

***THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND
SOCIAL JUSTICE POLICY
1997–2010:
AN HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALIST ANALYSIS***

by

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Abstract

This thesis uses historical institutionalism (HI) to explain why social justice policy became an important focus for change in the 1997–2010 Conservative Party, how this policy changed, and why radical ideological change did not take place. Utilising interviews with mid- and elite-level Party actors, and analysis of policy publications, this thesis maps the restrictive and enabling effect of material and ideational institutional structures. It introduces new HI theoretical mechanisms of path tendency within path dependency, and confluence junctures, as key processes; neutral and mimicry invasion as key sources of new policy; and policy and institutional entrepreneurs as key types of actor. It couples these newly defined terms to present mechanisms in HI to offer an explanation that down-plays Cameron as a significant break from past ideological practice: rather there has been broad continuity throughout the opposition period, which, rather than being restrictive, has *facilitated* incremental policy change, largely emerging slowly from mid-level actors in the Party. The thesis contributes to debates in the study of British politics by offering a theoretical and institutionally focused explanation rather than prioritising descriptive and personality focused work. It also develops HI, improving its explanation of incremental change in a non-crisis institutional environment.

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Abbreviations

HI	Historical Institutionalism
RCI	Rational Choice Institutionalism
SI	Sociological Institutionalism
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CCHQ	Conservative Campaign Head Quarters
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
PCP	Parliamentary Conservative Party
CCF	Conservative Christian Fellowship
LSE	London School of Economics
RSA	Royal Society of Arts
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
SMF	Social Market Foundation
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale for research

When the Conservative Party returned to power in May 2010 it finally left behind thirteen years of unfamiliar opposition. It was by no means a triumphal return, and the visual of Cameron's somewhat stoical entry into Downing Street was far removed from Blair's new dawn breaking. Rather than enjoying a landslide, or even a healthy working majority, the Conservatives experienced a subdued stumble over the finish line aided by the supporting shoulder of the Liberal Democrats. Can it be said that the opposition period was one of reflection and renewal, and, as a consequence, that the UK voter was offered at the 2010 election a reinvigorated and changed party? If this were so—and indeed the Party itself was keen that this be projected—then it was a change that was not wholly embraced by the electorate, though, indeed, not wholly rejected, either. But it is possible that the ambivalent endorsement evidenced in the Party's election performance was a result of a public impression that the Tories had not adequately changed.

My aim in this thesis is to understand how, and to what extent, the Party had changed on the way back to government. To do this it is necessary that we examine the entire period of Conservative opposition since 1997. In doing so we can understand the nature of the Conservative Party; and what difficulties the Party's successive leaderships experienced during opposition to direct the Party once again towards the power they had coveted for so long. In particular, I focus on social justice policy, as

emblematic of wider considerations of change, or resistance to change, within the Party. However, though this policy forms a guiding through line, it cannot be understood in isolation—therefore, it is linked to changes in economic policy, marketing, organisational structure, the electoral environment and the actions of elite and mid-level actors in the Party.

The extent of the electoral challenge facing the Conservatives after the first Labour landslide was considerable. In 1997 the Party suffered its biggest defeat of the mass democratic era when they secured only 165 seats and 30.7 per cent of the vote (Crowson 2001: 52). Many experienced ministers lost their seats, such as Michael Portillo, David Mellor, and Malcolm Rifkind, and not a single MP was returned from either Scotland or Wales. In response to this unequivocal public rejection, John Major immediately resigned as leader leaving a dazed and injured Party behind him. It was the nadir of the Conservatives' electoral history and the Party, as it launched quickly into a divisive leadership election, appeared in disarray as to the direction it wished now to take. It was believed by some that the moment held the possibility of rapid renewal and significant change in the image, policies, and even ideology of the Party. But many were also cautious that the heady days of post-defeat should not lead to change for change's sake; even Michael Portillo (1997), who would go on to be a persistent voice of modernisation in the coming years, counselled in a Conference fringe speech following the Labour victory, that 'there is much for the Conservative Party to learn and to put right. We shall do it. But that is not to say that everything that we did in the past was wrong. Very far from it...' And yet what the Party presented to the electorate in 2001 and 2005 was largely similar, in its beliefs and electoral positioning, to that seen previously. Indeed, it appeared that no deep reflection had taken place; and that no

significant policy innovations had been proffered. Consequently, the result of the election of 2001 was almost identical, both in its psephology and in its humiliation for the Tories, as 1997; and the result in 2005, though gains were made, was far from securing victory—a fact confirmed by Michael Howard’s swift resignation. The public largely saw the Party at this point as having not shifted at all to the supposedly popular, voter led, centre ground. As Quinn (2008: 180) writes, interpreting a contemporaneous YouGov poll, when ‘Michael Howard led the Tories...both the leader and his Party were seen as “fairly right-wing”, whereas voters placed themselves (on average) and Tony Blair in the centre.’

It was only after 2005—a full eight years after the initial catastrophic defeat—with the leadership of David Cameron, that the Party witnessed a sustained increase in its polling numbers; however, even this revival ultimately did not transform into a winning majority at the 2010 election. As a result, the thirteen years of opposition appear to present a narrative of partial incompetence, of an inability to enact transformative change within, despite calls for it without. This failure of the Conservative Party to regain power quickly after 1997, or decisively in the election of 2010, provides us with an opportunity, however, to assess how one of the most electorally successful parties in Western Europe dealt with, and, moreover, often failed to deal with, a moment of uncertainty regarding its future viability. Indeed, it is hardly impertinent to say that when one examines the eventual Tory electoral victory (or partial victory) of 2010, the central question that comes to mind is, as Tim Bale (2006a: 7) pointedly phrases it: What took them so long? We must ask why three leaders were seemingly unable to revivify a once effective and power-focused party; and, following from this, why Cameron, though able to do so more easily upon gaining the leadership in 2005, was, all

the same, unable to gain more than a plurality of seats in 2010, despite facing a seemingly moribund Labour Party, a financial collapse that should have favoured the appeal of a Conservative stewardship, and an unpopular Prime Minister with the dark hauteur of an Victorian prelate.

An analysis of the long opposition period will answer why this was so. Taking social justice policy as our guide, an analysis will provide a narrative of the difficulties of party change. We can then shape an explanation as to why change took the character and pace that it did. From this a contribution can be made to the understanding of the thirteen crucial (and atypical) years out-of-office of a Party that is central to the history of British politics. The analysis of these events is not just an historiographical necessity, however, but is of key interest to political science, also. An examination of the Tory opposition period provides us with an opportunity to make a theoretical contribution to the study of British politics, and the study of political parties more generally. The actions of the Conservatives can inform a theoretical understanding of the agency of party leaders in engendering change and the concomitant levels of resistance to these changes presented by the wider party. By examining these processes we are able to assess the ability not only of the Conservative Party but parties in general to react constructively to external repudiation of their practices. Such an assessment must be based around key questions: what amounts to changing the party; what are the external circumstances and internal structures that enable and constrain this change; who are the active agents; and what are the dynamics of change (is it purely linear, or rather, does it resemble the flow of a river, consisting of eddies and currents of differing velocities)?

In this thesis, I argue that these theoretical questions can be addressed most rigorously by utilising the framework of historical institutionalism (HI). This framework

is not widely employed in the study of British politics; this thesis, therefore, seeks to utilise HI to enhance an analysis of the Conservative Party, but also to advocate more generally for reflection on the efficacy of theory in furthering our understanding of institutional change, and, moreover, how specific actors are able to operate within an institution. Furthermore, the utilising of this framework allows for the testing of the theoretical claims made by HI regarding the mechanisms and speed of institutional change, thus placing the conclusions of this thesis within the broader context of developments in political science and the advancement of specific institutional theoretical debates. The wider aim here is to demonstrate that the study of British politics can, and should, make contributions to, and engage with, transferable debates regarding the nature of institutional change and party development within other democratic political systems.

1.2. An overview of the argument and structure of the thesis

In chapter 2, the thesis begins by examining the work done on the Party in the post-1997 opposition period. It divides this work into four categories, highlights the many excellent insights that have been generated in the field, but also acknowledges that there are a number of deficiencies in the literature. I argue that the literature—with a few notable and useful exceptions—is characteristically leader focused, agential and narrative based. As a result, examinations of change have focused on the instrumentality of elite figures and produced explanations which miss much of what occurred at the mid-level of the Party; have exaggerated the degree of ideological change in the Party; have emphasised the tactical moves of leaders (from supposed core vote to

modernisation), outside of environmental context; and heavily focused on Cameron's individual role in change. I then examine how this agentialism has been shaped by a dominant understanding of parties which is informed by the party model literature. Though this literature provides incisive static modelling of parties it fails to explore dynamism, and therefore misses the need to prioritise institutional restrictions of leadership agency: rather, it sees leaders as readily capable of shaping parties into new forms and models. This wrongly facilitates heavily leader focused empirical work. I therefore argue that reflection is needed on the, often implicit, theoretical assumptions in the study of British politics, and the acceptance of party model literature as the primary theoretical concern when examining party adaptation.

Following from identifying these deficiencies, I introduce the theoretical framework of historical institutionalism in chapter 3. I present its central mechanisms and outline how they define institutions, an actor's actions in institutions, and how change occurs in an institution. I demonstrate that HI has been able to explain radical change effectively. However, I seek to enrich the theory by incorporating elements from rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, as well as introducing three key terms I have specifically developed from this case study: policy entrepreneur, path tendency, and confluence juncture. This developed theoretical framework enables an explanation of *incremental* change, an area HI has been accused of under-exploring. Taking cognisance of the deficiencies in the literature on the Conservative Party, I then use theory to generate an hypothesis of how change occurred and the manner it took.

Before testing an hypothesis one must be aware of the applicability of one's methods. I therefore reflect on methods in chapter 4. I outline my choice of empirical data, and step through the methodological journey in my research. I then, in chapter 5,

test my hypothesis using the empirical data of interviews, primary texts and secondary analysis on the Party in opposition post-1997. I conclude, in chapter 6, that policy emphasis change occurred within overall ideological continuity; that Cameron acted as a facilitator rather than driver of change; and that all four leaders were strongly restricted in their agency by their environmental and institutional context. Change in social justice policy was primarily a result of tendency change in mid-level actors over the entire opposition period—and when successfully linked to economic policy, marketing techniques, and a favourable environment, formed Party wide and elite support to become the dominant image of change in the Party. The thesis, therefore, fills a gap in the literature by providing an alternative to the argument that Cameron is an ideological break from the past, and that leaders are strongly able to direct change in a Party in non-crisis periods; it also focuses more attention on mid-level actors, an area often under-explored in accounts.

Furthermore, because the empirical data and explanation is shaped around theoretical mechanisms, and not presented as merely a chronological narrative, the case study can be used to support theoretical insights across political analysis, and offers an exemplar for comparative analysis (a possibility often underutilised in the study of British politics). Finally, I develop the theoretical literature and demonstrate the ability of historical institutionalism, given the introduction of new mechanisms, to explain incremental change, an area it has been thought to be ill-equipped to tackle.

2. A Review of the Literature on the Post-1997 Conservative Party

In this chapter I highlight the areas of interest in the Party that research since the 1997 defeat has taken; I identify the excellent work that has been done but also signal that this work is under-developed in a number of areas. Notably, current analyses lack a strong theoretical grounding and, as a result, are unable to adequately explain why changes in the Party occurred at the pace and in the manner that they did. In the final part of this section, I examine the party model literature: for in the study of British politics, when theorisation is present at all, parties are predominantly understood as having adapted through a number of stages. I highlight why this approach is amenable to the general preference in the study of British politics of descriptive instrumentalism; and why this approach, though informative, leaves areas of party behaviour under examined. My review provides the grounding that allows me to identify the need to incorporate the theory of historical institutionalism into an analysis; by doing so I am able to improve upon the deficiencies and gaps that are present in the current literature on the Party.

It is convenient when addressing the history of a Party to divide the time under examination into the neat analytical compartments of sequential leaderships. The inclination is to construct an analysis based around a cyclical, and largely instrumentalist, narrative of failure, reflection, and renewal, which leads to the electoral evolution of a party. This tendency can clearly be seen in numerous works on the

Conservative Party throughout its history (see, for example, Blake 1979; Ball and Seldon 1994, 2005; Evans and Taylor 1996; Charmley 1996, 2008; Clark 1998; and the vast and authoritative Ramsden 1995, 1996, 1998). This research, firmly positioned within an historical perspective, contains excellent empirical work; but its overarching narrative structure is formulaic and episodic. For example, Ramsden's work (some of which constitutes part of the landmark, multi-volume Longman series on the Conservative Party) is exhaustive in its account of the machinations and manoeuvrings of the Party elite but is near silent on the oscillations of party membership, financing, and organisation, and how this served to constrain the actions of the leadership. As a result, the work provides only a surface account of British political history as the cumulative sum of the actions of great men and women, and fails to uncover the deeper structural restraints that have served to limit and shape the movement of agents within the Conservative Party.

The most notable large-scale work on the recent opposition period is Tim Bale's *...From Thatcher to Cameron*. Bale (2010: 363–391) presents a comprehensive argument: he acknowledges that there is no single big explanation for change in the opposition period, and goes on to highlight the role of limited actor rationality in perceiving the right action to take, especially with low positive feedback; that Tory actors were ideologically not pragmatically driven; that they rejected ideological change under Hague, wrote IDS off as an embarrassing liability, and that Howard was too traditional and right-wing, achieving little. Bale argues that Cameron's success is in part due to favourable environmental changes: the diminishing and the end of Blair, the unpopularity of Brown, and the economic downturn. He also identifies the neutralising of issues that had previously caused division: Europe and the removal of Thatcher. He

adds to this that the actors in Cameron's leadership, even those who had previously served under former leaders, were *less ideological* because of strategic learning and the replacement of conviction with positioning. Cameron also, argues Bale, pursued a decontamination marketing strategy, embraced minorities, and showed clear leadership during the expenses scandal to become one of the 'most skilled leaders of the opposition Britain has ever seen' (Bale 2010: 389).

But Bale seems, ultimately, to renege on his promise of 'focusing on the intersection, the interrelationship, and the reciprocal influence of ideas, interests, and institutions' (2010: 12) in favour of a comprehensively empirical, resolutely chronological, and heavily leader focused account. As I demonstrate through my own examination, both explicitly and by implication, Bale fails in his work to fully employ institutional theory, as he argues is necessary. Rather, he utilises the framework mainly as a means of blocking and organising his narrative—moving from examining a leader in part, to then examining the contemporaneous Party, in part—than as a tool to help ontologically disentangle the complex delimited agency of actors operating within the party institution. As a result, there is the implication of rump statecraft, rather than institutional theory, in Bale's conclusions, especially around Cameron (who will prove, of course, to be the dominant figure of the era, and therefore the one most necessary to be explained accurately). Because Bale's explanation is not informed adequately by institutional theory, he underplays the ideological continuity of the opposition period, which I strongly argue was a key *driver* and organiser of incremental change. As a result, he overstates Cameron's break with the past, and misses the amenability of his new policies with past practice, and the central joining of social and economic policy which had its antecedence not in agential leaders but with mid-level players, operating

across leaderships and shaping the institution. Furthermore, his avoidance of theoretical reflection means he does little to test or develop his theoretical framework, or provide transferability for his conclusions. Whilst Bale's empirical work is often comprehensive, a central purpose of this present thesis is to give a theoretical framing to an analysis of the opposition period that will address the weaknesses in Bale; and such an analysis forms conclusions that strongly deemphasises Cameron as a radical and agential leader.

Research that has chosen to focus on a narrower period than cited above has had the opportunity to examine the Party somewhat away from the leadership. It has been able to unpick a variety of organisational and external themes (see, for example, on the 1979–1983 Party: Hall, *et al.* (eds) 1983; on the 1991–1997 Party: McAnulla 1999; on the 1997–2001 Party: Garnett and Lynch (eds) 2003; on the 2001–2004 Party: the *Political Quarterly* special edition 2004; and on the 2005–2010 Party: Lee and Beech (eds) 2009; Dorey *et al.* (eds) 2011; Heppell and Seawright (eds) 2012). These works are cynosures for the detailed analysis required when examining the Party (though some retain certain theoretical weaknesses that I expand upon below). However, when analyses have stepped back to survey the broader landscape ranging over several incumbencies, the episodic, leader-focused approach dominates (see, for example, Heppell (ed) 2012). There is the possibility that as the literature on the Conservatives' opposition period is written it will coalesce solely around this narrative structure: and so we will be presented with the Hague disaster; the Duncan Smith interregnum; the Howard management; and finally the Cameron revival. In this manner the history of the Party will continue to be primarily concerned with the torch carrying of leaders. This

form of Whiggish diachronic taxonomy, however, can serve to overemphasise the importance of the leader as a focus of attention. Consequently, the leader becomes a metonym for the party, and the analytical attention given to his or her agency is greatly and wrongly increased, uncoupled from the array of party activity. Indeed, Whiggish historicity is characteristic of an area of British political science which has been somewhat resistant to the theorisation and professionalization (to use the tendentious word partially adopted by Bevir and Rhodes 2007: 235) that has been largely accepted in other areas. When Bevir and Rhodes state (2007: 236), in a review of the development of the discipline, that ‘Whiggish writers are the fundamental influences on British political science’, they could find strong evidence for their assertion by examining the canon of work on the Conservative Party. And this is to be lamented: for to examine the Party in this traditional way misses the possibility that history is not a series of episodes but rather a complexity of events and institutional mechanisms that tend to cross over the clear lines (often drawn, at least superficially, by the Party leadership themselves) that demark a change in power. This is not to say that we should ignore the leader as a powerful actor but rather we must consider the leader only alongside the institutional factors with which they are permanently engaged.

