society's culture, or those which are demanded by its code of morals, etiquette, or dominant religion, or by its legal and parliamentary procedures. These are very often transmitted as much if not more by example than by explicit instruction (Quinton 2004: 37; Scruton 2014: 20-22). So, osmosis explains how the social practices which constitute societal traditions are transmitted.

¹⁰⁸ See also Franco (1990: 134-135) and Hayek (1967: 43-45).

Indeed, it is no accident that many of those who endorse the claim that osmosis is the process of transmission for societal traditions regard their transmission objects as practices (myself included). For as discussed, the range of possible transmission objects is constrained by the transmission process. If one selects testimony as the transmission process for any sort of tradition, it is not clear how one can allow that social practices are its transmission objects. But it is clear how one can allow that social practices are possible transmission objects if one selects osmosis as the transmission process. So, clearly osmosis is a more appropriate account of the transmission process for societal traditions if one wants to accommodate the possibility that the transmission of social practices is a societal tradition.

It is relatedly not coincidental that many of those who regard traditions as the transmission by osmosis of social practices think of traditional knowledge as irreducible practical knowledge, which is non-propositional in nature, as discussed in the Introduction.¹⁰⁹ This is because it is quite clear that osmosis can transmit know-how, which these writers think of as being non-propositional. But it is less clear how osmosis could be involved in the transmission and acquisition of propositional knowledge, though I of course seek to demonstrate exactly how this works in Chapter Five.

I consider an objection here. Olivier Morin argues that any theory of tradition must explain why there are traditions at all. One problem that any such explanation must solve, according to Morin, is the ‘Flop Problem’ (2011: 5). The essence of the Flop Problem is that many items of behaviour are simply never transmitted. He argues that ‘we can reproduce a gesture quite faithfully and never see it again. We can retain a sentence with near-perfect exactitude, without transmitting it to others. In those cases, the chain just peters out for lack of success. The message [...] is a flop’ (Morin 2011: 5). But there clearly are

¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding these remarks and the discussion which precedes them, it should be noted here that the testimonial view and osmosis are compatible. There may be more than one transmission process. One can be a pluralist about types of transmission processes as well as about transmission objects.

traditions, many of them long-standing, whose transmission objects have been passed down through a reliable chain of transmission. So, an explanation is required as to why some traditions take off, as it were, and why others flop. Any theory of tradition must answer this question. If it does not, then it fails (Morin 2011: 1-11).

Crucially, Morin argues that osmosis cannot provide an answer to the Flop Problem. Hence, it is not a viable theory of how traditions are transmitted. Most important for Morin's argument are his reasons for thinking that osmosis cannot explain how traditions come to exist and be successfully transmitted. He argues that human beings are not sufficiently inclined to imitate for imitation to be a plausible explanation of how a given tradition's transmission process gets going. This is because imitation, in his view, involves compulsively copying behaviours from others, as well as biases toward the prestigious or the common, and people are not as compelled to compulsively imitate as we might think, nor is the influence on them of bias toward the common or prestigious particularly strong. (We can call these 'prestige bias' and 'conformist bias', respectively). Hence, he concludes, people do not compulsively imitate others with sufficient reliability for imitation to be the transmission process for cultural traditions (Morin 2011).¹¹⁰

Morin seems to understand imitation's being compulsive as its being non-voluntary and unthinking. It is something that, in his view, people cannot help but do, and which they do automatically, without being aware of it (2011: 53-54).

Putting all this together, the thrust of Morin's objection is that positing osmosis as the transmission process doesn't explain why there are traditions, because people do not unthinkingly and automatically imitate others. But there clearly

¹¹⁰ The argument is dispersed throughout Morin's book. The Introduction, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three are the most important sections for present purposes.

are traditions. Hence, the transmission process must be something other than osmosis.¹¹¹

I take no stand here on whether imitation involves or is motivated by prestige or conformist bias. However, I doubt Morin's claim that imitation is, or need be, compulsive in nature. It is true that when a practice is transmitted by osmosis, the transmission is often unintentional. It is also true that its reception may be unintentional or unconscious. But Morin seems to regard imitation as being necessarily, and not merely sometimes, or even frequently, compulsive. This, however, is clearly not the case. Consider the artisanal and professional traditions discussed earlier. These traditions are most clearly linked with apprenticeship. During the transmission of some traditional craft, the master clearly intends to transmit the practice, along with the attendant skills and the know-how which partly constitutes it, to the apprentice, and the apprentice's reception of these is clearly voluntary as well, unless, of course, she has been forced into the apprenticeship!

Traditions which are more relevant to the purposes of this thesis can have this feature too. Moral traditions, traditions of etiquette, traditions of prudence and perhaps even political traditions, such as those which jointly constitute the British constitution, can be transmitted when the transmitter seeks to deliberately 'set an example' to be copied. The transmitter transmits the practice voluntarily in choosing to set an example, and the recipient may also receive it deliberately, or make themselves apt to do so, in seeking to learn from the transmitter. Of course, such examples may have to be set multiple times before the transmission is successful. But if, during apprenticeship or training, a mentor repeatedly and deliberately sets an example to be copied and the recipient seeks to learn from her by observing and copying her behaviour, and the practice is successfully transmitted, then we have a case of transmission through non-compulsive imitation.

¹¹¹ Morin (2011: 38-39) seems to have been inspired here by Turner's (1994) view that there is no plausible account of the transmission process for practices. Chapter Four of Turner's book is most relevant to this discussion.

Perhaps Morin would reply that he intends to restrict the term ‘imitation’ to refer to the more compulsive kind of copying and that he accepts the possibility of the kind of imitation I describe here serving as the transmission process. There is, indeed, some evidence of this in the text (2011: 54-83). If that is the case, there is no dispute between him and I.

In this section, I have argued that the transmission process for societal traditions is osmosis, rather than testimony. I first argued against the testimonial view of transmission, on the grounds that it cannot explain how social practices are transmitted and hence how the transmission of social practices could constitute a societal tradition. This is because practices require know-how on the part of the practitioner and know-how is not easily transmissible through testimony. Osmosis, by contrast, can transmit social practices and hence can explain how their transmission could be a societal tradition. Thus, we should accept that osmosis, not testimony, is societal traditions’ transmission process.

3.2.2. Traditions’ Epistemic Role

As discussed in the Introduction, any adequate conservative normative epistemology must allow that both propositional and non-propositional knowledge can be acquired from traditions. In this section, I address this problem and its relationship to the question of what the transmission process is. I first show that no extant account of the role that traditions play in the acquisition of normative knowledge allows that there is normative knowledge that is acquired from traditions. I then lay the groundwork for Chapters Four, Five and Six by summarising how I plan to provide an account of traditions’ epistemic role which allows that both propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge can be acquired from traditions.

In respect of the first task, I consider three possible views concerning how traditional knowledge is transmitted. One might think that traditional knowledge is transmitted in the same manner as traditions themselves, either through testimony or osmosis. I take testimony and osmosis in turn and argue that

neither view is acceptable. Testimonial views of traditional knowledge cannot capture the fact that it is possible to acquire know-how from traditions. Osmosis has the opposite problem. While osmosis makes sense of how it is possible to get know-how from traditions, no extant account of osmosis (at least those which are endorsed by conservatives) explains how it is possible to get propositional knowledge from traditions. This is because, as discussed in the Introduction, conservatives have tended to focus on non-propositional knowledge. The third possibility is that traditions' role in the acquisition of normative knowledge is that they are repositories of the community's experience and wisdom. This view must also be rejected, since it does not cash out the idea of traditions' having a crucial role in the acquisition of normative knowledge in analytically useful terms. Thus, a new account of traditions' epistemic role is needed.

In regard to the second task, I argue that while traditions are transmitted by osmosis, and hence we can acquire know-how from them, they are still possible sources of belief. This, as should become apparent in Chapters Five and Six, is why they are a source of propositional normative knowledge. For if beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society meet the conditions on knowledge, then there is propositional normative knowledge that is acquired from traditions.

I now discuss these points more fully. I begin then by discussing the possibility that traditional knowledge is testimonial. If the transmission process for societal traditions were testimony, would it be possible to get knowledge from traditions? In one sense, the answer to that question is obviously 'yes'. An advantage of testimonial accounts of traditional knowledge is that testimonial transmission makes good sense of the idea that it is possible to acquire propositional normative knowledge from traditions. It is clearly possible to acquire normative propositional knowledge through testimony, just as it is possible to acquire non-normative propositional knowledge through testimony (Hills 2013: 553-554; Howell 2014: 393). When someone utters a sentence expressing a normative proposition and we form a belief on the basis of her testimony, our belief is a candidate for knowledge.

Moral education gives the clearest examples of this. If a child is told by her mother that 'it's wrong to hit other children' and forms the belief that it is wrong to hit other children on that basis, then she acquires a true moral belief and, provided the other conditions on knowledge are met, has come to know that it is wrong to hit other children.

Thus, adopting a testimonial view about the transmission process allows the development of a form of conservatism which, unlike extant theories, accounts for propositional normative knowledge that is transmitted by traditions.

However, such accounts have a serious defect. As discussed in connection with transmission processes, testimony does not reliably transmit know-how. Hence, testimonial views of traditional knowledge have difficulty explaining how it is possible to reliably get know-how from traditions. But know-how can be reliably acquired from traditions. Therefore, testimonial views should be rejected.

I have already argued that testimony does not reliably transmit know-how, so I discuss this no further here. I have also already argued that it is possible to reliably acquire know-how from traditions. Artisanal and professional traditions, such as those involved in the production of salt or gold (Ruben 2013: 40), provide clear examples of this. The process of training apprentices in the relevant craft plausibly constitutes an artisanal or professional tradition. Clearly, in the process of this training, apprentices acquire the know-how without which they would not be successful practitioners of their craft.

What about the possibility that traditional know-how is transmitted by osmosis? It would clearly be possible to get knowledge-how from tradition if the transmission process is, as I have argued, osmosis. Take the practice of cooking. An apprentice chef not only acquires the motivations and patterns of behaviour which partly constitute the practice during her training. She also acquires the relevant know-how, without which she could not be a successful cook. Like the practice itself, this know-how is not explicitly taught or learned, but merely inadvertently imparted. An apprentice, once qualified, may look back and

realise that she has acquired such knowledge without ‘being able to say precisely what it is’ and without its having been expressly taught (Oakeshott 1991c: 15). The normative domain which is most relevant to cooking is prudence. The chef must tailor the techniques she uses to achieve her desired ends. However, it is plausible that similar points apply to the practices and related knowledge which fall within other normative domains, such as morality.¹¹²

There is a problem for this proposal, though. Those advocating the thesis that the transmission process is osmosis have neglected to explain how one could acquire propositional knowledge from traditions. This matters because it is not clear how propositional knowledge could be transmitted by osmosis and therefore it is not clear how it could be acquired from traditions. So, views of tradition on which the transmission process is osmosis, as they stand, are inadequate. An explanation of how both propositional and non-propositional knowledge can be acquired from traditions is required for a viable conservative normative epistemology.

There is a third option for how knowledge can be acquired from tradition, one which is popular but ultimately unhelpful. I call it the ‘storehouse view’ (c.f. Franco 1990: 139). On the storehouse view, traditions function as repositories of the accumulated experience and wisdom of the political community. According to the storehouse view, each generation inherits traditions – and the experience they embody – from their ancestors. They then add to the common stock of experience, thus increasing the experience deposited in the traditions, before passing them on to the next generation. In other words, on the storehouse view,

¹¹² The artisanal traditions mentioned the previous page also provide good examples of this.

traditions are a kind of receptacle or container for the political community's collective and accumulated experience and wisdom.^{113,114,115}

The problem with the storehouse view is that it is almost always stated in metaphorical terms which are not easily translated into more literal language and which are themselves of little analytical use. The principal claim of the storehouse view is that traditions are storehouses or repositories of experience, or that they somehow embody or reflect that experience. But it is not entirely clear what that central idea of the storehouse view amounts to. What does it mean for a tradition to contain or embody the experience of a political community? And, more importantly, how does the idea that a tradition embodies the experience of a political community deliver the result that traditions are a source of propositional knowledge, non-propositional knowledge or both? The answers to these questions are never made clear by adherents of the storehouse view.

Perhaps the idea that traditions embody the experience of the community reduces to the claim that traditions simply transmit it. But this is still unclear. Experience belongs to the experiencer or, insofar as members of a community can share similar experiences, to a community. But it is unclear how experience can be transmitted to someone else. I suspect that what is meant here is that traditions transmit the *lessons* of the past, which are learned in previous generations' experience. This is a clear and initially plausible idea of the role played by traditions in the acquisition of normative knowledge. However, insofar as lessons are taught and learned through instruction or by example, this reduces the storehouse view to either the testimonial view or the osmosis view, or possibly some combination of both. In that case, the storehouse view is not a

¹¹³ Adherents of the storehouse view include Burke (2004: 183), Dinan (1991), Hogg (1947: 11), Kirk (1982), Norton & Aughey (1981: 23-30), Quinton (1978: 13, 16-18, 59-61; 2007), and O'Hear (1998b).

¹¹⁴ Scruton sometimes uses the language of the storehouse view (2010: 125-126; 2014: 21; 2017: 41-42) but I think he ultimately rejects it, as evidenced by his clear criticism of it (2001: 31-32).

¹¹⁵ Scheffler also endorses the storehouse view (2010: 292, 301), though he is not a conservative.

distinctive conception of traditions' epistemic role and is subject to whatever objections affect those other views.

It is of course entirely possible that the storehouse view was never meant to be a distinctive view in the first place. Perhaps it was only ever intended as a helpful analogy. That may be the case, but it still leaves us in need of an account of traditions' role in normative knowledge-acquisition.

Thus, while the rhetoric of the wisdom of the ancestors growing over time may be inspiring, it does not provide much basis for a serious and sustained philosophical inquiry into the plausibility of conservatism's epistemic claims. Therefore, I suggest the storehouse view should be rejected.

Having surveyed the views of traditions' role in the acquisition of normative knowledge that exist in the current literature, I conclude that none of the extant views allow that both propositional and non-propositional knowledge could be acquired from traditions. Hence, an alternative must be sought.

I now briefly outline my proposal for how it is possible to acquire both propositional and non-propositional knowledge from traditions, assuming that the transmission process for societal traditions is — as argued in §3.2.1. — osmosis. I do not say any more here about how it is possible to get know-how from traditions. I have already argued that osmosis, which transmits traditions' transmission objects, can transmit know-how. And, of course, the gap that this thesis seeks to fill is the absence of an account of propositional knowledge that is acquired from traditions.

So, I lay the groundwork here for my account of how propositional normative knowledge can be acquired from societal traditions whose transmission process is osmosis. I assume, for the purposes of this thesis, that knowledge is reliably formed true belief that is non-luckily true.¹¹⁶ Thus, for traditions to be a source of normative knowledge, traditions would have to be a source of reliably

¹¹⁶ I discuss this account of knowledge more fully in Chapter Four.

formed, non-luckily true normative belief. I argue for the reliability of deference to the traditions of one's society in Chapter Five and for the non-luckiness of some such beliefs in Chapter Six. In this section, I focus solely on how traditions can be a source of belief even though they are transmitted by osmosis.

It might be strange to think that a process which transmits non-propositional know-how could be a source of belief. After all, non-propositional knowledge need not involve belief (Hopkins 2007: 618-619). However, I argue that there are various ways in which traditions (in the object sense) that are transmitted by osmosis can be a source of belief. Each of these is related to how a subject becomes apprised of a tradition's content. In becoming apprised of a tradition's content, a subject learns what proposition captures the tradition. Furthermore, she can come to believe that proposition. Importantly, this can happen even if the tradition was transmitted to the subject by osmosis. So, in becoming apprised of a tradition's content, a subject can come to believe that p , where p captures the tradition in question, and where that tradition has been transmitted to the subject through osmosis. I now discuss three types of case in which this can happen.

First, while testimony is not societal traditions' transmission process, it is a possible means whereby a subject can be apprised of a tradition's content and thereby acquire the belief whose content is the proposition which captures that tradition.

Consider the social practice of queueing, which is a tradition of British society. Suppose that that tradition is transmitted to a child, Jane, without her receiving explicit instruction. Jane internalises the rule requiring queueing, gains the knowledge of how to do so, and understanding of when and why it is appropriate to queue simply by observing and copying her elders. She therefore queues in circumstances in which it is appropriate to do so. Jane has no explicit beliefs concerning whether queueing is required, but simply does so unreflectively in the appropriate circumstances. One day, however, Jane asks her mother about why people queue in shops, banks, post offices, and so on. Jane's mother

explains that queueing is a tradition according to which one ought to form a queue when there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, post office or whatever. Jane realises that in testifying that one ought to form a queue when there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, post office or whatever, her mother is articulating the content of the tradition that requires queueing. Jane then forms the belief that it is obligatory to queue whenever there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, or post office. But she forms this belief out of deference to the tradition, not out of deference to her mother.

Thus, even a theory of tradition on which the transmission process is osmosis can accommodate a very natural thought about how knowledge is acquired through traditions. This thought is that traditions operate using both testimony and osmosis, with propositional knowledge being transmitted by the former and know-how being transmitted through the latter. My account allows that testimony plays a role in the transmission of propositional traditional knowledge, even though it is not the method by which traditions (in the object sense) are transmitted.

Furthermore, it is possible to acquire belief from traditions without testimony. It is not necessary for one to become apprised of a tradition's content and thereby to form the belief whose content is the proposition capturing it that another person articulate its content.

There are two cases of this sort. In the first, a subject reflects on the content of a tradition that has been transmitted to her through osmosis and thereby identifies and comes to believe the proposition which captures that tradition.

Consider a variant on Jane's case. Jane forms the belief that it is obligatory to queue whenever there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, or post office. However, this time, she does not form that belief by asking her mother. Instead, she reflects on the tradition's content and realises that it mandates queueing. Since she recognises the tradition's authority, she forms the

belief that it is obligatory to queue whenever there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, or post office.¹¹⁷

Finally, there are cases in which a subject simply finds herself believing the proposition that captures a given tradition having internalised it through osmosis.

Consider one more variant on the queuing example. As in the other two cases, Jane forms the belief that it is obligatory to queue whenever there is more than one person awaiting service in a shop, bank, or post office. However, in this final scenario, Jane simply finds herself holding that belief after having internalised the traditional rule that mandates queueing.

So, even if the transmission process for societal traditions is osmosis, it is possible that traditions play a role in the acquisition of propositional traditional knowledge. As the examples given above show, even though traditions are transmitted by osmosis, they are still a possible source of belief and if beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society meet the conditions on knowledge, societal traditions are a source of propositional knowledge.¹¹⁸

3.3. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have defended my account of traditions. I argued that there are two aspects to traditions: some object(s) which are transmitted from generation to generation and the transmission process. I contend that traditions are rule-governed social practices which are typically unreflectively complied with, reasonably old, and evolved. Crucially, traditions overlap with, but are not identical with, habits, customs, rituals and ceremonies. Furthermore, I argued

¹¹⁷ To be sure, this example is not incompatible with the claim that traditions are typically complied with unreflectively. First, even if traditions are typically complied with unreflectively, this does not mean that compliance is *always* reflective. Second, reflecting on the content of a tradition does not mean reflecting on the reasons for compliance with it. It is possible to reflectively consider the content of a tradition while complying with it unreflectively.

¹¹⁸ 'Osmosis', like 'storehouse', is a metaphorical term in this context. But unlike 'storehouse', 'osmosis' can be translated into analytically useful terms (such as 'imitation') and does not serve as a substitute for argument.

that the process by which these rule-governed social practices are transmitted is osmosis – the unconscious imitation of elders’ behaviour. I argued that osmosis is not only more plausible than testimony as an account of how practices are transmitted, it also provides a stronger basis for developing a conservative normative epistemology.

Chapter Four: The Social Knowledge Argument

I now defend the core argument of this thesis, the argument for the tradition principle, which I call the Social Knowledge Argument. The tradition principle states that some traditional beliefs constitute normative knowledge. Traditional beliefs are those normative beliefs that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. According to the Social Knowledge Argument, traditional beliefs are the outputs of deference to the traditions of one's society, which is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. And some traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable are non-luckily true. Furthermore, a belief constitutes knowledge just in case it is true, is reliably formed, and its truth is not merely a matter of luck. Hence, some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge.

I defend the Social Knowledge Argument in three stages. First, in the remainder of this chapter, I explain the argument more fully and remind the reader of its contribution to the literature. Second, in Chapter Five, I argue for the Social Knowledge Argument's first premise, which states that deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. Third, in Chapter Six, I defend the third premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, which states that some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

I do not defend the second or fourth premises of the Social Knowledge Argument. The second premise simply states the definition of traditional beliefs – that traditional beliefs are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society – which I ask the reader to accept for the sake of argument. The fourth premise simply states the theory of knowledge that I assume. So, it also does not require a separate defence.

Since I argue that it is in virtue of the reliability of deference to the traditions of one's society as a process for normative belief formation that some true beliefs

formed in this way constitute knowledge, it is no doubt already apparent that the Social Knowledge Argument assumes a process reliabilist theory of normative knowledge. Also, I call my argument the ‘Social Knowledge Argument’ because it constitutes an account of normative knowledge on which we are dependent for the latter’s acquisition on a social process, namely cultural evolution, though it is deference to the traditions of one’s society, not cultural evolution, which is the belief formation process.

4.1. The Explanation of The Social Knowledge Argument

The Social Knowledge Argument goes like this. Deference to the traditions of one’s society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. And, since traditional beliefs are the outputs of deference to the traditions of one’s society, traditional beliefs are the outputs of a process for normative belief formation that is reliable in some societies. Furthermore, in some societies deference to whose traditions is reliable, some beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one’s society are non-luckily true. Finally, a normative belief constitutes knowledge if and only if it is the output of a belief formation process that is reliable in respect of normative beliefs and is non-luckily true. Hence, some traditional beliefs constitute normative knowledge. The Social Knowledge Argument can be set out as follows.

P1: Deference to the traditions of one’s society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies.

P2: Traditional beliefs are the outputs of deference to the traditions of one’s society.

C1: Therefore, traditional beliefs are the outputs of a process of normative belief formation that is reliable in some societies.

P3: In societies in which deference to the traditions of one’s society is a reliable process for normative belief formation, some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true.

P4: A normative belief constitutes knowledge if and only if it is the output of a reliable process for normative belief formation and is non-luckily true.

C2: Hence, some traditional beliefs constitute normative knowledge.

Let me now explain the Social Knowledge Argument in more detail. I set out the key notions of deference to the traditions of one's society (in §4.1.1.), what constitutes reliability for processes of normative belief formation, what traditional beliefs are, and what normative beliefs are (in §4.2.2.), and the theory of knowledge that I assume in the following chapters (in §4.3.3.).

4.1.1. Deference to the Traditions of one's Society

I understand deferring to a tradition of one's society as forming a normative belief on the sole basis that that belief's propositional object captures that tradition. A proposition captures a tradition when it is a suitable translation of the rule that partly constitutes the tradition. For example, the rule 'do not steal' can be translated into the proposition 'you ought not to steal'.

Here is an example of deference to the traditions of one's society. If there is a tradition in Jones's society which requires treating everyone equally, and Jones believes that it is obligatory to treat everyone equally solely because the proposition that it is obligatory to treat everyone equally captures that tradition, then Jones defers to that tradition in forming her normative belief.

Recall, I understand traditions as a species of rule-governed social practices. For example, the tradition of the Monarch not interfering in politics is a practice, namely non-interference, combined with the rule forbidding interference. Traditions, in my view, typically have three features. They are (a) such that compliance with them is unreflective, (b) relatively old, and (c) evolved.

It is necessary to discuss two questions here about the individuation of the process of 'deferring to the traditions of one's society'. The first concerns how precisely 'one's society' is to be individuated. Some societies are contained

within larger societies and many societies are multicultural. This creates a certain ambiguity in the term 'one's society'. The second concerns why I identify 'deference to the traditions of one's society' as the tradition-involving process of normative belief formation in the first place, as opposed to, say, 'deference to a tradition' or 'deference to tradition X'. I discuss these questions in turn.

In respect of the first question about process individuation, it makes sense to begin by setting out a definition of a society. I understand a society to be a population whose members firstly share a common territory, secondly are subject to a common set of rules in their public conduct toward each other, and thirdly are subject to a common political authority (c.f. Copp 1995: Ch.7; Giddens 1993: 746).

The common rules governing a population's interpersonal public conduct may be formal, such as those enshrined in laws, or informal, such as those that are purely customary. The rules whose being followed makes a population a society concern public conduct, rather than conduct generally, because a population's being a society is compatible with its members having very different types of social rules that govern relationships in the private domain, such as familial relationships and romantic relationships. This point is most obviously illustrated by multicultural societies. Such societies will contain many different groups with different rules concerning interpersonal relationships and other matters. But members of each of these cultures subscribe to common rules concerning interpersonal interaction in the public domain. The common rules of etiquette, such as those dictating how people are to greet each other, are a good example of this, as are some general moral rules that most cultures subscribe to, namely those prohibiting killing, stealing, and the like.

Furthermore, a society's political authority need not be the state governing its territory. Some populations have their own internal political system. Yet they are plausibly distinct societies, especially if they are sufficiently isolated from the wider population and are beyond the effective reach of the state. For

example, remote Amazonian tribes often have their own internal political structures and are sometimes beyond the reach of, or have limited contact with, the state who claims the territory they inhabit (Schaden 2018). Such tribes plausibly constitute separate societies from the wider society of the country in which they live.¹¹⁹

Finally, a society can be nested within a larger society (Copp 1995: 137-139). For example, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish, and English societies exist within British society. These societies share a common territory, which encompasses each of their individual territories, and their members are subject to a common political authority. There are also some social rules that they all share. The reason why they are distinct from one another, of course, is that there are some social rules that are followed in some of these populations and not in others, and there are political authorities to which some of these populations are subject but to which others are not subject. The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly are examples of the latter.

Relatedly, 'society' is not identical with 'culture'. A group comprising a society does not require that it is culturally homogenous. It is entirely possible that there are several cultures within a single population that shares a territory, common rules of public interaction and a single political authority. The societies of Western Europe and North America are probably the clearest examples of multicultural societies. Therefore, the traditions of a society encompass the traditions of all the cultures that exist within that society.

Importantly, the nesting of some societies within others and the existence of multicultural societies are the reasons for the ambiguity of 'one's society' and hence of 'deference to the traditions of one's society'.

Each society has its own traditions. So, in a society which is nested within a larger society, there are two sets of traditions that one might defer to: the

¹¹⁹ This is not to deny that there is contact between Amazonian tribal societies and the members of the wider nation and culture that they inhabit, nor is it to deny the disastrous results that can follow for these tribes' ways of life. See Schaden's (2018) paper.

traditions of the smaller society or the traditions of the larger society within which it is nested. These traditions may be captured by different propositions. Indeed, the proposition that captures the tradition of the smaller society on some matter may be incompatible with the proposition that captures the tradition of the larger society on that same matter.

For example, there is a tradition in British society of antagonism to the French. There is no such tradition within Scottish society, probably due to historical alliances between Scotland and France. These traditions impose incompatible demands. The British tradition demands antagonism to the French and the Scottish tradition does not. Deference to the British tradition will lead to the belief that antagonism toward the French is appropriate. Deference to the Scottish tradition will lead to the belief that antagonism to the French is inappropriate. Thus, deference to the traditions of 'one's society' for a Scottish person could lead to one of two incompatible beliefs.

Similarly, each culture has its own traditions. Hence, for any multicultural society, there are multiple sets of traditions that a member of that society may defer to, one for each of the cultures present in that society. Of course, it may be that individuals will rarely defer to the traditions of another culture. However, in multicultural societies, many individuals will belong to two or more cultures and have inherited the traditions of both. This is most obviously true of individuals who are the children of recent immigrants or who have parents from different cultures.

Suppose that Jones is the child of immigrant parents who come from a culture whose traditions permit polygamy. However, Jones and her parents inhabit a society whose most prevalent culture is one whose traditions forbid polygamy. Jones is, as it were, caught between the culture of her parents and the culture of her wider society. Suppose also that there are many people who belong to the culture of Jones's ancestors in the society that she currently inhabits. Its traditions therefore count as (some of the) the traditions of that society. For Jones then, 'the traditions of one's society' includes two different sets of

traditions: the traditions of her ancestral culture and the traditions of the culture which is most prevalent in the society that she inhabits. Deference to the tradition of polygamy will lead to the belief that polygamous marriage is permissible and deference to the tradition of the non-polygamous tradition will lead to the belief that polygamous marriage is impermissible. These beliefs are, of course, incompatible. Hence, deference to the traditions of one's society for Jones could lead to one of two incompatible beliefs. So, there is certainly an ambiguity in 'deference to the traditions of one's society'.

However, I think this ambiguity is easily overstated. In nested societies there are traditions that the smaller and larger societies have in common. In multicultural societies there are some societal traditions that are adhered to by members of all of the cultures that exist within that society. Consider again the British traditions requiring the presumption of innocence, that everyone receive a fair trial, that the Monarch ought to give Royal Assent to any Bill that is passed by both Houses of Parliament, that the Monarch should appoint as Prime Minister whoever can command a majority in the House of Commons, that a government should resign if it loses a vote of no confidence, that ministers should resign from office after having mismanaged their departments, and so on. These traditions are plausibly deferred to by members of many of the cultures that are represented in British society and indeed by many members of the smaller societies, such as English or Welsh societies, that comprise it.¹²⁰ So, nested societies and multiculturalism do not problematise individuating the process of normative belief formation as 'deference to the traditions of one's society' as much as it may at first appear.¹²¹

I now discuss the second question of process individuation, namely why I identify the process of normative belief formation as 'deference to the traditions of

¹²⁰ It is worth noting that many people who subscribe to these traditions do not strictly adhere to them, since such traditions make no demands on their actions. For example, there is no question, obviously, of the average citizen complying with the traditional rule demanding that the Monarch give assent to all Bills that have been passed by Parliament.

