

# Conservatives favour pragmatism over principle

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*Discuss.*

Pragmatism essentially believes in a more practical behavior or form of policy, as opposed to an ideological principle. Conservatives traditionally favour pragmatism because it emphasizes the impact of applied ideas that have been tested over time- highlighting the importance of tradition (one major traditional conservative value. One-nation conservatives agree with the foundations of pragmatic ideas.

Whereas the New Right was heavily ideological- arguably, the application of Neo-liberal ideas with an emphasis on free-market economics (i. e. : heavy privatization in the Thatcher period) shows a radical change into applying newer principles. Traditional conservatives place a higher emphasis on pragmatic ideas- as these ideas have been tested over time (a conservative would argue that they work; they are product of years of continuity) thus humans are incapable and essentially limited in radically making theories themselves.

Their ideas may be based upon the idea of tradition; which aligns itself with the Darwinian belief that only the fittest policies have survived over the years- and have created what Chesterton called the ' democracy of the dead' which is much more reputable than todays ' arrogant oligarchy'. Pragmatic ideas are preferred because they have continuously growing over centuries whereas principle would ensure instability- for example: the sudden abolition of the monarchy would heavily affect the public; because it's nationally

loved- therefore extreme principles of ideologies like communism would definitely cause imbalance.

This agrees with the Burkean view that a human principle can't be superior to the pragmatic principle that has developed on its own- as the political world is 'boundless and bottomless' (as Oakshott said), essentially too complicated for the human mind to articulate principles efficiently. Furthermore, traditional conservatives disregarded the application of representative democracy as it was seen as being too radical in the early 19th century.

Although one could argue that these conservatives are unaware of the benefits that radical change could bring- it can be countered by stating that fair democracy was a product of years of supplementing the system (example: through many Reform Acts-1832, 1848, 1867... etc. ); therefore this gradual and continuous change (that benefit pragmatic ideas) completely contrast the excessive change the immediate application of principle would bring.

Another sect of conservatives- One-nation conservatives clearly favored pragmatism but Disraeli realized the importance of 'change in order to conserve', which would satisfy the masses without significantly impacting the elitists. The 1867 Reform Act exemplifies that these traditional principles were supplemented for beneficiary purposes- for example: Disraeli thought reform would diminish the brewing hope of revolution and actually convince the supporters to support conservatives. Thus Disraeli's pragmatism was non-conventional but still built up on practical ideas.

Moreover, the application of political principles by Thatcher led Macmillan to give the 'selling of the families silver' speech- this can create an illustration: the silver which has been accumulated over the years pragmatically has been radically excluded and unnecessarily cashed in. In contrast, New right conservatives oppose the idea of pragmatism but rather favour the principled ideas. The mixture of neo-liberal ideas used by Thatcher and the rise of neo-conservatism through Reagan who placed an emphasis on supply-side economics.

These ideas proposed something different- for example: Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign placed a large emphasis in less government interference in lives of people- which completely obstructs the traditional idea of organic society and social obligations. Although New Right affected people socially, its economic impact was excessive- as the ideas of neo-liberal economists like Hayek and Freidman who proposed leaving it to the market (like the father of economics: Adam Smith). Freidman once remarked ' Governments never learn.

Only people learn. '- so this was applied by Thatcher who met much opposition from public/even party members who believed in more pragmatic change and weren't ready for such a radical one. These ideas created a rapid increase in unemployment numbers, realistically reaching 4 million in terms of relativepoverty; this widened the gap between South and North- a pragmatic conservative would have altered their political policies in order to come to terms with the public yet Thatcher ocused on her original ideological principles. Thatcher went against many traditional conservative values that have been developing over the years. There was a rejection of social

obligations and responsibilities which was traditionally emphasized; yet the increase in atomistic individualism and egoism. In her famous speech, she said: “ there is no such thing as society”- this can itself exemplify that her beliefs are formed from neo-liberal political beliefs, rather than incorporating pragmatism.

An idea that evolved from an organic society; into what One nation conservatives' idea of a paternalistic state- this was completely rejected which is evident in the increase in privatization of industries in order to ensure profit. Although one could argue that the application of this was essentially required- for example before Reaganomics, the economy was in its worst shape since the Great Depression- therefore if these New Right ideas weren't applied and more pragmatic ideas were used then progress would be stationary and the debt would rapidly increase.

Essentially, if we simplify the argument it's just trying to, (a) bring change through principles, and, (b) do what pragmatism failed to do- so maybe, it's just changing in order to converse. For example, if these free-market economic ideas are applied, they can eventually be successful- for example: Estonia, which was influenced by ' Free to choose' (Friedman) introduced a flat tax rate-it's now very profitable and there is a boost in public satisfaction.

Although, arguably it wasn't able to act pragmatically because it had just been released from the cruel soviet system therefore this doesn't significantly illustrate the benefits of ideological principle- as it couldn't purely work on Britain, for example: the Thatcher era: there was a boost in unemployment, poverty, frustration. In conclusion, on large conservatives <https://assignbuster.com/conservatives-favour-pragmatism-over-principle/>

believe in pragmatism instead of ideological principle- although when the economy is in a slump then the application of newer ideas can revolutionize the system, evident with the New Right.

However, Thatcher can be seen as an anomalous character in Britain- one could argue that David Cameron is shifting back to the pragmatic style of conservatism: with Big Society which will loosely reinstate social responsibilities. Although it's equally arguable that New Right had an impact on New labor thus principle could be significantly important (as it was famously called: " Thatcherism with a human face"). Furthermore, on a whole, conservatives based their views on pragmatic ideas as opposed to ideological principles.