The review below will not present the recent literature on the Party in an episodic and chronological fashion; in doing so it will avoid precipitating the continued conceptualisation of the period in this manner. If we conceive of the literature as operating around a series of themes, we are better able to see the cross-layered nature of change. Since 1997 there has been excellent work examining the Conservative Party that can be ordered thematically, either by the narrow period of time focused upon, or the specific topic analysed: for example, there has been period specific work examining

general elections (Bartle 2003; Seldon 2005) and leadership elections (Heppell 2007; Denham and O'Hara 2008); and also thematic work on marketing (Lees-Marshment 2001); sleaze (Doig 2001; 2002; 2003); euroscepticism (Baker 2002); organisational structure (Kelly 2002); party discipline (Whiteley and Seyd 1999); ideology (Hickson 2005); policy (Dorey 2004; and specifically on the Big Society policy, the special issue of *Political Quarterly* vol. 82 2011); financing (Fisher 2004); and feminization (Campbell *et al.* 2007; Childs and Webb 2012); as well as work on the roles and leadership styles of Hague (Collings and Seldon 2001), Duncan Smith (Hayton and Heppell 2010), Howard (Roth 2004) and Cameron (Lee 2009).

I have grouped these themes under four umbrella headings which identify areas of general inter-relatedness: Campaigning, marketing, and elections; leadership elections and leaders; ideology and policy; and party organisation. In the review below, I identify areas of agreement and disagreement in the literature; which areas and interpretations are well reasoned and which are underdeveloped; and, finally, as a means of justifying my own approach to the topic, I underline the theoretical deficiencies that need to be addressed in order to produce a more comprehensive analysis.

2.1. Campaigning, marketing, and elections

The Conservative Party have long been credited as political communications innovators. They have developed techniques of both information gathering and policy marketing and have, in repeated elections throughout the modern era, operated a highly skilful campaign machine. The adoption of market research techniques, such as psycho-metric profiling, and the utilisation of the slick Saatchi and Saatchi advertising agency by the

Party in the 1980s, marked the beginning of the permanent professionalization of political communications in British politics, and the ever increasing predominance of admen within party headquarters and election war-rooms. Indeed, the election war-room itself, pioneered by Cecil Parkinson in 1983, has been identified as a key organisational development that has since been adopted by the other major parties (Scammell 1995). This exemplary marketing aptitude, however, seemed absent for the majority of the Conservatives' post-1997 period of opposition. No longer a professional foil to the amateurish Labour Party, they now appeared as somewhat fogeyish and lacking in self-awareness: a corduroy suit at the New Labour discotheque.

The marketing and communications literature is uniform in describing an operation following the 1997 defeat that was underfunded and unfocused, though not unmotivated. Indeed, much was tried; but most of the tactics used engendered only limited success, with some techniques on occasion appearing almost risible. As Lees-Marshment (2001: 936) writes of the Hague period, '[Tory] communication attracted ridicule and had little effect on the Party's overall support.' The techniques used, she writes, were 'haphazard and ineffective—or effective but in a damaging way.' On his succession, Hague appointed Cecil Parkinson as Chairman of the Party; but the old-hand seemed unable to grasp hold of a new direction. The input of Hague's inner circle, notably from Amanda Platell and Sebastian Coe, was similarly unproductive. Though a number of well-publicised stunts were enacted with the intention of presenting Hague as youthful and dynamic, even hip, the baseball cap was quickly abandoned in favour of more comfortable attire. The dominant narrative outlines how by mid-term the focus altered to limiting the loss of more voters at the next election by appealing to core Conservative values. The Party no longer sought to project an image of innovation, but

rather one of dependability and the championing of traditional right-wing values (see Sanders 2001; Norris 2001; Berrington 2001).

This inability to communicate effectively and project a positive image of the Party supposedly persisted through the tenures of Duncan Smith and Howard, who decided—by and large—to continue the core vote strategy, both in policy construction and communications emphasis, that Hague had begun during his term as leader (see, for example, Bara 2005). The 2005 campaign, orchestrated by the erstwhile successful Lynton Crosby, was again pitched largely to the right-wing. Indeed, it is stated, as Seldon and Snowden (2005: 733) write, that ‘the Conservatives’ emphasis and tone of the policy of yearly quotas and caps on both asylum seekers and immigrants *succeeded* the rhetoric used in Hague’s unsuccessful campaign four years earlier.’ Consequently, the literature largely homogenises the first three post-1997 leaders, describing their communication strategy as a similar shoring up approach that relied heavily on right-wing positioning. The three leaders, therefore, become somewhat interchangeable, with none offering much by way of distinction from each other, or with the Thatcherite past.

The literature on Cameron also largely takes this view of the first three leaders—which tends to suit its purpose—and juxtaposes it with an account of bold rebranding upon his succession in 2005. Cameron is described as revivifying the image of the Party, cleansing it of its “nasty” reputation, and moving it towards the “compassionate” centre. A clear binary is therefore set up between approximately six years of no change in the marketing goals of the Party (starting arguably with the Hague strategic retreat beginning around 1999—though Bale (2010), for example, eschews the early Hague mini-thawing altogether and posits little significant change at all from 1997 until Cameron) and then more rapid change from 2005 onwards (see, for example, Denham

and O'Hara 2007a, 2007b; Evans 2008). However, I argue that we need to be more sceptical of any account that suggests a leader is able to take control of an institution, such as the Conservative Party, and substantively alter its beliefs and norms in a rapid and radical way immediately, relatively speaking, upon their succession. Because this literature primarily focuses on the image and perceptions of the Party (which are somewhat prone to the here-today-gone-tomorrow character of politics) it misses the degree of ideological and policy continuity there has been between all *four* leaders. Indeed, the very superficial and protean nature of image management and marketing means supposed transformations are actually quite liable to mask a more rigid institutional position. In fact, this is, most often, their primary objective. Therefore, it is quite erroneous to conclude that a change in the leader image of the party is indicative of anything but itself; and it is certainly not, *ipso facto*, an indication of significant institutional change.

We see a similar emphasis in the specific literature on the 1997, 2001, 2005, and 2010 elections. Although this thesis does not seek to specifically analyse the causes of defeat in the 1997, 2001 and 2005 elections, nor, in detail, the cause of success in 2010, these elections are certainly germane to any account of change in the Party. The majority of research in the 2000s in British politics addressed the Conservative Party somewhat perfunctorily during their decade or so out-of-power: often they are presented as mere scenery in the central performance of the government. However, the work done on the Party—both academically and journalistically—has notably increased around general elections. Though the Tories' status as a rump opposition party in 2001 and 2005 has led many studies to inevitably focus somewhat more on New Labour's fortunes and

activity—with the Conservatives characterised as behaving only reactively (see, for example, Evans and Norris 1999; Berrington 2001; Seldon and Snowdon 2005)—it is still possible to identify rich material on a Party that has not been well covered during its early period of opposition. Analyses of the short campaign season provide material for understanding party funding, organisational structure, marketing abilities, and policy formation during a heightened moment of activity. However, it is largely the case that the present election literature rarely examines the Party at this level of complexity.

There are a number of case studies and regular series on these elections in the British politics canon (see, Butler and Kavanagh 1997, 2001, 2005; Geddes and Tonge 1997, 2001). These studies offer a detailed analysis of the Tory defeats and repeatedly point once again to a key factor being the ‘Party’s failure to reposition itself in the centre of British politics and project an attractive new image’ (Bartle 2003: 318). Again, as in the general marketing literature, it is widely agreed that the Party moved more to the right—in its policies and in the image it presented to the public—at the elections subsequent to the 1997 defeat (and only began to alter this course once Cameron took the helm). We should be, in part, sceptical of this characterisation that presents an institution lurching easily from right-wing to the centre right, or the centre, of the political stream with nimble ease depending on the given leadership. Rather, we need in any analysis to be more sensitive to identifying consistency and stability within the Party—forms of inertia, as I will demonstrate, towards which institutions are particularly prone. We should question the dominant narrative—perpetuated most of all, and understandably, by the Party themselves—which purposes a sudden shift in policy after 2005 and rather seek to contextualise all four post-1997 leaderships within a wider Conservative rubric of ideology, norms, practices, and membership profile that has

remained largely stable throughout the period despite a change in marketing tactics and a newly cleansed, palatable, and “friendlier” image.

Moreover, the reason why the Party supposedly moved to the right is repeatedly left under-examined by election and marketing analyses which purport its truth. Firstly, they examine the entire electoral environment, and, secondly, adopt a time frame that emphasises the one-month short campaign season over the preceding four years of the considerably more influential long campaign. The literature presents the argument for a shift largely based on the evidence of short term electoral gimmicks: so, we are offered the Hague “save the pound campaign” (Jones 2001) or the Howard “*Are you thinking what we’re thinking?*” poster campaign (Cowley and Green 2005) as evidence of the character of the Party. However, whether this ephemeral move to the right at election time significantly characterises the Party—ideologically, organisationally, or in the long-term perceptions of the electorate—is left at best moot. For it is largely agreed upon in the same literature, with the exception of a few dissensions (for example Sanders et al. 2001), that the short campaigns of the 2001 and 2005 general elections mattered little in affecting how the Party was perceived by voters. As a result of polling preferences data taken on the run-up to and during the campaign, Norris and Weizen (2005: 887) have stated that, ‘Although the official campaign mattered, the long campaign set the stage; indeed, electoral preferences at the national level were largely in place when the election was called on 5 April’. Consequently, though elections are potentially useful to an analysis of how and why the Party has changed since 1997, the increased interest they have generated is in practice of little help. The present election literature produces plenty of anecdotal narrative to add to the history of the Party’s fortunes, but is relatively weak on producing explanation for why it behaved in the

manner that it did, and why the Party was perceived in a certain way by the electorate. The literature chooses to be highly descriptive but also acknowledges the causal and explanatory weakness of that which it describes. Indeed, much of the campaign literature appears committed to proving conclusively its own causal irrelevance, as if one were writing a comprehensive nosology of epiphenomena.

If campaigns have repeatedly been shown to be of limited utility, especially in the case of a party significantly trailing in the polls, then we should question also the utility of a literature which seeks only to report campaigns as a list of events and performances. Rather, it is more productive to ask what dictates the moves a party makes in a campaign, and what underlying norms are manifesting—at this particularly moment in the party’s history—as specific election promises. However, it remains noted that the observation that election activity does not form the image of a party in the perceptions of the electorate is important, and is instructive. The wilful and intentionally short-term distortions of political marketing mean that we cannot, and should not, see these campaigns as representing the summation of a party’s beliefs and practices. Headline grabbing policy changes may be shown to have occurred—but these operate only at a superficial level regarding image and a number of salient, media friendly, ideas which are more “empty signifiers” than indicative of significant alteration in norms, beliefs, and practices of the institution. Therefore, it needs to be emphasised that it is necessary to look over a longer period than the short campaign and in more detail than marketing strategy, and uncover institutional structures (both material and ideational) that are only poorly represented in marketing strategies, if not, in fact, wholly obscured by them.

We must ask whether the explanation is to be found not in assuming that parties must always act rationally and pragmatically to either maximise potential votes by moving to the centre, in the classical Downsian model (see Downs 1957); or, alternatively, seeking to secure their core vote in times of potential defeat; but rather that their actions are the function of institutionally determined norms of behaviour that did not necessarily act to maximise collective interests? The present psephological research and election campaign literature does not seem fully capable of addressing such questions because it is largely focused on the presumption that leaders survey the electoral landscape, rationally formulate their strategy, and then take action. But as Norris and Lovenduski (2004: 98) write (in a rare piece on the Conservative Party that employs theory to question frameworks which make the, often implicit, presumption of agent rationality): ‘problems of *selective perception* may have led the Conservatives astray and blinkered them to the pressing need to revise their policies and programme.’ As a consequence of the presumption of rationality, both successful and unsuccessful leaders have been granted by analysts an unreasonable amount of agency over their party; and consequently, are overly lauded for their victories, or alternatively, maligned for their failure. A richer explanation would emphasise that a leader operating within a specific institution may not have a fully rational view of the landscape, due to a selective understanding that is a consequence of limited data. But also, I would add, due to the fact that their behaviour is partially constrained and constructed by the strategy the institution will permit him or her to take. It is in this context of “bounded rationality” (Simon 1957; see §3.2.), constructed by institutional frameworks and mechanisms, that we must place any assessment of a leader’s actions, and of their responsibility for electoral failure or success.

So, our first guiding observation that can be drawn from deficiencies in the literature: we need to ask questions which do not solely, or indeed predominantly, focus on the actions of leaders. But rather we must place leaders within institutions that limit their agency and their supposed rationality, to produce bounded rationality—and it is often the nature of the institution, rather than the abilities of the leader, that informs the possibility of change.

2.2. Leadership elections and leaders

Whether the Conservative Party has ever truly loved its leaders is unclear: often it has seemed that Tory loyalty has been a tradable commodity, valuable in times of prosperity and readily cashed in when the polling numbers fall. Indeed, as Arthur Aughey (1996: 83) writes, though ‘the cultural ideal of conservative politics is one of loyalty and harmony: it is of course a myth.’ What is clearer, however, is that Tory leaders do hold a pantheonic presence in the metropolis of the Conservative historical narrative. This attention has been tackled with varying degrees of sophistication; all the same, it is rare to find a work on the Party that does not take as its central focus—be it a monograph or a wider historical survey—a leader or series of leaders.

Recently, Hill (2007) Heppell (2007), Heppell and Hill (2008; 2009; 2010), and Denham and O’Hara (2008) have produced extensive empirical work on the make-up of support, and the systems and strategies that have shaped that support, during leadership elections. Together this work covers the leadership elections of the last forty years, and is specifically detailed on those of 1997, 2001, 2003, and 2005, which are of key concern to any account of the recent opposition period. Their work provides an

excellent resource for mapping the relationship specific leaders have had with wider party members both within and without parliament, at least at the beginning of their tenures; they also evoke—at least implicitly—the issue of whether institutional systems—both formal and informal—actually matter. They helpfully question whether the electoral system under which a leader has gained control of the party (and the result achieved) shapes the leader chosen. Moreover, they emphasise how configurations of certain members of the parliamentary party, who prioritise certain ideas, can block the dominance of new ideas, regardless of the popularity of key figures. As Heppell and Hill (2010: 37) write, regarding their analysis of the 2001 leadership election, the means by which IDS prevailed ‘is an important question to address in order to understand developments within British Conservatism in opposition...Why was Portillo screened out, when his platform was reflective of the shifts in the political climate..?’

Heppell and Hill, by rigorously profiling the ideology and demography of the parliamentary party, have provided a number of comprehensive synchronic analyses of how exactly the Party conspired *as an institution* to repeatedly block the emergence of a modernising figure. What we see is a party “acting out” an ingrained form of behaviour, and grouping into set factions or tendencies, in order to control an outcome which does not necessarily reflect the optimum of the interests of the members of the institution ideologically, nor their minimal interests in the electoral landscape. However, such implications, which provide rich material for institutional analysis, remain understandably underexplored in the work of Heppell, Hill, and others, which emphasises more the journalistic elements of personal conflicts on the one hand, and the raw data of voter support on the other—without taking this data to the fruitful conclusion of linking it to institutional theory.

The literature on the successive personalities of the party leaders who have been elected since 1997 is, perhaps, the most pervasive of any area of study on the opposition Party, lending itself as it does to easy cross-over from the academic tower to the more popular, and demotic, world of political publishing and journalism. As a result, this body of work is of mixed levels of analytical sophistication, ranging, in the world of journalism, from somewhat sympathetic and tendentious works (see for example, on Hague: Nadler 2000) to more rigorous and less deferential treatments (see, for example, on Howard: Crick 2005); alongside academic accounts which though perhaps more comprehensive still maintain a populist tone (see on Cameron: O'Hara 2007; Bale 2010; and a biography by Elliott and Hanning 2012). All the leaders have been covered to some degree by such works; though whole books on IDS remain relatively quiet.

The Party elected Hague because he was seen as a youthful figure that could counteract the negative image of an aging party out of touch with the electorate. The limited accounts of the period explain Hague's ultimate failure by emphasising his inability to appeal to "ordinary" people—despite admiration for his grasp of policy and debating acumen from the media and Westminster colleagues (see popular accounts by Walters 2001; Wheatcroft 2005). Hague, rather than appearing as modern and energetic began to be seen by the public as precocious and mercurial, employing various superficial tactics in an attempt to hide the Tory image (Andersen and Evans 2001). If Hague's persona—partially contrived though perhaps it was—had been received more agreeably by the public, it might, one may hypothesise, have emboldened him into more substantive steps to attempt to modernise the Party (beyond the limited manoeuvres which he did enact regarding reorganisation) during his first year as leader. However,

his modernising moves were abandoned as a result of an unpopular reaction from the public to his perceived personality.