¹²¹ I discuss the relevance of multiculturalism for conservative normative epistemology again in Chapter Six, where I consider the significance of multiculturalism for the luckiness or non-luckiness of true traditional beliefs.

one's society'. This question is best answered in connection with a problem for reliabilism that is known as the 'generality problem'. This problem has to do with how processes of belief formation are individuated. Each process-token, which is a specific sequence of events leading to a belief, belongs to a variety of process-types, where process-types are kinds of belief formation processes (Feldman 1985: 160). Reliability is a property of process-types, not of process-tokens (Feldman 1985: 160). Process-types differ in respect of how specific they are and in respect of whether they are relevant to the epistemic standing of the beliefs in which they issue. Importantly, the reliability any belief formation process-type depends (in part) on how fine-grained it is (Feldman 1985: 160-161).

The challenge for the reliabilist is to offer principled criteria for determining, for any process-token, which of the process-types to which it belongs is relevant for determining the epistemic standing of the beliefs in which it issues. The demand that the criteria be principled amounts to the claim that the reliabilist should not be allowed to choose how to describe process-types in an *ad hoc* way which allows her to fit her description of the process to the desired epistemic evaluation (Feldman 1985: 159).

The difficulty in satisfying this demand is that to succeed, the reliabilist must individuate the relevant process-type in a way that is neither too general nor too specific. If the process-type is individuated in a very general manner, then reliabilism will classify any beliefs which are the outputs of tokens which belong to that same very general type as having the same epistemic standing, even when they do not. This is known as the 'No-Distinction Problem' (Feldman 1985: 161). Alternatively, if the process-type is individuated in a highly specific manner, then it may have only one token. This would entail, bizarrely, that if the process-token issues in a true belief, it is perfectly reliable, and if it issues in a false belief, it is completely unreliable. This is known as the 'Single Case Problem' (Feldman 1985: 161-162).

I cannot hope to give a full reply to the generality problem here. What is required of the conservative is that she individuates the process of normative belief formation involving traditions in a principled way and so that it is neither too coarse-grained nor too fine-grained. I do not have the space to do that here. Instead, I propose to simply stipulate that the process of normative belief formation that involves traditions is to be individuated as ‘deference to the traditions of one’s society’. This stipulation is, of course, substantive rather than terminological. So, my conclusions are conditional on its being correct.

I briefly tease out some of the epistemic implications of this way of individuating the process of normative belief formation involving traditions before moving on. ‘Deference to the traditions of one’s society’ does not immediately seem vulnerable to either the No-Distinction Problem or the Single Case Problem.

Suppose that Smith inhabits a society in which there are many traditions deference to which will lead to false beliefs. Suppose also that Jones belongs to a society in which there are very few traditions deference to which will lead to false beliefs. Suppose finally that both are inclined to form their normative beliefs by deferring to the traditions of their society.

Individuating the process as ‘deference to the traditions of one’s society’ implies that Jones’s normative beliefs are stronger candidates for knowledge than Smith’s, since given the traditions in Jones’s society as compared with Smith’s, Jones’s beliefs are far more likely to be true.

This is just the right result. Jones’s normative beliefs do have much better epistemic standing than Smith’s. Individuating the process of belief formation as ‘deferring to the traditions of one’s society’ gets this correct result given the indexicality of ‘one’s society’. The epistemic standing of beliefs produced by the process ‘deferring to the traditions of one’s society’ clearly depends on what the traditions of one’s society are. Thus, ‘deferring to the traditions of one’s society’ avoids the No-Distinction Problem. It also avoids the Single Case Problem, since there are many tokens of the process-type ‘deferring to the

traditions of one's society'. Therefore, 'deferring to the traditions of one's society' is precise enough to avoid the No-Distinction Problem but broad enough to avoid the Single Case Problem.

To be sure, that a way of individuating a process of belief formation yields plausible epistemic verdicts is not an argument for individuating the process in that way. A process reliabilist theory of knowledge is supposed to generate verdicts about the epistemic standing of beliefs and therefore cannot rely on such verdicts without circularity. The reliabilist is not entitled to select the manner of individuating the process of belief formation to suit pre-determined epistemic evaluations of beliefs. Instead, the criteria for individuating the belief formation process must be determined independently of verdicts about beliefs' epistemic standings (c.f. Feldman 1985: 159). The point here is simply to note the epistemic implications of a conservative process reliabilist theory of knowledge that individuates the process of normative belief formation as 'deference to the traditions of one's society'.

4.1.2. Reliability, Normative Beliefs, Traditional Beliefs

The reliability of a belief formation process is usually thought of in terms of the ratio of true to false beliefs it produces. A process is reliable in respect of a given class of beliefs (perceptual, normative, and so on) if and only if it produces more true beliefs of that sort than false beliefs of that sort.

An important question for the reliabilist is where to set the threshold for reliability. What percentage of true beliefs must a process produce to be reliable? Following Goldman (2012: 38) and Alston (1995: 3), I argue that it is unnecessary to give an exact answer to this question. A process is reliable only if more than fifty percent of the beliefs in which it issues are true. But beyond that, it is not clear where to set the threshold. Intuitively, the percentage cannot be as low as fifty-one percent or fifty-five percent. It is equally clear that a process need not produce only true beliefs in order to be reliable. Intuitions may vary when it is suggested that sixty or seventy percent of beliefs

in which a process issues must be true for it to be reliable. It is highly plausible that a process is reliable if eighty percent of the beliefs in which it issues are true. Hence, there is some unclarity concerning how many true beliefs a process must produce in order to be reliable.

This need not be a problem for our purposes, however. Setting the threshold for reliability is a task for the epistemologist. For present purposes, it is enough to acknowledge that the majority of beliefs, significantly more than fifty percent, produced by a process must be true for it to be reliable, without specifying an exact percentage.

Applying this to normative belief formation, a process is reliable for normative belief formation if and only if the majority of normative beliefs in which it issues are true, where the percentage of true beliefs in which it issues is significantly more than fifty percent.

Before moving on, I briefly discuss why I argue that deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies and not in all societies. Whether deference to the traditions of one's society mostly leads to true beliefs or not depends on what the traditions of one's society are, as discussed. If eighty percent of the traditions of Jones's society capture normative demands, then she will end up with more true beliefs than false beliefs by deferring to the traditions of her society. If only thirty of forty percent of the traditions of Jones's society capture normative demands, then she will not generally end up with true beliefs by deferring to the traditions of her society.

Crucially, it is of course true that different societies have different traditions. And it is at least somewhat plausible that some societies have a greater number of traditions that capture normative demands than others. Indeed, it is plausible that there are societies in which only a minority of traditions capture normative demands. So, deference to the traditions of one's society is plausibly more reliable in some societies than in others and may even be unreliable in some societies.

In other words, deference to the traditions of one's society may or may not be reliable in respect of normative beliefs in the sense that the reliability of the process depends on which society's traditions are picked out by the indexical 'the traditions of one's society' in any given context.

So, I argue that deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies because I wish to leave open the possibility that there are societies deference to whose traditions is unreliable. I discuss this more fully in §5.2.2.

Normative beliefs, of course, are those which concern what ought to be the case. There are many kinds of normative beliefs, since there are a range of domains in which certain acts are required or forbidden. Recall, I term these 'normative domains' and the actions that are required in normative domains 'normative demands'. Morality, prudence, aesthetics, etiquette and epistemology are all normative domains. Hence, there are normative moral beliefs, normative prudential beliefs, normative aesthetic beliefs and normative epistemic beliefs. The belief that one ought not to steal is an example of the first; the belief that if you want to arrive on time, you should take the train at 1.05pm is an example of the second; the belief that composers ought not to write parallel fifths is an example of the third.¹²²

The concept of traditional beliefs can be explained very quickly. Traditional beliefs are those normative beliefs which are formed out of deference to a tradition of one's society.

4.1.3. Normative Knowledge

I now discuss normative knowledge. I begin by explaining the general process reliabilist theory of knowledge that I assume throughout the following two chapters. I then discuss normative knowledge in particular. While I do not offer a fully-fledged defence of that theory of knowledge since there is insufficient

¹²² I do not argue, of course, that there are no non-normative beliefs in the moral, prudential, aesthetic or epistemic domains. The point is rather that there are a range of normative domains.

space to defend it in this thesis and, in any case, I assume it, I do say something to motivate it.

There are many process reliabilist theories of knowledge and I could not hope to discuss each of them and their respective merits in detail. What all process reliabilist theories have in common, of course, is the claim that a necessary condition of a subject's knowing that p is that her belief that p is the output of a reliable belief formation process.

My favoured process reliabilist position can be stated as follows. S knows that p if and only if (1) S believes that p , (2) p is true, (3) S 's belief that p is the output of a belief formation process which is reliable in respect of the relevant type of belief, and (4) S 's belief that p is non-luckily true (c.f. Carruthers 1992: 72-77, Goldman 1976, and Goldman 1986: 42-57).¹²³

Conditions (1) and (2) do not, I think, require further explanation. I have also already explained the notion of reliability. Hence, condition (3) has also been partly explained. It requires no further explanation than to emphasise that in order to constitute knowledge, a belief must be the output of a process which is reliable in respect of *that type of belief*; it obviously is not enough for a belief's constituting knowledge that it is produced by a process which is reliable in respect of some other belief-type.

Finally, condition (4), the anti-luck condition, can be unpacked in several ways. Indeed, many specific anti-luck conditions on knowledge have been proposed by

¹²³ I have taken inspiration from each of these authors. However, there are some differences between each of their views and mine. Carruthers does not endorse an anti-luck condition. Goldman (1986: 53-55) endorses a justification condition on knowledge. My account is probably most similar to Goldman's. He proposes a global or general reliability condition which is like condition (3) above; it claims that a belief constitutes knowledge only if it is the output of a process which is reliable in many or all of its uses. He also proposes a local reliability condition on which a belief is an item of knowledge only if it is the output of a process which is reliable 'in the context of the belief under assessment' (1986: 45). He understands local reliability in counterfactual terms in which, as we shall see in Chapter Six, the anti-luck condition that I propose here can also be understood. Goldman does not explicitly mention the distinction between global and local reliability in his (1976) paper, but he makes clear in his book (1986: Ch.3) that he did not mean to deny the distinction in the earlier paper.

epistemologists in recent years.¹²⁴ I do not endorse any particular anti-luck condition in this chapter. There are two reasons for this. First, there are plausibly different kinds of anti-luck conditions appropriate to different kinds of knowledge. For example, perceptual knowledge plausibly requires the ability to perceptually discriminate between relevantly similar objects which might be found in the same environment (Pritchard 2010: 245-247). This condition does not obviously hold for other types of knowledge. Second, and more importantly, I show in Chapter Six that there is more than one anti-luck condition that beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society could satisfy. So, I defer discussion of the precise nature of the anti-luck condition until then.

All this being said, it is possible at this stage to give a general account of the sort of luck which prevents a belief from constituting knowledge. A subject's belief is lucky in the sense that precludes knowledge if and only if it is merely a matter of luck that the belief in question is true. This type of luck is called 'veritic luck' by Pritchard (2005: 146). So, if an agent's belief constitutes knowledge, then it cannot be a matter of luck that her belief is true (Pritchard 2005: 146; 2014: 153).

Let me illustrate this with an example. John is very gullible. Knowing this, some of his acquaintances tell him, for a 'joke', that his house is on fire. John forms the belief that his house is on fire and rushes home to put out the blaze. As it turns out, his belief is true, but only because an electrical fault triggers a small fire which he extinguishes on arriving home (Pritchard 2005: 147). John's belief is clearly veritically luckily. Hence, it does not constitute knowledge.

Veritic epistemic luck can be distinguished from three other kinds of epistemic luck that do not preclude knowledge. First, there is 'content epistemic luck' (Pritchard 2005: 134). This is the kind of luck that an agent's belief is subject to when the proposition that she believes is true only by luck (Pritchard 2005: 134). For example, suppose that someone witnesses a car accident. A car accident is a paradigmatic case of bad luck. So, when the subject forms the belief that a car

¹²⁴ See Ichikawa & Steup's (2018) article for a discussion of several of these.

accident has just taken place, the proposition believed is true only by luck. But the agent can know that a car accident has just taken place provided that her believing that a car accident has just taken place is not itself a matter of luck (Pritchard 2005: 133-135).

Second, there is 'capacity epistemic luck' (Pritchard 2005: 134). This is the kind of luck involved when it is lucky that the agent is capable of knowing (Pritchard 2005: 134). Suppose, for example, that someone narrowly escapes being killed by a sniper because she glances downward momentarily. If the agent's downward glance reveals that she is wearing non-matching socks, then clearly her belief that she is wearing non-matching socks is lucky because she is lucky to be in a position to know this fact or, indeed, to know anything at all. However, this luck does not prevent her from knowing that she is wearing non-matching socks (Pritchard 2014: 152-153. C.f. Pritchard 2005: 135-136).

Third, there is 'evidential epistemic luck' (Pritchard 2005: 136). An agent's belief is evidentially lucky if and only if it is a matter of luck that she possesses the evidence that supports her belief (Pritchard 2005: 136). For example, suppose that while standing outside a colleague's door, one overhears the colleague, who is a reliable testifier, assert that p . It may be entirely a matter of luck that one happens to be standing outside the door at the right moment to hear one's colleague assert that p , but this does not prevent one from knowing that p . Since one's colleague is a reliable testifier, one can come to know that p from her testimony (Pritchard 2014: 153).

So, the kind of luck that prevents an agent's belief from constituting knowledge is luck that her belief is true, as distinct from its being lucky that the proposition believed is true, or that the agent has the capacity to know, or that the agent has the evidence that supports her belief.

Let me illustrate the analysis of knowledge offered here with an example. Jones, while visiting the zoo, knows that the animal in front of her is a zebra just in case (1) Jones believes that the animal in front of her is a zebra, (2) it is true

that the animal in front of her is a zebra, (3) Jones's belief that the animal in front of her is a zebra produced by a belief formation process (let's say that the relevant process-type is visual processes) which is reliable in respect of beliefs about kinds, and (4) Jones's belief that the animal in front of her is a zebra is not true only by luck.¹²⁵

Again, there are different ways to unpack the anti-luck condition. In this case, as with perceptual knowledge generally, Jones's knowing that the animal in front of her is a zebra might plausibly require that she can discriminate the truth from relevant false alternatives, for example that the object in front of her is an elephant, a lamppost, a rubbish bin, a penguin, or whatever (Carter & Pritchard 2016: 970). In other words, Jones's knowledge in this case requires that she can discriminate between zebras and 'other non-zebra items that might plausibly be in the neighbourhood (such as elephants, lampposts, penguins, rubbish bins, and so on)' (Carter & Pritchard 2016: 970).

I now briefly motivate this account of knowledge. It is virtually uncontested within contemporary epistemology that knowledge entails true belief. So, I do not argue for condition (1) (the belief condition) or condition (2) (the truth condition). I argue only for condition (3) (the reliability condition) and condition (4) (the anti-luck condition). I take each in turn and give an example to support it.

Suppose that Jones's visual processes are unreliable for beliefs about kinds. Jones looks out of her kitchen window and spots a bird in her garden that she takes to be a goldfinch. Jones forms the belief that there is a goldfinch in her garden. Furthermore, Jones's belief is true: the bird in her garden is indeed a goldfinch. However, while Jones's belief that there is a goldfinch in her garden is true, most of her beliefs about kinds of birds are false given the unreliability of her visual processes for beliefs about kinds. Thus, she plausibly does not know that there is a goldfinch in her garden (c.f. Pritchard 2010: 245-246).

¹²⁵ This example was first offered by Dretske (1970: 1015-1017)

However, reliably produced true belief is insufficient for knowledge. Consider a variant on the example given above. Jones's visual processes are *reliable* for beliefs about kinds. She looks out of her kitchen window and spots a bird in her garden that she takes to be a goldfinch. Jones forms the belief that there is a goldfinch in her garden. Suppose that the bird spotted by Jones is actually a woodpecker, which she has mistaken for a goldfinch. However, there is also a goldfinch in another part of the garden that she is unaware of. Hence, her belief that there is a goldfinch in her garden is true and reliably produced, since in most cases in which she forms a belief about kinds of birds using visual processes, her belief is true. But in this particular case, her belief is true only by luck. Thus, Jones plausibly does not know that there is a goldfinch in her garden (c.f. Pritchard 2010: 245-246).

A belief's constituting knowledge requires then that there are two senses in which it could not easily have been false. First, it is the output of a process of belief formation that will not generally lead the subject to form false beliefs of that kind. Second, it must not be the case that the subject's belief would have been false in the specific circumstances at issue were it not for some dose of good veritic luck.

Having motivated my account of knowledge, I now consider normative knowledge. Specifically, I discuss propositional normative knowledge, hereafter simply 'normative knowledge'. Normative knowledge is expressed by sentences of the form 'S knows that p ', where S is a knowing subject and p is a proposition about some normative demand. So, normative knowledge is a species of propositional knowledge, knowledge of normative demands.

Normative knowledge plausibly exists in all normative domains: ethics, politics, aesthetics and epistemology. However, for the purposes of this and the remaining chapters, I focus on the moral and prudential knowledge which is relevant to politics. Knowledge of which aims it is morally permissible to pursue by political means, and the moral and prudential constraints on how they ought to be pursued fall under normative political knowledge. Normative political

knowledge includes knowledge of how, morally speaking, political institutions ought to be structured, whether it is permissible for the state to promote any controversial views, and to what extent it is prudent for the state to engage in redistributive activity, etc. Normative political knowledge might also include moral knowledge which is not directly related to politics, such as knowledge of ordinary ethical truths concerning the wrongness of (some instances of) killing, stealing, defamation, etc. insofar as they concern conduct that is regulated by the state.

Finally, let me note that, as a practical matter, the conservative must accept reliabilism if she is to adopt the theory offered in this chapter as a foundation for her position. However, social knowledge arguments which assume different theories of knowledge are conceivable. The familiar kind of conservative argument according to which traditions are a source of knowledge because they reflect the historical experience of the community is one example, though I do not think it is viable, as I argued in §3.2.2. It may be possible to develop other novel conservative epistemologies. For example, one might develop a conservative virtue epistemology on which some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge because knowledge is true belief formed out of intellectual virtue and it is an intellectual virtue to form one's normative beliefs by deferring to the traditions of one's society. I discuss this more fully in Chapter Seven.

Moreover, even if one does not accept reliabilism, the Social Knowledge Argument should still be interesting and contentious. After all, even if a belief's being produced by a reliable process is neither necessary nor sufficient for its constituting knowledge, it is still plausibly an epistemically desirable feature of beliefs that they are produced by reliable processes. A belief's being reliably produced might be sufficient for its being justified or permissible, for example. So, the Social Knowledge Argument should be interesting not only to reliabilists, but to anyone who is curious about the possibility of a successful epistemic defence of conservatism.

4.2. The Social Knowledge Argument's Contribution to the Literature

I now remind the reader of why the Social Knowledge Argument constitutes an original contribution to research on epistemic arguments for conservatism and how it is situated within the conservatism literature. Recall, there are three gaps in the existing literature on conservatism. First, while conservatives have offered accounts of the role that traditions play in the provision of non-propositional normative knowledge, no conservative has yet given an account of the role that traditions play in the provision of propositional normative knowledge. Since we have propositional normative knowledge, any plausible theory of conservatism must explain how we come to acquire it and what role traditions play in its acquisition.

Second, conservatives do not always provide fully-fledged arguments for their epistemological claims. Instead, they often discuss those claims in a relatively brief and cursory manner, despite their being central to the case for conservatism. Moreover, sometimes conservatives cash out the claim that traditions have a role in the provision of normative knowledge in metaphorical terms, seemingly in the hope that metaphor will serve as a substitute for sustained argument. The writers who regard traditions as repositories of wisdom are the main exemplars of this tendency (Burke 2004: 183; Hogg 1947: 11; Norton & Aughey 1981: 23-30; Quinton 1978: 13, 16-18, 59-61; O'Hear 1998b).

Third, while conservatives have acknowledged the essentially epistemic nature of their doctrine, they have rarely (if ever) consulted the epistemology literature. Thus, many resources from epistemology remain untapped. Conservatives maintain that traditions play a vital role in the acquisition of normative knowledge, but they never explain what they understand knowledge to be. They certainly do not seek to show that traditional beliefs satisfy recently developed theories of knowledge in making their arguments. They do not refer to the epistemology literature in discussing the relationship between propositional knowledge and non-propositional knowledge, even though that topic has been extensively discussed by epistemologists whose arguments could

clearly provide important insights on that topic. Conservatives also do not typically consider epistemic objections to their claims, such as the possibility that some true traditional beliefs fail to constitute knowledge on account of their being merely luckily true.¹²⁶

These gaps in the conservatism literature should be plugged. As discussed in the Introduction, it is a failure of extant forms of conservatism that they neglect propositional normative knowledge, rely on metaphor, and do not utilise relevant resources from epistemology.

The Social Knowledge Argument does not have these flaws. It constitutes a sustained argument for the conclusion that (and a fully-fledged account of how) traditional beliefs can constitute propositional normative knowledge. In addition, the Social Knowledge Argument draws on previously untapped resources from epistemology, namely process reliabilist theories of knowledge.

I now briefly remind the reader of how the Social Knowledge Argument is situated within the conservatism literature. Recall, there are two broad types of conservatism. The first is sceptical conservatism. According to sceptical conservatism, there is a presumption in favour of the status quo and wholesale changes to the basic structure of society should be resisted, since given the limits of human knowledge, there is a significant chance that any such changes would have seriously bad unforeseen consequences. On sceptical conservatism, deference to tradition is a 'second best' option. It would be better if we were able to design and create optimal political institutions but, given the limits of human knowledge, we cannot. So, we are best advised to maintain current institutions unless there is strong evidence that proposed changes can be implemented without destructive consequences.

The second type of conservatism is traditionalist conservatism, according to which traditions transmit practical knowledge or wisdom, which is conceived of

¹²⁶ As mentioned in the Introduction, conservatives have focussed on non-propositional knowledge. That may be the reason for their neglect of this objection.

as non-propositional. On traditionalist conservatism, traditions should be deferred to not because deference to tradition is a second-best option to having normative knowledge, but because traditions are a source of knowledge.

The Social Knowledge Argument is, in one sense, a form of traditionalist conservatism. It is through deference to the traditions of one's society, according to the Social Knowledge Argument, that normative knowledge is acquired. And since the Social Knowledge Argument allows the existence of such knowledge, it certainly is not a form of sceptical conservatism.

However, the Social Knowledge Argument also explains how traditions can play a role in the provision of propositional knowledge, which extant forms of conservatism do not. Hence, the Social Knowledge Argument develops a new form of traditionalist conservatism which does not fit neatly into either category of existing conservative view.

4.3. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explained the Social Knowledge Argument. The Social Knowledge Argument claims that deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies and that in some of those societies where deference to the tradition of one's society is reliable, beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society are non-luckily true. Moreover, such beliefs constitute knowledge; hence, some beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society constitute knowledge. Furthermore, I have shown that the Social Knowledge Argument makes an original contribution to the conservatism literature. Specifically, the Social Knowledge Argument establishes that there is propositional normative knowledge, and it constitutes an explicit and sustained argument for conservatism that draws on relevant epistemological resources.

Chapter Five: The Social Knowledge Argument's Reliability Claim

In this chapter, I defend the first premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, which states that deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. We can call this premise the 'reliability claim'. The argument for the reliability claim is that cultural evolution reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands because it aims at the production of traditions which mandate actions that contribute to human need fulfilment. Rules that mandate actions that contribute to human need fulfilment are ordinarily right and traditions are rules. So, cultural evolution aims at the production of traditions that mandate actions that are ordinarily right. Furthermore, if cultural evolution reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies. Hence, deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies.

I explain the argument for the reliability claim in more detail in §5.1. I then argue for the first premise of the argument for the reliability claim in §5.2. before defending its second premise in §5.3.

5.1. The Explanation of the Argument for the Reliability Claim

A clarification is in order before I explain the argument for the reliability claim. Whether deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in any society is an empirical issue that cannot be definitively settled by philosophical inquiry. This is because deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in a society only if most of that society's traditions capture normative demands. And whether most of a society's traditions capture normative demands is something that can only be ascertained by comparing the number of traditions in that society that capture normative demands with those that do not. This cannot be done 'from the armchair'. However, I hope that by providing arguments and refuting objections, I will be able to show as far as is possible in a philosophical

study that there are societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

The argument for the reliability claim is that traditions issue from cultural evolution, which reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands. As discussed, the demands of morality and prudence are most relevant for present purposes. Crucially, if cultural evolution reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. This is because if cultural evolution reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands, then most traditions are captured by true normative propositions and deference to the traditions of one's society involves believing a proposition which captures a tradition of one's society. The argument can be expressed as follows.

P1: Cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which often capture normative demands.

P2: If cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which often capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies.

C: Therefore, deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies.

I remind the reader of the core terms of this argument that have already been defined, before explaining cultural evolution. First, traditions are rule-governed social practices that are typically – though not necessarily – such that compliance with them is unreflective, relatively old, and evolved. Second, normative demands, as discussed, are whatever is required of us in normative domains such as morality, prudence and etiquette. Deferring to a tradition of one's society is forming a normative belief solely because that belief's propositional object captures that tradition. A process for normative belief formation is reliable if and only if most of the normative beliefs in which it

issues are true. And, of course, normative beliefs are those beliefs that concern what ought to be the case.

I now explain cultural evolution. It is perhaps worth noting, at this stage, that I am unable to fully substantiate the account of cultural evolution that I will offer. I offer an account of cultural evolution which is inspired by recent empirical work within the existing literature. But I am essentially borrowing the findings of researchers who are working on the evolution of culture and teasing out their philosophical implications. This may give the impression that my arguments are therefore beholden to empirical hypotheses which may be disconfirmed at a later stage. That is true, but I also think it is unavoidable if one wants to offer an argument for conservatism. Conservatives have often made claims about the epistemology and normativity of tradition, and those claims have always rested on empirical theses about the genealogy of traditions and the organic nature of society. In any case, the prospects for a rationalist argument for traditions' epistemic standing look dim and would be out of keeping with conservatives' anti-rationalist epistemological commitments. So, we must content ourselves with arguments whose empirical assumptions may turn out to be false. Furthermore, even if there were an argument for traditions' epistemic standing which is not beholden to empirical assumptions, this would not entail that the normative epistemology I develop here is not the strongest case for conservatism.

Cultural evolution is the process whereby cultural items and traits, such as practices, skills, beliefs, desires, values, artefacts, institutions, traditions, norms, and so on, come into existence, and come to bear their properties, as a result of evolutionary pressures (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Let's call the collection of cultural items and traits possessed by a group its 'cultural inheritance'.

Cultural traits are those phenotypic traits whose development depends on social learning (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Social learning is 'the nongenetic transfer of patterns of skills, thought and feeling from individual to individual in a

population or society' (Boyd & Richerson 1985: 34). Nongenetic transfer is brought about by the imitation, by juvenile members of the group, of their elders and peers (Boyd & Richerson 1985; Boyd & Richerson 2005: Ch.18; Richerson & Boyd 2005: Ch.4). More specifically, the cultural items and traits which comprise a given group's cultural inheritance came to exist, and to have the properties of which they are the bearers, because their being adopted, and subsequently transmitted by social learning, was adaptive: their adoption and transmission contributed to the fulfilment of the core evolutionary 'aims' of survival and reproduction.

A group's cultural inheritance, and alterations in the distribution of a group's cultural items and traits over time, are the results of cumulative change. Cumulative change comes about through what is sometimes called 'descent and modification' (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Cultural traits and items are inherited (via social learning) by a given generation from their ancestors. These traits are sometimes then modified and passed on to the next generation (again via social learning). The process continues over multiple generations, with each generation modifying the cultural inheritance they have received from the previous generations. So, 'new modifications are piled on top of old modifications' over an extended period (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Each group's cultural inheritance is the result of this process of transition and modification, through social learning, of cultural traits and items.

Crucially, what makes this process a type of evolution is that it is the result of 'hidden hand mechanism' (Mameli & Sterelny 2009).^{127,128} The most obvious and fitting candidates for such a hidden hand mechanism are those that are analogous to the mechanisms which explain cumulative biological change. In

¹²⁷ A clarification is required here. Sometimes 'hidden hand explanation' is used to refer to the kind of explanation which posits intentional design as the real cause of some explanandum which is not apparently designed. But Mameli and Sterelny use 'hidden hand explanation' to refer to what is usually called an 'invisible hand explanation': the kind of explanation on which something that appears to be intentionally designed is not (c.f. Nozick 1974: 19).

¹²⁸ It is worth noting the parallels between this account of cultural evolution and both traditionalist conservatives' claims about the transmission of traditions through osmosis and free market conservatives' claims about economic order arising from an invisible hand. I discuss this in more detail shortly.

particular, the obvious candidate is a mechanism like natural selection, where cultural traits are selected for because they enhance the fitness of their bearers.

There is indeed some reason for thinking that the mechanism by which a group's cultural inheritance changes over time is like natural selection (Dennett 2001: 313-320; Boyd & Richerson 1985: 11, 173-180; Sober 1991). However, it is worth noting an important difference between cultural evolution and biological evolution. The selection of biological traits by genetic transmission is entirely vertical. Parents pass their genes on to children. Cultural evolution, however, involves *horizontal transmission*, where traits are acquired through social learning from peers, and *oblique transmission*, where traits are acquired through social learning from non-parental adults (Boyd & Richerson 1985: 53; Lewens 2013; Sober 1991: 537).

Natural selection allows learning from non-parents, and hence horizontal and oblique transmission, because the larger the sample size of models one can copy, the greater the chance that one will acquire adaptive traits. If someone in the community who is not one's parent has discovered some adaptive behaviour, one will benefit from copying it (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 119-126, 156-157, 166-169). The wider the range of adaptive behaviours one can copy, the greater one's chance of surviving and reproducing.