The literature on the Hague leadership, therefore, places significant emphasis on failures of presentation. Alongside this is a focus on Hague's decision to enact a core vote strategy rather than move to the centre ground (notable minority reports are, in part, Bale 2010; and more strongly Green 2005; 2011). However, as Richard Kelly (2001: 200), in an indicative observation, outlines it: 'Hague's U-turn [mid-term] can also be attributed to pressure from inside his own party—thus raising the possibility that, even if public opinion had been more receptive to libertarianism, party opinion would have still forced Hague to reconsider'. If we are to accept the accuracy of this characterisation of a turn to a core vote strategy—and it is somewhat moot—it still remains problematic. Kelly presents his proposition as a counter-factual; in doing so he implies a hierarchy of pressures on a leader: one must react to the public, and then one must react to the party. In doing this Kelly—and his work is indicative—misses, or rather under-examines, two points. Firstly, that the restrictions on a leader's agency occur simultaneously; that is to say, Hague was reacting to feedback from both the public and the Party at the same time, and that his possible mid-term U-turn was a result of both of these factors. Secondly, and following from this, we can say that Kelly's counterfactual leads us into rich institutionalist territory but which he—and much of the literature—chooses not to fully explore. If both public and Party feedback loops serve to restrict the agency of the leader then we must ask, and seek to show, which is the more important. We must ask in what ways the institution of the Party restricts the leader and acts uncoupled from, and unresponsive to, the attitudes of voters. Indeed, why (as Kelly seems comfortable to assert) would the Party have scuppered Hague's modernisation

moves *even if* they had found favour with the public? These questions are there to be asked in the literature as it is presented, but they are too quickly passed over or under addressed by work that is largely descriptive and not guided by the sort of theoretical framework that would readily sensitise a researcher to such forms of inquiry.

Following Hague's inglorious departure, the IDS and Howard leaderships repeatedly backed away from positions that were seen to threaten continuity with past practice and continuity within the Party; as a result, both tenures present, for the literature, apparently fewer attempts at change than the Hague period (see Garnett and Lynch 2003; Dorey 2004). The literature largely presents the IDS leadership as a disaster, and the Howard period, though an improvement, as still misguided. In general, there is a notable dearth of academic research on the Party from 2001–2005, no doubt as a consequence of the lack of rapid renewal as promised by Hague, and the subsequent institutional failure to replace him with an energetic figure who might promise transformation. Indeed, it may seem justified, by and large, that political scientists have decided that there is little to examine in the Party during this most somnolent interlude. Hill's (2007) work on IDS's winning leadership election presents, however, fertile conclusions for why this period remains interesting, particularly for institutional scholars. 'Iain Duncan Smith reaching the final ballot' writes Hill (2007: 4), 'was due to the support of an ideologically cohesive group of traditional Thatcherite MPs and indicative of the continued significance of ideology on the direction of the Conservative Party.' The question we must ask, therefore, of the IDS tenure, and indeed of Howard too, is not what they did to change the Party (or not only this question) but why they were there in the first place: Why did a Party traditionally hungry for government elect

two leaders seemingly incapable of securing popular support; and what does this say for the proposition that parties are able to act rationally to maximise voter appeal? Once the question is framed in this manner, the 2001–2005 period becomes no longer an uninteresting time of stagnation but rather a salient example of how institutions work to create inertia. In this approach, explaining why change does not happen becomes as important as explaining why change does happen. Furthermore, though a period may initially seem to exhibit pervasive inactivity, the nature of institutions is never to remain wholly immobile. And though we may not evidence a radical shift in the Party at this point (indeed, at any point in the opposition period) what we do see are the stirrings of new policy ideas which would later come to fruition under Cameron—a fact borne out by Duncan Smith’s later work at the Centre for Social Justice and appointment to the 2010 Tory cabinet as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Hayton and Heppell (2010; see also Hayton 2012), almost uniquely, are open to the rich possibilities of the IDS leadership. In their re-examination, they argue (2010: 14), by paraphrasing the opinion of Teresa May, that IDS ‘played an important role in creating the political space for Cameron to exploit in more favourable political terrain...’ The same may be said for Howard. The importance of identifying the seeds of policy renewal in the three leaders who preceded Cameron is essential to any analysis of the Party in opposition which is to be framed by institutional theory. Certain influential agents—such as Cameron—remain of high importance in the enacting of change; but we must be sceptical (especially when there is general ideological continuity in an institution) of presenting such an agent as a sort of *deus ex machina* who suddenly appears on the political stage to make right once more. Rather, we must examine the tenures of their predecessors for evidence of continuity and, moreover, of the source

springs for future mainstream policies: for in institutions which are not radically and suddenly changing, small changes will appear all the same; but this will be slowly, and the changes will develop and move across the boundaries of successive leaderships.

The emergence of Cameron was the point when interest in the Conservatives rapidly increased. It has continued to expand ever since, and most likely will further increase over the expected five years of Cameron's premiership. Cameron met with more limited institutional resistance than his predecessors upon securing the leadership of the Party, despite the fact that a number of his policies went somewhat further in expanding the previous practices and beliefs of the Party—indeed, at times he made explicit statements intended to, as Evans (2008: 295) writes, 'distance himself from the Thatcher years', such as in a leadership election interview with Jeremy Paxman (BBC 2005), where Cameron claimed to be an admirer of Thatcher but concluded that he did not think that this made him a *Thatcherite*: a statement that can be characterised as an exemplary and nuanced having, and eating, of political cake. Cameron has seemingly been successful in presenting to the Party—and in part the electorate—the salient concerns of contemporary society, such as climate change, globalisation, and more liberal attitudes to sexuality; and merged this temperament with policies that are more appealing to the right-wing, such as qualified euro-scepticism, limits on immigration, deficit reduction, and support for marriage and the nuclear family. The literature on Cameron, however, is somewhat divided on how best to characterise the ultimate intention of these changes. Dorey (2007) has argued that what has taken place is a genuine and comprehensive modernization project similar in style, if not in scope, of that undertaken to create New Labour: 'Cameron' he writes (Dorey 2007: 138–139), 'has made valiant efforts at

modernising the Conservative Party and steering it back to the centre ground...’ The degree to which we can discern whether Cameron’s changes have genuinely innovated from past practice, or rather have merely amounted to superficial presentational gloss, such as argued by Kerr (2007), is at the centre of any assessment of the extent of institutional change. Moreover, the assessment informs the wider analysis of whether an institution is able to enact significant discontinuous change despite internal resistance and inertia.

Cameron certainly enjoyed a more popular public image and higher approval ratings during his time as opposition leader than any of his three predecessors—and this popular image ultimately became a key factor in the plurality victory in the 2010 general election. His family life (and family tragedy) and his agreeable disposition—hiding his posh, not losing his common touch—have produced a public persona which evokes a middle class contemporary everyman, or what Whitehead (2007: 238) more specifically identifies as “metrosexuality”: ‘a straight man, but one who cares for his appearance and grooming, is comfortable with diverse sexual and cultural identities, and is not in any way macho or overbearing. He is sensitive, reflexive and expressive. He has emotional intelligence.’ Indeed, Cameron’s contemporary charm—such as it is—marked his personality as something positively removed from the apparent boyishness of Hague, the timidity of Duncan Smith, and the lugubriousness of Howard. The Conservatives finally had a leader who could match Blair for GQ and Esquire front cover *savoir-faire*; and once Gordon Brown acceded to the premiership the comparison was decidedly in Cameron’s favour—at least when it came to questions of affability or desirability, if not wholly of political authority. This personable quality was ultimately a contributing factor in securing a governing coalition in 2010, confirmed by leaks from

the Liberal Democrat camp suggesting that one of the inhibitors of a Lib-Lab pact was Gordon Brown's lack of collegiality, something notably absent in dealings with Cameron (Wintour 2010).

However, whether it can be said that such adept presentation is representative of wider institutional change—and hence a change in the Party—is questionable. As previously argued, the leader, after all, is not the institution entire. It has been the case, both in academic work and in journalism, that Cameron the individual has garnered attention at the partial expense of looking at the wider Party. We should not assume that we can identify institutional change when it is posited merely on a change in the public perception of the leader; but often in the media we see the two factors equated: this has been demonstrated extensively by Kevin Maloney (2006) who has gathered a media archive of instances where Cameron's personal narrative and public persona has been tied to changes (or supposed changes) in the wider Party.

This form of discourse articulation, though erroneous, is perpetuated because it serves both the communications agenda of the Party as well as the short-cut narrative style of 24-hour journalism. We therefore must be sceptical of the significant change narrative and direct our explanation towards why changes in the institution since 2005 have been over emphasised. This has been due, in part, to the nature of electoral politics which is liable to exaggerate the perceived amount of change that has occurred in a party. In this instance, the leader wrongly becomes the primary embodiment of the institution, with the new attractive personality foisted against his predecessors: new policy ideas are given exaggerated coverage in the media, at the expense of covering more indicative and longer term positions. The British Election Survey has shown that voters who change their vote do so based on these superficial indicators of change (see Andersen and Evans

2003); consequently, a large swing in voting may be erroneously interpreted as indicating a fundamental change in the institution. This feedback loop then leads the leadership to believe in the “change” narrative and therefore the image of the party—including its self-image—becomes somewhat uncoupled from the more durable ideational and material structures of the institution. It is wrong to assume that a party that polls positively and may win big is significantly different from its previous iteration that lost big five or nine years earlier. But the media myth—and internal party myth—of “change to win” can enforce this view so that a recovery in the polls wrongly becomes *post-hoc ergo propter hoc* evidence that the party must have significantly changed to achieve this.

However, the articulation remains instructive to our analysis for it leads us to ask what *does* constitute change in a party if we are to be sceptical of media accounts that it is represented merely in a change in leadership. These are questions that are largely missed by a literature that has focused for too long on the personality of leaders. Therefore, our second key point is that institutional theory sensitises us against equating changes in presentation with changes in the institution. Consequently, we need to ask questions that help us define what the institution *is*; and what changes within that institution might look like, if we are requiring them to be manifested deeper than the presentational level.

2.3. Ideology, policy and factions

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the Conservative Party have been in power, cumulatively, for almost seventy years (Ball 2005: 6); it is not, therefore, a party whose

identity is shaped around opposition. Rather, not to be in government is seen as an aberration, a transitory moment wherein the natural order has been disrupted. The image of the Tory Party as intertwined with the essence of the British state, with stability and rightness, is central to this prolonged dominance of electoral politics (Wheatcroft 2005: 21). The Party has been seen as reliable and predictable, and capable of the wise management of the institutions of state: for many years the Church of England was the Tory Party at prayer; and, it could be added, the Tory Party was England at the dispatch box (see, for example, the paean by Norton 2012).

This image of good management has underpinned the notion that the Tories are a non-ideological party whose pragmatic members are solely interested in the acquisition of political power, and who, especially in opposition, move quickly to review and abandon supposedly outmoded policies (Ball 1998: 2). Consequently, the Conservative Party, as Kevin Hickson (2005: 1) writes, is characterised—both in admiration and calumny—as being ‘prepared to adapt to changing times and changing electoral demands in a pragmatic, if not ruthless, way.’ Such a characterisation, however, is only partly accurate. Whereas the Party in opposition has clearly demonstrated an ability to change this is not to say that it is a protean institution (indeed, such a term is oxymoronic). On the contrary, outside of certain transition periods in the early 1950s and the late 1970s there has been a dogmatic impetus within the Party that has prioritised ideological—or at least quasi-ideological—concerns above the mere pragmatic acquisition of power. The Party, therefore, can be accurately characterised as capable of ideological change at certain, somewhat prolonged, moments, but these are followed by periods of relative stability and doctrinal adherence. Importantly, it is the case—despite the presence of a significant electoral upheaval—that the post-1997 era

has been such a moment of relative ideological stability. The pretence of some party members towards political opportunism seems, dare one say, to contain a sort of snobbish (and, of course, facetious) affection for the glamour of megalomania, shorn of the floral and chintz principles of the *bien pensant*. And it is this pose that serves to belie the underlying ideology of the Party, one that is often implicit to the point where it may seem that it is not an ideology at all—at least not the type one might march behind. An ideology is something for the *other* lot. In fact, throughout its history Tory politicians have repeatedly shown themselves to be idealists and not unprincipled in the slightest.

However, this is not to say that the majority of Party members are interested in “ideas” *per se*. Roger Scruton is a man who has often felt himself marginalised in his attempt to produce a more ideas motivated strand of conservatism—and he has said that the Party’s approach towards intellectualism has been largely that ideas ‘should be inherited and ignored, not acquired and defended. And they never take the form of convictions’ (quoted in Edemariam 2010). That is to say, though ideas do play a strong part in forming a Conservative identity, these ideas—in particular the founding idea of promoting ruling class economic interests for the supposed good of the nation—are not as openly discussed as in other parties, they are not self-reflexive, and they have not forged a self-aware identity: but this serves in many ways to make the ideology of Conservatism more effective in its constraining rules because its presence is not openly and regularly interrogated. This fact is often somewhat overlooked by the literature (see notably Bulpitt 1986; 1988), which argues that if ideology is not explicit then it does not play a role in shaping behaviour, and that power-seeking statecraft is the main cause of individual behaviour.

The reason why Scruton believes that ideas are ignored within the Party is because conservatism *in practice*—that is to say the opinions proffered by those who self-identify as Conservative—adheres to a set of beliefs that do not pertain to the same necessary coherence and intellectual ancestry as required by the conservative philosophies discussed in the academy. As the MP Jesse Norman (2011) remarked to me in an interview: ‘You can talk about a libertarian conservatism, in the same way that you can talk about a kind of statist conservatism: they are not really species of conservatism in my view, though they are species of *Conservative Party activity*...It’s important to keep those things distinct: the conservatism of ideas and Conservatism as a political party which can behave in very un-conservative ways.’ We are not, therefore, looking to identify some abstract and consistent notion of conservatism—far from it. The very contested and contradictory nature of ideology *as practiced* is what generates movement within political parties. For ideas remain important even if they do not present themselves as crystalline Scrutonian syllogisms. As Whiteley *et al.* (1994: 126) write about the form of empirical analysis research on the Party should take: We should focus ‘not on Conservatism as a set of philosophical ideas which might be logically analysed or compared and contrasted with other belief systems, but rather Conservatism as a set of attitudes and beliefs’; moreover, we should also examine ‘the extent to which political attitudes are interrelated...and ideologically “constrained”.’

What is ideology?

It is indeed the lack of internal consistency in Conservative thought as it is practised that allows for the oscillation and variation in beliefs held by conservatives, and the tensions

between them. However, these tensions remain within certain boundaries. Whiteley *et al.* (1994: 159) in their empirical work on the opinions of grass-roots actors, for example, concluded that disparate beliefs and policy attitudes could be grouped within the same single ideological constraint which they termed: ‘the role of the State in the lives of the citizens’. We can take from Whiteley *et al.* (1994) a working definition of ideology, which is at the core of the explanation in this thesis. We can understand ideology as a shared assumption, often implicit but *emergent* in day-to-day policy activity, regarding the ontological *conditions* of politics: that is to say, the structure of the interaction of the individual, the state, and society. In this understanding, ideology is ‘a linked set of beliefs about the social or political order’ often attached to a central moral judgement (Fine and Sandstrom 1993: 23, quoted in Meyer *et al.* 2009: 6). It is not, we should emphasise, a set of policies on immigration, or Europe, or gays. It is a conception, deeply embedded, on the function of the state, on the efficiency and purpose of the state as a system, and a conception of individual autonomy and the inter-relation of individuals in society (see Meyer *et al.* 2009 1–16). As a result, we can identify continuity in ideology even when there is disconcert on policy. The literature on the Party often blurs these boundaries, using the term ideology too readily to label changes in policy emphasis. Consequently, the extent of change in the Party is exaggerated; more importantly, the mechanisms of how change occurs are underdeveloped. This thesis addresses this blurring by being strict about the labelling of ideology and of policy: and using continuity in ideology as a *causal explanation* for incremental change in policy.

Ideological periods

The literature is in agreement that since the post-war era there has been two broad ideological periods within the Conservative Party. The first significant moment of ideological change in the Party in the twentieth century occurred during the years immediately after the landslide defeat of 1945. The Tories had dominated British politics for over twenty years but lost the first post-war election by 183 seats (Crowson 2001: 47). And yet by 1951 the Party recovered power and went on to remain in government for another 13 years. This notable recovery was testament to the members' ability to reinvent the Party along a new ideological line. The ultimate success of this reinvention, however, was only made possible by the Party's embracing of the new politics that had been forged by the Labour Party after the Second World War.

The dominant narrative within the present day literature is that this period marked a moment of change and the forming of new bodies and goals that were to direct Conservative actors for a generation along the line of One Nationism (cf Seawright 2009). The early 1950s saw the establishment of bodies such as the One Nation group that has proved to be an ongoing force in the promoting of social democratic policies within the Party (Seawright 2005). Though it is noted that this shift in ideology was not *sui generis* but rather built upon nascent policies that had been fomenting within the institution since the 1930s and which culminated in the formation of the Tory Reform Group (Ramsden 1980: 99). It was, furthermore, the actions of three key actors—rather than a large movement—within the Party that were predominant in using this opportunity to forge a position, which, though still agonistic with Labour, placed the Conservatives on a new line which embraced a general consensus of social democracy. Churchill, as the figurehead, represented the Party's continued authority, which enabled

it to remain largely cohesive during its time of transition. Lord Woolton began to reform corrupt practices, such as the *de facto* buying of Tory safe seats by munificent potential candidates; and broadened the selection procedure so that the parliamentary party might be more representative of the country at large. Finally, “Rab” Butler acted to re-shape the ideology of Conservatism, seizing the moment to introduce new ideas into the institution of the Party. As Willetts (2005: 107) writes, at this juncture Butler ‘set out a framework for modern Conservatism which dominated the Party in the second half of the century.’ It was not a framework that was effortlessly instigated; nonetheless, the electoral environment coupled with the illegitimizing of past Tory practices, caused the levels of opposition to be considerably reduced.

The second critical ideological change for the Tories, purported by the literature, occurred in the 1970s with the ascendancy of the New Right and neo-liberalism. In the view of these actors, by the mid-1970s ‘the Keynesian ideas that had guided macroeconomic policies of both Labour and Conservative governments since World War II’ had become increasingly discredited (Walsh 2000: 494). They also identified corporatism and consensus policies as responsible for the UK’s failing industry; high unemployment; militant unions; inefficient public services; and overall relative economic decline. Keynesian economics and consensus policies broke down as a workable paradigm and opened up the agency of political actors to bring new ideas into institutions. It was, however, the Conservatives who were first to fill the vacuum that was created. In response to this diagnosed period of decline the New Right—influenced by thinkers such as Hayek, Freedman, and Oakeshott—‘espoused political conviction rather than consultation and consensus, individualism rather than collectivism and, on an economic front, competition and market forces rather than state intervention’ (Kerr

and Marsh 1999: 169). Hence we see a new paradigm replacing one that had become illegitimated in the minds of key figures within the Party; and it was this new paradigm that would become the dominant position of modern Conservatism and, indeed, British politics as a whole. The New Right was a rejection of past practice, and therefore, in many ways, antithetical to conservatism—a fact that has remained since and ensured its partially incongruous position within certain strands of modern conservative thinking. However, it is noted within the literature, particularly from left-leaning critiques of neo-liberalism, that this break from the past was successful only because it was not absolute. The New Right coupled their economic measures to what Andrew Gamble (1983: 113) labelled ‘a new populism—the focusing on issues like immigration, crime and punishment, strikes, social security abuse, taxation and bureaucracy.’ Consequently, much of their policy and propaganda outside of the economic sphere appropriated traditional conservative themes in order to gain discursive legitimacy for the new ideas that were being introduced. As a result, what occurred within the institution was not a violent and sudden severance from the past but rather it was, in part, a culmination of a process. This process capitalised on minority dissenting ideas that had been around for a while in the post-war period in the economic sphere, with Thatcherism emerging as ‘a final evolutionary stage’ (Kerr 2001: 164); any hostility was then further tempered by linking these partially new ideas to more established social ideas.

We should not, however, conclude that because actors of the time built upon already established ideas within the institution, and other institutions—particularly in the City—and within wider society, that this means they were reacting deterministically to their environment. As Kerr and Marsh write (1999: 182), ‘we need to recognise that the Conservatives were actively involved in both extrapolating meaning from the

information they received from their environment and injecting their own intentionality about their strategic responses.’ Much of the literature presents new ideas as entering the institution as if they appeared from nowhere, were an irresistible force, and operated without the instrumentalism of actors within the institution. However, we need a conceptualisation of change as occurring as a result of the dialectical interaction of actors with their environment; this means that our understanding of a period should not focus merely on the causal power of a contingent event, or established minority ideas, to enact change. Rather, we must recognise the importance of individuals in capitalising on that event for their own purposes.

Consequently, the success of ideological change within the Party must be understood as in part due to agential factors: notably, the charismatic leadership of Margaret Thatcher and the choice to restructure the party so that ‘adherents of the post-war collectivist consensus were gradually removed from leadership roles’ (Barry 2005: 28) is key to understanding ideological change in the 1970s. But agency is also an iterative and circular relationship with structure: for new bodies and ideas, strategically established by actors, serve to limit the decision making within the Party and the form that powerful dissent to new ideas can take. Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson (2009) have produced a comprehensive cataloguing of the major ideas in the party, for example, but do not bed them in the material operation of an institution, so that we can begin to understand how ideas produce action and causality. Their thorough work is key to an understanding of which ideas succeeded in the party over time, but without placing them within the operations of an institution and the relative power of different actors, it is more difficult to explain *why* certain ideas succeeded.

The literature is accurate in describing and emphasising these two central ideological periods in the Party's history. However, it is only a minority of the literature that questions the clear episodic break between the consensus period and the following radical neo-liberal period and suggests that such an interpretation is somewhat too schematic and simplistic; and, in regard to thinking within the Conservative Party, partly mythic. It is the case that the New Right has chosen, in part, to discursively 'construct an image of radicalism based on a manufactured, and often false, dichotomy between the pre-1979 and post-1979 eras' (Kerr and Marsh 1999: 172). And a similarly discursively constructed break took place in the 1950s with regard to the pre-War Party. For if one looks closely at the institution, then one sees that the change was not clear-cut in the 1970s and early 1980s; and the Conservatives embarked upon new policies with caution as would be expected of any large scale institution. It was only with time and incremental success that the neo-liberal agenda was ploughed into an ideology that would endure. Indeed, Thatcherite policies proved to be 'more consistent and developed through the successive terms in office' (Kerr and Marsh 1999: 186) so that it was only in Thatcher's final, more radical, third term that Thatcherism could be said to have begun to dominate the Party and to have been largely established beyond reversal. This demonstrates that Party institutions are not as protean as they might wish to believe and new ideas require time to take hold. Accordingly, the fact that 'in terms of policy, ideas and political purpose, the Major period demonstrated overwhelming continuity with the Thatcher era' (McAnulla 1999: 207) can be understood as a result of slow, incremental changes in material, ideational, and what can be called "ideational-mythic" structures over a more than ten year period. Many of the material structures were formed by the government in the 1980s: for example, the privatisation of public utilities and the

disempowerment of the unions; and also occurred outside of national government control, such as the growth of global industries and institutions. The ideational structures constituted a neo-liberal worldview which has shaped and limited political thinking since the 1980s. Finally, the ideational-mythic structure is largely internal to the Party and constitutes, for many, a restrictive narrative that emphasises Thatcher as an iconic figure; and which honours an agonistic insouciance and permanent neo-liberal radicalism. The central point being that ideological change in a Party is never absolute and, moreover, does not turn on a sixpence, but rather is achieved slowly, with one feeling one's way, somewhat clumsily, and searching for reassurance that one is heading in the right direction. So, when we look for past paradigmatic shifts in the Party (which might be used as a foil to the post-1997 period) it is arguable that they do not exist: that the Party has never been able to radically change itself over a short period of time.

Tendencies within the ideology

We cannot, and should not, talk solely of the “ideology” of the Party with all the attendant homogeneity and monolithic overbearing of that term. For when Conservative ideology surfaces in the prosaic pools of policy-driven politics it manifests itself not singularly but as a number of different factions or tendencies (Norton 1996), which operate within, and contest the space of, what I will later label in more detail as the dominant ideological “path dependency”. Different tendencies have dominated, with differing periods of longevity, at different times in the Party's history. But these tendencies have largely remained within the concomitant, hegemonic, and uncontested

ideology of the time. Of course, how and why the predominance of one tendency might shift in favour of another is of key interest to any study of institutional change. As Leonard Tivey (1989: 4) wrote, in an older but still highly instructive assessment of ideology in British politics: ‘Among the creators, developers, and adherents of any ideology, however defined, there will be some profound philosophers, some able analysts, some keen followers, and a number of others who merely share its attitudes and understandings. Others will give it confused and inconsistent support; others will be temporarily or loosely attached to some of its facets.’ This leads one to ask: how do ideologies succeed in this mixed environment of adherence? The answer is: they succeed because they operate through *institutions*. What a political party as an institution does (by controlling ideational and material structures) is enforce an ideology *despite* mixed adherence or rather *on top of this*; so that the ideological path dependency is greater, more impactful, than the individual belief claims of many actors might suggest.

Though the literature agrees that Tory policy positions must be placed along a spectrum, there is some disagreement on how exactly one should draw up the taxonomy of these tendencies, or if indeed one can draw it in detail at all. Whitely, *et al.* (1994: 132–134) use the terms “traditionalism”, “progressivism” and “individualism” to identify broad groupings throughout the membership, obtaining, respectively, to reactionary, centrist, and neo-liberal positions. Hill (2007) and Heppell and Hill (2008; 2009; 2010) use the following taxonomy or coding to categorise the policy tendencies of Tory MPs: Firstly, they identify three main policy areas; they then place MPs—based on voting record and public statements—within three possible positions on each area as shown below in figure 1:

Fig. 1 *A taxonomy for mapping the ideological composition of the post-1997 PCP.*

Social	Economy	Europe
Liberal	Wet	Europhile
Agnostic	Agnostic	Agnostic
Conservative	Dry	Eurosceptic

(*Mutatis mutandis* Heppell 2002; 2007; Hill 2007; Heppell and Hill 2008; 2009; 2010)

The taxonomy produces twenty-seven possible “identities”. In practice, a majority of members converge around five or six possibilities; however, Heppell and Hill’s empirical work does also evidence to a notable degree the wide multiplicity of identities that can and do emerge within the Party from examining a relatively small number of central policy areas. When Hill (2007) collates his categories multi-dimensionally, he evidences seventeen of the possible “identities” in his taxonomy occupied by Parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) members in 1997 and again (though slightly varied) in 2001. The work of Heppell and Hill, therefore, undermines the notion that tendencies within the Party are stable and mutually exclusive: Rather they cross over, they are various, and any graphic representation of them would appear as a complex series of Venn diagrams rather than as contiguous and simple groupings. This is a key insight when conceptualising the manner in which actors position themselves and

operate within an institution: we are able to see that identities within the PCP are multifaceted.

However, it is the case that Heppell and Hill's work—though empirically rich—understates diversity in its necessary attempt to produce a relatively parsimonious model of PCP member identity. For Heppell and Hill's categories remain somewhat reductionist: should one equate the single issue of European integration—wherein a tripartite position is feasible—with the complexity of positions that are possible on social and economic policy? This parsimonious aspect of their research seems to be further present in their examination of Cameron (Heppell and Hill 2009) wherein they emphasise one-dimensional identity change in the Party. This work does evidence rich information on policy change: they demonstrate, for example, that from 1992 to 2005 the PCP membership became significantly more socially conservative, economically dry, and Eurosceptic, to the extent that it appears that there is little strong minority dissent to these three categories—particularly so on Europe: as Philip Lynch (2003: 160) wrote of the early 2000s Party, 'the Conservatives were now the most Euro-sceptic mainstream party in Britain, and perhaps the EU' (see also Lynch 2012). However, this apparent absence of policy dissent leads one to question the effectiveness of Heppell and Hill's methodology if it is no longer able to distinguish significant dividing lines. Though we are able to draw the valuable conclusion that the Party is no longer divided to any significant degree along the sort of fault lines that caused division (and derision) in the 1990s this does not mean *ipso facto* that it is united across the board. By sticking to their set three categories we learn less from Heppell and Hill about what actually does divide the Conservative Party. Moreover, by presenting only a one dimensional analysis in their work on Cameron, and tracking the changes of social, economic, and

European positions separately, their analysis presents a too simplistic account of change in the Party and perhaps goes too far in emphasising stability and cohesiveness—though such a description is in part characteristic of the period. Additionally, it is important to remember that the impact of dissent is not solely a numbers game. Though the PCP membership may have increased its right-wing numbers this does not mean that these ranks have been peopled with powerful actors. Likewise, though dissent may be an ever-decreasing minority pursuit, it may still be undertaken by powerful and vocal individuals who enjoy the potential for high impact criticism.

Dissent and factions

There has always been a history in the Party of minority dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy, a tradition that has continued in the post-1997 era. There have been certain policy areas which have remained consistent; however, during the Hague period there was a dissenting faction, led by Michael Portillo, which gave voice to a number of alternative views from mainstream Conservative thinking regarding social inclusivity and taxation that caused the policies of the Hague period to veer somewhat between the left and right-wings of the party—though not quite to the extent that has been reported. The dominate position—advocated by Hague—was largely restricted within the policy tenets of Thatcherism: emphasis was still on low taxes; reduced government spending; hostility to European integration and increases in immigration; and promotion of heterosexual family units. During much of the post-1997 period, the Party leadership, rather than being able to unite along a single paradigm, became embroiled in negotiating these two competing policy positions. These positions—commonly called mods and

rockers—epitomised the ‘historic dilemmas of Toryism’ (Seawright 2005: 85): economic liberalism versus social libertarianism; conservatism versus modern radicalism. The numbers were in favour of the right of the party but the relative noise of the dissenters meant that the Tories could never become wholly united. We can see, therefore, that the literature does richly address the role of factions, it having been long understood that factions are a key component of Tory Party behaviour (see, for the classic account, Rose 1964; and for contemporary development Heppell and Hill 2009; Childs and Webb 2012). It is not the case, therefore, that *only* leaders are studied—often it is argued that leaders are restricted by negotiating the competing interests of factions. But often, even when addressing factions, the emphasis is on how factions are dealt with by a leader, and the work is often under-theorised. Attention is given to labelling factions on supposed ideological divides, and much space is given to personalities, anecdote, and dramatic events as if political action was so much strut and fret upon a stage. Less attention is given to the mechanistic role within an institution that factions play: how, indeed, they might empower the leadership, how they generate new ideas, and how they interact with each other, and often effect a *modus vivendi*, based on path dependent ideological agreement—something particularly seen under Cameron.

Kerr, Byrne and Foster (2011) have argued that Cameron’s action can be interpreted as containing a number of elements: in part it is a continuation of Thatcherism; yet it is also *expanding* the logics of neo-liberal governmentality; and advancing the cartelisation of political parties. This Cameronite project is then partially obscured by a “modernisation” electoral strategy which seeks to perpetuate depoliticisation and distance the Party from its Thatcherite past (see also Byrne, Foster and Kerr 2012). Kerr et al. are effective in describing the hybrid nature of Cameron’s policy emphasis and

electoral strategy, though are less clear on the institutional tensions he is attempting to resolve and the roots and development of these tensions. Importantly, Kerr et al. emphasise that ideas matter—that a leader does not engage in an electoral strategy without ideational restrictions. Buckler and Dolowitz (2012) support this view in their work on contemporary party ideology in British Politics. These approaches prioritise the relative stability and continuing presence of ideology, that it cannot be merely shrugged off and nimbly changed. What needs to be added, however, is a further understanding of ideas embedded in institutions, which would enrich these theoretically grounded explanations by better outlining and labelling the specific mechanisms by which ideas act to restrict actors.

What appears to be lacking in the literature is an examination of the different characteristics of ideology and policy, their relative mutability, and how *ideology* produces varying policy. Because rival factions were competing over policy they have often attempted to exaggerate the ideological differences in the Party. However, as Quinn (2008) and Green (2011) note, the policies of the Hague to Howard era were not as right-wing as their detractors suggest, or the majority of the public believed—especially when one subtracts the more high-profile media initiatives. Consequently, one can suggest that though a change of policy emphasis did take place with Cameron there has not been a radical ideological change across the board. Indeed, when one applies an institutional lens to events this fact becomes hardly surprising. The fact that commentators often equate high profile policies (especially when covered extensively in the media) with overall ideology means that the extent to which Cameron has broken with the past has been overstated. Therefore, our third key focus is that we need to understand a party as a particular type of institution that often experiences considerable

minority dissent. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is an ideological split in the party. Hence, we need to ask questions that uncover what are more adaptable policy positions and attitudes and what are more entrenched ideological positions. And from this we need to ask under what circumstances do strong ideological positions alter—such as in the early 1950s and 1970s—at what speed does this take place, and have these circumstances been present in the Party since 1997?

2.4. Party organization

The organisation of an institution's various components acts as a funnel for the collection of power and therefore also for the sourcing, dissemination, and management of policy ideas (though I argue throughout this thesis that ideology acts in a less conscious fashion than policy ideas). If we are to track a change in the ideas that are prevalent within an institution, then following the flows of organisational structure—both official and unofficial—is instructive. We can see new ideas emerge, often from within small components of the institution, and make their way to wider acceptance by meeting with the approval of other actors and through the upward movement within the institution of their advocates. Furthermore, we can track changes in organisational structure which evidence an attempt by powerful actors to control ideas and their effect on the institution.

The Party in the country

The Tory Party is a multi-faceted organisation: firstly it is—by way of numbers—constituted mainly of the so-called “party in the country”. Work on this dispersed membership has focused on two key areas: who are they and what influence do they have? The literature presents an image of a largely loyal army of supporters who meet in Conservative clubs and who provide money and time for the cause; as Stuart Ball (1998: 63) writes, ‘they are the foundation on which all else is built.’ An important part of these clubs—especially within universities—is the youth organisation variously called “Young Conservatives” and “Conservative Future”. It is certainly the new blood that is to be found in the younger generation seeking political careers which might transfuse into, and reinvigorate, the Party. However, one should not underestimate the degree to which constituency level members of all ages see themselves as part of the policy making process. The media may at times present the Party membership as a coterie of Colonel Blimps and Hyacinth Buckets who are content to complain but not to act, and who largely permit the PCP and the leadership to “get on with it” whilst they turn their hand to garden fete fundraisers. But there is research in the literature that suggests that the constituency-club members are not as right-wing as they are often portrayed: as Bale (2010: 15) puts it ‘they are no more likely to be...zealots than those who run or represent the Party at the national level.’ This observation suggests that the Party is relatively ideologically consistent through-out its operational levels rather than supporting the idea that the leadership are facing a strong internal struggle and wrestling for the soul of the Party—at least not in regard to the party in the country. This fact is supported by the conclusions of the empirical work done by Whitely *et al.* (1994: 230) who found that ‘many progressives exist in the grass-roots party’; and though they are

not in the majority, the finding does run counter to the notion that the membership is strongly and overwhelming right-wing (that is to say, socially conservative, economically dry, Eurosceptics).