For example, if one's mother is 'an inefficient or poorly informed gatherer' and someone else, such as 'an aunt, grandmother, in-law, or friend' is much better, then it makes sense to copy them rather than one's mother (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 157). Similarly, among the Aka people, boys learn most of their hunting techniques from their fathers. However, when crossbows were first introduced, most fathers did not know how to use them. So, many Aka boys learned how to use the crossbow from non-parental figures who knew how to use them, since the crossbow is a very useful hunting tool (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 157).

The obvious question concerns how it is possible to acquire adaptive traits and avoid acquiring maladaptive traits by copying from a wide range of models, since it is often difficult for individuals to make detailed assessments of the adaptiveness of others' behaviour. The answer is that learning from non-parents operates through two biases which make conscious assessment of whether some observed behaviour is adaptive unnecessary. These biases operate as shortcuts to acquiring adaptive behaviour from non-parents. The first is *prestige bias*; the second is *conformist bias* (Lewens 2013). I discuss them in turn.

Human beings are biased toward copying the skills and techniques of those who occupy prestigious social positions. Such bias toward prestige is somewhat adaptive. As Richerson and Boyd (2005: 124) argue, it is much easier to determine who is successful than it is to determine how to succeed. So, by copying the successful, there is a good chance that one will acquire the traits that cause success. Importantly, success, its indicators, and its constituents – such as 'wealth, fame, and good health' – correlate with fitness (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 124). So, by copying the successful, there is a good chance that one will acquire traits which are at least locally adaptive (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 124-125).

For example, suppose that a 'hypothetical population of early humans' is 'expanding their range from tropical savannah into temperate woodland' (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 124). Suppose also that those living in the woodland environment are finding it difficult to determine which behaviours are most conducive to survival. The result will be that peripheral populations contain a mixture of behaviours, some of which are adaptive and some of which are not. However, people who acquire the most adaptive behaviour will typically be more successful. Therefore, other things being equal, those who imitate the successful are more likely to acquire behaviours that are adaptive in their environment (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 124-125).

We are also biased in favour of conforming to the standards of others, as indicated in their behavioural cues. This can be a useful way of learning

behaviours which are adaptive in a given environment, especially if that environment, and the situations one will encounter therein, are novel.

Consider again the population of early humans that is in the process of migrating from the savanna into temperate woodland. These environments favour very different behaviours. This is most obviously true in respect of subsistence (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 121). The food with the highest nutritional value, the habits of one's prey, and the best type of dwellings and methods of constructing them are different in these two environments. But this is also true in respect of social norms. The group size, marriage practices, rules concerning sharing, and so on that are adaptive in one of these environments may not be in the other (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 121). Once the most adaptive behaviours for the environment are discovered, however, and become relatively common, incomers to the new environment who copy the common type are more likely to acquire adaptive behaviours (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 121).

There is an obvious problem here. There is a disadvantage to copying a wide range of models. The disposition to copy a large range of non-parental figures may enable its bearer to acquire adaptive behaviours, but it also leaves them vulnerable to acquiring maladaptive behaviours. Importantly, these maladaptive behaviours can be spread by prestige bias and conformist bias (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 162-167).

For example, on the pacific island of Ponpae, a man's prestige is determined, in part, by his contribution of very large yams to certain feasts (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 164). So, men who are motivated by prestige bias are likely to invest significant time and effort into the cultivation of large yams. But the cultivation of these yams is maladaptive insofar as it is inefficient from the perspective of food production (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 164). Hence, prestige bias can spread maladaptive cultural practices.

This slightly mystifies how evolution could allow learning from non-parents. If non-parental figures exhibit a wide variety of maladaptive behaviours, then

imitating them increases the chance that one will acquire maladaptive behaviours. So, why would evolution allow this possibility? After all, evolution could have shaped our psychology such that we only imitate parents, or such that we copy non-parents but only imitate their adaptive behaviours (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 154-155).

The answer is that evolutionary pressures push us in the direction of using methods of learning that allow us to acquire as much adaptive behaviour as cheaply as possible and which are sufficiently flexible to allow us to adapt quickly to new environments. Social learning is one such mechanism. However, it is only because social learning involves the indiscriminate imitation of a wide range of models that it enables us to cheaply and flexibly acquire as much adaptive behaviour as possible. And it is precisely this feature of social learning that results in it spreading maladaptive traits. There is simply an unavoidable trade-off between social learning's effectiveness and flexibility, on one hand, and its making us susceptible to acquiring maladaptive traits, on the other (Richerson & Boyd 2005: 154-155). For a variety of reasons discussed by Richerson and Boyd, which I do not explore further here, the evolution of more selective biases is prohibitively costly from an evolutionary perspective (2005: 154-167).

Importantly, there is controversy over whether it is the individual or the group which is the unit of selection in cultural evolution. On some accounts, traits are selected for because they enhance the fitness of the *individuals* who bear them, but where such traits are culturally heritable, and spread to the other members of the group, because of their fitness-enhancing properties, through social learning.

For example, consider a population in which deer are an important food source. Now suppose that some members of that population hunt deer with spears, and others hunt them with snares and traps. Suppose, finally, that hunting with spears is far more effective. Those who hunt with spears are much more likely to survive and reproduce. Hence, there will be more spear hunters in the

population, since spear hunters tend to have more children. The spear hunters will teach their children how to hunt with spears rather than with snares and traps. Moreover, as spear hunting becomes the dominant practice, this creates the opportunity for further development, as the more adept spear hunters introduce innovations which make their way of hunting more effective than the other spear hunters'. These innovations can be culturally transmitted and increase in frequency like spear hunting itself (Mameli & Sterelny 2009).

This is a hidden hand mechanism because it does not require that the individuals within the population are aware of the differences in hunting technique and consciously adapt their own hunting practice (though this may play a role in the generation of new modifications). Differences in the fitness-enhancing power of different hunting practices are sufficient to explain the prevalence of spear hunting (Mameli & Sterelny 2009).

On other accounts, certain traits are selected for because they enhance the fitness of the *group* which bears them. There are certain traits which, if a group bears them, increase the chance that that group will continue to exist and that it will give rise to 'offspring' groups which descend from it. This might sound odd, but most cultural groups are either the continuation of some cultural group or the offspring of some prior 'parent' group (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). That groups can bear traits is evidenced by the distinctive 'patterns of action, resource use, technology, family pattern, beliefs etc.' (Mameli & Sterelny 2009) which are observed in every group, which allow us to identify groups over time, which are not predicted by differences in those groups' environments, and which exist and persist in spite of the diversity of individuals' beliefs and practices within the group.

The reason why the group can have such traits despite the diversity of its members is that there are pressures toward homogenisation. Prestige bias and conformist bias play a role in generating homogeneity within the group, and hence group-level traits, because the desire to imitate the prestigious or one's peers shapes one's set of behaviours so that it is similar to theirs. Homogeneity

can also be created by explicit sanctions which punish deviance (Hayek 1967: 78) and homogeneity also comes about because it is useful in helping solve coordination problems. If we conform to others' expectations, we can coordinate our behaviours with them more easily (Mameli & Sterelny 2009).

For example, suppose that several cultural groups share a habitat. Within this habitat, there is a dangerous predator. Some groups within the habitat have developed effective means of sharing information concerning how to deal with the predator. Other groups have no means of sharing the relevant information. Within the information-sharing group, it is not only the information concerning the predator which is passed from some members of the group to others. The importance of sharing the information, together with the rule that information ought to be shared and associated punishments for non-compliance, also develops within the group. The information-sharing habit is transmitted and acquired through social learning. Hence, the members of the information-sharing groups cooperate well in trying to deal with the dangerous predator. The members of non-information-sharing groups do not cooperate well in trying to deal with the predator. As a result, the information-sharing group is more likely to produce 'offspring' groups (Mameli & Sterelny 2009).

Some conservative theorists have assumed that the group is the basic unit of selection, rather than the individual. Hayek is the most prominent of these (1967: Ch.4; 1988; 2006: Ch.4; 2013).¹²⁹ Moreover, while the idea of group selection had fallen out of favour, it has experienced some resurgence in acceptance (Lewens 2007: 180-184; Zywicki 2000: 81). Recent proponents include Boyd and Richerson (1985: 227-240), Sober and Wilson (1998), and Zywicki (2000).

¹²⁹ Gray (1984: 52-53) raises the question of whether this is consistent with Hayek's methodological individualism. Nozick (1974: 18-22) discusses the compatibility of invisible hand explanations and methodological individualism more generally. I take no stand on this question here except to note that Gray raises the interesting possibility that Hayek is effectively a fictionalist about groups, treating them as useful 'heuristic devices' (1984: 52). Incidentally, Gray (2004: 69-71) rejects the idea of cultural evolution.

I take no firm stand on this here. I shortly argue that the rules which eventually become a group's traditions are adopted, modified and transmitted because they enable that group to survive and reproduce itself. However, this can be understood in terms either of individuals or the group being the basic unit of selection. So, my account is neutral on the question of whether the individual or the group is the basic unit of selection. On the first picture, traditions enable the group to survive and reproduce because they enable its constituent members to do so. On the individualist picture, group survival and reproduction reduce to individual survival and reproduction. On the second picture, traditions enable the group itself to survive and reproduce, where the group's survival and reproduction is not reducible to the survival and reproduction of its constituent members.¹³⁰

So, we have seen that cultural evolution is the process whereby groups acquire cultural items and cultural traits because the adoption of these items and traits contributes to the fitness of the group. These items and traits are transmitted and modified by a mechanism which is analogous to natural selection, since adaptive cultural traits are transmitted vertically, from parent to child, horizontally, between peers, or obliquely, from non-parental adults, through social learning.

I now briefly comment on the similarities between the account of cultural evolution that I have assumed here and extant conservative views about the evolution of social and economic order. Traditionalist conservatives have typically thought of society as an organic or natural growth, with its traditions being the outputs of this process of organic development (Burke 2004; Hogg 1947: 24-30; Nisbet 1986: 23-34; Quinton 1978: 24-30, 59-60; Scruton 2001: 19-30, 34-35; Wilson 1951: 12-15). Free market conservatives have often argued,

¹³⁰ There is a third candidate for the basic unit of selection, namely discrete chunks of information known as 'memes'. Memes are supposed to be the cultural evolutionary analogue of genes (Mameli & Sterelny 2009). Dennett (2001), following Richard Dawkins, is the most prominent philosophical proponent of mimetics. Mimetics has come under fire in recent years to a sufficient extent that it can be left aside (Lewens 2007: 202-212).

following Smith, that economic order arises as the result of an ‘invisible hand’ (Hayek 1948a; Hayek 2006: 49-62; Hayek 2013; Willetts 1992: 79-91).

In both cases, it is argued that order arises not from design, but as the cumulative effect of many individuals’ independent actions, where the resultant order is in no way intended or even foreseen. Instead, on these views, order emerges indirectly through individuals’ interacting with one another and thereby discovering which patterns of behaviour are mutually beneficial. Those which conduce to the fulfilment of human interests become established and spread (they become traditions, in other words); those which do not conduce to human need fulfilment are weeded out.

Let me give an example to illustrate this. Hayek argues that human societies acquire what he calls ‘a tradition of learnt rules of conduct’ which has ‘made possible the formation of larger orderly groups of gradually increasing size’ through a process of ‘winnowing and sifting, directed by the differential advantages gained by groups from practices adopted for some unknown [...] reason’ (2013: 488). Like the traditionalist conservative, Hayek argues that such rules and practices have been transmitted by imitation (1988: 12).

The parallel between the traditionalists’ idea of organic growth and the free marketeers’ claims about the invisible hand has been noted by O’Hear (1998b) and Scruton (2010: 125-127; 2013: 219-220; 2017: 39-42).

Furthermore, the account of cultural evolution that I offer here explains the transmission of cultural items and traits in a way that is acceptable to conservatism. The idea of social learning through which cultural items and traits are transmitted on this account of cultural evolution involves imitation by the young of their elders. Social learning is rather like osmosis, which, according to many conservatives (and as I argued in §3.2.1.) is the transmission process for societal traditions. I said there that I would defend an account of traditional knowledge involving this transmission process on which it is possible to acquire propositional normative knowledge from traditions. As is already clear, I am

sure, if the Social Knowledge Argument is successful, then we have such an account. For I argue that it is possible to gain propositional normative knowledge by deferring to the traditions of one's society, which are transmitted by osmosis.

Incidentally, this should further demonstrate why my account does not have one of the flaws of existing conservative theories that was mentioned in the Introduction, namely that they do not draw on relevant developments within philosophy and the academic literature more generally. Early conservative theorists did not, and could not, draw on scientific theories of cultural evolution. As several writers point out, conservatism's claim that social orders evolve via an invisible hand mechanism pre-dates Darwin's discovery of biological evolution and the subsequent investigation of its effect on culture (Arnhart 2003: 15; Hayek 2006: 53; Vannatta 2012: 34). Second, except for Hayek, recent conservative theorists have not extensively drawn on scientific theories of cultural evolution. This thesis, in drawing on contemporary theories of cultural evolution, seeks to remedy this.

5.2. The First Premise of the Argument for the Reliability Claim

Having explained the argument for the reliability claim, I now defend its first premise. I present the argument for the first premise of the argument for the reliability claim in §5.2.1. I then refute objections, in §5.2.2.

5.2.1. The Argument for the First Premise of the Argument for the Reliability Claim

The argument for the first premise of the argument for the reliability claim goes like this. Cultural evolution tends to produce cultural items and traits which enable a group's members to survive and reproduce. Cultural evolution tends to produce cultural items and traits which enable a group's members to survive and reproduce only if it tends to produce cultural items and traits which contribute to human need fulfilment. So, cultural evolution tends to produce cultural items and traits which contribute to human need fulfilment. Importantly, traditions are among the cultural items produced by cultural evolution and cultural

evolution shapes all of its products in the direction of human need fulfilment. Hence, cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which contribute to the fulfilment of human needs. Finally, rules which contribute to the fulfilment of human needs often capture normative demands and traditions are rules. Therefore, cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which often capture normative demands.

I say no more about two of the premises of the argument outlined above. The first is that cultural evolution issues in traditions; the second is that traditions are rules. In setting out an account of cultural evolution, I have already given the evidence that cultural evolution issues in traditions. I have also already argued for my account of traditions in Chapter Three. It is part of that account that traditions are rules. So, I ask the reader to accept that cultural evolution issues in traditions and that traditions are rules.

There are several other premises that can be readily accepted. The first of these is that cultural evolution tends to produce cultural items and traits which enable a group's members to survive and reproduce. This is true for obvious reasons. As discussed, cultural evolution is the process whereby a group comes to have its cultural inheritance under evolutionary pressures. Evolution obviously aims at survival and reproduction. So, just as with the claim that cultural evolution issues in traditions, it is clear from the characterisation of cultural evolution given above that it tends to produce cultural items and traits which enable a group's members to survive and reproduce.

It should also be clear that cultural items and traits enable a group's members to survive and reproduce only if their being followed contributes to the fulfilment of human needs. A group's members survive and reproduce only if a wide range of their needs are fulfilled. If many of a person's needs are frustrated, the individual whose needs they are may perish before getting the chance to reproduce. This is most obviously true of that which is needed for survival, such as the need for food, water, shelter, health, and so on. And since

human need fulfilment is necessary for survival, it is impossible that something should promote survival without contributing to the fulfilment of human needs.

Finally, it should be at least somewhat apparent that cultural evolution shapes all of its products in the direction of human need fulfilment. Cultural evolution universally aims at survival and reproduction, which requires the fulfilment of human needs, and therefore shapes all of its products so that they are conducive to survival and reproduction.

The most crucial step in motivating the claim that cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which often capture normative demands, and hence for motivating the first premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, is demonstrating that rules which fulfil human needs often capture normative demands.

I first set out my account of human needs and their relevance to normative demands. In the most general sense, a human need is something that is necessary for the fulfilment of some human agent's goal, desire or preference (Braybrooke 1987: 30-31; Copp 1995: 173; Miller 1976: 126-127; Wiggins 1987: 6-9). But these are not the sort of needs which are relevant to actions' normative statuses. When needs are understood in this way, a rule whose being followed contributes to the fulfilment of a human need may mandate a wrong action and a rule whose being followed frustrates a need may mandate a right action, whether the action in question is morally, prudentially or aesthetically right (c.f. Copp 1995: 173). For example, a murderer needs access to a murder weapon in order to carry out her crime. However, it would clearly be (morally) wrong to satisfy that need and it would be right to frustrate it.

The needs that are relevant to an action's normative status are those things that are required for an agent's attainment of that which is objectively good for her (Braybrooke 1987: 32-33; Copp 1995: 173; Kekes 1989: 25-33; Kekes 1998: 31-36, 50-54; Miller 1976: 130-136; Wiggins 1987: 6-14). Hereafter, I use 'human needs' and 'needs' to refer only to this sort of need.

There are several types of need. This is because there are several types of fact that determine what is good for human beings. These facts concern human biological, psychological and social nature (Kekes 1989: 25-33; Kekes 1998: 35-36, 50-54). Kekes (1989: 27-28) calls these facts of the body, facts of the self, and facts of the social life. Facts of the body concern our capacities, including capacities for movement and sense perception, our organs, facts concerning aging, consumption, pain, health, sickness, and so on. Facts of the self are psychological facts concerning what we like and dislike and how we want to make use of our physiological capacities in our lives. Facts of the social life are facts concerning the scarcity of resources, human vulnerability and limitations, child rearing, the division of labour and other things which may constitute a locus of conflict (Kekes 1989: 28).¹³¹

The biological needs include the need for food, shelter, and sleep. They also include the need for rest and recreation, health, and freedom from serious pain or injury. The psychological needs include the needs for company, self-respect, choice in respect of how one fulfils one's biological needs, the hope of improving one's situation, the capacity to satisfy one's likes and dislikes, and to fulfil one's self-chosen goals in life. The social needs include the ability to depend on intimates such as family members, partners, and friends, cooperation with other people, justice in our dealings with others, and regularity in the management of human affairs (Kekes 1998: 35-36, 51-52. C.f. Copp 1995: 173).

Importantly, some needs are basic, while others are derivative. A need is basic if and only if its necessity for an agent's attainment of that which is good for her is not conditional on certain circumstances obtaining. To put it another way, a need, N, is basic just in case there is no true statement of the form: 'if C does not obtain, then A does not need N', where C is a set of circumstances and A is an agent. The basic needs are determined by the facts of the body, facts of the self, and facts of the social life (c.f. Braybrooke 1987: 29-45; Copp 1995: 173-

¹³¹ Other writers have made similar distinctions between the different types of needs. For example, Braybrooke (1987: 35-36) distinguishes between physical and social needs. His category of physical needs contains more or less the same needs as Kekes's category of biological needs, and their lists of social needs are very similar.

177; Kekes 1989: 29-30; Kekes 1998: 35, 50-54).¹³² Given the sort of beings we are, human beings could not fail to need those things our needing which is determined by our biological, psychological and social natures. The basic needs are therefore universal. Every human being needs food, shelter, and health. Everyone needs company, happiness, and self-respect. All human beings need to have relationships, to cooperate with other people, and to live in a society in which regularity means that instability is kept to a minimum (Copp 1995: 173; Kekes 1989: 29-30; 1998: 35, 50-53).

A need is derivative if and only if its fulfilment is required for the fulfilment of some basic need in a given set of circumstances (Copp 1995: 173-174). In other words, a need, N, is derivative just in case there are true statements of the form: 'if C does not obtain, A does not need N to fulfil X', where C is a set of circumstances, A is an agent, and X is a basic need. Derivative needs may or may not be universal. This is because some circumstances always obtain, and others do not.

Suppose that health is a basic need. Suppose also, as is plausible, that the absence of serious injury or disease and access to reliable health care are necessary for (one's own) health in all circumstances in which one finds oneself. If these circumstances obtain, but only if they obtain, one needs to be free from serious injury or disease and to have access to reliable healthcare. So, the needs for the absence of serious injury or disease and access to reliable health care are derivative on the need for health. However, since freedom from serious injury or disease and to have access to reliable healthcare are necessary for health in all existing circumstances, there are no circumstances in which the absence of serious injury or disease and access to reliable health care are not necessary for the fulfilment of the need for health (c.f. Braybrooke 1987: 14-20, 41-47, 56-60). The antecedent of the relevant conditional ('C does not obtain') is never true. Therefore, these derivative needs are universal.

¹³² I take the terminology of 'basic' and 'derivate' needs from Copp (1995: 172-177).

By contrast, suppose that the ability to move safely is a basic need and one is trapped down a mine. Suppose also that one can escape the mine safely only if one has a torch and a hardhat. In that case, one needs a torch and a hardhat (Copp 1995: 173). However, if one is not trapped down a mine, one's safety of movement does not require the possession of a torch and hardhat. So, the needs for a torch and hardhat are derivative on the basic need for safe movement. Furthermore, most people are obviously not trapped down mines. Therefore, most people do not need a torch and a hardhat, unless, of course, they are in some other set of circumstances that make possession of those items necessary for the fulfilment of some basic need. So, the need for a torch and a hardhat is not universal.

I now argue that rules which contribute to the fulfilment of human needs often capture normative demands. This is because normative properties supervene on non-normative properties. It is in virtue of bearing one or more of the relevant non-normative properties that an action comes to have the normative properties that it bears. So, when an agent ought to do an action, she ought to do it in virtue of it bearing certain right-making features. Similarly, when an agent ought not to do an action, she ought not to do it in virtue of it bearing certain wrong-making features. One right-making feature of an action is that it promotes something good or beneficial. An action that promotes one or more goods is ordinarily right. One wrong-making feature of an action is that it promotes something disvaluable or harmful. An action that promotes one or more harms is ordinarily wrong.

Importantly, actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs promote one or more goods, and actions that contribute to the frustration of human needs promote one or more harms. This is because, as discussed, human needs are those things whose possession is required for the attainment of some good. Fulfilling a need involves providing whatever is necessary for the relevant good and to provide that which is necessary for the attainment of some good is also to promote that good. By contrast, actions that frustrate human needs withhold that which is necessary for the production of the relevant good and/or promote

the harm which is its opposite. Therefore, any action that promotes the fulfilment of human needs is ordinarily right. Similarly, an action that contributes to the frustration of human needs is ordinarily wrong.

The rightness of actions may be moral, prudential, or whatever, as discussed. Whether they are morally, prudentially, aesthetically right, and so on depends on what sort of goods they promote. Actions that promote a moral good are ordinarily morally right; actions that promote the agent's own interests are ordinarily prudentially right, and so on.

Given the foregoing arguments, rules whose being followed contributes to human need fulfilment prescribe actions that are ordinarily right. And rules that prescribe actions that are ordinarily right often capture normative demands. So, rules whose being followed contributes to human need fulfilment often capture normative demands.^{133,134}

Let me illustrate these points with an example. To provide someone with food, water, shelter, and clothing is clearly to fulfil her needs for these items, insofar as they are necessary for survival and survival is good. Similarly, to withhold food, water, shelter, and clothing from someone is clearly to frustrate her need for these items, insofar as these items are necessary for survival and survival is good. Moreover, to fulfil these needs is obviously ordinarily morally right and to frustrate them is clearly ordinarily morally wrong. Hence, rules that forbid the frustration of these needs mandate that which is ordinarily morally right (c.f. Kekes 1989: 28-29 and Kekes 1998: 49-54). Similarly, to subject someone to abuse because of her race, religion or sexuality frustrates her need for self-respect and is clearly morally wrong; to systematically interfere in someone's

¹³³ One might wonder whether there are other right-making features on my view. I assume, for present purposes, that contribution to the production of good outcomes is the only right-making feature. The action that is right in all-things-considered a given set of circumstances is the one that produces the most good in those circumstances. I say that need-fulfilling actions are 'ordinarily' right because while actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs always promote some good, they may not produce the most good in some circumstances and hence will not be right all-things-considered in some circumstances.

¹³⁴ My view concerning the normative significance of human needs is heavily influenced by three writers: Arnhart (1998; 2005), Copp (1995) and Kekes (1989, especially pp. 25-33; 1997: 358-362; 1998: 31-36, 48-67).

life so that she cannot pursue her self-chosen goals clearly frustrates her need to do so and is, other things equal, morally wrong. Finally, to needlessly sow the seeds of division in a society frustrates the social need for cooperation and stability in the management of human affairs and is morally wrong.

I make two clarifications here. First, the fulfilment of needs is ordinarily right, but it is not invariably right. And an action that frustrates a need is normally wrong, but it is not invariably so. For example, it is ordinarily wrong to kill another human being. However, it may be permissible to kill another person in self-defence if they launch an unprovoked attack.

Second, I say that rules whose being followed contributes to human need fulfilment *often*, rather than *always*, capture normative demands for the same reason. Rules whose being followed contributes to human need fulfilment prescribe actions that are ordinarily right. However, an action that is ordinarily right may be wrong in certain circumstances. So, rules that prescribe actions that contribute to human need fulfilment capture what normative domains usually demand.

5.2.2. *Objection: Bad Traditions*

Having argued for the first premise of the argument for the reliability claim, I consider an objection. Buchanan and Powell have recently argued that cultural evolution does not tend to produce social rules which are both optimal in respect of their adaptive function and morally valid.^{135,136} The evidence of cultural evolution's failing to produce social rules which are both optimal in

¹³⁵ Buchanan and Powell's discussion focuses specifically on morality, whereas I am interested in normativity more broadly. In what follows then, I discuss moral rules, moral demands, and moral traditions; but the arguments that Buchanan and Powell make and my responses to them generalise to other normative domains.

¹³⁶ Buchanan and Powell frequently refer to 'valid moral norms' throughout their book. (We can substitute 'rules' for 'norms' without loss, I think). However, nowhere do Buchanan and Powell define the term 'valid moral norms'. By valid moral norms they seem to mean simply whatever norms constitute genuine demands of morality. In other words, Buchanan and Powell seem to regard being morally valid as equivalent to what I describe as capturing normative, and specifically morality's, demands. For example, they correctly argue that the norm forbidding interracial marriage is invalid (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 242).

respect of their adaptive function and morally valid is, in Buchanan and Powell's view, the existence of what we might call 'bad traditions'. Bad traditions are traditions which permit or mandate morally wrongful behaviour. The examples of bad traditions that Buchanan and Powell discuss include the Indian caste system, duelling, foot-binding, and female genital mutilation (hereafter 'FGM') (2018: 240-259).^{137,138}

It is necessary to begin by setting out the background against which Buchanan and Powell make their arguments. They begin by stating that there are 'surplus moral constraints' (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 240). Surplus moral constraints are social rules which constrain people's liberty when the relevant constraint is not required by morality (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 240). Examples of surplus moral constraints include rules forbidding 'profit-seeking, lending money at interest, premarital sex, homosexual behaviour, interracial marriage, masturbation, refusal to die "for king and country", and virtually all instances of resistance to government authority' (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 241). Surplus moral constraints have internal and external elements. Externally, they limit people's liberty through official sanctions or social pressure. Internally, they limit people's freedom by imposing psychological costs such as intense shame and guilt (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 240-241).

Buchanan and Powell go on to argue that 'emancipation from surplus moral constraints is an important type of moral progress [...] (2018: 241). They argue further that emancipation involves 'de-moralising' the practices forbidden by surplus moral constraints (2018: 239-243). De-moralisation consists in coming to regard behaviour which was once seen as impermissible as permissible, or even

¹³⁷ Buchanan and Powell do not explicitly mention traditions. But the examples that they give of invalid social rules – such as foot-binding, FGM, and so on – which are sustained by cultural evolution are plausibly regarded as traditions.

¹³⁸ It is perhaps worth noting here that Buchanan and Powell appear to be appealing to liberal, cosmopolitan, universalist standards of morality in making their argument. Thus, one could worry that they are simply assuming a moral viewpoint that is different from or incompatible with conservatism. However, the bad traditions that Buchanan and Powell mention clearly are universally wrong, and every decent and plausible moral outlook ought to say that they are. Hence, while Buchanan and Powell assume moral standards that are in general different from conservatism's standards, their arguments should be taken seriously.

commendable. Buchanan and Powell regard the de-moralisation of the practices mentioned above as being an important form of moral progress.

In summary, then, Buchanan and Powell argue that there are surplus moral constraints: social rules which place external and internal limits on people's actions, which are not required by morality, and whose de-moralisation is a significant form of moral progress.^{139,140}

Buchanan and Powell's argument comes out against the background sketched above. In making the case that emancipation from surplus moral constraints is a form of moral progress, Buchanan and Powell consider why rules that are 'clearly irrational, destructive, or bigoted' persist in the first place (2018: 243). The answer to this question, they claim, is that cultural evolution produces and maintains surplus moral constraints. Sometimes a rule which does not represent a genuine moral duty can persist because its being followed is adaptive. Some social rules evolve and persist even though they are not adaptive, since rules that were once adaptive can be maintained even though they ceased to be adaptive. The conclusion that Buchanan and Powell draw from this is that cultural evolution will not tend to produce rules which are both morally valid and adaptive.

I shortly explore the ways in which, according to Buchanan and Powell, cultural evolution can produce and sustain invalid or maladaptive social rules. Let me note here, however, that their argument clearly threatens the reliability claim. I have staked the reliability of deference to the traditions of one's society on cultural evolution's generally producing traditions that capture morality's

¹³⁹ Buchanan and Powell are essentially engaged in the project of critiquing conservatism's appeal to tradition on the grounds that it is an ideology in the Marxian sense. They are by no means the first and most important writers to critique ideology. Aside from Marx himself, Geuss (1981), Hobsbawm (1983a; 1983b) and the ideological theorists of conservatism mentioned in Chapter One are prominent critics of ideology. I have chosen to engage with Buchanan and Powell's arguments since they represent one of the most recent variations on this theme and they engage with the same research on cultural evolution on which I drew in §5.2.1.