Likewise, the degree of vocal complaint by the membership is also moot. Bale (2010) suggests they are a relatively quiet and benign force, whereas Ball (1998: 63) argues that though they may be silent on the complexities of policy they are more protective ‘over matters of finance and candidate selection’, an observation Cameron became aware of during his difficult, though largely successful, implementation of the “A-list” of candidates for the 2010 general election (Kite 2010). So, we are presented with a membership which is by no means mutely acquiescent, but at the same time by no means militant; and, moreover, are far from out-of-step with the political tunes being danced to at Westminster. From an institutional perspective this is instructive: the disparate, quasi-autonomous, almost *ad hoc*, nature of this section of the party’s structure suggests that implementing change in the party is more difficult because the chains of command are far from clear. We may hypothesise that the leadership has more independence as a result—but we may also counter this with the suggestion that their supposed independence is always at the behest of the membership, and that the membership trust them to stay largely in line with their beliefs. Indeed, the reason why the membership is largely supportive of, and similar to, their leaders may be because the institution does not have any strong ideological divides (only divides along policy ideas) and it does not engage, in any great degree, in the sort of intellectual soul-searching which is likely to lead to the opposition Blair encountered in his transformation of the Labour Party.

Hague's changes to the party in *The Fresh Future* initiative are largely agreed in the literature to have been cosmetic and a veiled attempt to empower the leadership (see Lees-Marshment and Quayle 2001; Kelly 2003a; 2003b). IDS and Howard paid little attention to radical restructuring of the national party, and during their tenures the make-up of the Party hardly altered, especially in the country at large (Kelly 2004). Notably, Howard's leadership election was achieved via an orchestrated attempt to undermine the power of the membership to choose a leader of the Party—however, there is not an examination in the literature of how this undermining of institutional rules can be linked to a slowing of the exchange of ideas during the Howard period. Overall, the literature perceives that Cameron has strengthened his authority over the constituency clubs by having a strong say on the formulating of candidate lists, and used this position to increase the presence of women and ethnic minorities, and partially change the overall make-up of the Party (see Childs and Webb 2012)—though as Bale (2008: 274) points out 'even now there are few on the front bench who look or sound much like the country they want to govern.'

Childs and Webb have done substantial work on women and gender issues and the Conservative Party (for example, Childs 2005; 2008; Childs, Webb and Marthaler 2008; Childs and Webb 2012). In the contemporary Party, Childs and Webb (2012: 168) identify three groupings, which they label as ideological tendencies, of Conservative Party members: Thatcherites, liberals, and traditionalists, with the last two being generally favourable to a modernising gender-strategy by the leadership. Childs and Webb's work is empirically rich and theoretically grounded; their categorization along ideological lines, however, is perhaps too strong a divide—missing that ideology is a cohesive feature in political parties that guides actors when they are split along policy

tendencies. Childs and Webb emphasise the central role feminization has played in Cameron's decontamination strategy, where certain moves were made to buy the Party, so to speak, goodwill with the electorate so that they could be heard on other issues. Childs and Webb (2012: 88) highlight the attitudes of party members towards the roles of women: an often sub-conscious, ideational resistance to certain women-centred policy objectives from the leadership—providing interesting empirical evidence for institutional claims of the delimited agency of leaders.

We can conclude that the general view of the literature is that despite supposed democratisation moves since 1997, the emphasis in the Party has been and remains towards top-down management. However, we should not read this structural organisation as being an inevitable sign of unfettered agency for the Party leadership. The literature sometimes seems to mention the membership only to dismiss it; but it is arguable that they act as a silent but ever present restraint on the activity of the leadership. They often show more loyalty to their local parliamentary member than to the leadership, so that the leadership cannot always rely on them to toe-the-line. As Whiteley and Seyd (1999: 67) write: 'in the case of the Conservative Party, an MP who gratifies local sensibilities and who does a reasonable amount of constituency service can persistently rebel in the House of Commons without being unduly concerned that this will lead to his or her de-selection'. Moreover, we must also be cognisant of the fact—which a majority of the literature ignores—that the leadership is generally constrained by an unspoken, non-decision, ideological ethos in the Party, which is reflected in the attitudes of its members, and does not need to be explicitly enforced by grass-roots dissent.

The party elite

Juxtaposed to the party in the country are the Calvinistic few: the party elect. This group consists of the politicians of various councils and legislatures as well as, most importantly, the PCP (which itself consists of a number of relevant committees, such as the 1922 committee, and the Cornerstone group). Bestriding these higher-level actors there is the inner circle of the leadership who constitute the realm of high politics and supposed “statecraft”. These elite actors are found not only in the Palace of Westminster but also at Conservative Central Office, and in particular the Conservative Research Department and Policy Unit, where media-advisers, strategists, as well as wealthy donors, vie for influence.

Much of the literature concerned with elite organisational factors (when it is not preoccupied with mere gossip and bickering) focuses on the degree of autonomy exercised by the leadership, and the extent of discipline that can be expected from backbenchers. Cameron has appeared to be more pro-active than his predecessors in asserting his authority over the PCP—as evidenced by his attempt to curtail the independent power of the 1922 committee upon gaining the premiership; and dissent in general during his leadership has been quieter than in previous years. Whether or not he should be genuinely worried about approaching rebellion, however, remains unclear. The literature on the Party largely agrees that the Tories are not quite the regimented and obedient organisation they perhaps once were. Their reputation for discipline was shattered during the internecine conflict of the 1990s, and what has emerged since is a Party which, if no longer divided, certainly does not take consensus for granted. Of course, factionality is not the same as militancy: and differences of opinion need not progress towards open hostilities. As Baker *et al.* (1999: 74) state, ‘dissent [within a

party] should be most evident when a pressure-point issue emerges that divides the party deeply'; if events conspire to somewhat absent these occasional pressure points then endemic factions or tendencies do not come to loggerheads. The issue of Europe, post-1997, came less and less valent as the old Europhile guard retired and the intentions of the leadership seemed to settle with the prevailing mood in the Party. As a consequence, the literature largely presents a party that is more disciplined than it was in the 1990s. But all the same, there have remained dissenting actors. During Hague's tenure there was the "awkward squad", formed around former ministers Eric Forth and David Maclean, who 'engaged in a parliamentary form of guerrilla warfare' (Cowley and Stuart 2003: 71) and who, it is largely agreed, were a small but persistent nick in the foot on Hague's march towards party change and electoral recovery. This was coupled with a more powerful faction headed by Michael Portillo who represented dissent from within the leadership, and who was attempting to direct the party in an opposing direction. IDS and Howard also had to deal with factional criticism, most notably exhibited in the swift IDS defenestration of 2003, which perhaps was a *form* of discipline, inasmuch as there was near collective agreement for the removal of the leader.

What this means for the party as an institution is instructive. We are presented with an institution that survives through a form of permanent *modus vivendi* between factions: a state-of-affairs that does not incapacitate the functioning of the institution, but neither does it offer peace and prosperity down a singular policy line. Rather, there is constant negotiation, prodding, and testing of new policy ideas in order to slowly change the institution towards a new direction. What we also see is that factions are more likely to (literally) die-out than change their minds: suggesting, morbidly perhaps,

that people die sooner than their stubbornness. Hence, we see that factional fault lines in the Party have seemingly shifted over the last twenty years not because old established actors have altered their beliefs, but rather because new actors have entered the institution in their place: an observation which further emphasises the potentially slow pace of change within institutions.

Though, once again, parties should be considered unique in institutional theory in the respect that they experience, on occasion, a rapid influx or exit of actors during elections which can speed change: however, since 1997 only the 2010 election saw such a significant replacement of actors within the Party. We also need to consider the degree of pre-socialization the institution undertakes: does it select new actors on the basis of their similarity to present actors, a fact that may be considerable if constituency clubs have a strong say in recruitment and candidate selection; alternatively, or concomitantly, is there a degree of self-filtering by individuals interested in joining the institution based on their perceptions of the Party's beliefs and practices (see: for empirical work on self-filtering and candidate selection Norris and Lovenduski 1993). The problem of attracting new diverse actors to the institution has been highlighted by a number of studies on racial minorities and women in the Party, all of which emphasise the relative lack of success in the area (see: Campbell *et al.* 2007; Heppell and Bryson 2010; Childs and Webb 2012). We are therefore presented with a disconnect between the rhetoric of change, certain material alterations, and the overall persistence of the institutional make-up of the Party. Despite wanting—perhaps sincerely—to include people from diverse backgrounds, Cameron and his predecessors have been faced with the entrenched homogeneity of the institution. However, this fact (that a large institution is hard to change because its members cannot be readily replaced) is not adequately

explored in the literature, and the fact is not adequately linked to issues of ideology and policy.

Outside the material party

It is important not to define the institution of the Party as coterminous with its material membership. When we understand an institution as a concentration and interaction of certain *ideas* then its boundaries become more amorphous, and more widespread. Consequently, it is necessary to examine the flow of ideas from areas outside of the membership. Central to this is the role of think-tanks which offer an exemplar of how ideas germinate then penetrate an institution and possibly take hold.

Peck and Tickell (2006: 36), regarding nascent neo-liberal think-tanks of the 1970s, write of the ‘challenge of translating foundational ideas into circulating policy knowledges, fit for governmental practice; the need for sociospatial proximity to key political decision makers...the significance of a favourable political-economic and institutional context...and the importance of perpetually refining policy rationales...’ We can see from this description the highly instructive use of studying think-tanks, as they provide an illustration of how ideas from outside interact with an institution. Within the Conservative Party there are a myriad of think-tanks *cum* social clubs made up of MPs along with fellow travellers, such as (roughly ranging from degree of bibulousness to degree of ratiocination) the Carlton Club, the Bruges Group, the Monday Club, the Tory Reform Group, and the Bow Group; as well as more professionalised academic research organisations such as the Social Market Foundation, the Centre for Policy Studies, Policy Exchange, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), the Adam Smith Institute,

Politeia, Civitas, Reform and the neophyte ResPublica. There has been relatively little work done on think-tanks and the Party, despite their presence as a rich source of ideas. Pautz (2012) has conducted a useful overview, and emphasises the key role for Policy Exchange and the CSJ over the other organisations.

Alongside these think-tanks are independent lobbying groups with strong unofficial ties to the Party due to the interconnectedness of their membership, such as the Countryside Alliance or MigrationWatchUK. We can also look further afield, at institutions in other countries that have strong links to the Party. There are unofficial policy networks with American think-tanks, such as the Hoover Institute; and, naturally, with the Republican Party, who have regularly performed as amenable hosts to ingénue Tories eager to learn of the latest policy ideas and marketing techniques.

Finally, there is what Bale (2010: 18) has labelled the “party in the media”: which can be seen as a form of shadow organisation, a part of the Party in spirit and influence, if not officially identified on the books. This shadow organisation is of significant importance. ‘Certainly,’ writes Bale (2010: 18), ‘there is every reason to suppose that leader writers, columnists, and even reporters exert more influence on the Conservative Party’s leadership...than any fabled “core vote”’. Consequently, the agential Mr Tory has circles and circles of institutions, or sub-institutions (both internal and external), surrounding him, all of which have expectations, cognitive norms, and beliefs.

To define, however roughly, the outline of a political party, we must understand that an institution is more than its material structure, that it is in fact a somewhat amorphous ideational entity. Consequently, if we aim to identify and understand change in the Party then we must initially ask the ontological question: what constitutes a political party?

What exactly are the boundaries of the entity we are examining; what is the quiddity of the Conservative Party, so that we might identify when it has changed, what has changed, and what has caused and restricted change? It is not, as we have seen from examining an overview of its organisational structure, a mere matter of stating that the institution is the sum of its membership, as there are both powerful actors outside the institution, and inert actors within. Often the literature is only interested in describing the institution as if it were an organism that can be straight forwardly dissected, magnified, and labelled, without considering the more interesting ontological possibility that an institution is something different—at times something more, at times something less—than the organisation that bears its name, and the agents that claim membership. Therefore, a final area of concern is that once we have situated the leader within an institution we need to ask how we can identify the limits, or the outline, of that institution that bears upon them. And from this, how strong the institutional restrictions on the agency of a leader, as well as other actors, actually are and what organisational factors cause a tightening or loosening of these restrictions?

2.5. Political party adaptation

The current literature on the Party, as we can see, is not strong on explicitly *theorising* party adaptation, preferring, rather, the agential leader-focused approach characteristic of Whiggish historiography. This thesis, however, examines how an entire political party, as an institution, has adapted in response to electoral defeat. This examination must, therefore, be placed in the context of the literature on political parties and party adaptation. This section briefly reviews the literature on how political parties have been

defined and how adaptation has been presented. It outlines that the persistent ability for parties to adapt to survive within the electoral environment has become an accepted maxim. It demonstrates that parties have been presented as highly reactive to changing electoral circumstances and are conceived as particularly malleable entities. Indeed, even those theorists who have begun to conceptualise political parties as institutions in their own right present them as capable of being ‘changed with greater rapidity and ease than virtually any other political organization’ (Aldrich 2006: 556).

However, I argue that the nature of this adaptation—its drivers and constraining factors—requires theoretical reflection before an empirical study is undertaken. I demonstrate that at present the adaptive ability of parties has been under examined and, as a consequence, problematically presented. I run through, in this section, how this viewpoint has come about. Much of the literature sees parties as mirrors of changes in the electoral and wider political environment. Consequently, they are characterised as ostensibly lean and active, and capable of responding quickly (within the relative time frame of other more docile institutions) to external events. I outline below how specific theoretical approaches—both explicit and implicit—have led analysts to converge on this dominant approach to political party adaptation. I conclude that once we closely examine the inner workings of parties such mercurial characteristics can be questioned. It is rather the case that internal change is hard-won, inertia is pervasive, and external changes are often misinterpreted by internal actors.

Examining the theorising of party adaptation is central to understanding the dominant approach to analyses of the Conservative Party and, indeed, the study of British politics as a whole. As the theorising of parties developed over the last decades, its valuable insights at no point threatened to question the dominant agential approach

of the more empirically minded analysts. Indeed, as we will see, much of its modelling seemed to provide tacit support for an instrumentalist approach: with theory being understood as a niche interest, used not for causal explanation, but rather as a form of static categorisation. Consequently, much party adaptation literature has not impacted the study of the Conservative Party in the manner one would hope theoretical developments might. In this section, I examine how this came about, explain how the theorising of party adaptation can be improved, and demonstrate the necessity of linking theoretical insights to a re-ordering of how we interpret empirical data—so that theoretical insights are not merely left in splendid isolation from the explaining of real world empirical puzzles.

How political parties have been theorised

Political parties are a ubiquitous feature of liberal democracies. They are not explicitly prescribed by electoral systems (the writers of the constitution of the United States notably attempted to prevent their emergence); nor can it be said that they are a theoretically necessary condition of democracy (Krouwel 2006: 249). However, empirically they are a close to inevitable product of free and fair democracy, once such a description can be understood as applicable to a state where power is peaceably handed over from one group of actors to another group with whom they do not agree (Wolinetz 2006: 51). It is this characteristic of the handing over of power that led analysts such as Sartori (1976) to emphasise that a political party, if the designation is to mean anything, must be a *part* of a party system. That is to say, that a party is defined by the presence of a least one other party and that its *sine qua non* is that it acts within a

competitive party system. Such a definition was crucial in distinguishing that a group could only operate as a political party within a multi-party democracy: a group operating without political competition was not a party, not part of a party system, and not democratic. In such circumstances the political group in power is indistinguishable from the state. As a consequence of this characterisation, an approach to political party adaptation developed during the latter half of the last century that concentrated not on the inner workings of parties but rather on their movements within a system. The actions of political parties were then conceptualised as being defined by the systems in which they operated, most notably the electoral system that produced either two- or multi-party competition (White 2006: 7).

The work of Downs (1957) and Duverger (1964), and later Sartori (1976), was indicative of an approach to party adaptation that concentrated on party systems and conceptualised parties as singular entities which acted rationally within the rules (that is to say, the implied strategic rules) created by the electoral system. In Downs's classic formulation the logic of competition would lead a two party system to produce parties that converged on the ideological centre of the political spectrum to maximise votes. We see, therefore, that parties adapt towards stability. The parties are seen as aggregate reflections of the political needs of the electorate; they are reactive not proactive. If the political expectations of the electorate change the parties quickly adapt to re-centre themselves. They are water in a tilting bucket. Duverger's formulation that the right underwent a 'contagion from the left' after the extension of the franchise in the first third of the twentieth century follows the same logic of reacting to external events. He outlines how the right-wing cadre parties had to re-organise as mass parties in order to survive in the new era (Rae 2006: 201). In this conception parties do not have ideas but

strategies. However, this leads to a relative lack of change because it remains logical for a party to present a consistent platform from one election to the next, thus providing a stable cognitive short cut for the median voter who has little engagement with policy issues. This definition also gives a high degree of agency to party leaders who have the ability to steer their party to the centre ground.

Notably the internal workings of the party become a black box. If we apply the Downsian calculus to the internal debate within a party we see the complexity, or even the contradiction, of its predictions (Katz 2006: 36). A democratic party, or even just a party that had a reasonable level of dissenting opinion, would produce a convergence on the median opinion of its own members, thus making it impossible to steer the party towards the centre of the electorate. This, however, is not examined. The party, in this approach, is as one, and it is party systems that are the drivers of change.

The attention to party systems rather than party institutions is somewhat explained by the concern produced by the Berelson paradox. Berelson (1986: 312) writes:

That is the paradox. *Individual voters* today seem unable to satisfy the requirements for a democratic system of government... But the *system of democracy* does...The individual members may not meet all the standards, but the whole nevertheless survives and grows. This suggests that where the classic theory is defective is in its concentration on the *individual*...What are undervalued are certain collective properties that reside in the electorate as a whole and in the political and social system in which it functions.

Attention to individuals was seen as too problematic, when so many individuals seemed uninterested in policies, and ignorant of politics. But aggregated into a system such individuals begin, when viewed as a collective, to supposedly act in a logical manner. What, when viewed in microcosm, could be thought of as a failure of democracy, when viewed systemically can be labelled efficient. The system works, at least in the model, but to do so the micro units of the system must be left under examined, be they the political party actor or the individual voter.

The problem with seeing parties as singular entities in a system

Behaviour cannot be reduced down to rational self-interest; for not only do political parties not always behave rationally, neither do individual voters. As Schlesinger, *et al.* (2006: 62) write, in a critique of Duverger's work, 'free and periodic elections create peculiarly imbalanced markets that treat the participants differently.' As a result, the electoral landscape does not always roam over level ground, and parties are not always free to plant themselves where the vote is most fertile. Voters are resistant to such moves; voters do not merely want to be offered what they want to hear, if they already have a cognitive resistance to the party doing the offering (see, for how this applies to the Conservative Party, Green 2011). Consequently, parties (even *if* we were to propose that party actors can survey the electoral market with rational self-interest) are faced with a capricious marketplace, which is difficult to read.

Of course, actors do attempt to read the electoral marketplace, and base strategy upon such a reading. However, it is likely that the more difficult the reading, the more likely it is that party actors turn inwards for guidance: that it is endogenous factors that

determine behaviour, factors that can be, in part, idiosyncratic to each party. The literature is not silent on the difference between parties, and it does acknowledge difference, if not outright idiosyncrasy. However, it tends to undermine this observation by returning to the great leveller of behaviour which is the causal influence of the rational marketplace. The theoretical literature on party change, therefore, has tended towards partial contradiction. It presents parties as acting in response to the electoral environment. Yet it also has a number of classificatory models (with one new model superseding the previous model) which attempt to distinguish between different types of party. The implication seems to be that parties are distinguishable in their history and makeup, their power centres and organisations, but not in their behaviour: for when it comes to behaviour they act the same. If this is so, it is a theorisation that reduces and abstracts individual party behaviour, basing it not on individual characteristics, but on generalisable systemic ones. As a result, the classificatory models that dominate the theoretical study of political parties can be read as more strongly descriptive, rather than predictive, or explanatory, of behaviour (that is to say, they do not posit institutional factors as a causal independent variable)—with causal explanation left to exogenous factors, such as party systems. It is as if one were to make a taxonomy of animals, but then state that all animals behaved in the same manner in reaction to the same change in the weather.

How parties have been classified by the theoretical literature

Let me make my point clearer by presenting an overview of these competing classificatory models. These classifications are based on a number of differing

formulations on how parties might be grouped, all of which, it should be noted, *do* remain instructive, though they are far from sufficient, in the developing of the theoretical framework for my case study. Firstly, classification can be based on linking different party types by a common genus: most notably, Duverger (1964) identifies that the differing origins of party formation have led to differences in the manner that elite party actors relate to the rest of the party membership. Parties that were formed *post-hoc* within legislatures as a means of aggregating competing elites are labelled “cadre parties”; whereas parties that were formed outside of the political arena, at a grass-roots level, and *propter hoc* of electoral competition, are labelled “mass parties”. During the twentieth century era the Conservative Party has increasingly transformed into a mass party model; however, its origins as a cadre party are still present in its structure so that ‘the party almost certainly remains a hybrid of sorts, albeit an evolving one’ (Webb 2000: 198). Duverger’s work is highly useful in identifying the origins and changing periods of the organisational structures within the Conservative Party; moreover, his models aid an explanation as to why the party leadership have consistently *appeared* to enjoy greater decision-making agency within the institution than similar actors operating within externally formed mass parties. However, Duverger is not explicit enough on how the unique formation of cadre parties leads to not only different *processes* of decision making, but different decision *outcomes*. For though he posits that cadre party leaders are potentially freer from grassroots interference than mass party leaders, he does not use this to suggest that cadre party leaders make different decisions, hence the categories are descriptive but not explanatory. Moreover, Duverger tends to equate agency within a party as being determined by material organisational structures, and ignores the manner in which apparently instrumental agents can in fact be heavily

restricted by ideational frameworks. Hence, his categories are based on material difference between parties; but he is silent on immaterial—that is to say, ideational—difference (which may, in fact, demonstrate that cadre and mass parties have more in common than Duverger supposes; not, that is, in the *content* of the ideas they hold, but in the degree of their decision structuring nature).

Parties are also classified by more complex typologies of characteristics and sub-characteristics from which we can identify two broad descriptive categories of parties since the Second World War: the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966) and the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995). The catch-all party outlines the move beyond the interests of their initial formation. ‘Catch-all parties,’ writes Michele Hale Williams (2009: 539), ‘can be identified by their size as larger mainstream parties, by their pursuit of votes at the expense of ideology, by their centrist and often inconsistent party platforms designed to appeal to ever wider audiences, and by their organizational style that is elite driven.’ For the Conservatives this has meant the formation of policies that are not solely in the interests of the elite it first represented. This move in policy choice has been the result of an expansion of the salariat, which the party has traditionally represented, so that the archetype of the potential Conservative voter has also become more varied (Webb 2000: 83).

This catch-all party model aids an understanding of the causal link between a change in the electoral environment and the goals a party orientates itself towards; it also sensitises us to the fact that as an institution grows it develops on its initial founding interests. We should not, therefore, be positing an explanation of Conservative party change that reduces behaviour to the acting out of the financial interests of the ruling elite. However, the model overstates the degree to which a party actor will

instrumentally follow the demands of the electoral environment in order to gain votes. I argue that the Conservative Party embraced concerns outside the initial cadre not because, or not solely because, of exogenous demands; but rather because new actors, with slightly changed beliefs, entered the institution due to wider social change (to repeat: *people die quicker than the ideas they hold*). Hence, though the description of the catch-all party is accurate, to a degree, the suggestion that its appearance was due to adaptability by *existing* institutional actors is exaggerated.

The catch-all party model is rivalled by the cartel party model which is now widely used, though with much dissent (see: Kitschelt 2000), to classify contemporary Western parties. It describes the construction of interests and identities through a focus on communication and image; the presidentialization of leaders; and the de-collectivization of supporters. It moves beyond the mass party and catch-all party models to argue that political elites have the ability to manipulate the electoral environment in their favour (Katz and Mair, 1995; 2009). Consequently, it suggests that elite party actors are less limited by both their own parties and the electorate and are able to form *de facto* cross party cartels that act to ensure the continued dominance of a small number of political actors.

The cartel model aids an understanding of the present day Conservative party elite as powerful actors capable of shaping—and not merely reacting to—the electoral environment by recourse to modern campaigning techniques. In this sense, the cartel model goes beyond the reductions of previous models by suggesting that the electoral environment is not the sole cause of change in parties, but rather that parties can manipulate the environment to meet their own predetermined interests. Consequently, endogenous factors appear to emerge as important in causal explanation, which is

fecund soil for institutional theory. However, the model does not develop on the potential. The cartel model has emerged alongside, and arguably been a result of, the growing interest over the last decades in the examination of campaigns and communication (Katz and Mair 1994: 3). This approach looks inside the black box to discover the internal workings of the party, and concludes there is much to be understood from endogenous behaviour to explain how the party acts collectively. Moreover, it outlines how parties have adapted to be tool makers, no-longer buffeted by their environment but able to re-shape it using technologies of information collection and dissemination. However, the cartel and professionalization models tend to exaggerate the power of party actors to manipulate the market. In a moment of cynicism, it appears as if analysts have given too much agency to elite party groups. Whereas before it was the market that was causal and optimising, so that behaviour only followed the market; now the reverse is posited as true: that the market follows the interests of elite actors, whose optimal interests are always achieved. However, as Kitschelt (2000: 150) writes, it ‘remains unclear why politicians are supposed to become increasingly independent from their electoral constituencies.’ Why is it that institutionally situated (and supposedly reactive) actors are suddenly infused with instrumentality? It is more likely the case that elite party actors are often ineffectual, and are only ever partially, if at all, capable of manipulating an electoral environment.

Furthermore, what appear initially to be endogenous concerns (because internal party communication techniques are examined) can, in fact, be questioned. Contemporary party models have homogenised the political environment (indeed, have claimed that such homogenisation is diagnostic) so that previously agonistic parties appear to act more and more in the same manner, towards the same goals. But if all

political parties are converging in behaviour then we cannot posit endogenous factors as causal; that is to say, in contemporary models, the black boxes of various party institutions are opened up, only to discover that each black box behaves the same!; with professional, cartel-minded actors, operating similarly in each—an outcome that suggests that it is an exogenous environment (the electoral marketplace) acting on each of these institutions which causes their similar behaviour. Consequently, the models ignore the possibility that *different* institutions act *differently*, because of the endogenous characteristics of unique organisational and ideological histories, and wish to move in different directions despite the exigencies of the electoral market place. We must note that for endogenous institutional explanation to be valid, it must be shown that different institutions are acting differently within the same environment; whereas contemporary party models seem to wish to obviate difference as much as possible.

What we can learn from the present theorising of party adaptation

The party models literature does provide beneficial ideal types that can guide research; and the superseding models are helpful in mapping general changes in parties over time. We are able to identify the Conservative party as an internally formed cadre organisation that has partially undergone transformation to a mass party appeal; but is also highly professional and electorally orientated in the manner of the cartel party. These models, however, have a number of weaknesses that limit their usefulness. Firstly, the models are descriptive rather than explanatory; they do not explain the form and speed of change, that is to say: what is changing about the party and what is static, and is there overall continuity? They do not address the interaction of structures and

agents in an explanation of the causes of change. The models aim to be applicable across democratic countries; therefore, they are not culturally specific. An effective analysis of the Conservative Party must be situated within both generic and nationally specific structures, allowing us to identify the specific historical contingencies that have led to a transformation of the party structure, behaviour, and goals. Finally, the models have a rational presumption and see actors as highly informed and self-interested (for example Harmel and Janda, 1994). The parties they describe are then seen as the products of these actions; or rather, as products of collective re-actions to the electoral environment. They do not address the possibility that actors hold beliefs that impact upon and construct their interests. As a result, the models have a bias towards explanation based on rationality, and tend to identify exogenous rather than endogenous causes of change. As Harmel and Janda (1994: 265) explain in their theorising of party change, ‘the most dramatic and broadest changes will occur only when the party has experienced an external shock’. But such explanation is insufficient when examining the activities of political parties as unique institutions. Consequently, party models do not offer an adequate theorising of the complexities of party adaptation. Indeed, their implied instrumentalism has done much to facilitate the perpetuation of the under-theorised approach to British politics in general, and the Conservative party in particular, outlined in this chapter. Because previous theoretical models have not sufficiently challenged agential autonomy, and have not opened the black-box of internal party structures, there has not been an adequate theoretical challenge to dominate empirically-focused accounts of the Conservatives in opposition. Therefore, the present party adaptation literature needs to be incorporated within the wider framework of institutional theory to provide a more comprehensive account of party

change, moving from the descriptive to the explanatory. We will then have a stronger theoretical approach to dynamic party adaptation, based on endogenous and institutional explanation.

In the next section I introduce how historical institutionalism can be used to address the series of questions presented in the previous section which reviewed the present literature. I will demonstrate how historical institutionalism can generate certain hypothesis for my analysis. So, an historical institutionalist analysis will be concerned with the following set of theoretically minded questions which I argue have been under-addressed by a large area of the literature: what institutional constraints restrict the agency of leaders; how and why do these restraints vary over time; has there been a change of presentation, policy, attitude, or ideology in the Party; and, finally, what causes change, and can we have change within overall continuity?

3. Historical Institutionalism

3.1. Introduction to theoretical framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that is adopted in the case study that follows. There is dispute in the literature as to how many institutional theories there are: Hall and Taylor (1996) influentially—and parsimoniously—classified three institutional theories; however, Rhodes *et al.* (2006) outline five; and B. Guy Peters (2007) identifies seven. Moreover, smaller taxonomies are not necessarily wholly merged into larger ones so that collectively these categorisations produce anything up to nine institutional perspectives, *viz.*: normative institutionalism; network institutionalism; feminist institutionalism; rational choice institutionalism; sociological institutionalism; empirical institutionalism; international institutionalism; constructivist/discursive institutionalism; and, finally, historical institutionalism. This wide range of approaches is testament to the depth and diversity of institutional theory. However, these institutional theories vary in their influence within the discipline. Here I will examine in detail Hall and Taylor's initial tripartite formulation of historical, rational choice, and sociological institutionalism, a formulation that still broadly categorises contemporary institutional theory.

Firstly, I introduce the framework of historical institutionalism which I am adopting in the case study. I then examine what can be learnt from the main competing approaches within institutional theory. The theoretical framework to be adopted must address the following sets of questions (*mutatis mutandis* Peters 2007: 22): Firstly, we must ask what constitutes an institution? What are the criteria of identification? It is the

case that ‘all institutional perspectives understand “institutions” as enduring entities that cannot be changed instantaneously or easily’ (Mahoney 2000: 512). However, there is disagreement as to what particularly these entities consist of. This leads us to ask: what is the ontological foundation and epistemological position of the theoretical framework? This question is central to tackling the question mooted in chapter one concerning the quiddity of the Conservative Party. If we are able to establish theoretically what the boundaries of an institution are then we can go some way to begin drawing a picture of what the essence of the Party is; what it means to be an actor in the institution of the Conservative Party.

Secondly, we are interested in how institutions begin and what the founding interests or goals of the institution are, and how persistent these are through its historical development. In this area we can be helped by political parties theory which has put considerable work into tracking and categorising how parties emerge and develop. Our concern here is to not to suggest that institutions—especially ones as old as the Conservative Party—cannot move beyond their founding interest but rather to emphasise that unless material circumstances have changed, or the founding interests were narrowly and temporally specific in the first place, then we are likely to find that these goals still play a guiding role in the institution.

Thirdly, we are interested in how theory suggests institutions change? It is important that we move beyond any explanation that is confined to saying that institutions are locked into playing out a realisation of their founding interests. However, by what mechanism, then, do institutions change and who changes them? Of course, change must take place through actors (structures cannot perform actions); but can they only change through the conscious actions of actors or do actors act sub-consciously to both

engender and veto change? Furthermore, what is the speed of change, is it evolutionary or punctuated, is their mainly continuity or flux? Does change occur occasionally or continuously; rapidly or incrementally; or some mixture of these categories?

This leads us to the central question of how individuals and institutions interact. That is to say, how does institutional theory address the structure/agency question? This question focuses attention towards how the explicit and implicit rules of an institution serve to reproduce the nature of institutional decision making so that significant change becomes difficult and the extent of the agency of actors operating within them is restricted. However, we should be cautious against any explanation that is too intentionalist or, alternatively, too structurally deterministic. We do not want to say that the leaders of the Conservative Party are free to realise their will in unfettered agency; but neither are they chained to a recalcitrant and immalleable institution. As Tim Bale writes (2010: 12): ‘party politics can only be understood not just by melding contextual and generic explanations but by focusing on the intersection, the interrelationship, and the reciprocal influence of ideas, interests, and institutions.’ That is to say, agency is a multifaceted, interrelated, and iterative process.

Now, key to understanding the extent of the agency of the leadership is a theoretical—followed by empirical—understanding of how the institution works. What does theory tell us about the processes by which institutional members achieve their goals? This is in part a material question—where are the sources of money, what is the importance of democracy and patronage in an institution, or the turnover of membership? But it is also about that age old question: Where does it get its ideas? What is the role of ideas in an institution (if indeed there is any); where do they come from and what affect do they have on members? As Peters (2007: 42) writes ‘there can

be a variety of cultures existing within a single institution,’ and I argue this is especially true with political parties. So we must ask: how do competing ideas emerge and coexist, and what is the effect of this dissonance within the institution; and, perhaps most importantly, how do these new, competing ideas enter the institution in the first place?

Finally, we are interested in conceptions of rationality. What emphasis is placed on high levels of rationality within the different approaches to institutional theory? Firstly, to what extent can an individual rationally determine their self-interest? For, as Thelen and Steinmo (1992: 8) write: ‘While rational choice deals with preferences at the level of assumptions, historical institutionalists take the question of how individuals and groups define their self-interest as problematical.’ And, following from this, to what extent can an individual rationally read the exigencies of the external environment, and then interpret any demands or changes through their own or the institution’s supposed interests, and act accordingly?

From these sets of questions, I proceed in this chapter to identify historical institutionalism as the approach that is most beneficial to an analysis of political parties. However, historical institutionalism need not stand wholly in isolation as an approach. These questions also serve to highlight the aspects of opposing theories which are in part similar to HI. The degree to which these competing theories can be hybridised is mooted: Thelen (1999), and Katznelson and Weingast (2005), for example, are confident of the possibility for intersection between rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism; whereas Rhodes (2008: 93) argues that ‘[t]he new institutionalism is composed of diverse strands, building on different and probably incompatible intellectual traditions, united only in the study of political institutions and their commitment to modernist-empiricism.’ Key to the possibility of finding common-

ground between these theories is an examination of the differing ontological assumptions that they make. For a theory to be internally consistent and rigorous it is necessary that it wear its ontological heart on its sleeve. It is only by doing so that it is able to ensure that the explanations it gives are credibly compatible—for ‘it is only once it is recognized that alternative ontological perspectives tell different stories,’ writes Mason (2002: 14) ‘that a researcher can begin to see their own ontological view of the social world as a position which should be established and understood, rather than an obvious and universal truth which can be taken for granted.’