¹⁴⁰ Buchanan and Powell are not, of course, the first writers to object against conservatism that there are bad traditions. G. Allan (1986: 191-199), Franco (1990: 136-140), Graham (1986: 186-187), Grant (1992: 423-424), Herzog (1998: 21), Kekes (1997: 367; 1998: 40-41), Popper (1949: 122,132), Spitz (1976: 340) and Wood (1959: 661) have all discussed this objection.

demands (and normative demands more generally). If cultural evolution does not generally produce traditions that capture morality's demands (and normative demands more generally), then my argument obviously fails.

Buchanan and Powell posit several possible sources of surplus moral constraints. These include adaption, 'evolutionary mismatch', 'special interest adaptations', 'failures of collective action' and the 'dynamics of cultural transmission' (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 244-260). I consider an example of each of these before responding.

Buchanan and Powell argue that culture is shaped by evolutionary forces (2018: 244). Many cultural traits are adaptations. That is, many cultural traits evolve because they confer a survival advantage on those who bear them. Crucially, morally invalid social rules can be adaptations insofar as they enable the group whose rules they are to survive and reproduce (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 245). For example, cultural evolution will select for rules which characterise 'thick' moral relations with fellow group members and 'thin' moral relations with members of out-groups, where 'thin' moral relations involve attributing lesser moral status to out-group members or denying it altogether (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 244-245). Social rules associated with xenophobic, distrustful and 'reciprocity-contingent' attitudes toward out-group members are invalid but adaptive constraints of this kind (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 244-245).

Evolutionary mismatch is what happens when a rule that was adaptive in one environment is maintained in another environment in which it is 'unnecessary and discordant' (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 247-248). Evolutionary mismatch can take two forms. The first is when there is mismatch between some innate disposition which 'solidified' in the hunter-gatherer environment of the Pleistocene and the contemporary environment (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 248). The second is when there is a mismatch between evolved cultural traits and the contemporary environment.

The disposition to leadership-following is an example of the first. This disposition was essential to coordinating the actions of prehistoric human groups, which were too large for egalitarian decision-making to be practicable (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 249). These activities included ‘hunting, foraging, war-making and resolving internal disputes’ (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 249). Since it was once adaptive, people are disposed to ‘gravitate toward authoritarian, hawkish, masculine, and charismatic leaders in times of actual or perceived intergroup conflict’ (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 249). However, in the contemporary world of interstate conflict, which is characterised by escalation of threats until the brink of war and the potential for terrorism, such hyper-masculine traits can have deadly consequences. Furthermore, the powerful can consolidate their position by playing on the human tendency to gravitate toward strong leaders, principally by sowing the seeds of division and creating the impression that some sub-group threatening society at large (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 249). Thus, while leadership-following may have served some adaptive function in prehistoric times, it no longer does.

Special interest adaptations are rules which ‘benefit an elite subset of individuals or a privileged class within a society’ (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 254). Crucially, special interest adaptations ‘can persist despite the fact that they are deleterious for most individuals within the society and even for the society as a whole’ (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 254).

Examples of special interest adaptations include the Indian caste system (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 254) and ‘the profoundly incompetent, ineffective, and unjust criminal justice systems of many developing countries that have gained independence from colonial rule’ (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 254). The rules at the foundations of such criminal justice systems were designed to protect the colonial settlers and their property at the expense of the general populace. In many postcolonial societies such rules still exist and benefit a new class of elites who have risen to positions of power (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 254).

The basic idea of failures of collective action is that surplus moral constraints and/or moral rules which were adaptive in some previous environment persist in a new environment even when they do not bestow reproductive advantage on the group or any of its constituent members, and where this is due to the fact that abolishing such constraints may require solving difficult collective action problems (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 255-256). Examples include duelling, foot-binding, and FGM (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 256). Duelling may have arisen as a way of enabling mate-selection at a time when females put lots of value on courage in males (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 256). Foot-binding and FGM, which are both examples of 'female mutilation norms', were initially special interest adaptations which then spread to the general population (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 256).

Here is why abolishing such practices involves solving collective action problems. The first defectors from duelling faced social stigma even though many participants knew the practice to be immoral (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 256). Thus, shame ensured that the practice continued even when it bestowed no reproductive advantage and was contrary to the participants' moral convictions. Similarly, even if there was initially some comparative advantage in the mating market for women who had mutilated genitals or bound feet (given the culture which they belonged to), once the practice spread there was no longer any advantage (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 257). Nonetheless, the first women who defected from foot-binding or FGM faced dramatically reduced marital prospects, which was a problem for women from societies in which unmarried women had bleak economic prospects (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 257).

Removing the elements of shame from defection from these practices is difficult for several reasons. First, for those rules which are special interest adaptations, the elites who benefit from them have resources at their disposal to prevent challenges to those rules, such as coercion, financial or material incentives and ideology (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 257). Second, those who are disadvantaged by those rules tend to rationalise them by buying into ideologies which preserve the status quo (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 258). Third, abolishing such social rules

through revolution is not easy. Revolution imposes a significant cost on each individual participant and will only succeed if a large enough number of people agree to take part. The result is that the individually rational thing to do is to refuse involvement in revolution, but the collectively rational thing to do may be to participate (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 258).

Finally, consider the dynamics of cultural evolution itself. The very nature of cultural transmission can support surplus moral constraints and/or maladaptive rules. Recall, cultural transmission need not be vertical; it can be horizontal or oblique. Horizontal transmission is where one acquires some trait by learning from one's peers. Oblique transmission is where one acquires some trait by learning from non-parental adults. This means that cultural traits can spread more rapidly than biological ones and that cultural transmission is particularly prone to spreading maladaptive traits. Interestingly, Buchanan and Powell identify prestige bias and conformist bias, which I argued above are the mechanisms of cultural transmission, as the reason why cultural transmission is vulnerable to spreading maladaptive norms (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 258). This is because prestigious individuals can adopt rules which do not enhance survival chances such as in the case of people who refuse to vaccinate their children against communicable diseases (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 259).

I now respond to Buchanan and Powell's arguments. I do not deny the badness of the traditions they cite as evidence of cultural evolution's not tending to produce social rules that are morally valid and optimal in respect of their adaptive function. Indeed, I do not deny that there have clearly been bad traditions in many human civilisations. Chattel slavery in the United States and its ancestors, the British Colonies, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the racial segregation that followed slavery in the United States, FGM, Sati, Apartheid, Seppuku, foot-binding, sectarianism in the west of Scotland, and traditions which use shame to regulate people's private lives, such as those which sanction disapproval of homosexuality, transgender people, and so on, are clear examples of bad traditions.

However, the existence of bad traditions does not by itself show that cultural evolution does not generally produce traditions that capture morality's demands. Instead, what is required for the existence of bad traditions to show that deference to the traditions of one's society is generally unreliable is that there are more bad traditions than good traditions (traditions that capture morality's demands). The question, then, is whether cultural evolution's producing the bad traditions mentioned above is sufficient to show that it does not generally issue in good traditions.

I make three objections to Buchanan and Powell's arguments that are connected to this. First, Buchanan and Powell's arguments fall short of establishing their desired conclusion. Their arguments support the conclusion that cultural evolution *can* produce bad social rules. But they set out to demonstrate the stronger thesis that cultural evolution does not *tend* to produce social rules which are both optimal in respect of their adaptive function and morally valid. In other words, Buchanan seem to want to claim that cultural evolution not only *can* produce bad traditions but *mostly* does so. The problem is that the reasons they offer support only the weaker claim that cultural evolution can produce bad traditions, but they do not show that cultural evolution is generally unreliable in producing traditions that capture normative demands.

Second, Buchanan and Powell attribute an assumption to the conservatives that they do not accept, namely that cultural evolution tends to produce social rules which are optimal in respect of their adaptive function. We can see this from some of their remarks concerning what they take to be the motivations for conservatism. Buchanan and Powell attribute to conservatives the conclusion that 'if a moral norm has persisted over a long period of time, then this is in itself a good reason to believe it is beneficial' (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 262). They argue that conservatives draw this conclusion from two premises: first, that cultural evolution produces optimal social rules, or at least that it is a 'force that tends to produce group-beneficial' social rules (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 262), and second, that group-beneficial social rules are generally non-surplus (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 262).

Buchanan and Powell object that these premises are false and paint a ‘vulgarised’ picture of cultural evolution on which maladaptive norms will be eliminated relatively quickly and adaptive moral rules are morally valid (Buchanan & Powell 2018: 262). The conservative’s premises are false, according to Buchanan and Powell, since cultural evolution can produce social rules that are sustained because:

They confer a fitness advantage [...], because they are the result of the consistent misfire of adaptive propensities, because they are evolutionary hangovers, because they are entrenched and thus refractory to modification due to their contingent causal connections to other adaptive cultural norms, because they serve the special interests of powerful elites at the expense of other segments of the population, because abolishing them requires solving difficult collective action problems, and because cultural transmission is highly susceptible to the spread of maladaptive variants. (2018: 262-263)

Contrary to the conservative, then, Buchanan and Powell conclude that a rule’s ‘being maintained in a society does not [...] provide persuasive or even prima facie evidence’ of its serving ‘a salutary function’ (2018: 259).

However, there are problems with this argument. It is wrong to think that conservatives endorse the two assumptions which Buchanan and Powell attribute to them. I do not know of any conservatives who claim that cultural evolution produces optimal social rules. Conservatism is generally inimical to the search of optimal social rules. Indeed, one of its major contentions is that we ought to be content with good enough social rules and arrangements because aiming to achieve optimal social rules and arrangements is dangerous and hubristic given the limits of human knowledge.

Furthermore, conservative normative epistemology does not require the assumption that is attributed to it in the first place. Cultural evolution’s tending to produce morally valid traditions does not require that it produces traditions

which are optimal in respect of their adaptive functions. Indeed, adaptively optimal social rules can be morally invalid, as Buchanan and Powell are themselves at pains to point out. This is not to say that adaptively optimal traditions will always be morally invalid. The point is rather that a tradition may be morally valid without being adaptively optimal. I argue, of course, that adaptive rules tend to capture morality's demands because they fulfil human needs. But a rule's contributing to the fulfilment of human needs, and hence being morally valid, does not require that it is adaptively optimal; it is sufficient that it is adaptive. So, conservative normative epistemology does not require the assumption that cultural evolution tends to produce adaptively optimal traditions.

Third, I argue that assuming ethical universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of bad traditions. The ethical universalist believes that the demands of morality are the same for everyone and hence that what is true or false in the moral domain is the same for everyone (Baghramian 2004: 2, 122). There are two reasons why assuming ethical universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of bad traditions. First, there may be no societies whose traditions capture whatever the universalist takes the (universal) demands of morality to be. Second, even if the universalist thinks that there is a society whose traditions mostly capture what she thinks morality (universally) demands, there is sufficient diversity of traditions that there will be many other societies whose traditions do not. And even in a society whose traditions mostly capture morality's demands, there may have been many traditions in that society's history that do not.

For example, suppose that one assumes universalism. Suppose further that one assumes that most of the traditions of one's society capture morality's demands. Whichever society one belongs to, other societies have very different traditions and the traditions of one's own society may be very different now from what they were in the past. So, if one believes that most of the traditions of one's society capture morality's demands and that universalism is true, one will

conclude that the traditions of other societies and the traditions of one's own society in the past fail(ed) to capture morality's demands.

I do not have space to make a fully-fledged argument for relativism here. But it is worth noting that relativism is plausible given certain facts concerning the relevance of needs to the moral status of actions. As discussed, actions that promote the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily right. And, as also discussed earlier, some human needs are universal, while others are not. Moreover, there are often multiple ways of fulfilling a universal need. So, some actions are universally right (or wrong), and some actions are right (or wrong) for some people and not for others. Therefore, some moral beliefs about which actions are right are universally true (or false), while others are relatively true (or false).¹⁴¹

The bad traditions that Buchanan and Powell consider plausibly mandate actions that are universally wrong because these traditions frustrate universal needs. Consider FGM, which can cause long-term health problems such as recurrent infections, pain, haemorrhage, infertility and complications during childbirth (Ceschia 2015). Human beings universally need to be free from chronic pain and infection and for their bodily functions to work effectively. These needs are derivative on the basic need for health. FGM's having these consequences frustrates the fulfilment of that need; they are consequences that are harmful to the health of any woman who experiences them.

Similarly, the Indian caste system historically involved the division of society into four main classes. In descending order, they are the Brahmins (intellectuals and priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (the merchant and trader class), and Shudras (the service class). Beneath these four classes, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, were the Dalits, or so-called 'untouchables' (Vallabhaneni 2015). Dalits were systematically ostracised and virtually excluded from society, and while promoting and practicing untouchability is now illegal, discrimination

¹⁴¹ This is an implication of arguing that an action's moral status depends on its relationship to human need fulfilment that is acknowledged by Copp (1995) and Kekes (1989).

against Dalits still exists (Vallabhaneni 2015).¹⁴² All human beings need some degree of social acceptance and inclusion. This need is derivative on the need for self-respect, which requires social acceptance (Copp 1995: 173-174).

Finally, consider duelling, which patently risks jeopardising the universal need for freedom from serious injury and disability. These needs are in turn derivative on the universal needs for survival and health.

Therefore, the beliefs that FGM is wrong, that practicing untouchability is wrong, and that duelling is wrong are universally true – they are true for each person, regardless of her society's traditions.

However, there are plausibly traditions which mandate actions that are right for the people whose traditions they are. First, not all needs are universal. For example, in 'a modern, pluralistic, mobile and discursive society' whose inhabitants are the 'inheritors of a particular, individualist form of life' autonomy is essential for welfare (Gray 1993: 81). Autonomy here is understood as the ability to choose for oneself how to live, where choice requires a range of options to choose from, the absence of coercion, and the capacities and resources required to achieve a 'reasonable' measure of success in pursuing one's self-chosen goals (Gray 1993: 78, 81). Since most contemporary societies are like this, autonomy is a need in most societies (Gray 1993: 81). However, in some historical societies, such as those found 'in medieval Christendom' or 'Japan in the Edo period', autonomy may have been relatively unimportant for welfare (Gray 1993: 81). Thus, if such societies' traditions were restrictive of autonomy, they were not necessarily bad traditions relative to those societies since they did not contribute to the frustration of human needs.

¹⁴² While the picture I have painted here is basically accurate, it is also slightly simplified, for two main reasons. First, there are many subdivisions in each of the classes mentioned here and identifying an individual's place in the hierarchy is complicated by the ambiguity of the various terms which are used to describe one's social standing within the caste system. Second, the caste system has changed in various ways over time. See Vallabhaneni's (2015) paper for more detail on these points.

Second, there are also cases in which universal needs can be satisfied by radically different traditional arrangements. Consider, for example, divergent traditions concerning family structure, childrearing, and the division of labour. A traditional family in many cultures, especially in the West, consists in a married, opposite-sex couple and their biological children. The mother in such families is often primarily responsible for certain aspects of the tasks connected to the day-to-day running of the household such as cooking, cleaning, and washing and ironing clothes. The father in such families may be the primary breadwinner and his domestic work may be restricted to occasional tasks such as low-key repairs that are required for the maintenance of the house.

However, there are other cultures with very different family structures. In India, 'joint families', in which three or more generations live together in a single household, are relatively common and at one time were much more common than today (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012; 2017). A joint family might be comprised by a married, opposite-sex couple, their sons and unmarried daughters, and their sons' wives and children (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012; 2017).

There are also various forms of matrilineal family arrangements. Among the Na (or Mosuo) of Yunnan and Sichuan in China, a household consists of a matriarch and her direct descendants. A typical household is comprised of a grandmother and all her children and grandchildren. The matriarch has absolute authority over the running of the household. Women are primarily responsible for domestic chores, while men are in charge of hunting and fishing. A person lives within her mother's household for most, if not all, of her life. Na society does not have formalised marriage. Instead, the Na have so-called 'walking marriages'. Upon entering adulthood, a woman acquires her own private sleeping quarters within her matriarch's household, into which she may invite the man of her choice. If he accepts, he visits her after dark and returns to his matriarch's household before sunrise. Both men and women are free to change partners as often as they like. Therefore, if a couple decides to be together long-term, they do not live together, since, as discussed, they remain within

their matriarch's household for life, and children are raised within their mother's household by their extended family. There is often little, if any, involvement from a child's father in her upbringing, although fathers can play a role in raising their child if they wish (Mattison, Scelza & Blumenfield 2014: 592-595; Thomas et al. 2018).

Consider the Nagovisi of South Bougainville, near New Guinea. Nagovisi society is matrilineal, with lineage being traced and property passed down through the mother's line. Descent groups within Nagovisi society own land, rights to the use of which are determined by sex. Married men have no right to use their descent group's land. Instead, they must use the land belonging to the descent group into which they marry (Nash 1978: 119-120). Women therefore effectively control the use of land in Nagovisi society. One of the most important land uses in Nagovisi society is the cultivation of food gardens, which is not only necessary for survival, but has social significance as well. Various forms of currency, such as valuable shells, as well as paper and metal currency, are exclusively the property of women, with married men having no money of their own (Nash 1978: 120). Finally, there is no formalised marriage among the Nagovisi. A couple is married in Nagovisi society if they sleep in the same house, 'walk around together', and the man helps the woman to cultivate her garden (Nash 1981: 111). Nothing more than that is necessary for marriage in Nagovisi society; no formal ceremony, exchange of property or anything of that kind is required (Nash 1981).

However different each of these traditions is from the other, they are all plausibly effective means of satisfying the universal human needs for family relationships, regularity in childrearing arrangements, and the division of labour in the societies whose traditions they are. Thus, each of these traditions

prescribes what is right in respect of family arrangements in the societies in question.^{143,144}

Hence, the belief that autonomy-restricting traditions are bad may be true for members of those societies in which autonomy is plausibly a need, such as in the contemporary West, but may have been false for those in historical societies whose members did not need autonomy. The belief that extended families should live together as a joint family may be true for members of Indian society but false for other societies who do not have the joint family tradition. The belief that people should live within their matriarch's household and visit their partner only at night, rather than forming a so-called 'nuclear family', may be true for the Na but false for members of other societies, even those, such as Han Chinese societies, that exist in close proximity. Similar points apply to the other traditions discussed above.

Some clarifications are required. First, I want to bring out some features of the brand of relativism defended here which are perhaps already apparent but should be stated explicitly. The relativism that I defend here is a metaethical thesis. It states that the truth values of some (but not all) ethical beliefs vary across societies. An ethical belief that is true for the members of one society may be false for another. This is because the moral status of some actions varies across societies. An action that is right for the members of one society may not be right for the members of another. This, in turn, is due to the dependence of moral facts on facts which are themselves variable between societies, namely facts about human needs. We can call this form of relativism 'truth value relativism'.

There is an obvious difficulty that I want to address here. The relativist is characteristically willing to allow that when two people make seemingly incompatible judgements, both may be right and that neither is necessarily

¹⁴³ I cannot claim complete originality here: Braybrooke (1987: 56-58) gives matrilineal societies as an example of how different social arrangements can satisfy the same universal needs.

¹⁴⁴ This is not to say that there are no problematic aspects to these traditions. For example, in a traditional Western family the division of labour is arguably unfair to women.

making a mistake. This is sometimes thought to have the problematic implication that, according to relativists, a single proposition can be both true and false at the same time or that two incompatible propositions can both be true. This raises the worry that relativism must allow for true contradictions.¹⁴⁵

For example, my form of relativism seems to entail that when a member of Indian society judges that extended families ought to live together in the same household, and a member of British society judges that extended families should *not* live together in a single household, both judgements are true and neither agent is mistaken.

I concede that it would of course be bizarre to attribute two different absolute truth values to the same proposition. In other words, it would be odd to claim that *p* can be both true and false *simpliciter*. But the truth value relativist does not need to do this; she is operating with a relative, rather than absolute, notion of moral truth in the first place. Truth value relativists claim that moral propositions cannot be true or false *simpliciter*; they can only be true or false relative to some parameter, and where there is no ‘uniquely relevant’ parameter of that sort (Kölbel 2004: 297-300). These parameters might include an individual’s or community’s moral code, principles, or perspective (Kölbel 2004: 305-306). I argue, of course, that the relevant parameter is facts about human needs. Since the facts about human needs in relation to which moral propositions get their truth values vary across societies, the upshot is that the

¹⁴⁵ Boghossian (2011: 58-66) and Lyons (1976) endorse this position. Baghramian (2004: 125-143), Baghramian and Carter (2019), Gowans (2019), and Kölbel (2007; 2015) all provide helpful general discussions of this issue.

truth values of moral propositions vary with them. Importantly, ‘*p* is true for *X* but false for *Y*’, where *X* and *Y* are agents, is not a contradiction.^{146,147,148}

To return to the example just given, there is no contradiction in saying that ‘extended families ought to live together in a single household’ is true for members of Indian society but false for members of British society. Thus, the objection that truth value relativism asserts the existence of true contradictions gets its force from the very absolutist conception of truth that the relativist seeks to deny from the outset (c.f. Meiland 1977: 570-574).

Truth value relativism differs from various other kinds of relativism. Truth value relativism is not the descriptive claim that different cultures have different moral codes or that there is widespread moral disagreement, though those descriptive claims are indeed true. Truth value relativism is not the methodological thesis that we ought not to judge other societies when studying them, though I think that also is true and have tried to abide by it in discussing the traditions of other societies. Finally, truth value relativism is not itself the normative claim that the right thing to do is whatever is demanded by the traditions of one’s society, though that claim fits well with conservatism, and it is not the view that other societies’ traditions ought to be tolerated, though, as

¹⁴⁶ Kölbel (2004), MacFarlane (2005; 2014), Meiland (1977), and Wright (2006) defend relative truth value.

¹⁴⁷ There are other ways to deal with this sort of objection. The first is to propose that seemingly competing moral beliefs are in fact compatible. The familiar types of relativism, on which ‘*A* is wrong’ means ‘I disapprove of *A*’ or ‘My culture’s moral code forbids *A*’, fall into this category. To use Kölbel’s (2004: 297) term, they ‘locate’ the relativity of moral truth at the level of sentences rather than the level of propositions. ‘*A* is wrong’ can be true for Jones but false for Smith because that sentence expresses a different proposition when Jones says it than when Smith says it. But the truth values of the propositions expressed are absolute. Boghossian (2001: 58), Lyons (1976: 119-121), and Kölbel (2004: 303-305) reject this possibility because these forms of relativism have problems accounting for genuine moral disagreement. The second option is to bite the bullet and endorse dialetheism – the view that there are true contradictions. The third is to say that while seemingly competing moral judgements are indeed incompatible and hence cannot both be true, it isn’t necessarily a mistake to believe a falsehood, and hence in cases where agents have incompatible beliefs, neither is mistaken. See Kölbel (2007) for a discussion, though not an endorsement, of the second and third options.

¹⁴⁸ This is not to deny that the relative conception of truth must be argued for. Specifically, it is necessary to spell out exactly what it means for a proposition to be true for some people and not for others, and how traditional theories of truth, such as the correspondence, pragmatic, or epistemic theories, could accommodate the idea of relative truth value (Baghramian & Carter 2019; MacFarlane 2014: Ch.2). Baghramian (2004: Ch.4) and MacFarlane (2005; 2014: Ch.2 and Ch.5) provide useful general discussions of these issues.

we shall see below, this is a plausible implication of the truth value relativism that I endorse here.¹⁴⁹

Second, truth value relativism is arguably compatible with the thesis that morality's demands and moral truth are mind-independent. Let's call this thesis 'moral realism'. This might seem odd, since relativism is often associated with the thought that the truth values of moral propositions somehow depend on human psychological states of one kind or another. As discussed, the relativist argues that moral propositions are not true or false *simpliciter* but true or false only relative true to some parameter. The parameters to which moral propositions' truth values are supposed to be relative are usually thought to be subjective. The common candidates are the beliefs, approbative states, standards, or values of the individual or the norms of a culture or society. However, there is no necessity in this. The parameter to which moral propositions' truth values are relative could well be something mind-independent (Wreen 2018: 339-341).

Indeed, the parameter to which I have claimed moral propositions' truth values are relative is a species of mind-independent facts, namely facts about human needs. Whether an agent needs something or not does not depend on her attitudes since, as discussed, she needs that which is objectively beneficial for her, as determined by the facts of the human condition.

There is, however, a difficulty here. Whether truth value relativism is compatible with moral realism depends on whether the sort of theory of truth entailed by moral realism can accommodate relative truth. It is sometimes thought that moral realism requires a correspondence theory of truth, on which truth is correspondence to reality. However, it is not clear that a correspondence theory of truth can make room for relative truth. It has been argued (MacFarlane 2005: 312; MacFarlane 2014: 42; Wright 2006: 54) that correspondence to reality is a two-place relation between a proposition and the

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of how metaethical relativism relates to descriptive, methodological, and normative forms of relativism, see Baghramian (2004: Ch.9) and Gowans (2019).

world which does not allow that there is some third relatum, a parameter to which the truth value of the proposition in question is relative. One way to answer this is to suggest that ‘*p* corresponds to reality for *S*’ means something like ‘*p* corresponds to the world as it is for *S*’ (Baghramian 2004: 130). Provided that the world can be different in relevant ways for different subjects, then this idea about truth might make sense. Furthermore, the world can be different in the relevant respects for different subjects on my sort of view. There are different facts concerning human needs for different subjects in different societies.

Putting this together, what I say about the relativity of some moral truths is compatible with the thesis that the truth values of moral beliefs do not depend on anyone’s psychological states.^{150,151}

Third, since I argue that only some actions’ moral statuses are variable across societies, my view is a form of what we might call ‘restricted relativism’, as distinct from more common forms of relativism on which there are no universal rights or wrongs, a view we might label the ‘anything goes’ type of relativism.¹⁵²

Finally, my view is thoroughly in line with conservative thinking on relativism. Conservatives who have endorsed restricted relativism include Larry Arnhart (2005: 10, 46, 59), Michael Clark (1983: 44-46), F.J.C. Hearnshaw (1933: 33-34), John Kekes (1997: 358-362; 1998: 34-36), Michael Oakeshott (1991b), Anthony Quinton (1978: 59-64; 2007), Claes Ryn (1982: 308-311; 2007: 545-548), Seth Vannatta (2012), William Waldegrave (1978: 41-46) and Francis Wilson (1942: 37).

¹⁵⁰ Failure to see that there can be mind-independent but relative truths is the result of failure to separate the mind-independent/mind-dependent distinction from the universal/relative distinction (Wreen 2018: 338-339).

¹⁵¹ Kekes (1998: 60-62) make a similar distinction between the universality and mind-independence of moral truths.

¹⁵² I take the former term from Baghramian (2004: 142-143). She discusses another powerful motivation for restricting the scope of relativism: it is a way of avoiding the worry that truth value relativism is self-defeating. Unrestricted relativism claims that all propositions in some domain are only relatively true, yet that claim itself seems to be universal. By restricting the scope of relativism, the relativist can avoid this worry.

Some of these writers, namely Clark and Kekes, disavow relativism. But they reserve the term 'relativism' for the 'anything goes' view on which there are no universal moral truths, and they think of their position as a kind of pluralism. However, their view is substantially the same as mine.

Nonetheless, it remains true that if at least some moral truths are relative – and it is indeed plausible that they are – then it is likely that the number of bad traditions is probably overestimated.

There is another objection that can be solved by positing the kind of relativism that I advocate here. This objection says that conservatism has the implausible and chauvinistic implication that other cultures lack moral knowledge (or normative knowledge more broadly) which they acquire through deference to their traditions. Suppose one regards the traditions of one's own society as mostly capturing morality's demands. This assumption, if it is combined with the acknowledgement that other societies have different traditions, and the premise that moral truths are universal, entails that the traditions of other societies are mostly captured by false propositions, and hence deference thereto is unreliable.

Adopting the relativism that I propose here is the best way of blocking that type of conclusion. The claim that other cultures have different traditions cannot sensibly be rejected. The thesis that the traditions of one's society are mostly captured by true moral propositions cannot be rejected by a conservative, unless she wants to court moral scepticism. If the traditions of one's society are not mostly captured by true moral propositions, then deference to the traditions of one's society is not reliable, in which case the source of one's moral knowledge cannot be tradition. So, the conservative's best option for responding to the objection that her view has chauvinistic implications is to reject universalism. By endorsing the restricted relativism that I defend here, one can recognise the reliability of deference to the traditions of one's own society while also recognising the reliability of deference to the traditions of other societies.

I have already argued, of course, that there may be some societies most of whose traditions are bad and in which therefore deference to the traditions of one's society is unreliable. But I certainly would wish to leave open the possibility that deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in many other societies.

Restricted relativism allows the conservative to avoid either one of two extremes. The first is an intransigent universalism which would imply that members of other societies cannot acquire moral knowledge by deferring to their traditions. The second is a spiritless relativism that would recognise all moral beliefs as true (for the people who hold them) and which would refuse to condemn certain practices that are plausibly wrong regardless of the traditions of the society that practices them.

Restricted relativism provides a nice intermediary position. It is somewhat tolerant of disagreement about moral matters between societies whilst preserving the resources to condemn beliefs and practices which ought to be condemned (c.f. Kekes 1997: 358-362; 1998: 35-36, 61-65).

To illustrate this, let me return to the examples given above. Traditions such as FGM, foot-binding, the Indian caste system, and duelling can be condemned as universally wrong, since they frustrate universal human needs. By contrast, the divergent traditions concerning family structure and childrearing also discussed above are tolerable. They each plausibly contribute to the fulfilment of universal human needs, albeit in very different ways in very different societies.

I now briefly situate the less-than-complete form of relativism that I endorse here within the recent philosophical literature on relativism. I discuss how it compares to two other restricted relativisms that have been recently advocated. Both of these views have three features in common. First, each is naturalistic in the sense that it connects morality with human needs and/or human nature more broadly. Second, both are forms of restricted relativism. They claim that there is more than one valid moral code but there are limits on which moral

codes are valid. These views assert the existence of a range of valid moral codes within which a given society's moral code may or may not fall.¹⁵³

I discuss David Copp's view first. He argues that an action is right or wrong only relative to the justified moral code of some society. However, it is not the case that every society's moral code is justified. A moral code is justified for a society only if that society would be rationally required to select it. Copp argues that a society is rationally required to select a moral code that will enable it to meet its basic needs, and all societies have the same basic needs. This is why there are some moral codes that are invalid and why there is only limited variation in the content of valid moral codes. However, whether a moral code contributes to the fulfilment of a society's basic needs is not the only determinant of whether a society is rationally required to accept it. Instead, a society's non-moral values determine whether it is rationally required to select a given moral code, and these vary from society to society (Copp 1995; Gowans 2019).

Similarly, Wong (1995) has argued that there is more than one true moral code, but there are constraints on which moral codes can be true. The basis for this claim is his contention that morality is a device for the promotion of social cooperation and individual flourishing. Thus, moral codes contain rules regulating human beings' relations to each other and the character traits, ideals and ends that individuals ought to pursue (Wong 1995: 383). These functions of morality, combined with human nature, set the limits to what can count as a valid moral code on Wong's view. I briefly illustrate this before moving on. Wong argues that if a moral code is to successfully perform the function of promoting social cooperation, it must contain rules that demand reciprocity. This is because self-interestedness is a universal human tendency. There are limits to the extent to which people will do what is in others' interests without expecting something in return. So, helping behaviour would quickly die out in a population in which reciprocity was not common. However, since reciprocity reinforces helping behaviour by rewarding people for helping others, helpfulness will thrive

¹⁵³ C.f. Kölbel 2015.

in societies in which reciprocity is practiced (Wong 1995: 384). Similarly, human beings seek the satisfaction of physical needs, the attainment of social acceptance, variety in the challenges they face, and knowledge. Any moral code that will succeed in promoting human flourishing must identify these as goods and allow their attainment (Wong 1995: 383-384).

However, these universal constraints on what can count as a valid moral code leave room for considerable variation in societies' moral codes because the content of morality is underdetermined by these universal constraints. There are various systems of rules that can promote social cooperation and human flourishing within the limits set by human nature. Hence there is room for considerable variation in the content of moral codes across societies and cultures (Wong 1995: 386-387). For example, some societies' moral codes are individualist, while others are more collectivist. But this variation is fine according to Wong (1995: 387).¹⁵⁴

In this section, I have responded to Buchanan and Powell's objection that cultural evolution does not tend to produce traditions that are both optimal in respect of their adaptive function and morally valid. I made three replies to that objection. First, Buchanan and Powell's argument succeeds only in showing that cultural evolution can produce maladaptive or morally invalid traditions. But they do not show that cultural evolution does not generally produce adaptively optimal and morally valid traditions. Second, conservatives do not make and do not need to make the assumption that cultural evolution produces adaptively optimal traditions, though Buchanan and Powell do not acknowledge this. Third, the assumption of universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of bad traditions. However, endorsing a plausible, restricted form of relativism allows the conservative to regard other societies' traditions as mostly being captured by true propositions.

¹⁵⁴ Wong develops his version of relativism in his more recent (2006) book.

5.3. The Argument for the Second Premise of the Argument for the Reliability Claim

Let me now discuss the argument for the second premise of the argument for the reliability claim, which says that if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies.

The argument is as follows. If cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then there are societies most of whose traditions capture normative demands. And, if a society's traditions mostly capture normative demands, then deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in that society. Therefore, if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then there are societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

The second premise of this argument can be readily accepted. The argument for its first premise is as follows. If cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then most of any given society's traditions capture normative demands, unless, in that society, causal influences other than cultural evolution have shaped that society's traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands. And there are societies in which it is not the case that causal influences other than cultural evolution have shaped that society's traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands. Therefore, if cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands, then there are societies most of whose traditions capture normative demands.

The idea behind the first premise of the argument above is that if cultural evolution universally 'aims' at the production of traditions that capture normative demands, then it will usually 'succeed' in realising that aim, unless something intervenes to prevent it. There are, of course, causal influences on

what traditions a society has other than cultural evolution, namely various forms of deliberate human intervention. For example, as discussed in Chapter Three, some traditions are invented, such as the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge. Furthermore, some traditions are disbanded by political authorities. This is true of the Dinka tradition, also discussed in Chapter Three, of burying tribal leaders alive. So, it is not only cultural evolution that affects what the traditions of a society are. The invention or disbandment of traditions can prevent most of a society's traditions from capturing normative demands by adding traditions that fail to capture some normative demand and removing traditions that do (though the latter isn't, in my view, the case in respect of the Dinka tradition!). In other words, deliberate intervention can change the number of a society's traditions that capture normative demands in a way that tips the balance between most of them capturing normative demands and most of them failing to capture normative demands. However, it remains the case that unless that happens, a society's traditions will generally capture normative demands, provided cultural evolution generally produces traditions that capture normative demands in the first place.

In many ways, the crucial premise of the argument is that there are societies in which it is not the case that causal influences other than cultural evolution have shaped traditions such that they do not mostly capture normative demands. The idea here is that causal influences other than cultural evolution do not have *sufficient* influence over traditions to prevent most of them, in some societies, from capturing normative demands. This is because cultural evolution is the major causal influence on traditions, and this significantly diminishes the power of other causal influences.¹⁵⁵ Some of the arguments that have already been given above can be deployed here. We have already seen that traditions are the outputs of cultural evolution. And the causal influence of a process such as cultural evolution will not easily be overridden by other causal influences, since the latter relentlessly aims at producing survival-enhancing cultural items.

¹⁵⁵ Note that this does not presuppose either the first premise or the conclusion of the argument for the reliability claim: cultural evolution's being the major causal influence on traditions does not entail that cultural evolution reliably produces traditions that capture normative demands or that deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

Furthermore, the influence of other causal influences is easily exaggerated, as I argued in connection with invented traditions. So, cultural evolution is a good candidate for being the major causal influence on traditions.

5.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have defended the first premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, according to which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies. I argued that deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies because cultural evolution tends to produce traditions which are captured by true propositions. Hence, believing propositions which capture the traditions of one's society can lead to true belief in more cases than it will lead to false belief. Cultural evolution tends to issue in traditions which are captured by true normative propositions because it aims at the production of traditions which contribute to human need fulfilment, and since actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily right, traditions which contribute to human need fulfilment mandate actions that are ordinarily right. Furthermore, if a tradition mandates an action that is ordinarily right, it captures a normative demand.

Chapter Six: The Social Knowledge Argument's Anti-Luck Claim

In this chapter, I argue for the third premise of the Social Knowledge Argument, which states that some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. I dub this premise the 'anti-luck claim'. Specifically, I show that some beliefs which are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society, in societies where that process is reliable for normative belief formation, satisfy two anti-luck conditions on knowledge that have recently been proposed by epistemologists: sensitivity and safety. The sensitivity condition states that a subject's belief that p constitutes knowledge only if, if p were false, she would not believe that p . The safety condition states that a subject's belief constitutes knowledge only if, in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, it continues to be true. A sensitive belief that p is obviously one that satisfies the condition: if p were false, the subject would not believe that p . Likewise, a safe belief satisfies the condition: in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which the subject continues to form a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true.

In §6.1. I show that there are sensitive traditional beliefs that are formed in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. In §6.2. I show that there are safe traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable. In both of those sections, I begin by explaining the relevant anti-luck condition more fully using non-normative and non-traditional examples. I then explain the argument for there being traditional beliefs that satisfy that condition in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. Finally, I give examples of traditional beliefs that satisfy the anti-luck condition in question in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

6.1. Sensitive Traditional Beliefs

I begin therefore by discussing why there are sensitive traditional beliefs in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable. I first remind the reader of the concept of veritic luck, which I introduced in Chapter Four, since veritic luck is the kind of luck that precludes knowledge, and sensitivity and safety can be viewed as intended to capture the intuition that veritically lucky beliefs cannot be items of knowledge. I then explain the sensitivity condition on knowledge and illustrate it with some examples, before showing that there are sensitive traditional beliefs in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

An agent's belief is subject to veritic luck if and only if it is merely lucky that that belief is true (Pritchard 2005: 146; Pritchard 2014: 152-154). Here is an example to illustrate this. Jones comes down the stairs in the morning and looks at the grandfather clock. It reads 11 o'clock. She forms the belief that it is 11am and it is indeed 11am. However, Jones is unaware that the clock stopped twelve hours earlier, at 11pm. Jones's true belief is clearly lucky. Intuitively, since it is only by luck that her belief is true, Jones does not know that it is 11am (c.f. Pritchard 2005: 148-149).

Importantly, there are several other kinds of luck that do not preclude knowledge. First, its being lucky that the target proposition is true does not prevent a belief from constituting knowledge (Pritchard 2005: 134). Second, its being lucky that one has the capacity to acquire knowledge does not prevent one's beliefs from constituting knowledge (Pritchard 2005: 134; Pritchard 2014: 152-153). Third, its being lucky that the agent has the evidence which favours her belief does not prevent it from constituting knowledge (Pritchard 2005: 136; Pritchard 2014: 153).

Finally, epistemologists have proposed several anti-luck conditions on knowledge that are intended to capture the notion of veritic luck and the intuition that it

precludes knowledge.¹⁵⁶ Sensitivity and safety are two such conditions. I discuss these conditions because they, especially the latter, are among the most popular anti-luck conditions that have been proposed by epistemologists in recent years (Ichikawa & Steup 2018). They are also, I think, among the most *prima facie* plausible anti-luck conditions to have been recently proposed.

Note, however, that I take no stand on which of these anti-luck conditions is the correct one. The task of deciding exactly how veritic luck should be unpacked is, like setting the threshold for reliability or answering the generality problem, a task for the epistemologist. I simply seek to show that on two popular and plausible ways of understanding the claim that veritic luck precludes knowledge, there are non-luckily true traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable.

I now explain sensitivity more fully. The sensitivity condition states that a subject's belief constitutes knowledge only if it is sensitive. Sensitivity is a matter of one's belief tracking the truth. That is, a belief's being sensitive has to do with its being sufficiently responsive to truth, such that had the proposition believed by the agent been false, she would not have believed it. More formally, S 's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, if were p false, S would not believe that p (Pritchard 2014: 154).

Sensitivity is a modal notion: it concerns not only what the agent actually believes, but what she would have believed in various counterfactual situations.¹⁵⁷ Hence, we can cash out sensitivity in terms of possible worlds. An agent's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, in the nearest possible world in which not- p , she does not believe that p (Pritchard 2014: 154). We can call the nearest world in which it is not the case that p 'the nearest non- p world'.

¹⁵⁶ Ichikawa & Steup's (2018) article provides a helpful discussion of several of these.

¹⁵⁷ See Pritchard's (2005: 126-133) discussion for reasons why epistemic luck (and luck more generally) should be understood in modal terms, as opposed to probabilistic terms, or in terms of accidentality, or lack of control.

Possible worlds should be ordered by similarity to the actual world. The greater the similarity between a given possible world and the actual world, the nearer that possible world is to the actual world (Pritchard 2005: 128-133). The nearest non- p world is therefore the one which is the same as the actual world in every respect save that the target proposition is false (Pritchard 2014: 154).¹⁵⁸

We might add to this that we should consider only the possible worlds in which the agent forms a belief about the matter at hand in the same way as in the actual world (Pritchard 2005: 157-158; 2014: 154).

Putting all this together, the sensitivity condition states that S knows that p only if, in the nearest possible world in which not- p (the world which is most similar to the actual world except that p is false and S forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world), S does not believe that p .

As an illustration of this, return to the grandfather clock case discussed above. Jones's belief that it is 11am is sensitive if and only if, in the nearest possible world in which it is not 11am where she forms a belief about the time by looking at the grandfather clock, she does not believe that it is 11am. Jones's belief, of course, is insensitive. In the nearest possible world in which it is not 11am where she forms a belief about the time by looking at the grandfather clock, she still believes that it is 11am. For she is completely unaware that the clock broke down twelve hours earlier. If Jones had come down the stairs at 11.01am, she would still have believed that it is 11am. If she had come down the stairs significantly later, say at 12.30pm, she may still have believed that it is 11am.

The sensitivity condition captures the veritic luckiness of Jones's belief. 'It is merely lucky that Jones's belief is true' is naturally interpreted as meaning that given how Jones formed her belief, if it were false, she would still have held it. And, of course, since Jones would still have believed that it is 11am even if that

¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Pritchard does not say in which respects nearby worlds are similar, and far-off worlds are dissimilar, to the actual world.

were not the case, her belief is insensitive. Thus, assuming the sensitivity condition, Jones does not know that it is 11am.

Now consider a case in which the agent's belief is sensitive. Jones comes down the stairs in the morning and looks at the clock, which reads 11 o'clock. She forms the belief that it is 11am, and her belief is true. In this case, however, the clock is working perfectly well, and there are no other conditions that would prevent Jones from acquiring a true belief about the time by looking at it. If Jones had come down the stairs at a different time and read the clock, she would not have formed the belief that it is 11am. Instead, she would have formed a true belief about the time, whatever time it happened to be. In the nearest world in which it is not 11am where she forms a belief about the time by consulting the clock, she does not believe that it is 11am. So, Jones's belief is sensitive. Assuming the sensitivity condition and plugging it into the analysis of knowledge that I set out in Chapter Four, if Jones's belief is also the output of a reliable belief formation process for beliefs about the time, then Jones knows that it is 11am.

Having explained the sensitivity condition, I set out the argument for there being sensitive traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable for normative belief formation. I first give some examples of true beliefs that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. As in the previous chapter, I will give examples of moral beliefs, though I think these arguments plausibly generalise to other normative domains. I then argue that these beliefs are sensitive because the nearest world in which the target proposition is false is far-off, and the agent would not continue to believe the target proposition in such a far-off world. Hence, in the nearest non- p world in which the agent forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, she does not believe that p .

I make two clarifications before presenting the argument. First, the conservative does not need to show that there are no insensitive traditional beliefs, just as she does not need to show that deference to the traditions of one's society is

perfectly reliable. Any reasonable normative epistemology recognises that sometimes our normative beliefs fail to constitute knowledge on account of being lucky.

Second, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is not possible to demonstrate definitively ‘from the armchair’ whether there are any societies in which deference to the traditions of one’s society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. It is also impossible to prove from the armchair *in which* societies deference to the traditions of one’s society is reliable, if indeed there are such societies. Therefore, like the reliability claim, the anti-luck claim cannot be conclusively proved as part of a philosophical study. However, the examples that I give of non-lucky true traditional beliefs are formed in societies deference to whose traditions is plausibly reliable.

I now present some examples of true traditional beliefs. Traditional beliefs, remember, are those that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one’s society. Suppose that an agent forms the belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics and she is an inhabitant of the UK who formed her belief by deferring to the UK’s constitutional traditions, which forbid the Sovereign’s involvement in politics.¹⁵⁹

Second, there is a tradition in many Western societies of tolerating, within certain limits, a range of religions. This tradition originated in the religious controversies that came about in the aftermath of the Reformation (Forst 2017). Suppose that an inhabitant of one such European society forms the belief that she ought to tolerate those who practice a different religion.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ For a discussion of the traditions governing the Monarch’s constitutional role, see Galligan’s (2015) chapter. He argues that in the constitutions of states in which the Queen is the Head of State, absolute executive power officially resides with her. However, real executive power resides with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, save for a few ‘reserve powers’, which can only be used in exceptional circumstances, such as the right to refuse a Prime Minister’s advice to dissolve Parliament if he or she loses the confidence of the house and refuses to resign (2015: 51-56).

¹⁶⁰ This is not to deny, of course, that toleration exists in non-Western societies. However, religious toleration as it exists in Western societies is a useful and familiar example of a tradition. Again, see Forst 2019.

Third, consider the Han Chinese tradition that mandates taking care of sick or frail elders rather than sending them into professional care (Zhan, Feng & Luo 2008: 544-549). A Chinese person might defer to this tradition and form the belief that she should take care of her elderly relatives.

Fourth, consider traditional beliefs connected with the traditions discussed in Chapter Five. A member of the Na people may believe, out of deference to Na tradition, that a household ought to consist of a matriarch and her descendants. A member of Nagovisi society might come to believe that a man should have no money of his own by deferring to Nagovisi traditions.

These traditional beliefs are all plausibly true. To be sure, I do not argue that they are all universally true. In line with the relativistic stance of the previous chapter, I contend that at least some of these traditional beliefs are true only for the members of the society whose traditional beliefs they are. The Na and Nagovisi beliefs are true for the Na and Nagovisi, respectively, but not for other societies, as previously discussed. The same is plausibly true of the Han Chinese tradition that mandates taking care of one's elderly relatives.¹⁶¹

The belief that religious differences ought to be tolerated is plausibly true for all societies in which there is significant religious diversity. This is because in any society in which religious diversity is combined with intolerance of religious disagreement destructive conflict usually breaks out. This sort of conflict, wherever it occurs, frustrates human social needs for peaceful coexistence, cooperation, justice in our dealings with others, and regularity in the conduct of human affairs. Thus, religious toleration is plausibly right for many societies, even if it is not universally right. Hence, for any such societies, it is true that religious differences ought to be tolerated.

¹⁶¹ This is not to say that non-Han people are not obliged to secure the provision of care for their elderly relatives. The point is rather that it might be thought shameful in Han society to send one's parents into professional care, rather than caring for them personally, and that belief may be true for Han people but not for non-Han people.

Similarly, the tradition that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics is plausibly right for any society in which there is a monarch and in which a measure of democracy is appropriate given its inhabitants' needs. For example, consider those societies discussed in the previous chapter in which many people have a psychological need for autonomy. Autonomy plausibly requires that one not be subject to the power of rulers that one has not had some role in selecting. And the Monarch's interference in politics subjects her subjects to her power when they obviously have not had a role in selecting her as Monarch. Thus, the Monarch's interfering in politics is incompatible with autonomy.

In any case, as will shortly become apparent, the sensitivity or safety of a traditional belief does not depend on whether it is universally true or true only for the members of some societies. The important point is that they are plausibly true, whether universally or relatively.

I also ask the reader to accept, again in line with the arguments of Chapter Five, that these beliefs are formed in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. So, let us take the examples above as cases of true traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation.

Why, then, should we think that there are sensitive traditional beliefs? Recall, a subject's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, in the nearest non- p world in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, she does not believe that p (Pritchard 2014: 154).

I argue that there are traditional beliefs that p in respect of which, in the nearest non- p world in which the agent continues to form a normative belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, she does not believe that p . The reason for this is that, for some traditional beliefs, the nearest non- p world is far-removed from the actual world. And, crucially, in such far-off worlds, the agent does not continue to believe that p when forming a normative belief by

deferring to the traditions of her society. So, for some normative beliefs that p formed through deference to the traditions of one's society, in the nearest non- p world in which the agent continues to form a normative belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, she does not believe that p . Hence, her belief is sensitive.

More fully, the argument goes like this. For some true traditional beliefs that p , the nearest possible world in which not- p is a far-off possible world. And, for those true traditional beliefs, the agent will not continue to believe that p in far-off possible worlds. Therefore, for some true traditional beliefs that p , in the nearest possible world in which not- p , the agent does not continue to believe that p . Crucially, if, for any true traditional belief that p , in the nearest possible world in which not- p , the agent does not continue to believe that p , then the agent's belief that p is sensitive. Hence, for some true traditional beliefs that p , the agent's belief is sensitive.

We can take for granted the premise that, for any true traditional belief that p , that belief is sensitive if, in the nearest possible world in which not- p , the agent does not continue to believe that p . It is simply an application of the sensitivity condition to traditional beliefs.

The reason for endorsing the first premise – that for some true traditional beliefs that p , the nearest possible world in which not- p is a far-off possible world – has to do with the dependence of normative facts on non-normative facts. Since normative facts depend on non-normative facts, for a given normative fact to be different, the non-normative facts on which it depends would also have to be different. However, it is often the case that the world in which the relevant non-normative facts are different is very dissimilar to the actual world and is therefore a far-off possible world.

Here is why that is. As discussed in Chapter Five, actions that frustrate the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily wrong. Crucially, human needs are determined by physical, psychological, and social facts about human beings. So,

for any actual-world wrong, X , which is wrong in virtue of frustrating human needs, the nearest possible world in which X is not wrong is the world most similar to the actual world in which the underlying physical, psychological, and social facts do not obtain. However, those underlying physical, psychological, and social facts not obtaining would make us very different beings from the sort of beings that we are now. In fact, we simply might not be human beings, as currently understood, if our biological, psychological, and social natures were different. Such a world is, I suggest, a far-off world indeed.

The most crucial premise is that for some true traditional beliefs that p , the agent will not continue to believe that p in far-off possible worlds. The argument for this premise is that in far-off-possible worlds, the subject's society has different traditions. The reason why the subject's society has different traditions in far-off possible worlds is related to the reasons why, for some true traditional beliefs that p , the nearest possible world in which not- p is far-off, namely the relationship between normative facts and facts about human needs.

Cultural evolution aims at the production of traditions whose being followed satisfies human needs. And, in far-off possible worlds, human needs are significantly different than they are in the actual world. Hence, in far-off possible worlds, cultural evolution produces significantly different traditions from those it produces in the actual world. If the traditions that cultural evolution produces in far-off possible worlds are significantly different from those that it produces in the actual world, then, in far-off possible worlds, there are very different traditions in any given subject's society than those that populate her society in the actual world. Hence, in far-off possible worlds, there are very different traditions in any given subject's society than those that populate her society in the actual world. And, crucially, a subject who is disposed to defer to her society's traditions will form her beliefs in accordance with the traditions of this very different, counterfactual society.

I return to the examples given above as an illustration of this. First, consider the true traditional belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics. The

nearest world in which it is not the case that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics, at least for members of British society and other similar societies, is a far-off world. This is because the nearest world in which human needs are sufficiently different in such societies for it not to be the case that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics in those societies is a far-off world. However, the agent plausibly would not continue to believe that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics in the nearest world in which the target proposition is false. The reason for this is that in such a far-off world, there is plausibly no tradition in British society mandating that the Monarch does not interfere in politics. Instead, there may be some other tradition, such as one permitting monarchical interference in certain circumstances. This is because in such far-off possible worlds, the relevant needs may be such that they are not frustrated by monarchical interference. (This is why it is false in far-off worlds that the Monarch should not interfere in politics). And cultural evolution aims at the production of traditions which satisfy human needs. So, in far-off worlds, there is plausibly no tradition in British society mandating that the Monarch does not interfere in politics.

Indeed, there may not be any traditions concerning monarchical interference in politics in far-off worlds. Traditions concerning monarchical interference in politics only pertain to societies in which the relationship between the Monarch and the other branches of government needs to be worked out. In far-off worlds in which British society has an absolute monarch, there will be no such traditions. There will also obviously be no such traditions in a far-off world in which British society which has no monarch. Hence, the agent could not come to believe that the Monarch should not interfere in politics by deferring to the traditions of her society.

Second, consider again the tradition of religious toleration. For any society whose traditions mandate religious toleration, and in which religious toleration is right for that society, the nearest possible world in which it is false that religious disagreement ought to be tolerated is far-off. For it to be false for a given society that religious disagreement ought to be tolerated would require

that religious intolerance does not frustrate social needs in that society. Furthermore, social needs are universal and religious intolerance will plausibly frustrate them in societies that are characterised by religious diversity, since religious intolerance can cause deeply disruptive conflict in such societies. So, in all societies that are characterised by religious disagreement, religious disagreement ought to be tolerated. Therefore, for any society whose traditions mandate religious tolerance, the nearest possible world in which it is not the case that religious disagreement ought to be tolerated is one in which either that society does not continue to be characterised by religious disagreement or in which human needs are such that religious conflict does not frustrate social needs. Such worlds are far-off. Importantly, in these far-off worlds there is plausibly no tradition mandating religious tolerance (and forbidding intolerance), since facts about human needs are sufficiently different for cultural evolution to aim at the production of different traditions. If there are no traditions mandating religious tolerance in a society, then the agent does not come to believe that religious tolerance is obligatory by deferring to the traditions of her society.

Third, let me return to the Han Chinese tradition concerning taking care of one's elderly relatives. The nearest world in which it is false for Han Chinese people that one ought to take care of one's elderly relatives is far-off. In societies in which elderly relatives depend on their younger family members, failing to take care of one's elders means that their needs are frustrated. It could also mean the frustration of one's own needs, given that in societies that emphasise reverence for elders, failure to discharge one's duty to care for them can elicit strong disapproval. If Han Chinese society were to lack these features, it would be a very different society than it is in the actual world. As in the other cases, it is likely that Han Chinese society would have different traditions in these far-off worlds. So, in the nearest world in which it is false for a Han Chinese agent that one ought to take care of one's elderly relatives, she would not come to believe that she ought to take care of her elderly relatives by deferring to the traditions of her society.

Similar points apply to the Na and Nagovisi traditions concerning family structure. These traditions contribute to the fulfilment of human needs in the societies whose traditions they are. For this to be otherwise would require that either these traditions cease to fulfil the needs that they fulfil in the actual world or that the members of Na and Nagovisi societies no longer have these needs. Any world in which either of those facts obtain is far-off and would probably contain different traditions. So, in the nearest world in which Na and Nagovisi beliefs about domestic life are false, agents in these societies would not believe as they do in the actual world by deferring to the traditions of their society.

In this section, then, we have seen that an agent's belief that p is sensitive if and only if, if p were false, she would not believe that p . Moreover, we have seen that some traditional beliefs satisfy this condition. This is because there are traditional beliefs which are such that the nearest world in which the target proposition is false is a far-off world. And, in such a far-off world, the traditions of the agent's society are different. So, the agent would not continue to believe that p by deferring to the traditions of her society in the nearest non- p world.

6.2. Safe Traditional Beliefs

I now defend the thesis that there are safe traditional beliefs in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. In §6.2.1. I give the argument for that thesis. In §6.2.2. I discuss how the safety of a subject's traditional beliefs can be affected by whether her society is mostly populated with good or bad traditions. In §6.2.3 I refute the objection that my view implies the epistemic badness of multiculturalism because multiculturalism threatens the safety of traditional beliefs.

6.2.1. The Argument for Safe Traditional Beliefs

Let me present then the argument for there being safe traditional beliefs in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable for

normative belief formation. As in the previous section, I first explain the safety condition before presenting the argument.

The safety condition states that a subject's belief constitutes knowledge only if it is safe. An agent's belief is safe when it is a true belief 'which could not easily have been false' (Pritchard 2014: 156). In other words, a subject's belief is safe provided that, given how it was formed, it would still be true in some alternative possible scenarios. More formally, *S*'s belief that *p* is safe if and only if, in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which *S* continues to form a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, *S*'s belief continues to be true (Pritchard 2005: 162-173; Pritchard 2014: 156).

As one can see from the mention of possible worlds, like sensitivity, safety is a modal notion: it concerns not only what the agent actually believes, but what she believes in various counterfactual scenarios. There are two more similarities with sensitivity. First, the closeness or nearness of possible worlds is ranked in terms of similarity to the actual world, with nearby worlds being those which are similar to the actual world and far-off worlds being those which are dissimilar to the actual world. Second, as is evident from how safety is formulated above, the only nearby worlds which are relevant to the safety of a belief are those in which the agent forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world.

Putting all this together, the safety condition says that *S* knows that *p* only if, in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which *S* continues to form a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, *S*'s belief continues to be true.

Note an important feature of safety: in evaluating the safety of a belief, it is not only the truth value of the proposition which the subject actually believes which is at issue, but the truth values of propositions which she might have believed given how she formed her actual-world belief. In other words, in evaluating the safety of a belief, we ought not to restrict our attention to nearby possible worlds in which the agent comes to believe the exact same proposition which she believes in the actual world. Instead, we ought to consider all nearby

possible worlds in which the agent forms a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, including those worlds in which she forms a belief whose object is a different proposition than the one that is the object of her actual-world belief (Pritchard 2014: 157).

The reason for this proviso is that otherwise the safety condition would wrongly classify all beliefs in necessarily true propositions as non-lucky. Consider the following example. Smith comes to believe that $2+2=4$ by flipping a coin. She had decided that if the coin were to land on heads, she would believe that $2+2=4$ and if it were to land on tails, she would have believed that $2+2=5$. Smith's belief is clearly unsafe, since she could easily have come to believe the falsehood that $2+2=5$ by forming her belief in that way. If an account of safety is to capture cases like this, it must be formulated in such a way as to make the safety of one's beliefs depend not only on the truth values in nearby possible worlds of the propositions that are the objects of one's actual-world beliefs, but on the truth values of other propositions which one might have believed as well (Pritchard 2014: 157-158).

From this discussion, it should be clear that there are two ways in which a belief can be unsafe. First, a subject's belief that p is unsafe if there is a wide class of close possible worlds in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world and continues to believe that p , but p is false. Second, a subject's belief that p is unsafe if there is a wide class of close possible worlds in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world but comes to believe some false, non- p alternative, q .

As an example of the first kind of unsafety, return once more to the grandfather clock case. In this case, Jones's belief that it is 11am is safe if and only if it is 11am and in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which she forms a belief about the time by looking at the grandfather clock, her belief continues to be true. Jones's belief, of course, is unsafe. In many close possible worlds in which she continues to believe that it is 11am by looking at the grandfather clock, the proposition that it is 11am is false. For example, if Jones had come

down the stairs that 11.01am or 12.30pm, she would have continued to believe that it is 11am even though the proposition that it is 11am would be false (c.f. Pritchard 2005: 148).

As an example of the second kind of unsafety, consider again the case in which Smith forms the belief that $2+2=4$ by flipping a coin. Given how she forms her belief, there are many close possible worlds in which Smith comes to believe a false alternative, that $2+2=5$, to her actual-world, true belief that $2+2=4$. Smith's belief is clearly unsafe in the second sense (c.f. Pritchard 2014: 157-158).

So, the safety of an agent's (actual-world) belief that p requires two things. The first is that there are few, if any, close worlds in which she forms a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, continues to believe that p , and p false. The second is that there are few, if any, close worlds in which she forms a belief on the same basis as in the actual world and comes to believe some false, non- p alternative, q .