By foregrounding the ontology of these institutional theories, therefore, we are able to be more measured about the uniqueness of a single approach; we are able to interrogate the “common-sense” ontological baggage that we carry into research (baggage which is liable to remain notably heavy for those who attempt to operate inductively and supposedly without a theoretical framework—as we have seen in dominant approaches to the study of British politics); and, finally, we are able to make manifest that certain approaches are more compatible than certain disciplinary demarcations might suggest, whereas others are mutually-exclusive. That is to say, that though a theoretical framework should not use a hodgepodge of analytical tools gathered from across the discipline, neither should we reject attempts at convergence if such moves are consistent at the meta-theoretical level. From this advice, I conclude that historical institutionalism has difficulty integrating with rational choice institutionalism; however, it can find common, and enriching, ground with sociological institutionalism.

3.2. The mechanisms of historical institutionalism (HI)

By the 1980s, behaviouralism and rational choice theory had brought a theoretical rigour to analysis which caused a descriptive focus and normative assertions to be no longer tenable. The return of institutional theory, as a result, occurred within a strong and reflexive theoretical framework. The aim of the new institutionalism was to explain how actor's preferences and agency were affected by their institutional environment; that is to say, institutions were to be given a causal role in explanation, if not *the* causal role, and would no longer be merely a stage upon which actors operated. As March and Olsen (1984: 738) wrote: 'Without denying the importance of both the social context of politics and the motives of individual actors, the new institutionalism insists on a more autonomous role for political institutions.' They argued that institutions are not merely reflective of external social forces and therefore explicable by them; nor are they mere aggregate reflections of individual decisions; rather they argued that processes internal to institutions were integral to the agency of actors, the outcomes of their decisions, and, on a grander scale, the very flow of history (March and Olsen 1984: 739). Consequently, it was paramount that these internal institutional processes begin to be studied by political scientists and their nature and mechanisms understood in more detail.

March and Olsen (1984) renewed interest in institutions, but how these new explanatory units might be understood—their definition, their mechanisms—soon became disputed. As Hall and Taylor (1996) have observed, after only fifteen years of the new institutionalism the approach no longer represented a unified body of thought. Institutional theorists began to part ways along a number of different fault lines: regarding the activity of the institution under study, its degree of concentration or

profuseness, as well as ontological and epistemological questions regarding the make-up of institutions and what claims it is possible to make about them. This divergence and splintering has continued to the present day so that there are now three main institutional approaches, which I examine and contrast below. My intention here is to outline the approaches but importantly to focus towards historical institutionalism and the critiques made of it by the other approaches.

Historical institutionalism emerged in the discipline in the early 1990s, on the back of work done by Theda Skocpol (1992); and Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth (1992: 2), who, in their seminal edited collection, defined institutions as ‘both formal organizations and informal rules and procedures that structure conduct...the whole range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups’. However, they were clear to state that institutions are not the sole causal factor in change: they act to shape and influence outcomes but do not ordain them. The key contribution of this early work was to emphasise the historically determined character of institutions; the importance, though not immutability, of early decision making in institutional construction; and the role of ideas, as well as material interests, in motivating the action of agents (Peters 2007: 71–86). On the strength of this conceptual position, which I will now go on to elucidate, HI has secured its place as a dominant approach within political science.

Preference and action

It is first necessary to conceptualise the ontology of agency within the institution of a political party; that is to say, what dictates, and therefore explains, *preferences* and then *action*—and specifically in the case of this study, what dictated the actions of Conservative party actors surrounding change within social justice policy. In this formulation, I understand preferences to be the summation of the negotiation between various inputs. Action then materialises this preference and can lead to, depending on outcomes, an alteration of the input factors in preference shaping. HI tells us not only what the input factors of agency are, but roughly how each factor varies and impacts other factors. In this section I outline and give dynamism to these factors. HI largely provides the tools to do this unpacking; however, in my later sections on rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, I will also highlight how HI crosses over with emphases from these approaches, as well.

Structure and agency

Within historical institutionalism, the term “institution”, writes Ira Katznelson (1998: 196), ‘gains its power as a concept to probe the infinitely intricate history of humankind by virtue of its junctional location at the intersection of structure and agency and of past and present’. An institution, therefore, is a uniquely beneficial and interesting social entity for political scientists to study because it brings to the fore some of the key questions of human agency; presenting, if not conclusive answers, some highly workable insights.

HI has a realist conception of institutional structures; that is to say, they are conceptualised as something other than the totality of the actors that operate within them. For contrary to a rationalist position, HI sees ontological structures as existing prior to any single agent that works within them (Blyth 1997: 230). Therefore, structures are something which agents *have to deal with*. This realist ontology, however, conceives actors as *interacting dialectically* with the independent, structured environment (Hay 2002: 89). Therefore, we see an interaction between the actor's rationality back to their structured context. A HI analysis emphasises how an actor is enabled and constrained by the institution in which they are situated: wholly intentionalist narratives are eschewed in favour of the complexity of a dialectical process between structure and agency.

The synchronic and diachronic aspects of structure

The structured context is analytically divided into two parts, representing two “aspects”: a synchronic aspect and a diachronic aspect. This is an analytical distinction; moreover, it is metaphorical, and is therefore useful in helping us *visualise* the issue rather than perfectly represent it. The word “aspect” has been used because it suggests two faces of the same object, two sides of the same window, one might say. Of course, an agent only ever interacts with structures *at a given time*, and so the interaction is always with the synchronic aspect. However, structures are not made anew, upon each interaction—ontologically, we must recognise that there is a diachronic aspect to structure, the history of that structure, which exists and impacts upon it, and shapes agential interaction. The reason why the metaphor “aspect” is only partly useful is because it

might suggest that the two aspects can be looked at separately, that they are a dualism rather than a duality (this analytical problem is usefully delineated by Hay 2002: 115–120). It is important to note, therefore, that we should not conceive that agents interact and reflect on, at one point, synchronic structures, then at another point, diachronic structures. Rather, the interaction with both is simultaneous, iterative, and multi-dynamic.

Firstly, let us analytically address structure as a synchronic aspect. Then, afterwards, I will go on to outline how historical institutionalism adds a diachronic aspect to this conception.

Material context

It is important to emphasise that material *and* ideational structures determine agency. Historical institutionalism, therefore, rejects a solely materialist representation of institutions: but, as importantly, it also rejects a solely constructivist (or anti-foundational ontology) representation. As Scott (2008: 49) outlines in his definition of the ontology of institutions, it is necessary to emphasise ‘the importance of including material resources—both material and human—in any conception of social structures [which include institutional structures] so as to take into account asymmetries of power. If rules and norms are to be effective, they must be backed with sanctioning power’. That is to say, material resources make a difference, and cannot be negated by ideational structures.

We see here that it is possible for historical institutionalism to borrow from, and add to, rational choice institutionalism (RCI). RCI identifies *individual material interest* and *individual resources*, as the sole causal factors in action. HI acknowledges that there is a set foundation of preferences for individuals that needs to be acknowledged (in the case of a member of a party, it is the will to be elected to higher office); but this foundation is built upon by institutional factors, and at times obscured by them. However, this does not singularly prioritise institutions: HI does not say that individual resources are solely based on those provided by the institution. An individual can have resources which are external to the institution, which they can bring to it; and this is particularly so with political parties. So, HI places the individual within an institution that has ontologically separate material structures. As the individual interest is in power maximisation, or utility, so is the collective goal of the institution, the *institutional material interest*—in a political party this is the goal of being elected to government. This can be seen as a set material goal that is absolute: the institution's *raison d'être*. This goal is materially facilitated by the resources of money and networks the members of the institution have access to, as a result of their membership—the *institutional resources*.

Finally, there are *institutional rules*, which can be seen as material as they are explicit, out in the open for all actors to be aware of, and constrained by. The regulatory nature of institutions is an observation shared by all the dominant approaches to institutional theory: the approaches differ, however, on the 'prominence they give regulatory processes—rule setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities' (Scott 2008: 52), as well as the emphasis they give to rules, rather than norms and ideas.

We should note two things here. Firstly, though rules are explicit within institutions, how they act on actors may be both explicit and implicit. Rules may be enforced clearly

through sanctioning committees, but also implicitly through a sense of community disapproval. Therefore, actors can mitigate the structuring impact of rules at different times: non-compliant behaviour may be disciplined variably, and therefore the cost of rule breaking is not always clear. Secondly, we should not conceive rules as merely constraining; for they consist of both sanctions and inducements. As Scott (2008: 52) observes, ‘although the concept of regulation conjures up visions of repression and constraint, many types of regulation enable social actors and action, conferring licenses, special powers, and benefits to some types of actors.’ Therefore, we can say that institutional rules directly impact upon an individual’s resources within that institution, by rewarding certain actors with greater resources in return for obedience to institutional rules. This observation is further explored in the section below on *veto players* and *ideological entrepreneurs*, two key types of institutional actor.

The material external environment

The individual, placed in an institution, is simultaneously placed in a material environmental context. Friedland and Alford (1991: 232) warned of the possibilities of the social sciences retreating from societal factors, ‘toward the utilitarian individual [or] the power-orientated organization’ and therefore ignoring a central structuring influence. We must be cognizant of this danger, and ensure that explanation is not posited based on a conceptualisation of institutions acting uncoupled from environmental restraints. The political party operates within two external material contexts which affect the action of political party members: the party system, and voter material interests. The party system is an *environmental rule*, for as with institutional

rules, they are set and explicit, though not immutable. However, we should not assume that the party system dominates institutional behaviour, for reasons outlined in the previous chapter on the study of political party adaptation. Indeed, the calculus of operating within a party system, the logic of moving to the centre ground, is at times ignored by institutional actors. Furthermore, as we will see in my empirical section, the peculiarities of safe seats and big tent parties within single member simple plurality party systems (see Duverger's Law in Bowler 2006: 580) often create unusual and divergent behaviour amongst political party members; this complexity can be missed if one gives too much emphasis to the explanation that party systems produce rational, utility maximising action. It remains important, however, because it acts as a measuring stick of institutional efficiency, but not necessarily a cause of institutional efficiency. Ultimately, and specifically at election time, the party system structures the action under which the institution receives information as to whether it has fulfilled its primary institutional interest: election to government. However, what is of interest to us is the relative inability of parties to read these rules and "play the game", so to speak, effectively.

Following on from the necessity of operating within a party system is dealing with voters. As Blondel (2006: 717) writes, 'Institutions are not regarded as automatically efficient; their efficacy seems ostensibly to depend, not just on *internal* characteristics, as on the way the actors use them, but on *external* aspects, as on the way the broader society reacts to them. The strength of institutions, at any rate in the political realm, appears linked in part to the support these may enjoy outside their "borders".' Indeed, voters have material interests that are absolute and therefore should drive the action of political parties. For example, if the material interests of voters are being satisfied by the

prevailing economic situation this structures the behaviour of political parties, limiting the agency of opposition parties to motivate criticism of the government. This observation suggests a possible route to efficiency for parties; for if they can read material interests correctly they should be able to position themselves to fulfil them. An observation which follows the Downsian logic that ‘citizens respond rationally (efficiently) to the exigencies of life’ (Downs 1957:149) and make choices accordingly.

However, work done since Downs’s parsimonious explanation has added complexity to this observation (see Caplan 2007). We should therefore note certain points before integrating voter objectives into a model predicting action. Firstly, voters may be limited in their knowledge of their material interests in a complex world, or in their prioritising of material interests over long and short term ideas. For, as Caplan (2007: 17) observes, ‘human beings value both their material prosperity and their worldview’. This can lead to voters varying their belief as to who can fulfil their material interests. Secondly, the relationship between party institutions and voters is iterative: for institutions can, of course, manipulate their environment. It is possible, therefore, for parties to shape voter interests by implementing policy whilst in government. An example would be the Thatcher government’s mobilisation of working class support by the selling of council houses and the creation of a new property owning working class with a constructed vested interest in a neo-liberal agenda. This past ability to shape interests may cause parties to be reluctant to move away from the attitude that at times voters follow parties, rather than parties following voters. Finally, the interests of voters may be difficult to read and therefore parties may be tempted not to second-guess voter objectives, but rather to project their own sense of voter objectives onto the electorate. For, as Norris and Lovenduski (2004: 99) observe: ‘Due

to ideological barriers...politicians can misidentify the prevailing policy mood and fail to respond to changes in public opinion despite the shock of successive electoral defeats.’ Consequently, though environmental factors should not to be ignored, they need to be presented in a manner that contextualises and qualifies their structuralising influence.

Ideational context

An actor, both within and without an institution, is affected by ideas which can obscure (or add to) their material interests, affecting a rational reading of material contexts (see Blyth 2002: 17–47). This ideational context is understood as *individual ideational interest*; that is to say, the individual’s own normative policy commitments—which might temper a mere material statecraft approach to action, wherein power is the only goal. This observation, of course, requires the presumption that party actors are in some way principled—something that is empirically investigated in the following chapter.

The individual who moves into an institution is then impacted by the prevailing ideas of that institution. There is a degree of pre-socialisation at work here; particularly so with political parties who attract members broadly in agreement with them. However, there is often discord, also. So, the relative impact of individual ideational interests (or new ideas) alongside institutional ideational interests (or established ideas) must be assessed in discerning agency within an institution.

The institution can also structure agency at an ideational level by less explicit means than a *clash* of ideas. This is the role of informal rules, or *norms* of behaviour, whereby agency is limited to the extent that actors are partly *unaware* of their socialisation into

the institution and the unconscious effect this has on their behaviour (Hall and Taylor 1998a; 1998b). In this formulation, as important as explicit rules of organisation are standard operating procedures—or norms of behaviour—that form a cultural tradition within the institution (see Sanders 2006). This understanding of an institution allows us also to examine restricting factors that are not explicit to the actors involved; that is to say, their enforcement is not formalised. As Scott (2008: 56) writes, ‘norms can evoke strong feelings, but these are somewhat different from those that accompany the violation of rules and regulations. Feelings associated with the trespassing of norms include principally a sense of shame or disgrace; or, for those who exhibit exemplary behaviour, feelings of pride and honour.’ The result is that conformity is enforced without the need for explicit rules, or even explicit language; as the actor often internalises and self-evaluates through a sense of implied appropriateness.

Finally, ideas manifest in the *environment* in which the institution operates. This is particularly relevant for political parties, for, of all institutions, they are one of the most concerned with their public appearance, and the most constrained in their goal achieving abilities by it. These ideas can be *environmental ideational interests*, which represent the prevailing ideological position; but also, and this can be more impactful (though it is ephemeral), *environmental norms* regarding how a party is perceived at that moment, amongst general received opinion, can shape what issues a party can lay claim to, and what the voter permits them to identify with. Consequently, a party may be in agreement with environmental ideational interests, but still be ostracised by environmental norms. Again, the relationship is iterative, but we must investigate to what extent? Are environmental norms resistant to being altered by an opposition party, when they have been strongly controlled by their political rivals? Does a party just have

to sit back until environmental norms change, until they can lay claim to environmental ideational interests?

Ideas matter, but not ideas alone

Before moving on from this examination of ideas, we should reject the recent work of constructivist institutionalists (CI)—for though the work of CI is informative, it is not over-riding, and it should not be understood as an approach that should replace historical institutionalism.

CI is an unnecessary addition to institutional theory because it is motivated by a flawed critique of HI. ‘Historical institutionalism,’ writes Hay (2006: 60) ‘is incapable of offering its own (i.e. endogenous) account of the determinants of the punctuated equilibria to which it invariably points.’ Rather, Hay argues, HI tends towards explanation that posits stability deriving from formative path dependent inputs which agents are constrained by, and are largely powerless to alter without the enabling effect of exogenous events. This description is indeed correct for those HI approaches which favour a largely material description of resources and interests—that is to say, an examination of the institution with regard to financial sources, decision making procedures, and power hierarchies. But this is not the predominant approach of HI. As Bell (2011: 891) has recently outlined: ‘An HI approach can easily integrate this constructivist notion of interpretive agency and give full recognition that ideas, language and the inter-subjective discursive processes provide the crucial building blocks for establishing meaning and understanding and thus lead to purposeful action in politics and institutional life.’ Indeed, Hay (2006: 62) states that if HI can be understood

‘as an approach predicated upon the dynamic interplay...of material and ideational factors, then the difference between historical and constructivist institutionalism is at most one of emphasis.’ I argue, therefore, that if the matter need only be one of emphasis then it is potentially distracting to offer a wholly “new” institutional theory; rather, we need only ensure that the right degree of attention is given to ideas within HI analysis. Consequently, the ideational path dependency which is emphasised in CI must be successfully brought in to HI, rather than serve to supersede it; fortunately, this is something HI is readily capable of doing.