Safety clearly captures the sense in which Jones's and Smith's beliefs are veritically lucky. For both agents, given how she formed her belief, it could easily have been false: there are many close possible worlds in which she comes to believe a falsehood by forming her belief in that way. Moreover, 'it is merely lucky that Jones's belief is true' is perhaps most naturally interpreted as meaning that given how Jones formed her belief, she could easily have come to believe something false. This, of course, is the essence of the safety condition. Thus, assuming the safety condition, neither Jones's nor Smith's belief constitutes knowledge.

Now consider a case in which the agent's belief is safe. Jones comes down the stairs in the morning and looks at the clock, which reads 11 o'clock. She forms the belief that it is 11am. It is indeed 11am, the clock is working perfectly well, and there are no other conditions that would prevent Jones from acquiring a true belief about the time by looking at the clock. If Jones had come down the

stairs at a different time and read the clock, she would not have formed the belief that it is 11am. Instead, she would have formed a true belief about the time, whatever time it happened to be. In all close worlds in which it is not 11am where Jones forms a belief about the time by looking at the clock, she does not continue to believe that it is 11am. Hence, Jones's belief is safe. Assuming the safety condition and plugging it into the analysis of knowledge that I endorsed in Chapter Four, if Jones's belief is also the output of a reliable belief formation process for beliefs about the time, then she knows that it is 11am.

I now argue that there are safe traditional beliefs that are formed in societies where deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. Recall, an agent's actual-world belief that p is safe provided that there are few, if any, close worlds in which she forms a belief on the same basis as in the actual world, continues to believe that p , and p false, and that there are few, if any, close worlds in which she forms a belief on the same basis as in the actual world and comes to believe some false, non- p alternative, q .

I argue that there are true traditional beliefs that p in respect of which, in every close possible world where the agent comes to believe that p by deferring to the traditions of her society, p continues to be true; she will not continue to believe that p in close non- p worlds in which she forms a normative belief by deferring to her society's traditions. I also seek to show that there are true traditional beliefs that p in respect of which there is no close world in which the agent forms a normative belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe some false, non- p alternative.

All this being said, the conservative does not need to show that there are no unsafe true traditional beliefs, any more than she needs to show that there are no insensitive true traditional beliefs or that deference to the traditions of one's society will never lead to a false belief. As discussed in connection with the sensitivity condition, any reasonable normative epistemology will allow that there are some cases of lucky true belief.

In order to argue for the first claim, I contend that the propositional objects of some traditional beliefs are true not only in the actual world, but in every close possible world. And, somewhat obviously, if a proposition is true in every close possible world, then in every close possible world in which the agent forms a belief in that proposition in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true. Thus, for some true traditional beliefs that p , in every nearby possible world in which the agent continues to believe that p by deferring to the traditions of her society, her belief continues to be true.

More fully, the argument is as follows. For some true traditional beliefs that p , the nearest non- p world is far-off, as I argued in connection with the sensitivity condition. Importantly, if, for some true traditional belief that p , the nearest non- p world is far-off, then p is true in every close possible world. Thus, for some true traditional beliefs that p , p is true in every close possible world. Moreover, if, for some true traditional belief that p , p is true in every close possible world, then in every close possible world in which an agent continues to form the belief that p in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true. Therefore, for some true traditional beliefs that p , in every close possible world in which the agent continues to form the belief that p in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true.

I have already argued for the first premise in connection with the sensitivity condition, so I do not defend it any further here. The second premise – that if, for some true traditional belief that p , the nearest non- p world is far-off, then p is true in every close possible world – is also quite obviously true. If the nearest world in which some proposition is false (for an agent) is far away, then there is no close world in which it is false (for that agent), and this entails that it is true in every close world, at least assuming that a proposition can only be either true or false (for the agent who believes it).¹⁶² The third premise of the argument can also be taken as read. An agent's belief that p must be true in every close

¹⁶² The reason for the qualifications in brackets is, of course, that some propositions, I argue, have relative truth values. However, this does not stop it being the case that a proposition is either true or false for an agent, and if there is no close world in which it is false for her, it is therefore true for her in every close world.

possible world in which she forms her belief in the same manner as in the actual world if it is true in *every* close world ‘full stop’, including those in which she forms her belief in a different way than in the actual world.

As with the argument for sensitive traditional beliefs, I illustrate these points by returning to the examples given above. Consider once more the British political tradition that forbids monarchical interference in politics. We have seen in connection with sensitivity that a British agent’s belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics is true in every close possible world. If the agent’s traditional belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics is true in every close possible world, then in every close possible world in which she comes to believe that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics by deferring to the traditions of her society, her belief is true and hence is safe. The same goes for the true traditional European belief that it is obligatory to tolerate religious disagreement, the Han Chinese traditional belief that one ought to look after one’s elders, the Na traditional belief that a household should consist in a matriarch and her direct descendants, and the Nagovisi traditional belief that a man ought not to have his own money.

What is the argument for the claim that there are traditional beliefs that are safe in the second sense? Recall, the claim is that for some true traditional beliefs that p , there is no close world in which the agent forms a normative belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe some false, non- p alternative, q . The basic line of thought here is that given the traditions which exist in an agent’s society, when she forms a normative belief by deferring to those traditions, she could not easily have come to believe another proposition and hence, when her belief is true, she could not have come to believe a falsehood.

More fully, the argument is as follows. There are true traditional beliefs that p in respect of which the agent continues to believe that p in all close possible worlds where she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world – by deferring to the traditions of her society. And, of course, if an agent’s belief

that p is such that she continues to believe that p in all close possible worlds where she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, then there is no close possible world in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world and comes to believe some alternative falsehood, q . Therefore, there are true traditional beliefs that p in respect of which there is no close possible world in which the agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe an alternative, false proposition, q .

I have already given the rationale for the first premise of this argument in connection with the argument for there being sensitive traditional beliefs and for there being traditional beliefs that are safe in the first sense. I claimed there that the nearest world in which the traditions of a society are different is far-off, at least in respect of many societies. And, obviously, a far-off possible world is not a close world. However, whatever the content of an agent's actual-world traditional belief, her forming an alternative belief in nearby possible worlds requires that the traditions of her society in nearby possible worlds are different from the traditions of her society in the actual world. So, in respect of some traditional beliefs, there is no nearby world in which the traditions of the agent's society are sufficiently different for her to form a different belief than the one she forms in the actual world.

Furthermore, the second premise is quite obviously true. A requirement of an agent's coming to believe a *false* alternative, in nearby possible worlds, to the proposition that she believes in the actual world, is that she comes to believe *some* alternative proposition in the first place. In other words, if the agent believes the same proposition in all close possible worlds as in the actual world, then she clearly does not believe, in any close possible world, any alternative proposition, true or otherwise, to the one that is the content of her actual-world belief.

As an illustration of this, I return once more to the examples that I used above. The nearest world in which British society does not have a tradition that forbids the Monarch from interfering in politics is far-off. If the nearest world in which

Britain does not have a tradition that forbids the Monarch from interfering in politics is far-off, then the nearest world in which an agent defers to the traditions of British society concerning the Monarch's role and comes to hold any belief other than the true belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics is far-off. And, of course, no far-off world is nearby. Thus, there is no nearby world in which an agent defers to the traditions of British society on the question of the Monarch's role in politics and forms any belief other than the true belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics. Furthermore, if there is no close world in which the agent forms any belief other than the belief that the Monarch ought not to interfere in politics, then there is no nearby world in which she comes to believe an alternative, false proposition to the one that is the object of her actual-world belief. Therefore, there is no nearby world in which an agent defers to the traditions of British society and comes to believe a different, false proposition.

Similarly, the nearest world in which it is false — for societies in which religious disagreement is prevalent — that religious differences ought to be tolerated is far-off. And, if the nearest world in which a member of such a society holds a belief other than the true belief that one ought to tolerate religious disagreement is far-off, then there is no close possible world in which she comes to believe a different, false proposition to the one that is the object of her actual-world belief by deferring to the traditions of her society. So, for the true traditional belief that religious differences ought to be tolerated, there is no close possible world in which the agent comes to believe a different, false proposition to the one that is the object of her actual-world belief by deferring to the traditions of her society.

Finally, the nearest world in which it is false for Han Chinese people that one ought to take care of one's elderly relatives is a far-off world. And, since the nearest world in which it is false for Han Chinese people that one ought to look after one's elderly relatives is far-off, there is no close world in which a member of Han Chinese society defers to the traditions of her society on the question of

who ought to care for elders and comes to believe a different and false proposition than the one that is the object of her actual-world belief.

In this section, I have shown that some traditional beliefs are safe. A subject's belief that p is safe just in case, in nearly all (if not all) close possible worlds in which she forms a belief in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true, whether she continues to believe that p or comes to believe some non- p alternative (Pritchard 2005: 163). This requires that in nearly all (if not all) close worlds where the agent continues to believe that p , p continues to be true and that there are few, if any, close worlds in which she comes to believe some false, non- p alternative, q . I argued that in respect of some traditional beliefs that p , p is true in all close possible worlds. Hence, for some traditional beliefs, there is no close world in which the agent continues to believe that p , and p is false. I also argued that in respect of some traditional beliefs that p , p is true, and the subject continues to believe that p in all close worlds. Thus, for some traditional beliefs, there is no close world in which the agent comes to believe that q , where q is a false proposition other than p .

6.2.2. Safe Traditional Beliefs and Bad Traditions

I make two clarifications here. The first concerns what I called 'bad traditions' in the previous chapter. There are societies in which the most widespread tradition concerning some matter is a bad tradition. The existence of such bad traditions in a society plausibly renders some true traditional beliefs lucky. Specifically, it makes them unsafe in the second sense.

Let me give an example to illustrate this. Take the tradition of chattel slavery as it existed in the United States and its ancestors, the British Colonies, in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was clearly a very bad tradition both morally and epistemically.

Slavery was morally bad because it involved subjecting slaves to heinous suffering and injustice. Slaves were treated as property, as objects to be bought and sold (Hellie 2018; Lynch 2018). For the purposes of taxation and

representation, slaves were regarded as being only three-fifths of a person (Lynch 2018). Slave owners made sizeable profits from slave labour, even though the slaves did not, of course, give their labour willingly, and their work in 'laying the economic foundations of the United States' was 'largely unrewarded' (Lynch 2018). Slaves were forbidden from marrying, from learning to read or write, from striking a white person (even in self-defence), from assembling without a white person present, from owning property, from testifying in court in any litigation involving white people, and from making contracts (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018). Most obviously, slaves lacked freedom, a situation their masters tried to reinforce by making slaves dependent upon them in every way, and by operating a strict hierarchy of slaves, with domestic servants at the top and field hands at the bottom, which prevented slaves from organising against their masters. In the South, even those black people who were nominally free suffered many of the same restrictions as slaves, whether through law or the imposition of custom. In the North, they were often discriminated against in respect of voting, ownership of property, and freedom of movement. Finally, free black people could also be kidnapped and sold into slavery (Lynch 2018).

Slavery was epistemically bad because it led people to false beliefs. Given that slavery sanctioned the enslavement and mistreatment of black people, anyone deferring to that tradition would have come to falsely believe in the permissibility of enslaving and mistreating black people. Slavery may also have indirectly inculcated false empirical beliefs. For example, consider that many advocates of slavery were Christians, and thus believed that each human person is made in the image and likeness of God, and/or espoused a political philosophy emphasising equality, rights, and freedom for all. The only way they could render their theological and moral beliefs consistent with being involved in slavery was rationalisation: they tried to make their involvement in slavery consistent with their belief in the dignity and equality of all human beings by regarding black people as not belonging to the human species, or being less than fully human (Smedley & Smedley 2005: 19). So, it is clear that slavery led people to false moral and empirical beliefs.

Suppose that an agent, Johnson, lives in the South of the USA in the time during which slavery is in operation. Johnson is white and forms the true belief that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white. Suppose that Johnson is a Christian and forms her belief by deferring to the tradition that mandates treating people of all races equally on the basis that all human beings are made in God's image and likeness (c.f. Dinan 1991: 461).

Slavery was a very widespread tradition of Jones's society, as was the broader racism of which it was a part. So, there are many close worlds in which Johnson forms her belief about how people of different races should be treated, defers to the tradition that permits slavery, and comes to believe in the permissibility of mistreating non-white people simply because they are not white. Therefore, Johnson's belief is unsafe in the second sense; while she holds a true belief in the actual world, there are many close possible worlds in which she forms her belief in the same way as in the actual world and comes to believe a false, alternative proposition. It is therefore not the case that in nearly all close possible worlds in which she forms her belief in the same way as in the actual world, her belief continues to be true.¹⁶³

That said, Johnson's belief is not insensitive or unsafe in the first sense, for similar reasons to those discussed above in connection with the examples of non-lucky true traditional beliefs formed in societies in which deference to tradition is reliable. The nearest world in which it not the case that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white – if there is any such world at all – is far-off. This is because racist treatment of other human beings frustrates their psychological needs, such as the need for self-respect, their social needs, such as the need for justice in our dealings with others, and often their physical needs too, such as the need for freedom from injury. The nearest

¹⁶³ Recognising the truth of Johnson's normative belief that all people should be treated equally does not require acceptance of the theological belief that all people are created in the image and likeness of God.

world in which racist treatment does not frustrate these needs is far-off. Hence, the nearest world in which racism is not wrong, if there is one, is far-off.¹⁶⁴

As previously discussed, the traditions of such far-off societies are likely to be very different from the traditions of actual societies, and subjects in such far-off possible worlds will form their beliefs in accordance with these alternative traditions. So, Johnson's belief is sensitive. In the nearest world in which it is false that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white, she does not come to believe in the permissibility of mistreating non-white people by deferring to the traditions of her society. Similarly, since the nearest world in which Johnson's belief that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white is false is far-off, it is true in all close worlds. And, if it is true in all close worlds that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white, then there is no close world in which Johnson forms the belief that it is wrong to mistreat non-white people on the basis of their not being white where that proposition is false.¹⁶⁵

The second clarification concerns the relationship between the safety of an agent's belief and whether the traditions of her society are mostly good or bad. As with reliability, the safety of one's traditional beliefs depends on the society to which one belongs. The argument for this claim is as follows. For any true traditional belief that an agent holds, the greater the number of traditions which are captured by true propositions in her society, the further away the

¹⁶⁴ I take no stand here on whether there are any necessary moral truths. But it certainly is an open possibility. One might wonder here whether the acceptance of necessary moral truths is consistent with the relativism that I sketched in the previous chapter. I think that it is. The relativism that I argued for in Chapter Five is consistent with there being moral truths that could not be false. I argued that some moral truths are universal. These universal moral truths could also be necessary. Universal moral truths supervene on facts about basic universal needs. Furthermore, there is plausibly no world in which human beings have different basic universal needs. Any beings with significantly different basic universal needs simply would not be human beings as we now know them. Furthermore, there may be relative necessary truths. Take the Na belief that society ought to be organised on matrilineal lines. While this belief may only be true for the Na, it is also plausible that if, in some society, the relevant facts about human needs were such that that belief would be false for that society, it would not be Na society as we now know it. Hence, it plausibly could not be false that Na society ought to be organised on matrilineal lines.

¹⁶⁵ The fact that sensitivity does not capture the luckiness of Johnson's belief is perhaps a reason for rejecting the sensitivity condition. But as discussed earlier, I take no definitive stand on whether the sensitivity condition is true.

possible world in which she forms her belief in the same manner, and it fails to be true. Similarly, for any true traditional belief that an agent holds, the greater the number of traditions in her society which are captured by false propositions, the closer the world in which she forms her belief in the same way, and it fails to be true.

In other words, in societies which contain mostly good traditions, or traditions captured by true propositions, one could not easily come to believe a falsehood by deferring to the traditions of one's society. Hence, one's traditional beliefs are safe. By contrast, in societies which are populated by mostly bad traditions, or those which are captured by false propositions, one could easily come to believe a falsehood by deferring to the traditions of one's society, so one's traditional beliefs are unsafe.

To illustrate this further, I draw an analogy with another case of a non-normative belief being unsafe in virtue of there being a wide class of close possible worlds in which the target proposition is false, and the agent still believes it. Henry is driving through the countryside with his son and points out various objects in the environment to keep him amused. Henry identifies one of the objects as a barn and forms the belief that there is a barn in front of him. The object is indeed a barn. So, Henry's belief is true. But suppose that Henry is unaware of the fact that in that neighbourhood there are many well-made papier-mâché barn façades which cannot be distinguished from genuine barns simply by looking at them from the roadside. If Henry had come across a facsimile barn, he would still have believed that the object in front of him is a (genuine) barn and his belief would have been false (Goldman 1976: 772-773). Henry's belief is unsafe: there is a wide class of close possible worlds in which he forms the same belief in the same way as in the actual world (namely by looking at the objects in his environment) and it is false.

The analogy here is that when one is in a social environment which is like Henry's fake barn environment, one's traditional beliefs are unsafe. Given that his physical environment is littered with fake barns, when Henry forms his belief

that the object in front of him is a barn by looking at the object, he could so easily have come to believe that proposition even if it were false. Similarly, if one's social environment is littered with bad traditions, when one defers to the traditions of one's society, one could easily come to believe something false.

There is, of course, a disanalogy here. Henry's belief is unsafe in the first sense: there is a wide class of close possible worlds in which he forms the very same belief that he holds in the actual world – that there's a barn in front of him – and that belief is false because he is looking at a fake barn. However, in the case of societies that contain many bad traditions, the agent's belief may be unsafe in the second sense – she forms a belief whose object is a different proposition than the proposition that she believes in the actual world. But the analogy is close enough to illustrate the point that the nearness of the possible worlds in which one comes to believe a falsehood by deferring to the traditions of one's society, and hence the safety of one's traditional beliefs, depends upon which traditions exist in one's society, just as the safety of one's belief that the object in front of one is a barn depends on whether one is in a fake barn environment or not.¹⁶⁶

Just as with reliability, then, the upshot here is that whether one can acquire knowledge by deferring to the traditions of one's society depends on the society that one belongs to. If knowledge requires safe belief, and if one's society is populated with many traditions which are captured by false propositions, then at least some of one's true traditional beliefs will be unsafe and hence not constitute knowledge, in the same way that if one is in an environment populated with fake barns, one's beliefs about barns will be unsafe, and one will lack barn-related knowledge.

All this being said, assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the extent to which the safety of traditional beliefs varies between societies, just as assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the extent to which the

¹⁶⁶ Pritchard (2010) discusses at length the relationship between an agent's environment and the luckiness of her beliefs.

reliability of deferring to the traditions of one's society is variable. This is because assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of traditions in other societies that are captured by false propositions. And, of course, the safety of a traditional belief depends on how close is the nearest world in which the agent forms a false belief by deferring to the traditions of her society. That, in turn, depends on how many traditions in that society are captured by true propositions. As discussed, the greater the number of traditions in an agent's society that are captured by false propositions, the closer the world in which the agent forms a false belief by deferring to the traditions of her society. And the greater the number of traditions in an agent's society that are captured by true propositions, the further away the world in which she comes to believe a falsehood by deferring to the traditions of her society.

It is easy to overestimate the number of traditions in another society that are captured by false propositions by assuming universalism because if one assumes universalism, and if one also assumes that most of the traditions of one's own society are captured by true propositions, then one is apt to assume that since the traditions of other societies are captured by different propositions than the traditions of one's own society, they are therefore captured by false propositions.

However, if the relativism that I have sketched in Chapter Five is true, then it cannot be taken for granted that a tradition that is captured by a different proposition than one's own is therefore captured by a false proposition. The action prescribed by a tradition of another society may be right for the members of that society, even if it is wrong for the members of one's own society. Hence, a tradition of another society may be captured by a proposition that is true for the members of that society but false for the members of one's own society.

This is not to deny, of course, that there are some universally false normative propositions and that there are therefore cases in which the agent has an unsafe belief because she could easily have deferred to a tradition captured by one such proposition. The examples of bad traditions already given should clearly

illustrate this. Nonetheless, it remains true that assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the unsafety of traditional beliefs formed in other societies.

6.2.3. *Objection: Multiculturalism and Safe Traditional Beliefs*

I have argued that some traditional beliefs are safe in the second sense – the agent does not come to believe a different, false proposition to the one that she believes in the actual world – because in all close possible worlds, she continues to defer to a tradition which is captured by a true proposition. However, in some of the examples given above, the societies in question have only one tradition concerning the matter in question. Crucially, this is the reason for the safety of the protagonists' beliefs. There is no close world in which the agent comes to believe an alternative falsehood to the proposition that is the object of her actual-world belief by deferring to the traditions of her society because there is no close world in which there are other traditions in her society to which she might defer.

This is most obviously true of small societies, such as the Na and Nagovisi societies, in which there is only one culture, or where one culture is dominant, or very large societies, such as Chinese society, in which a single ethnic group is the largest. (Han Chinese people, of course, form the largest ethnic group in China).¹⁶⁷

In multicultural societies, however, there are often several different traditions on any one normative matter. This raises the possibility that in a multicultural society, for any true belief that the agent forms by deferring to the traditions of her society, there are many close possible worlds in which she forms her belief in the same way but comes to believe a different, and *false*, proposition from the one she believes in the actual world, by virtue of deferring to a tradition of another culture.

¹⁶⁷ This is not to deny, of course, that there is some cultural diversity in such societies. Few societies are completely culturally homogenous.

So, one might wonder whether my view implies that traditional beliefs are more likely to be lucky and hence fail to constitute knowledge in a multicultural society. In other words, the issue here is whether my view implies that multiculturalism is epistemically bad because it renders traditional beliefs in those societies merely luckily true.

The important question, then, is whether multiculturalism entails that for some true traditional beliefs that p , in many close possible worlds in which the agent continues to form a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, she comes to believe an alternative falsehood, q .

There is a *prima facie* case for thinking that it does. Suppose that an agent has formed the true belief that p by deferring to the traditions of her (multicultural) society, where the particular tradition she defers to is a tradition of her own culture. Suppose also that the traditions of the other cultures in her society concerning the matter at issue are captured by false propositions. It may appear then that there are many close possible worlds in which the agent defers to one of these traditions of some other culture and thereby forms a false belief.

As an illustration of this, return to an example given in Chapter Four. There are two traditions in Scottish society concerning the relationship between the Scots and the French. There is a tradition of friendliness to the French among Scots, which plausibly dates back to the 'Auld Alliance' that existed between Scotland and France in the Middle Ages. There is a contrasting British tradition of antagonism to the French that has some following in Scotland. These are plausibly the traditions of two distinct cultures: a Scottish culture that conceives of itself as distinct from British culture, and British culture itself. Let us suppose that the French ought to be treated with friendliness. The tradition that is captured by a true proposition then is the one that mandates friendliness to the French, rather than the British tradition which mandates unfriendliness. Thus, it appears that should someone in Scotland come to believe that the French should be treated with friendliness by deferring to the friendliness-mandating tradition of her society, she could easily have deferred to the British tradition that

mandates unfriendliness instead and thereby come to believe the falsehood that it is permissible to disrespect the French.

Consider another example mentioned in Chapter Four. Jones is the child of immigrant parents who come from a culture whose traditions permit polygamy, but she and her parents inhabit a society whose most prevalent culture is one whose traditions forbid polygamy. However, the traditions of both cultures are sufficiently prevalent to be classed as the traditions of that society. Jones may defer to either the traditions of her parents and ancestors or the traditions of the more prevalent culture in her society. Whether we regard the polygamy or the monogamy tradition as being captured by a true proposition, Jones could apparently defer to the other tradition and thereby come to believe a falsehood.

On closer inspection, though, I think that multiculturalism probably does not present the threat to the safety of agents' beliefs that it appears to. This is because for some true traditional belief that p , multiculturalism entails the unsafety (in the second sense) of that belief only if in many close possible worlds in which the agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, she comes to believe an alternative, false proposition, q , by virtue of deferring to a tradition of another culture. However, the agent will not readily defer to the traditions of another culture. So, in most close worlds where the agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, she does not come to believe an alternative, false proposition by virtue of deferring to a tradition of another culture.

The first premise of this argument should be relatively uncontroversial. If the traditions of other cultures are captured by alternative, false propositions, but there is no close world in which the agent defers to those traditions, then there is no close world in which she comes to believe a falsehood by deferring to the traditions of another culture when she forms a belief out of deference to her society's traditions. Similarly, if there are close possible worlds in which the agent defers to the traditions of another culture, but in each of these worlds those traditions are captured by a true proposition, then there is also no close

world in which the agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe a falsehood on account of deferring to the traditions of another culture.

There are two reasons for accepting the second premise of the argument above. First, most or all of the cultures that exist in some societies have the same tradition concerning certain matters. We might call these ‘cross-cultural traditions’. Second, even when different cultures in a society have competing traditions on some matter, agents will not easily defer to the traditions of other cultures. I argue for these claims in turn.

There are often traditions in multicultural societies that are subscribed to by the members of many, if not all, of the cultures that are represented within that society. Importantly, some of these traditions are those that are most relevant to politics. Consider the British constitutional traditions mentioned in the Introduction. These include traditions that mandate that the Monarch ought to give Royal Assent to any Bill that is passed by Parliament, that the Monarch should appoint as Prime Minister whoever is best placed to command a majority in the House of Commons, that a government should resign if it loses a vote of no confidence, and that ministers should resign from office after having mismanaged their departments. People of all cultures in the UK subscribe to these traditions.

Alternatively, consider some traditions that are subscribed to in a range of societies concerning the relationship of the state to the citizen in respect of criminal proceedings. (Again, these traditions were mentioned in the Introduction). Take, for example, the tradition forbidding wrongful arrest, or the traditions requiring a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. These traditions are widely subscribed to in the societies whose traditions they are, including by the members of a range of different cultures.

Finally, traditions captured by plausible moral propositions are often adhered to by the members of many different cultures in a single society, such as those forbidding killing, stealing, slander, envy, assault, and so on.

The existence of cross-cultural traditions shows that there are traditional beliefs that p in respect of which there are few close worlds in which the agent continues to form a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and believes an alternative falsehood, q , which captures the tradition of another culture. The reason for this is obvious. The agent will come to believe an alternative falsehood that captures the traditions of another culture when she forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society in some close possible world only if, in that world, other cultures have different traditions on the matter in question. But in respect of actions that are governed by cross-cultural traditions, there are few close worlds in which other cultures have different traditions concerning the actions in question, since each culture has the same tradition on the relevant issue and the nearest world in which those cultures have different traditions on the matter in question is sufficiently far away not to be among the closest worlds.

I now argue that agents will not readily defer to the traditions of another culture, even when other cultures have different and competing traditions from the agent's own. The reason for this is that agents have usually internalised the traditions of their own culture. And internalising a tradition involves acquiring an entrenched motivation to comply with and defer to the tradition. Importantly, if an agent has entrenched motivations to comply with the traditions of her own culture, then she will reliably defer to the traditions of her own culture and will not frequently defer to the traditions of another culture. So, an agent will usually reliably defer to the traditions of her own culture and will not frequently defer to the traditions of another culture.

Furthermore, an agent will not only usually reliably defer to the traditions of her own culture in the actual world, but in all close possible worlds as well. This is because agents have the same entrenched motivations in all close possible

worlds as in the actual world. The nearest world in which agents have different entrenched motivations is far-off. An agent's having different entrenched motivations would require that, in more than one sense, she is a different person than she is in the actual world. Agents' entrenched motivations are constituents of their characters. So, if an agent were to have different entrenched motivations, she would have a different character.

Moreover, entrenched motivations are acquired during upbringing. For an agent to have different entrenched motivations would require that she have a different upbringing. So, an agent's having different entrenched motivations from those she has in the actual world would require that she have a different character and a different history. Moreover, if the nearest world in which an agent has different entrenched motivations is far-off, then there is no close world in which she has different entrenched motivations. So, there is no close possible world in which a given agent has different entrenched motivations than she does in the actual world (c.f. Zagzebski 1996: 116-125).

To illustrate this, let us return to the examples given above. If a Scottish person has internalised the Scottish tradition of respecting the French, she will not easily defer to the British tradition of antagonism. She has an entrenched disposition to defer to the tradition that mandates respect for the French and, as such, she reliably complies with and defers to that tradition. Importantly, she has the same entrenched motivations in all close possible worlds. This motivation is part of her character and was instilled in her upbringing. Hence, there is no close possible world in which she comes to believe any other proposition than the proposition that the French are due respect. Moreover, that proposition is true. So, there is no close possible world in which the agent defers to the traditions of her society on the question of whether the French ought to be respected and comes to believe an alternative, false proposition.

Similarly, in respect of the tradition concerning polygamy, suppose that Jones has internalised the monogamy tradition. She has an entrenched motivation in the actual world and in all nearby possible worlds to defer to that tradition.

Hence, there is no close world in which she comes to believe any proposition other than the one that captures the monogamy tradition. Suppose that the proposition that captures the monogamy tradition is true. There is no close world in which Jones forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe an alternative, false proposition because of there being different cultural traditions within her society.¹⁶⁸

Given the foregoing, then, my view does not imply that multiculturalism poses any significant threat to the safety of traditional beliefs.

6.3. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that there are sensitive and safe traditional beliefs in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in respect of normative belief formation. I argued that there are sensitive traditional beliefs because for some true traditional beliefs that p , the agent will not continue to believe that p in the nearest non- p world, since in the nearest non- p world her society has different traditions from its actual-world traditions and hence deferring to the traditions of her society leads her to a different belief in the nearest non- p world than it does in the actual world.

In favour of there being safe traditional beliefs, I argued that for some true traditional beliefs that p , p is true in all close worlds in which the agent forms a normative belief by deferring to the traditions of her society. Hence, there is no close world in which the agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society and comes to believe that p , where p is false. Furthermore, I argued that for some true traditional beliefs that p , there is no close world in which the agent comes to believe any non- p alternative. Therefore, for some true

¹⁶⁸ The crucial feature of Jones's case, of course, is that she is not merely a monocultural individual who is at risk of deferring to another culture's traditions. Instead, she has inherited two competing cultural traditions. However, as discussed, she will plausibly have internalised only one of them and therefore probably will not defer to the other. Furthermore, if the relativism sketched in Chapter Five is true, perhaps Jones will acquire a true belief regardless of which tradition she defers to. These points generalise to other individuals who are the inheritors of multiple cultural traditions.

traditional beliefs that p , there is no close world in which the agent comes to believe a false, non- p alternative.

Chapter Seven: Prospects for a Conservative Virtue Epistemology

In this chapter, I explore the prospects for developing a conservative virtue epistemology. Specifically, I consider whether traditional beliefs could constitute knowledge on a virtue epistemic analysis of knowledge. According to virtue epistemic analyses of knowledge, knowledge is true belief that is formed out of intellectual virtue. Thus, a conservative virtue epistemology would claim that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue and, since knowledge is true belief formed out of intellectual virtue, true beliefs formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society constitute knowledge. In the remainder of this chapter I therefore explore whether deference to the traditions of one's society could plausibly be an intellectual virtue.

I first explain virtue epistemology in general terms, in §7.1. In §7.2. I consider two contemporary virtue epistemologies, Greco's and Zagzebski's, and explore whether deference to the traditions of one's society could be a virtue on their understandings of intellectual virtue. Finally, I explain why it is unusual to think of deference as a virtue and hence why it might seem strange to think of deference to the traditions of one's society as virtuous, in §7.3.

To be sure, the purpose of this chapter is not to develop a fully-fledged conservative virtue epistemology. Instead, I simply seek to stake out some territory for future research by exploring the possibility of a virtue epistemic account of traditional knowledge.

One might wonder why I choose to consider the possibility of developing a conservative virtue epistemology. There are many different theories of knowledge that have been defended in the contemporary epistemology literature. Thus, there is plausibly more than one alternative to the process reliabilist form of conservatism that I advocate here which I could seek to develop in future research.

Virtue epistemology, however, provides a particularly promising prospect for developing an alternative conservative normative epistemology. As should become clear below, the virtue epistemologist's claim that a belief constitutes knowledge only if it is formed out of intellectual virtue is an anti-luck condition on knowledge that is no less plausible than other anti-luck conditions that have recently been proposed by epistemologists. Indeed, I would argue that apart from the process reliabilist theory that I have assumed thorough this thesis, virtue epistemological theories are the most compelling accounts of knowledge.

7.1. Virtue Epistemology

I begin then by discussing virtue epistemology in general terms. Virtue epistemology is an approach to epistemology which gives a central role to the intellectual virtues. Virtue epistemologies differ in several important respects (Turri, Alfano & Greco 2018). Two of these are most relevant here. The first concerns which roles are assigned to the intellectual virtues. The second is what intellectual virtues are. I discuss these in turn.

On some forms of virtue epistemology, the role of intellectual virtues is that they explain the difference between lucky true belief and knowledge. Specifically, these virtue epistemologies claim that knowledge is true belief that is formed out of intellectual virtue, whereas lucky true beliefs are not formed out of the agent's intellectual virtues. In this chapter, I will be exclusively concerned with this type of virtue epistemology. I say nothing of virtue epistemologies that define justified belief in terms of intellectual virtue or which pursue projects that lie beyond the boundaries of traditional epistemic inquiry, such as consideration of concepts like understanding or wisdom, examination of the relationships between virtues and vices, or analysis of the social and political aspects of knowledge.¹⁶⁹ Hereafter, I use the term 'virtue epistemology' to refer only to the sort of virtue epistemology that is concerned to analyse knowledge as involving the intellectual virtues.

¹⁶⁹ Turri, Alfano and Greco (2018) discuss the various forms of virtue epistemology.

Let us now consider the different conceptions of intellectual virtue. There are broadly speaking two views about the nature of intellectual virtue. First, there are those that characterise intellectual virtues as reliable methods or processes for belief formation. Views which identify intellectual virtues as reliable processes fall under the heading ‘virtue reliabilism’. Virtue reliabilists typically identify faculties such as perception, introspection, memory and intuition as intellectual virtues (Turri, Alfano & Greco 2018). Second, there are those that characterise intellectual virtues as character traits. These character traits are typically taken to include conscientiousness, open-mindedness, carefulness, thoroughness, humility, and so on (Turri, Alfano & Greco 2018). Views which identify intellectual virtues as character traits are labelled ‘virtue responsibilism’.

I now briefly discuss the virtue epistemic analysis of knowledge in more detail. According to virtue epistemology, knowledge is true belief that is formed out of intellectual virtue. More formally, the virtue epistemologist claims that *S* knows that *p* if and only if (i) *S* believes that *p*, (ii) *p* is true, and (iii) *S*’s belief that *p* is formed out of one of *S*’s intellectual virtues.

Importantly, (iii) is believed by its proponents to be a suitable anti-luck condition on knowledge.¹⁷⁰ The reason for this is that when an agent forms a true belief because of her intellectual virtues, her forming a true belief is an achievement of hers for which she deserves credit. In other words, knowledge is a credit-worthy achievement of the knower. However, in cases of lucky true belief, such achievement is lacking. The luckiness of a luckily true belief entails that the agent’s believing the truth is not an achievement of hers arising from her intellectual virtues (Turri, Alfano & Greco 2018).

Let me give examples to illustrate this. Jones seems to see a sheep in a field and forms the belief that there is a sheep in the field. However, by some trick of the light, Jones has mistaken a dog for a sheep, so what she sees is not a sheep.

¹⁷⁰ For this reason, the present discussion could also be viewed as an exploration of whether there is yet another sense in which some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true, namely that they are formed out of intellectual virtue.

Nonetheless, there is in fact a sheep in the field of whose presence Jones is unaware. Thus, Jones's belief is true. But her belief is true only by luck. She does not come to believe the truth because of her intellectual virtues and hence she does not deserve credit for her true belief (Greco 2002: 308-309).

By contrast, consider a case in which Smith comes to believe that human beings' actions are causing global warming. Smith arrives at this belief through the exercise of her intellectual virtues: she conscientiously and impartially assesses the available published findings on the causes of global warming, she perseveres in attempting to understand the relevant issues and evidence, and she responsibly tries to fit her beliefs to that evidence. Her belief is true, of course. So, Smith comes to believe the truth because of her intellectual virtues and therefore deserves credit for believing the truth. Importantly, Smith's belief is non-lucky true because it is the result of her intellectual virtues; she could not easily have believed a falsehood.¹⁷¹

7.2. Deference to the Traditions of one's Society as an Intellectual Virtue

I now explain how deference to the traditions of one's society could be considered an intellectual virtue on Greco's virtue epistemology, in §7.2.1. I then show how deference to the traditions of one's society could be considered an intellectual virtue on Zagzebski's virtue epistemology, in §7.2.2.

7.2.1. Greco's Virtue Epistemology and Deference to the Traditions of one's Society

Greco argues that the kinds of virtues that are relevant to knowledge are 'reliable cognitive abilities and powers' (2002: 302). These can be either 'innate faculties or acquired habits that enable a person to arrive at truth and avoid error in some relevant field' (2002: 287). The intellectual virtues include

¹⁷¹ Of course, the kind of virtues involved in the first case are reliable cognitive faculties and the kind of virtues involved in the second case are character traits, but nothing hangs on this.

‘accurate perception, reliable memory, and various kinds of good reasoning [...]’ (2002: 287).

Greco argues that ‘knowledge is true belief produced by the intellectual virtues of the believer’ (2002: 308). More fully, his view is that *S* knows that *p* if and only if (1) *S*’s belief that *p* is subjectively justified, which is to say that it is produced by a cognitive disposition which *S* manifests when *S* is motivated to believe what is true, (2) *S*’s belief that *p* is objectively justified, which means that it is produced by one or more of *S*’s intellectual virtues, and (3) *S* believes the truth concerning *p because S* believes that *p* out of intellectual virtue (2002: 310-311).

Importantly, Greco argues, in connection with this third condition, that when the agent comes to believe that *p* out of intellectual virtue, she can be credited with believing the truth. When the agent’s cognitive abilities are a salient part of the causal story which explains how she came to believe that *p*, her believing that *p* can be attributed to those abilities and hence she can be considered responsible for that belief (Greco 2002: 309-311).

There are many things that determine salience, but two are most relevant. First, there is abnormality. If something is abnormal in a case, it thereby becomes salient. For example, the presence of sparks becomes a salient part of the explanation for a fire in an environment in which sparks are unusual (Greco 2002: 310). Second, interests and purposes can determine salience. If something is relevant to the pursuit of our interests and purposes, then it is salient (Greco 2002: 310).

Greco argues that given our purposes as ‘information-sharing beings’ our cognitive abilities enjoy a sort of automatic salience (2002: 310). However, in some cases, something abnormal is more salient than the agent’s cognitive abilities. For that reason, the agent’s cognitive abilities are not the most salient part of the explanation for her belief. Thus, her true belief cannot be credited to her intellectual virtues and fails to constitute knowledge. This explains what,

in Greco's view, is the difference between cases of lucky true belief and cases of knowledge (Greco 2002: 310). He argues that in the former, the agent believes the truth merely by accident; but in the latter, it is to the agent's credit that she believes the truth: she is responsible for believing the truth (Greco 2002: 309-311).¹⁷²

To illustrate this, I return to the example given above. Jones seems to see a sheep in a field and forms the belief that there is a sheep in the field. But the creature that Jones observes is a dog which she has mistaken for a sheep because of a trick of the light. Nonetheless, there is a sheep in the field, unbeknownst to Jones. Hence, Jones has a true belief. However, her belief is not the output of one of her reliable cognitive faculties, and they are not the most salient part of the explanation of her belief. Instead, the most salient part of the explanation for Jones's belief is that there is something abnormal in the case, namely that there is indeed a sheep in the field but not where Jones is looking (Greco 2002: 310). Therefore, Jones does not deserve credit for her true belief (Greco 2002: 310).

The difference between this view, which Greco labels 'agent reliabilism', and standard process reliabilism is that on agent reliabilism the class of processes which can issue in knowledge or justified belief is restricted to those which are 'grounded in the knower's abilities or powers' (Greco 2002: 303). This restriction rules out the possibility that an agent's belief could be justified or constitute knowledge if it is the output of outlandish or transitory processes (Greco 2002: 303). Consider the case in which a subject suffers from a rare sort of brain tumour whose effect is to cause the victim to believe that she has a brain tumour. Yet she has no evidence in favour of the thesis that she has a brain tumour and indeed has evidence against it, since a competent neurologist has given her a clean bill of health. Her belief is unjustified and does not constitute knowledge, even though it is the output of a reliable process (Greco 2002:

¹⁷² While Greco identifies intellectual virtues as reliable cognitive abilities, given this emphasis on creditworthiness and responsibility, it is tempting to characterise Greco's view as combining elements of virtue reliabilism with elements of virtue responsibilism. This interpretation is supported by Turri, Alfano and Greco (2018).

292).¹⁷³ Since the process issuing in the agent's belief in this case is not one of her intellectual virtues, agent reliabilism can capture the intuition that it does not constitute knowledge.

I now consider whether deference to the traditions of one's society could, in conjunction with what I have already argued, be an intellectual virtue on a virtue epistemology like Greco's view. Greco thinks that intellectual virtues are innate faculties or acquired habits which lead to more true beliefs than false beliefs in a given field. Now, deference to the traditions of one's society is obviously not an innate faculty. However, it is an acquired habit. And, presuming that the arguments of Chapter Five are sound, deference to the traditions of one's society leads to more true normative beliefs than false normative beliefs. Hence, on an account of intellectual virtues like Greco's, deference to the traditions of one's society is plausibly an intellectual virtue.

We can see how it is possible to construct a virtue epistemic argument for the tradition principle on the model of Greco's virtue epistemology. If we combine the premise that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue with Greco's account of knowledge – on which *S* knows that *p* just in case *p* is true and the most salient part of the explanation for *S*'s belief that *p* is *S*'s exercising some intellectual virtue – then it follows that there are cases of traditional knowledge, at least if there are cases in which the most salient part of the explanation for someone's true belief is her deferring to her society's traditions.

I do not have space to defend this argument here. But it should illustrate how an argument for the tradition principle constructed along the lines of Greco's virtue epistemology would work.

¹⁷³ This example was first proposed by Plantinga (1993: 199).

7.2.2. Zagzebski's Virtue Epistemology and Deference to the Traditions of one's Society

I now consider Zagzebski's virtue epistemology. I first set out her account of intellectual virtue and her theory of knowledge before examining whether they allow the possibility of a conservative virtue epistemology.

It will be helpful to begin by considering Zagzebski's general account of virtue, before discussing intellectual virtues in particular. Zagzebski argues that a virtue is 'a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person' (1996: 137). She claims that virtue has two components: a motivation to pursue some valuable end and reliable success in achieving that end (1996: 165). Zagzebski understands motivations as dispositions to have a motive, where the latter are understood as emotions which guide action toward the relevant end (1996: 137). Her motive for placing the reliable success condition on an agent's possessing a virtue is that simply being disposed to realise an end is clearly insufficient for the possession of whatever virtue is defined by that end. For example, one is fair only if one is routinely successful in bringing about states of affairs which instantiate fairness, one is just only if one is routinely successful in bringing about states of affairs which instantiate justice, and so on (Zagzebski 1996: 136). If one is motivated to bring about fairness but systematically fails to do so, one is not fair; if one is motivated to bring about justice but routinely fails to do so, one is not just.

So, to understand intellectual virtue, we need to understand what ends and motives are involved (Zagzebski 1996: 165-166). The end involved in defining the intellectual virtues is true belief. Thus, the general motivation underlying all the intellectual virtues is the motivation for true belief.¹⁷⁴ However, Zagzebski argues that this general motivation gives rise to more specific motivations which

¹⁷⁴ Zagzebski's account of the ends and motives involved in the intellectual virtues is actually slightly more complex than this. She thinks that the motives involved in intellectual virtues are 'forms of the motivation to have cognitive contact with reality' [...] (1996: 167), where having cognitive contact with reality at least potentially includes more than simply having true beliefs (1996: 43-51, 166-168). In particular, she regards understanding and wisdom as forms of cognitive contact with reality (1996: 43-51, 166-168). This need not detain us here, however; it does not affect the argument that I go on to make.

are involved in specific intellectual virtues (Zagzebski 1996: 166-168). We can call these ‘derivatives’ of the general desire for true belief (Zagzebski 1996: 168). Such derivatives include the ‘motivational components distinctive of the individual intellectual virtues [...]’ (Zagzebski 1996: 181). These include the motive to consider the ideas of others in an open-minded and fair manner which is constitutive of open-mindedness, the motive to consider evidence with care which is constitutive of carefulness, the motive not to back down when challenged which is constitutive of intellectual courage, and so on (Zagzebski 1996: 181).

What then does Zagzebski have to say about the success condition on intellectual virtue? As with virtue generally, it is constitutive of intellectual virtue that the agent reliably attains the end involved in the motivational component. So, one has a given intellectual virtue only if one reliably attains the end at which the relevant motivation aims. These motivations, as discussed, are the motivation for true belief and its derivatives. Therefore, intellectual virtues are directed at ends such as the acquisition of true belief.

In light of this, the possession of intellectual virtue involves forming one’s beliefs in truth-conducive ways (Zagzebski 1996: 176). Zagzebski does not identify truth-conduciveness with reliability as the process reliabilist conceives of it. Instead, she thinks that there are other kinds of truth-conduciveness, though the details of this need not detail us here (Zagzebski 1996: 181-184). However, she recognises the reliability of belief formation processes as one important type of truth-conduciveness. So, the possession of intellectual virtue, for Zagzebski, often involves using reliable processes in forming one’s beliefs. This, I suggest, is one affinity, if the only one, that her view has with virtue-reliabilism.

Zagzebski gives different examples of intellectual virtues in different parts of her book. They include ‘the ability to recognise the salient facts’, fairness in evaluating others’ arguments, intellectual humility, diligence, and thoroughness (Zagzebski 1996: 114), open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility

(Zagzebski, 1996: 173), as well as carefulness, perseverance (Zagzebski 1996: 179), intellectual flexibility, and boldness (Zagzebski 1996: 181).

Having set out her account of intellectual virtues, I discuss Zagzebski's account of knowledge. Zagzebski defines knowledge as follows: 'knowledge is a state of belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue' (Zagzebski 1996: 271).

The main concept which needs to be unpacked here is that of an act of intellectual virtue. Zagzebski defines an act of virtue as 'an act that is not only virtuously motivated and reliable but is successful in the particular case in reaching the aim of the virtue through those features of the act' (Zagzebski 1996: 269). In other words, given the aims and motivations involved in intellectual virtue, an act of intellectual virtue is one in which the agent acquires true belief (or one of its derivative ends) by acting on the motivation for true belief (or one of its derivatives). To put it one more way, if the agent acquires true belief by acting on the disposition to do so, then it is to the agent's credit that she has grasped the truth and her belief constitutes knowledge (Zagzebski 1996: 269-273).

Two brief clarifications are in order. First, Zagzebski's definition of knowledge does not explicitly say that knowledge is *true* belief formed out of intellectual virtue.¹⁷⁵ This is because it is part of the definition of an act of intellectual virtue that beliefs resulting from such acts are true. Hence, to define knowledge as true belief which arises out of acts of intellectual virtue, while in keeping with the tradition of defining knowledge as true belief combined with some additional ingredients, involves redundancy (Zagzebski 1996: 270-271).

A second crucial clarification is that according to Zagzebski, it is not necessary for the performance of acts of a given intellectual virtue that one has that virtue. An act of intellectual virtue requires only possessing and acting on the motivational component of the virtue and succeeding in realising its end. But this does not require that the motivation is the deep and enduring trait which it

¹⁷⁵ Zagzebski gives several variants on her definition of knowledge (1996: 270-271).

would have to be for one to have the virtue. Zagzebski writes: ‘it is not necessary that to perform an act of, say, intellectual courage, one have the entrenched habit that courage requires’ (1996: 276). The significance of this point is that it allows Zagzebski to concede that agents can plausibly have knowledge before having fully developed virtues (1996: 276).

As one can expect given her definition of knowledge, Zagzebski argues that what makes the difference between cases of lucky true belief and cases of knowledge is that in the latter the agent has a true belief which arises from acts of intellectual virtue (1996: 293-299).

Here is an example to illustrate. Dr Jones has good reason to believe that her patient, Smith, has a virus, X. Smith has all the classic symptoms of X, and no other known virus causes the symptoms exhibited by Smith. There is a complication, however. Smith does in fact have virus X, but his symptoms are not caused by virus X, because he has contracted X too recently for it to manifest itself in any symptoms. Instead, Smith’s X-like symptoms are being caused by another, undiscovered virus, Y, which, unbeknownst to anyone in the medical profession, has the same symptoms as X (c.f. Zagzebski 1996: 290-291).¹⁷⁶ Dr Jones forms the belief that ‘Smith has virus X’. Her belief is clearly lucky and hence isn’t an item of knowledge. Zagzebski argues that while the doctor may possess intellectual virtues and may even exhibit them in making the diagnosis, she does not arrive at the truth ‘through *an act of intellectual virtue*’ (1996: 296-297, original emphasis).

Let us consider then the prospects for a conservative virtue epistemology modelled on Zagzebski’s account of knowledge. Recall Zagzebski’s definition of intellectual virtue. She argues that a virtue is ‘a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about this end’ (1996: 137). Intellectual virtues are such deep and enduring acquired excellences, where the

¹⁷⁶ Zagzebski’s example is more complex, but some of the details that she includes do not need to be added here for it to illustrate the point.

desired end is true belief. There are some other, more specific, motivations involved in particular virtues which are derivatives of the motivation for true belief (Zagzebski 1996: 168). Hence, intellectual virtues on Zagzebski's view are deep and enduring excellences involving the motivation for true belief and its derivatives and reliable success in attaining it and other epistemic goods.

Is deference to the traditions of one's society a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person which involves a characteristic motivation for true belief and its derivatives? That it could be is, at first sight, a difficult case to make. It is not clear that deference to the traditions of one's society is either an excellence or that it involves the motivation for true belief. However, I think it can be argued that deference to the traditions of one's society is an excellence and that it can involve the motivation for true belief. I take these points in turn.

First, let's consider whether deference to the traditions of one's society could be an excellence. At first sight, it is not obvious why this should be so. However, let us consider what makes a trait an excellence. One obvious answer to this question is that excellent traits are those (and only those) traits which are somehow connected with the good. There are various candidates for what that connection is, including that excellences make their possessor good (admirable), that they are good for their possessor (in the sense that they are beneficial to the agent), or that they bring about some good outcomes (Zagzebski 1996: 89-90). The question then is whether deference to the traditions of one's society is good in any of these senses. I take the three senses of 'good' in reverse order.

Suppose that a trait constitutes an excellence because it leads to good outcomes. One such good, which is relevant to whether a trait constitutes the kind of excellence which is a candidate for being an intellectual virtue, is true belief. If, as I have argued, deference to the traditions of one's society reliably leads to true belief, then it is an intellectual excellence and, provided it meets the other conditions on virtue, is therefore an intellectual virtue.

Now consider whether the disposition to defer to the traditions of one's society is a trait which benefits its possessor. The disposition to defer to the traditions of one's society is a trait which is beneficial to its possessor precisely because it leads to knowledge. Deference to the traditions of one's society leads to knowledge, and knowledge is good for its possessor. So, deference to the traditions of one's society leads to something which is good for its possessor. Crucially, one might think that traits which lead to that which is beneficial for the agent are themselves good for their possessors. They are instrumentally good in bringing about outcomes that are good for their possessors. So, deference to the traditions of one's society is good for that trait's possessors (c.f. Zagzebski 1996: 97-98).

Finally, is the disposition to defer to the traditions of one's society a good-making trait of agents? At first glance, it is not clear why it would be. However, I think there is a case to be made for the idea that it is a good-making trait in agents. It is plausible that a trait's contributing to an agent's admirability is a function of whether it is the kind of trait her possessing which will motivate her to attain various goods. Deference to the traditions of one's society motivates people to attain true belief, which is a good. So, deference to the traditions of one's society motivates people to attain a good and hence contributes to the admirability of its possessor.

Crucially, as discussed, it is insufficient for a trait's being a virtue that it is an excellence; it must be an excellence that involves a certain kind of motivation and reliably leads to the realisation of the good at which that motivation aims. In the case of intellectual virtue, the relevant end is true belief. Given the arguments of this thesis, deference to the traditions of one's society can and does reliably lead to true beliefs.

So, we must consider whether deference to the traditions of one's society is motivated by the desire for true belief. It is not obvious that the answer here is 'yes'. Indeed, I argued earlier that deference to the traditions of one's society is often unreflective. However, I argue that, firstly, there are conservatives who

self-consciously believe that tradition plays some role in the provision of true belief and hence who, in the search for truth, might defer to traditions with the motivation of acquiring true beliefs. Second, I argue that not all motives are self-conscious. It is entirely possible that some people are motivated to defer to traditions out of the desire to attain true belief without being consciously aware of having this motivation. One might, for example, be driven by an instinctive appreciation that traditions are a reliable source of true normative belief – though it may be no more than an instinct – to defer to traditions. So, there are plausibly people who are motivated, self-consciously or otherwise, to defer to traditions out of the desire to acquire true normative beliefs.

I now briefly make some clarifications about this second point before proceeding. First, Zagzebski makes some comments about the motivational components of virtues that suggests she might be receptive to the suggestion made above. Specifically, she argues that many of the motivations involved in virtues may operate at ‘moderate or even weak levels of intensity’ (1996: 131-132). This low level of intensity may be insufficient for the agent to be consciously aware of the relevant motive (Zagzebski 1996: 132).

Furthermore, there are good reasons for thinking that a virtue epistemology of Zagzebski’s sort should allow the possibility that not all virtuous motives are self-conscious. This is because there are cases in which an agent clearly seems to have a virtue without being self-consciously aware of the relevant motive. For example, suppose that Smith is kind. Smith is reliably motivated to do that which is kind and she reliably succeeds in doing that which is kind. However, she is not consciously aware of the motive to do what kindness requires. Instead, she is dispositionally kind without any self-conscious awareness of being motivated to be kind and perhaps too without having any self-conscious beliefs about what kindness requires or any explicit awareness that she is being kind. Smith still plausibly has the virtue of kindness, despite her not being self-consciously aware of possessing her motivation to be kind.

We are now in a position to see whether it is possible to develop a conservative virtue epistemology utilising Zagzebski's view. As with Greco's view, the basic pattern of reasoning here is to combine the premise that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue with the author's definition of knowledge. As discussed, according to Zagzebski, 'knowledge is a state of belief arising out of acts of intellectual virtue' (Zagzebski 1996: 271), where an act of intellectual virtue is one in which the agent attains true belief precisely by dint of acting on the motivational component of the relevant virtue. This definition of knowledge, combined with the premise that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue, yields the conclusion that traditional beliefs can constitute knowledge. So, taking Zagzebski's definition of knowledge and combining it with the premise that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue, one can argue that deference to the traditions of one's society is an intellectual virtue. I do not have space to defend this argument, but it should serve to illustrate the possibility of developing a conservative virtue epistemology on Zagzebski's model.

7.3. The Unusualness of Deference as a Virtue

I have now argued that deference to the traditions of one's society could plausibly be a virtue on both virtue reliabilist and virtue responsibilist accounts of intellectual virtue. However, in the moral epistemology literature, deference is often regarded as being incompatible with, or undermining, virtue. Several moral philosophers have argued that forming one's belief on the basis of another's testimony, which involves deferring to their opinion, is incompatible with or undermines virtue. All of the arguments for this conclusion have in common the idea that something is missing in cases of deference. They differ over what the missing ingredient is, whether it be virtue itself, or some other good – such as understanding or autonomy – whose absence indicates lack of virtue. The absence of these latter goods is thought to be connected with lack of virtue because their absence indicates that the deferrer's moral agency or character has become compromised. Importantly, such arguments can plausibly

be adapted to show that deferring to the traditions of one's society is incompatible with virtue.

In this section, I consider two arguments for the incompatibility of deference and virtue. In §7.3.1. I discuss Alison Hills's argument that deference fails to transmit moral understanding and that moral understanding is required for virtue. In §7.3.2. I discuss Howell's argument that virtue requires that one's beliefs and attitudes be integrated into a coherent whole, and beliefs that are acquired through deference are not integrated into one's wider set of beliefs and attitudes.

7.3.1. Hills's Rejection of Deference

In this section, I first explain Hills's argument before considering how it could be modified and applied to deference to traditions. The basic thrust of Hill's argument is that moral understanding is necessary for moral virtue. But testimony does not reliably transmit moral understanding. Hence, usually when one forms one's belief by deference, one fails to acquire understanding and thereby fails to be virtuous.

This takes some unpacking. Hills defines moral understanding as 'understanding why p , where p is a moral proposition' (Hills 2013: 555). Understanding why p involves grasping the reasons why p , where grasping the reasons why p consists in exercising a set of abilities. These include the ability to follow an explanation of why p , to explain why p in one's own words, to draw the conclusion that p from premises q and r , and so on (Hills 2013: 554-555).

Virtue, according to Hills, involves dispositions to do morally right actions along with reliable judgment concerning which actions are morally right. Hills's (2009: 109) argument for the reliable judgement condition is that morally worthy motivation is insufficient for virtue because morally worthy motivations are virtuous only if they are responsive to moral reasons. Crucially, responding to moral reasons requires reliable moral judgement. Without reliable moral judgement, the agent would be unable to identify which acts are morally right

or morally wrong and hence their motivations could not be responses to the moral reasons underpinning the rightness or wrongness of those actions. The evidence of this is that people who lack reliable moral judgement either fail to do what is right or do so only by accident (Hills 2009: 108-111).

For example, an agent cannot reliably do that which is just, honest, and kind, and so on if she cannot reliably judge which actions are just, honest, and kind, etc. (Hills 2009: 108-109). She will either fail to do what is just, honest, or kind, or she will do so only by accident. Note, however, that while one's failing to reliably do the right thing or doing the right thing only by accident is often a manifestation of lack of virtue, reliably doing the right thing and doing it non-accidentally is not sufficient for virtue. One can reliably and non-accidentally do what's right but where one's motives for doing what's right are not responses to moral reasons. One can, for example, reliably and deliberately do what's right out of selfish motivations (Hills 2009: 108-111). In these cases, one is not virtuous.

By 'deference' Hills means acceptance of pure moral testimony. Pure moral testimony is 'testimony about a specifically moral matter' (Hills 2013: 552) which is unsupported by reasons, such as 'it is wrong it eat meat' (Hills, 2013: 552). The testifier gives testimony about some moral matter without offering reasons for her conclusion. Acceptance of pure moral testimony constitutes deference because in such cases 'your moral judgement is formed and sustained purely by someone else's moral judgement' (Hills 2013: 552).

With these explanations in place, let us now consider the reasons Hills offers for each of her argument's premises. Again, the thrust of Hills's argument is that moral understanding is necessary for virtue and that one cannot easily acquire understanding from testimony. Therefore, in most cases in which one forms one's belief by deferring to another's testimony, one fails to be virtuous.

Much of the argument for each of Hills's premises has already been suggested by the explanation of her account of virtue given above. The reason for thinking

that moral understanding is required for virtue is that being fully virtuous – having a generally good moral character – requires the ability to reliably judge what counts as virtuous conduct in a range of circumstances. One cannot be virtuous if one is frequently mistaken about what is just, honest, or kind (Hills 2009: 108). One will often fail to do what is virtuous or will do so only by luck, as discussed (Hills 2009: 108-109). Furthermore, reliable judgement concerning what is virtuous itself requires responsiveness to moral reasons (Hills 2009: 109). And, crucially, when one bases one's moral judgement on the testimony of another, one fails to respond to moral reasons (Hills 2009: 108-110).

The reason why testimony does not transmit understanding is that moral understanding consists in the possession of certain abilities – such as the ability to give an explanation in one's own words, to follow an explanation, and so on – and such abilities are not easily or usually transmitted by testimony (Hills 2009: 119-121). Hills argues that this is because acquiring abilities usually takes practice, practice that one does not get simply by accepting testimony (Hills 2009: 119).¹⁷⁷

Here is an example to illustrate the points above. There is a judge, Claire, whose sentences do not exhibit justice. This is because while she wants to sentence justly and is reliable in doing so, her judgements concerning the justice of a given sentence are formed on the basis of the testimony of a more experienced judge, Judith (Hills 2009: 110). Remember, according to Hills, the motive to do the right thing, reliable moral judgement, and even reliability in doing the right thing are insufficient for virtue. Virtue requires that one's motivations and beliefs are responses to moral reasons. Thus, Claire's beliefs about the justice of her sentences are not responses to justice but to Judith's testimony (Hills 2009: 110-111). Importantly, the missing element in Claire's way of forming her judgements about the justice of a given sentence is moral understanding. Claire does not grasp for herself the reasons why a given sentence is just or not. Instead, she is entirely dependent on Judith's testimony,

¹⁷⁷ It is for this same reason that Hills thinks that know-how is very difficult to transmit by testimony (2009: 121), something which she has in common with conservatives.

which does not transmit to her the abilities required for moral understanding (Hills 2009: 110-111).

Having explained Hills's view, I assess how it applies to deference to the traditions of one's society and discuss how Hills's view relates to the conservative position. It is not hard to see how Hills's argument could be adapted to apply to deference to the traditions of one's society. Supposing that moral understanding is required for moral virtue and that moral understanding cannot easily be acquired by deferring to the traditions of one's society, the conclusion that follows is that one usually fails to exhibit moral virtue by deferring to the traditions of one's society.

The conservative position does not place the same emphasis on understanding as Hills does. Specifically, failure to acquire understanding is not as much of an epistemic or moral failure on the conservative view as on Hills's view (and she seems to think it is both an epistemic and moral failure). The reason for this is that, as far as the conservative is concerned, understanding is very difficult to attain and plausibly, failure to attain that which is very difficult to attain is not a (particularly bad) fault. Let me explore this in more detail.

The most important move in the argument here is that where Hills's position assumes that people can attain understanding just by reasoning for themselves, the conservative regards that claim as false. Understanding cannot be attained simply by thinking for oneself and is in fact rather difficult to attain. The basis for this judgement by the conservative is, I'm sure, rather obvious, but it is worth stating explicitly. The conservative's basis for scepticism about how easy it is to acquire moral understanding is motivated by her anti-rationalism. Understanding why p requires the relatively sophisticated abilities involved in grasping the reasons why p , such as the ability to follow an explanation of why p , the ability to explain why p in one's own words, draw the conclusion that p from premises q and r , and so on (Hills 2013: 554-555). These are abilities whose development and exercise essentially involves the use of human reasoning capacities. However, given the limits of human reason, acquiring and reliably

exercising such abilities is difficult. Thus, acquiring understanding is, according to conservatives, rather difficult.

The upshot of this for the conservative is that we should be content to rely on tradition as a source of knowledge, true belief and inspiration to do the right thing, even if we do so without understanding. This is not to say, of course, that understanding is disvaluable or not worth pursuing. Possessing moral understanding is clearly good. However, given the difficulty of attaining it if anti-rationalism is true, failure to do so is not a serious failing.¹⁷⁸ Another way of putting this is that the conservative can take the view that acquiring knowledge from tradition is a permissible, second-best option to attaining moral understanding.¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, perhaps deference could serve as a means of developing understanding. By deferring to the traditions of our society, we could acquire the true beliefs or knowledge on which to draw in seeking to enhance our understanding. It is often the case that we only come to grasp why something is the case once we realise *that* it is the case and then come to reflect on the reasons for the relevant facts' obtaining.

Perhaps an analogy will help here. Hills argues that it is permissible for children to defer to adults on moral matters, since as 'immature moral agents', they lack moral understanding and will only come to develop it by acquiring 'a stock of true moral beliefs on which to draw' when learning how to make judgements about new cases by reasoning from familiar ones (Hills 2009: 120). Hills also claims that any moral agent who is lacking in maturity, including some adults,

¹⁷⁸ Interestingly, Zagzebski argues that while Hills is correct in thinking that it is not possible to get understanding from pure moral testimony, it is possible to help someone acquire moral understanding from more complex testimony, such as that involving outlining reasons why *p* is true. On this basis, Zagzebski argues that deferring to tradition is compatible with acquiring understanding, since the transmission of a tradition involves moral teaching, which in turn involves complex testimony (2012: 174-178).

¹⁷⁹ This argument should be distinguished from the sceptical argument for conservatism discussed in the Introduction. The latter claims that reliance on tradition is a second-best option to be used in the absence of normative knowledge. The argument I make here, of course, allows that there is normative knowledge but posits reliance on tradition as a second-best option to moral understanding.

may be justified in deferring for the same reason: they lack the relevant stock of true moral beliefs and need to acquire such beliefs before they can develop moral understanding (Hills 2009: 120).

Importantly, the conservative might be tempted to argue that deferring to the traditions of one's society is effectively to defer to the generations that have gone before. And, in a sense, we stand to them as children to adults; their collective experience and understanding vastly outstrip our individual experience and understanding.¹⁸⁰ Each of us can hope to acquire true beliefs by deferring to the traditions of our society, beliefs that we may not otherwise have acquired. If we lack understanding, such true traditional beliefs or traditional knowledge can serve as a second-best option and, indeed, as the stock of true beliefs on which to draw in the quest to develop more understanding.

7.3.2. *Howell's Rejection of Deference*

I now consider Howell's argument concerning deference and virtue. He argues that beliefs which are formed out of deference are not integrated into one's wider set of attitudes. However, virtue requires that one's beliefs and wider attitudes form a unified, integral whole. So, when one forms one's moral beliefs by deferring to another's testimony, one compromises one's virtue (Howell 2014: 402-404).¹⁸¹

As with Hills's argument, this needs to be unpacked. Howell argues that 'deference involves forming and sustaining a belief in p based upon some other act of believing p ' (2014: 389). Howell adds several clarifications to this. First, deference *sustains* and not only causes belief. If a belief is merely formed by taking another's word for it, but not sustained by it, then it is not formed through deference. For example, if Smith believes that p based on Jones's

¹⁸⁰ This is the one true element in what I earlier called the 'storehouse' view of traditions' epistemic role, on which the latter function as a kind of repository for the ancestors' collective experience.

¹⁸¹ It should be noted that Howell does not regard deference as strictly incompatible with virtue. Instead, he claims only that the agent who defers is sub-optimal in respect of virtue.

assertion that p but only because Smith has found her own reasons for believing that p , then Smith has not deferred. Second, one can defer to oneself. For example, one could remember believing something and then come to believe it again solely on that basis (2014: 389-390). Third, it is appropriate for some individuals, such as sociopaths and young children, to defer (2014: 390). Other agents can also permissibly defer in exigent circumstances, such as when time is short, or the costs of inaction are severe (2014: 390).

Howell says that a virtue is ‘a reliable disposition to act and feel in certain ways’ which is characteristic (2014: 403). In other words, possessing a virtue consists in being reliably disposed to act and feel in certain ways, where the dispositions are reflective of the agent’s character (2014: 403). Howell approvingly quotes Annas as saying that when an agent acts on a virtue, she acts on the relevant disposition ‘in and from virtue’ (Annas 2011: 9; Howell 2014: 403). The kind agent acts in and from character when being kind (Annas 2011: 9; Howell 2014: 403). The generous agent is disposed to perform generous actions and has ‘the feelings appropriate to the situation’ (Howell 2014: 403). She is reliably motivated to be generous and will have entrenched intuitions about the appropriateness of giving under certain conditions. She feels generous: she gets pleasure from giving and will not suffer negative emotions when helping others (Howell 2014: 403).

What then does Howell mean when he says that virtue requires that one’s attitudes are integrated? Howell does not explain exactly what this means, but he seems to have in mind the thought that to be virtuous one must have each disposition of the relevant type and that these are mutually reinforcing. He argues that one could have beliefs about generosity without this belief giving rise to or resulting from the dispositions to feel or act which are definitive of generosity (Howell 2014: 403). Thus, he claims, ‘unification between beliefs, feelings and dispositions to act is part of what allows virtues to be dynamic, allowing beliefs to reinforce feelings and dispositions to action, and vice versa’ (Howell 2014: 403).

Having explained the terms of Howell's argument, I now consider it in more detail. Recall, Howell argues that when one defers, one's belief fails to be integrated into the web of one's wider attitudes. This failure of integration compromises the agent's virtue. Hence, deference compromises the agent's virtue.

I discuss the premises of Howell's argument in reverse order. Why then does he think that virtue requires the unification or integration of one's attitudes? He argues that possessing only one of the relevant kinds of disposition (to believe, feel, and act in the relevant way) is insufficient for virtue. If one has beliefs about the appropriateness of giving under certain conditions but lacks the disposition to give to others or compassion for their adversity, then one is not generous. If one is disposed to engage in philanthropy but lacks compassion or the relevant beliefs, then one is not generous. If one has compassion for the poor but lacks the relevant beliefs or disposition to help, then one is not generous, and so on (Howell 2014: 403). So, generosity requires the integration of each kind of disposition, and the same goes for the other virtues.

There are, according to Howell, several ways in which beliefs formed out of deference can fail to be integrated into one's wider set of attitudes. I discuss three. First, deference can indicate that the agent lacks virtue. Second, deference does not inculcate virtue. Third, deference can have long-term negative effects on the agent's moral character.

Deference can indicate lack of virtue because if someone needs to defer on, for example, whether needlessly causing suffering is wrong, this indicates that she lacks more than knowledge or understanding. It indicates that she lacks certain 'intuitions, feelings, and other non-cognitive attitudes about suffering' and these indicate a lack of virtue (Howell 2014: 404). In other words, Howell argues that when one defers concerning the wrongness of causing suffering, one acquires the belief that it is wrong to needlessly cause suffering. But that belief is insufficient for virtue, since virtue requires the presence and integration of dispositions to feel and act, as well as to believe, and the fact one needs to

defer indicates the lack of these other dispositions. If one had those dispositions, one might have already believed that it is wrong to needlessly cause suffering given that beliefs, in Howell's view, can 'stem from' those dispositions (Howell 2014: 404). So, if one needs to defer on whether suffering is wrong, this is evidence that one lacks virtue. (Presumably the virtue in question is compassion, though Howell does not say).

Deference does not inculcate virtue because when someone defers to testimony, while she may well gain knowledge or justified belief, she does not thereby gain the other attitudes that are partly constitutive of virtue. These include the relevant emotional reactions, the motivations or intuitions and associated non-cognitive states (Howell 2014: 404-405). One can learn through testimony that needlessly causing suffering is morally wrong. But one does not thereby acquire compassion for those who suffer, outrage at those who cause it, aversion to causing it oneself, and so on (Howell 2014: 405). One can come to believe that it is good to help the needy without thereby becoming inclined to do so (Howell 2014: 405). Since possessing the virtues requires this wider range of attitudes, the agent who defers to testimony acquires true belief, but does not thereby acquire virtue. Howell argues that 'because [...] deference fails to bring with it feelings, intuitions and motivations, the resulting belief does not give rise to a virtue or reinforce existing virtues in the way the belief might if it were gained in other ways' (2014: 408). Howell's complaint against this is seemingly that this lack of virtue – and the disconnect it entails between an agent's moral beliefs and her wider range of (non-doxastic) attitudes – constitutes a deficiency in the agent's moral character (Howell 2014: 404-405).

Deference can have long-term negative effects on the agent's moral character in several ways. I consider just one of these. Howell argues that there are two levels of virtue, one higher and one lower, though he does not specify exactly how the higher and lower levels are to be distinguished, since nothing hangs on that (Howell 2014: 406). At the lower level, it is sufficient for virtue that one has the relevant dispositions and the required unity or integration (Howell 2014: 406). However, the higher level of virtue requires moral understanding. Higher

virtue requires not only that one acts in certain ways but understanding of why one is acting in that way in the relevant circumstances (Howell 2014: 406). This understanding can enable one to reliably judge how one ought to act in new cases, shape one's dispositions, and become a better moral teacher (Howell 2014: 406). Crucially, such understanding is not transmissible by moral testimony. So, one who is in the habit of deferring to others foregoes the attainment of moral understanding and thereby frustrates the attempt to attain higher virtue (Howell 2014: 406).¹⁸²

Let us now consider how Howell's arguments could apply to deference to the traditions of one's society. I assume for the sake of argument his premise that virtue requires the integration of one's dispositions to believe, feel, and act in certain ways. So, when an agent forms a belief by deferring to the traditions of her society, does the resultant belief suffer failure to be integrated with her other attitudes?

I consider each of Howell's three arguments and see how they apply to deference to the traditions of one's society. First, Howell argues that deference can indicate lack of virtue. Virtue requires the possession of certain non-cognitive attitudes, such as feelings or intuitions, and their integration with one's beliefs. If someone needs to defer, this is a sign that she lacks these non-cognitive attitudes. Therefore, if she needs to defer, this could indicate lack of virtue.

Applying this to deference to the traditions of one's society, perhaps if someone needs to form her normative beliefs by deferring to the traditions of her society, this indicates that she lacks the attitudes whose possession and integration with one's beliefs constitutes virtue. The virtuous agent would be able to work out for herself, and therefore to know about, whether it is wrong to needlessly cause suffering, without having to rely on traditions. This is because an agent's moral beliefs often 'stem from' her feelings and intuitions. So, if an agent lacks

¹⁸² This is an affinity between Howell's account of what is wrong with deference which is similar to Hills's, as he himself notes (2014: 406).

the belief that it is wrong to needlessly cause suffering, there is a good chance that she also lacks the relevant non-cognitive attitudes. And if she needs to defer, this indicates that she lacks the belief. Hence, deferring to the traditions of one's society can indicate lack of virtue.

Second, Howell argues that deference fails to inculcate virtue. When one acquires moral knowledge by testimony, one gets a true moral belief by testimony. But the other elements whose possession and integration with one's beliefs are required by virtue are not transmissible by testimony. So, when one acquires moral knowledge through testimony, one does not thereby acquire moral virtue.

Similarly, perhaps deference to the traditions of one's society does not inculcate virtue. Just as virtue is not transmissible through testimony, perhaps it is also not acquirable through deference to the traditions of one's society. Hence, when one defers to the traditions of one's society, one may acquire normative knowledge, but fail to acquire virtue.

The third argument is that deference has bad long-term effects on the agent's character. One way in which this can happen is that deference prevents the agent achieving higher virtue. Lower virtue requires only the relevant attitudes and their integration. But higher virtue requires moral understanding. Moral understanding is not transmissible through testimony. So, reliance on testimony means foregoing the attainment of higher virtue.

Perhaps this argument, like those considered previously, can be applied to deference to the traditions of one's society. Reliance on tradition does not inculcate moral understanding. And, again, moral understanding is required for higher virtue. So, reliance on the traditions of one's society means foregoing the attainment of higher virtue.

I now discuss how Howell's position is distinct from the conservative position. I explain how the conservative position is distinct from each of Howell's arguments by discussing them in reverse order. In connection with Howell's third

argument, I simply return to the points made above in connection with Hills's objections to deference. Howell seems to assume that moral understanding, and the higher virtue which requires it, is easy to attain. However, this is false on the conservative view. Moral understanding, as far as the conservative is concerned, is difficult to acquire. This is because, as discussed, the conservative believes in the limits of human reason, and the acquisition and deployment of understanding involves the use of abilities that are essentially reasoning processes. Thus, if conservatism is true and Howell is correct about higher virtue requiring moral understanding, then higher virtue is difficult to attain. Perhaps, if moral understanding is difficult to attain, failure to acquire it is not as serious a failing as it would otherwise be. Therefore, reliance on tradition is a permissible, second-best option to take in the absence of higher virtue.

Similar points apply to Howell's first and second arguments. The conservative position is one according to which virtue is hard to acquire. There are two reasons for this. First, as discussed above in connection with both Hills's and Howell's arguments, virtue plausibly requires understanding. But understanding is difficult to acquire according to conservatism, and hence so too is virtue. Second, as mentioned in the Introduction, conservatives regard human beings as inexorably imperfect in respect of their capacity to acquire and act on the virtues. Thus, failure to acquire the virtues is not a serious fault because it is part of the human condition.¹⁸³

Let me make some clarifications on this before proceeding. First, the conservative position does not entail that we should be content to lack virtue. It is of course true that we should try to develop virtue to the greatest extent that we are able. However, reliance on tradition is a permissible, second-best option in the absence of virtue.

¹⁸³ In Chapter One I argued against tethering conservatism to pessimism. So, one might wonder whether the response I make here is consistent with those remarks. But the reader will remember that while I took issue with robust forms of pessimism that assert the wickedness of human beings or the doctrine of original sin, I did not disavow the thesis of human moral imperfection.

Second, acceptance of testimony can be a good way of developing virtue, as Howell himself points out: ‘deference as a child seems to be a precondition of attaining virtue [...]’ (2014: 411). Without accepting the moral testimony of adults during our childhood as part of our moral education, we could not develop the virtues. Howell does not spell out exactly why this is, but it is not hard to imagine what his case for thinking this may be. During moral education, we testify to children in order to induce true moral beliefs in them, beliefs whose propositional objects are moral truths they could not otherwise grasp. Their acquisition of these true moral beliefs is the starting point for their developing understanding as to why these propositions are true and the development of the various non-cognitive attitudes and dispositions that motivate one to act in accordance with them. Once these non-cognitive attitudes and dispositions are ingrained, the belief is integrated into the child’s character and is no longer deferential – it is no longer sustained purely by adults’ words.

The same plausibly applies to deference to the traditions of one’s society. By deferring to the traditions of one’s society, one can plausibly acquire true beliefs, as discussed. One can thereby go on to develop the various related non-cognitive attitudes whose development would entail the integration of these beliefs within one’s wider set of attitudes. This is plausibly true not only of children who defer to the traditions of their society through their moral education, but of adults whose moral development may still be ongoing.

7.4. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that there are good prospects for developing a conservative virtue epistemology. Specifically, I have argued that there are two contemporary views about the nature of intellectual virtues on which deference to the traditions of one’s society could plausibly be an intellectual virtue, namely Greco’s virtue reliabilist account and Zagzebski’s virtue responsibilist account. Furthermore, according to virtue epistemologists, knowledge is true belief that is formed out of intellectual virtue. Hence, there are two contemporary virtue epistemologies on which one could acquire normative

knowledge by deferring to the traditions of one's society. This is an interesting direction for future research. Finally, I discussed the unusualness of considering deference as a virtue given that the former is often taken to be incompatible with or to undermine virtue.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have argued that some traditional beliefs constitute knowledge, where traditional beliefs are normative beliefs that are formed out of deference to the traditions of one's society. I call this thesis the 'tradition principle'. The argument for the tradition principle, which I call the Social Knowledge Argument, says that deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation in some societies and that, in some of those societies, some traditional beliefs are non-luckily true. Furthermore, reliably produced beliefs that are non-luckily true constitute knowledge.

In Chapter One, I set out my account of conservatism. I argued that conservatism is composed of three principles. First, there is the tradition principle. Second, there is anti-rationalism, which says that there is no normative knowledge whose source is pure reason. Third, there is organicism, according to which society evolves and cannot be designed or shaped in accordance with human purposes to any great degree.

In Chapter Two, I refuted three arguments for the conclusion that conservatism is opposed to political theorising. The first of these arguments, which I call the 'Anti-Rationalist Argument', states that theorising about the justification for deference to traditions is inconsistent with conservatism's anti-rationalism. I replied that theorising does not commit one to 'rationalism' in any sense that is problematic for conservatism, such as belief in *a priori* normative knowledge. The second argument, which I call the 'Anti-Ideology Argument', claims that theorising commits one to ideology, which the conservative rejects. Hence, the conservative cannot engage in theorising. In response, I argued that theorising does not commit one to ideology in any sense that is incompatible with conservatism, for example a utopian blueprint for radical social change. The third argument, which I label the 'Anti-Theory-Theory Argument', claims that conservatism is self-defeating on account of being a theory that prohibits theories. In reply, I argued that conservatism is indeed opposed to theorising about first-order (substantive) normative questions. But the motivation for this

opposition to first-order theorising is a set of decidedly theoretical second-order principles that concern epistemological and metaphysical questions, namely the three principles of conservatism discussed in Chapter One. So, conservatism is consistent in regard to theorising once the kind of theory that it is an instance of is clearly distinguished from the kind it rejects.

Chapter Three defended my account of traditions. I argued that there are two elements to a tradition: an object which is transmitted from one generation to the next and the process of transmission. Furthermore, I argued that the transmission objects for societal traditions are rule-governed social practices that are characteristically complied with unreflectively, reasonably old, and evolved. I also argued that rule-governed social practices are transmitted by osmosis, which is the inculcation of beliefs, motives, norms, and the resulting behaviours, through imitation.

In Chapter Four, I explained the Social Knowledge Argument. Having just summarised the Social Knowledge Argument above, I do not repeat it here. I also reminded the reader of the Social Knowledge Argument's contribution to the literature. There are three gaps in the literature that the Social Knowledge Argument fills. First, the Social Knowledge Argument explains how it is possible to acquire propositional knowledge in whose acquisition tradition plays a role. Second, the Social Knowledge Argument is an explicit, sustained argument for the tradition principle, which does not rely on metaphor. Third, the Social Knowledge Argument utilises previously untapped resources from epistemology, namely process reliabilism.

In Chapter Five, I defended the Social Knowledge Argument's reliability claim. Deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable in some societies since traditions are the outputs of cultural evolution, which tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands. Cultural evolution tends to produce traditions that capture normative demands because it aims at the production of traditions that mandate actions that contribute to the fulfilment of human needs, and such actions are ordinarily right.

I also considered Buchanan and Powell's argument that cultural evolution does not reliably produce traditions that capture normative demands, as evidenced by the existence of 'bad traditions' in every society, traditions that mandate wrongful actions. In reply, I argued that assuming universalism makes it easy to overestimate the number of bad traditions and hence to call into question the reliability with which cultural evolution produces traditions that capture normative demands. A limited form of relativism, I argued, is plausible given the relationship between human need fulfilment and moral rightness. Actions that contribute to human need fulfilment are ordinarily right and actions that frustrate the fulfilment of human needs are ordinarily wrong. Some needs are universal, as are the conditions of their fulfilment. But not all needs are universal, and universal needs can sometimes be fulfilled in multiple ways. Hence, some acts are universally right or wrong, but others may be right or wrong for one society and not for another. In light of this, while there clearly are or have been traditions that mandate universally wrongful practices – FGM and slavery, for example – seemingly bad traditions from other societies may mandate actions that are right for the members of that society and seemingly bad traditions from the history of one's own society may have mandated actions that were right for the people whose traditions they were.

In Chapter Six, I defended the Social Knowledge Argument's anti-luck claim. I argued that there are traditional beliefs in societies in which deference to the traditions of one's society is reliable which meet two anti-luck conditions on knowledge, namely sensitivity and safety.

In Chapter Seven, I considered the prospects for developing a conservative virtue epistemology. According to virtue epistemologists, knowledge is true belief formed out of intellectual virtue, though different virtue epistemologists conceive of intellectual virtue in different ways. Virtue epistemologists are standardly divided into two camps: those who define intellectual virtues as innate faculties (virtue reliabilists) and those who define them as cultivated character traits (virtue responsibilists). I considered two major virtue epistemic theories of knowledge: John Greco's and Linda Zagzebski's. Greco represents

the virtue reliabilist camp and Zagzebski represents the virtue responsibilists. I argued that deference to the traditions of one's society could be construed as an intellectual virtue on either a virtue reliabilist or virtue responsibilist picture of intellectual virtue. Thus, there are prospects of developing a virtue epistemic form of conservatism, though doing so is a project for future research.

On the point about future research, I now discuss some further possibilities for future research projects that I did not explore in the thesis for reasons of space. The first of these is the possibility of making a less epistemically ambitious defence of conservatism. There are several forms that a less ambitious epistemic defence of conservatism might take. For example, rather than arguing that traditional beliefs constitute knowledge, an epistemic defence of conservatism might instead argue that there are justified traditional beliefs that fall short of knowledge. That thesis, like the tradition principle that I defend here, could be defended in reliabilist terms. A view about epistemic justification that we might call 'simple process reliabilism' says that *S*'s belief that *p* is justified if and only if it is the output of a process of belief formation which is reliable in respect of beliefs of that type. To give an example, on simple process reliabilism, Smith's belief that there is an apple on the desk in front of her is justified if and only if her belief that there is an apple on the desk in front of her is the output of a belief formation process – such as visual processes – that is reliable in respect of beliefs about kinds.

It is not hard to see how a theory of justified traditional belief could be developed along simple process reliabilist lines. Supposing that the arguments of Chapter Five are sound, then deference to the traditions of one's society is a reliable process for normative belief formation. Thus, on a process reliabilist theory of justification, there are justified traditional beliefs. This opens up the possibility of developing a less ambitious form of conservatism on which all traditional beliefs are justified, even if many fail to constitute knowledge on account of being lucky, contrary to the arguments of Chapter Six. Developing this position more fully is, of course, a project for future research.

I now discuss a second possibility for future research. The argument that I have made in this thesis and the reliabilism about justification sketched above both stake the epistemic standing of traditional beliefs on the reliability of the normative belief formation process that produces them. However, there is a very different approach to assessing the epistemic standing of beliefs on which the justificatory status of a belief depends entirely on the evidence that the agent has for the proposition that is the object of her belief (Conee & Feldman 2008). This thesis is known as ‘evidentialism’. More formally, evidentialism states that *S* is justified in believing that *p* at time *t* if and only if *S*’s evidence at *t* supports *p* on balance (Conee & Feldman 2008: 83).

Importantly, some conservatives have argued that a practice’s being a tradition is evidence, albeit defeasible, that one ought to comply with the practice (Kekes 1997: 367; Kekes 1998: 40-41). This opens up the possibility of developing an evidentialist form of conservatism. Suppose that a practice’s being a tradition is indeed defeasible evidence that it is right. Now suppose that an agent forms the belief that *p*, where *p* captures a tradition. The evidence in favour of *p* (the practice’s being a tradition) may be undefeated: there may be no strong countervailing evidence against *p*. In this type of case, the agent’s evidence supports *p* on balance. Assuming evidentialism, the subject is therefore justified in believing that *p*.

For example, suppose that the traditionality of men taking their hats off in church is defeasible evidence that favours the proposition that men ought to take their hats off in church. Jones forms the belief that men ought to take their hats off in church. Jones also has no strong countervailing evidence against the proposition that men ought to take their hats off in church. Hence, Jones has evidence that favours that proposition on balance. Therefore, if evidentialism is true, Jones is justified in believing that men ought to take their hats off in church.

So, it looks as if there could be justified traditional beliefs on an evidentialist theory of justification. Moreover, suppose that there is a theory of knowledge

that has evidentialism as one of its components and traditional beliefs can satisfy the other conditions on knowledge that such a theory sets out. If that is the case, then there could be traditional beliefs that constitute knowledge on an evidentialist theory of knowledge.

There are, of course, several details that would need to be worked out to develop a viable evidentialist conservatism. Any form of evidentialism needs to address the question of what evidence is, what the possession of evidence amounts to, and what it is for evidence to support a belief (Chignell 2018). There are multiple answers that have been given to each of these questions and each is controversial. I cannot possibly hope to answer them here. But I mention them because if it turns out that there are multiple different ways in which the conservative can answer one or more of these questions, then there are several evidentialist forms of conservatism that could be developed.

A third possibility for future research is developing the form of relativism that I sketched here more fully. Specifically, the relative conception of truth, on which normative propositions are only true-for-X, rather than true *simpliciter*, is controversial within contemporary philosophy and requires more extensive defence than I have been able to give it here.

Finally, there is one more possibility for future research that I want to discuss. The goal of this thesis has been to develop a conservative account of normative knowledge. However, it has focussed almost entirely on the sorts of normative knowledge that are most directly relevant to politics, namely moral and prudential knowledge. However, there is scope in future research for developing a conservative normative epistemology for other normative domains.

For example, one might seek to develop a traditionalist epistemology for aesthetic knowledge. Such an epistemology could also be developed along either reliabilist or evidentialist lines.¹⁸⁴ There are traditions in a range of aesthetic

¹⁸⁴ To be sure, however, reliabilism and evidentialism are not the only two theories of knowledge or justified belief available. So, there are even more possibilities for developing a conservative epistemology, though I explore them no further here.

domains such as music, painting, literature, and sculpture, such as the musical traditions of composition that dictate how a melody can be permissibly harmonised. It is possible to develop theories of propositional aesthetic knowledge that is acquired by deferring to such traditions.

A reliabilist theory of aesthetic knowledge might claim, for example, that deferring to the musical traditions of one's society is a reliable process for forming beliefs about such matters as how melodies ought to be harmonised. Consider the tradition that forbids a composer from writing parallel fifths. If deference to the aesthetic traditions of one's society is reliable in respect of beliefs about permissible harmonisation, then one could come to know that a composer ought not to write parallel fifths by deferring to this tradition.

By contrast, an evidentialist theory of aesthetic knowledge might argue that an aesthetic practice's being traditional is evidence in favour of the aesthetic proposition that captures it. So, to return to the musical example once more, one might form the justified belief that a composer ought not to write parallel fifths because the tradition forbidding the writing of parallel fifths constitutes evidence that favours, on balance, the view that one ought not to do so, and the possession of such evidence makes a belief justified. Thus, there are interesting prospects for developing a range of different conservative epistemologies for different normative domains that utilise different theories of knowledge or justified belief. Again, however, these are possibilities that must be left for future research.

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