However, CI misses the important role of agency within a material institution. As Bell (2011: 894; see, also, Bell 2012) has observed: ‘Constructivism’s account of agency is somewhat truncated.’ Bell argues, in his defence of HI, that agency is only rigorously theorised when it is understood not only as constructed through ideas but also enacted through resources. ‘Institutional dynamics,’ he writes (2011: 894) ‘also involve power struggles as actors exploit their institutional positions and deploy resources to win battles and reshape their institutional environments.’ Constructivist institutionalists (see Hay 2006 and Schmidt 2006; 2010b; 2012) have importantly emphasised the need for reflection on the role of ideas; but both have also advocated the primary emphasis of ideas, which remains an unnecessary step. Schmidt, in fact, recognises this problem: ‘Where DI [discourse institutionalism; i.e. CI] can go wrong,’ writes Schmidt (2010b: 17) ‘is when it considers ideas and discourse to the exclusion of issues of power (read RI instrumental rationality) and position’. This is, indeed, a problem with CI—in chasing the ideational bone, it drops the material bone in the water. For we should question explanation that does not give partial recognition to material factors: though it is correct that an actor’s preferences are shaped by ideas, the action those preferences

take are also filtered through a material environment of resources and rules. Schmidt (2010b: 9) writes that: ‘One way out of this dilemma is to separate the HI examination of the institutional context of historical rules and regularities...from the DI [i.e. CI] analysis, which could then use the results of the HI investigation as background information.’ Such a twofold approach—examining material factors, then ideational factors—is one way forward, but it would seem to belie CI’s intention to form a wholly ideational account, and lead to a falling back on the sort of rump materialism bewared by Hay (2006: 71). Moreover, proceeding in this manner makes it less likely that a genuinely interactive account of ideational and material factors will be presented. CI at times seems to be resting on a materialist rump, in which case it is unnecessary; or it is solely ideational, in which case it is untenable (see Schmidt 2010a).

Historical path dependency

To the formulation of agency outlined so far, we must add a diachronic aspect, or a notion of structures being formed, strengthened, and altered, *over time*; for the historical nature of a structure dictates its relative mutability, and the manner in which an actor is constrained by it. That history matters is hardly a new assertion for the study of British politics (where history has always been embraced in an atheoretical manner) but it is an input that is often ignored by theoretical approaches, which, as Pierson (2004: 168) writes, prefer generalising from observations ‘that are largely separable from any particular context.’ But HI argues that the historical context is crucial to understanding the relative value actors place on observing prevailing ideas and norms over electoral interests. That is to say, history impacts rationality—and it is these limitations, or

alterations, in rationality, which mean we cannot merely posit individuals maximising interests as the sole causal variable of change. Now, these historical structures do not dominate but rather direct the preferences of actors; as Vivien Schmidt (2006: 3–4) has written in her précis of HI, ‘historical structures *add* to norms [and ideas] to give meaning to actors’ interests and worldview.’ That is to say, the history of the norms and ideas of the institution in which actors operate impacts upon how they understand the extent of their agency, what it is possible to achieve within the institution, and what change is acceptable to both the institution and to them as individuals. Material structures are also variously mutable based on their history. The diachronic aspect of structures, therefore, constitutes both the bureaucratic organisation of an institution—that is to say, explicit formal rules of organisation—and the prevailing ideational context of the institution, which may manifest themselves as *implicit* norms of behaviour, as well as *explicit* ideas (see Levi 2005).

The actions of actors are often presented ahistorically in rationalist orientated political science, within primarily synchronic time frames. And yet actors clearly are not ahistorical, they do not make their world, and their world choices, anew with each new interaction. Moreover, the make-up of independent structures is more usefully understood by examining the genesis and causal series that has led to their present form. Historical explanation, therefore, is central, so that HI researchers ‘instead of spending their entire energy on identifying relevant current variables’ need to ‘trace the historical path of social outcomes’ (Ma 2007: 66). Following from this, HI explanation is concerned with *change* over time, for structures are not seen as unalterable and deterministic. Hence, an HI analysis is concerned with the events and processes that preceded the period under analysis as well as those which occurred during it. This is,

also, equally important when looking at the external environment as well as the institution; for the environment is similarly affected by historical processes that impact on rationality and the unadulterated expression of material interests. The central focus on history within an HI analysis means that it finds the formation of this attitudinal culture through diachronic analysis, for HI is ‘more concerned with the long-term evolution and *outcome* (intended or not) of a welter of interactions among goal-seeking actors’ (Sanders 2006: 42) rather than in simplified, rationalised, synchronic scenarios. In consequence, HI does not conceptualise parties only as a collection of actors negotiating power positions at an isolated point in time, but as institutions that are shaped by structures, material organisations and attitudinal cultures, which have emerged over time.

Path dependency defined

HI labels the delimiting role of history “path dependency”. Though, as Shu-Yun Ma writes, ‘rational choice and game theory focus on equilibria, historical institutionalism’s primary interest is in historical processes, legacies, and contingencies [and] central to this is the idea of path-dependence’ (2007: 63). Institutional path dependency describes a process where once a decision or event has been put into motion it can, though this is not inevitable, become self-perpetuating so that future decisions are constructed upon it; moreover, the ability of future actors to think outside of the path dependency, or return and undo previous critical decisions is significantly curtailed. Path dependencies can be understood as standard operating procedures, behavioural norms, worldviews, or

collective goals that become pervasive throughout a particular institution (Weingast 2005).

Contingent events and critical-junctures

The role of path dependency begins with the *formation* of institutions: that is to say, what ideas, and what norms became embedded initially in the institution; what were the prevailing interests of the actors involved; and what were the explicit rules. However, path dependencies can alter—slightly, greatly—as the result of a contingent event; that is to say, an event that could not have been predicted by theory, that falls outside of the normal causal process, and therefore alters the prevailing political environment. As Mahoney (2000: 511) writes, ‘a contingent event is...an occurrence that was not expected to take place, given certain theoretical understandings of how causal processes work.’ A contingent event, therefore, vastly increases the options available to actors as new ideas enter the open space of the political environment. A contingent event alters the prevailing orthodoxy and informal rule structure; as a result, exogenous ideas enter into the institution and permit significant change in the policies and goals of its members.

These contingent moments mark a “critical-juncture” where agents are instrumental in the selection of new path dependencies (Pierson and Skocpol 2002). As Galvin writes, ‘Change from one period to the next is prompted by growing tensions, or incongruities, between socioeconomic developments, on the one-hand, and non-adaptive institutions of electoral politics on the other.’ (Galvin 2008: 7). These tensions are the result of “inertia” within the institution whereby a path dependency has become

exhausted and notably unresponsive to, and unreflective of, new ideas being formed both inside and outside the institution. Inertia is then made explicit to the actors within the institution at a critical-juncture created by a contingent event. Hence, a historical account that looks to identify the cause of an event or process must look to pinpoint these junctures so that it may explain how they occurred; and how they have shaped proceeding political activity. That is to say, it is not a case of identifying historical, unchanging deterministic structures, but rather examining how agents have interacted with their environments at particular critical-junctures to create new path dependencies. Marking out the history of an institution in this way avoids the risk of an analysis based on causality becoming overly complex. As Paul Pierson (2003: 188) writes: ‘arguments based on causal chains face an infinite regress problem: there is always some earlier link on the chain, so what is to keep one from endlessly seeking that earlier stage? To answer this question... analysts may choose to break the chain at “critical-junctures” that mark a point at which their cases begin to diverge in significant ways’. Consequently, identifying critical-junctures offers a means of prioritising causes and discarding those factors that, though influential, are surplus to a necessarily schematic account.

Critical-junctures mark the dialectical creation of new forms of institutional structures: formal and informal, material and ideational. Agents interact with structural norms and reshape them; the process, however, is dialectical because agents’ preferences have already been shaped to a degree by the institution in which they are placed and the wider environment. Nonetheless, at certain moments agents work to think outside of the prevailing orthodoxy and change the dominant behaviour within an institution. Consequently, analysis focuses on how actors have capitalised, or failed to capitalise, on critical-junctural moments to enact change. These moments only form

new path dependencies through agential choice; hence by no means is a HI analysis advocating structural determinism. As Weingast (2005: 163) writes, ‘a prevailing idea dominates [until] various political entrepreneurs attempt to persuade others that... new political ends and policy changes should replace the prevailing idea.’ Whether or not an elite is able to ensure that this new idea gains acceptance, however, is the result of ‘events beyond the direct control of the political entrepreneurs’ and which act to ‘confirm the entrepreneurs’ views.’ It is the case, therefore, that events exogenous to the party serve a twofold purpose in producing institutional transformation at a critical junction. Firstly, a new idea emerges that orders the worldview of actors within the party in a more convincing way after a contingent, unpredicted event has illegitimated the prevailing orthodoxy; secondly, this event makes the public more receptive to these new ideas which are being advocated by the members of the institution.

Central to this formulation, therefore, is that agency matters. However, this agency must be placed within a selective context that gives positive confirmation to an actor’s choices (Katznelson and Weingast 2005). How an actor interprets his or her selective context is central to HI’s epistemology. If we take the position that the analyst can only address actors as having given and explicit *interests* then the focus of analysis will be heavily on the selective context; for in this approach an actor will quickly change his or her actions in a rational response to changes in their environment. However, HI’s emphasising of ideas is better able to explain how certain institutions resist change due to their emergence in a restrictive path dependency. As a result, even though the environment might have changed and individuals might recognise the need for the institution to change in order for interests to be maximised and goals achieved, the means to do this are not always readily available.

Sequencing

Following from a contingent moment to a critical-juncture and on to a continuing path dependency is a line of causality. In this scenario causality is not understood deterministically; that is to say, each choice made by an actor does not lead *ipso facto* to another specific choice and so on. Rather, causality is understood in a less determinate form wherein the ‘sources of potential preferences are discerned probabilistically within the dynamics’ of an institution (Katznelson and Weingast 2005: 3). Causality, therefore, is not predicative of definite outcomes; but rather suggests the limits that are likely to restrict and direct an actor’s choices. That is to say: if *A* has happened then the choices are likely to lie somewhere between *B* and *D*, not *X* and *Z*. This means that historical institutionalism does not position itself to be predictive of definite outcomes; though it is able to identify the dominant formal and informal, conscious and unconscious, rules that delimit the scope of those outcomes.

Key to the drawing of a causal line is the sequence and timing of events that immediately proceeded the contingent moment (Pierson 2000). As Mahoney (2000: 510) writes, ‘path dependent analysis involves the study of causal processes that are highly sensitive to events that take place in the early stages of an overall historical sequence.’ This is because the adoption of a new idea at its inchoate stage is highly vulnerable to rejection. However, the right sequence of events will ensure the increasing viability of a new idea; consequently, a self-enforcing path is created and ‘with increasing returns, an institutional pattern—once adopted—delivers increasing benefits with its continued adoption, and thus over time it becomes more and more difficult to

transform the pattern' (Mahoney 2000: 508). Again, such a focus moves HI away from the synchronic analysis of party models to diachronic analysis. Sequencing is critical because it allows the analyst to understand how events and structures operated to seemingly narrow down the options available to an actor so that an ultimate decision or path was taken.

Positive feedback

Once a choice has been made by an actor after a contingent event, and early decisions begin to structure and limit future ones, it becomes increasingly beneficial for an actor to stay on this path rather than alter it. Consequently, positive feedback is created so that a path becomes self-reinforcing. The reasons why it is beneficial to stay on the path, and concomitantly why there are high costs for leaving it, are as follows (Scott 2008: 121–146). Firstly, it costs time and money to investigate new ideas. Also, actors who have learnt one way of doing things are reluctant to have to learn another. There are co-ordination effects: everyone is “on the same page” with the present idea. Newcomers find it easier to identify with prevailing ideas. Personal relationships lead to a desire to preserve norms, and not “rock the boat”. Overtime, subjective choices appear as objective norms. And, finally, electoral markets are imperfect; therefore, they do not effectively punish and reward institutional behaviour towards utility maximisation.

Limiting structures, in this scenario, become a more productive heuristic in the explanation of how a particular path was chosen than the focus on an actor's intentions alone. This is because of, as Schmidt (2006: 3) writes, ‘the unintended consequences of intentional action and the unpredictability of intervening events, ensuring that the

institutional structures of the historical institutionalists are neither as efficient as they appear to rational choice institutionalists nor as purposive’.

If some of the consequences of actions are not envisaged or desired then it is ultimately unhelpful to solely focus on the intentions of individual actors to explain why a particular path was taken. The calculus approach of RCI— wherein actors engage in a process of maximising intentions via a rational exchange of actions—should be rejected in favour of a cultural approach that permits explanation that acknowledges the limitations of actors’ perceptions (Hay and Wincott 1998). Consequently, an analysis must emphasize how actors are guided on a particular path by the consequences of their decision making. In this characterization ‘change is seen as the consequence (whether intended or unintended) of strategic action (whether intuitive or instrumental), filtered through perceptions (however informed or misinformed) of an institutional context that favours certain strategies, actors and perceptions over others.’ (Hay and Wincott 1998: 955). The actor in such circumstances remains central to an analysis but is far from exercising intentionalism. A contingent event may offer a possible new path to be taken but whether that path becomes self-enforcing cannot be foreseen by the actor to any great degree.

Agent rationality

To further explain path dependency we need to outline HI’s conception of rationality. HI has a particular conception of rationality due to its move away from, or rather adding to, an understanding of agency as merely utility maximising, synchronic behaviour. Rather, agency is impacted by *bounded rationality* (Simon 1957; see Lee 2011). This

term has three key points: Firstly, the individual's ability to identify their material interests, or to negotiate between the competing material and ideational interests they may have, is less than perfect. Secondly, the individual's ability to read the interests of others, both within and without the institution, in a complex world, is less than perfect. Thirdly, unforeseen consequences mean choices can be wrongly chosen and negatively impact interest maximisation—that is to say, rationality cannot foresee all outcomes and use this to priorities interests.

As a result, the individual deals with mixed and variously limited information which they attempt to rationalise to the best of their ability. In this conception individuals are not rational *per se*; but rather, are rational seekers of justification for their actions. Individuals, with few exceptions, wish to behave rationally, and so they seek justification, to themselves and to others, for their actions. Due to bounded rationality, the actor cannot be motivated solely to maximise their, or the institution's, or the environment's interests. Therefore, in order to seek rationality, so that a preference is not formed arbitrarily from amid the maelstrom of information available, they are motivated to do “just enough”, to fulfil norms, and repeat dominant ideas, even if these go against maximising utility. As Montpetit (2005:234) writes, in HI: ‘Actors are viewed as satisfiers instead of optimizers. Given the difficulty of computing all possible alternatives and deciding which one most optimally matches one's interests, actors stop analysing once they are satisfied [that]... they see a good fit between proposed solutions and the institutional norms to which they are accustomed.’

From this conception of action stemming from bounded rationality, therefore, we see that actors are guided less by consequentialism (that is to say, anticipating what will be gained from action) and more by conformism (that is to say, anticipating how an action is similar to past actions). As a result, the institutional inputs into preference shaping tend to be less chains to be broken in order to emancipate agency, and more lanes along which one wilfully seeks direction, for fear that without them, nothing will be clear. In a complex world, where an actor has less than perfect insight, it is *rational* for them to be drawn towards certainty, and this is provided by, and serves to reinforce, path dependency. Yet only to a point; for there is resistance to this form of inertia if it leads to outcomes which move too far from interests.

It is in this formulation of rationality that we see a workable definition of agency, within structure, emerging. The rationalist formulation of agency is to be rejected for it is deterministic. If an agent seeks to maximise self-interest, and is highly rational, then there is little room for interpretation: the right option *at that time* is likely to be chosen; consequently choice, and therefore agency, is limited. However, in bounded rationality, choice, and therefore agency, is greater because options are not clear, interests are in competition, and the actor seeks guidance in their uncertainty. We therefore have a truly decision making actor, who negotiates the competing ideational and material contexts to the best of their knowledge, weighs their options, implicitly and explicitly, against the attractive certainties of past action—and then finally (and possibly tentatively) forms a preference and acts. The actor, in their ignorance of maximum utility, is partly freed from determinism: for there are several ways they can read their options. Indeed, it is only with the seemingly “rational” decision to pick a less than optimal option, as a consequence of limited perspicacity, that we can see agency in operation.

Ideological, political and institutional entrepreneurs

So far the emphasis in this theoretical framework has been on predicting a lack of change in institutions through the influence of structures. We have presented agent bounded rationality and path-dependence as limiting agency towards choosing repetition over innovation. However, HI maintains that agency is increased at different times and also with different actors, depending on their location in the institution. Different actors will have different options depending on how material and ideational contexts, and path dependency, impact them (see Pierson 2004: 136–137). From this observation, it is possible to label actors of strategic importance in the institution: either due to their ability to enact, or to stop, institutional change. This study uses three categories of actor: ideological, political and institutional entrepreneur.

The terms ideological entrepreneur (Blyth 2003) and institutional entrepreneur (Pierson 2004) have an established presence in the literature—yet they are often not adequately disentangled, with the term entrepreneur being given to many different actors without the differentiation I will establish here. I have also created the term policy entrepreneur to adequately label one of the primary actors in incremental change, and to help us to differentiate the type of actor active in incremental change from the type of actor active in radical change. At present there is not an appropriate term in the literature for this type of actor; indeed, the literature is often tangled by attempting to apply the logics and labelling of action during radical change, to that of incremental change.

HI has developed most clearly the idea of the ideological entrepreneur who enacts radical change, utilising a new ideology at the moments after a crisis or critical-juncture. It is necessary, therefore, to label those actors who are not ideological entrepreneurs, but who are central to the enactment of non-radical, incremental change. I will add, therefore, to the established label of *ideological* entrepreneur that of *policy* entrepreneur and *institutional* entrepreneur (the latter is developed from Pierson 2004: 136–137). An ideological entrepreneur looks to forcefully change a path dependency; whereas a policy entrepreneur is strongly ideologically guided, and with that looks to forward a favoured policy emphasis within the institution, often in conflict with others in regard to *emphasis* but not in regard to ideology.

Finally, an institutional entrepreneur offers a negotiation between competing interests. They are more externally focused on the goals of the institution, such as election; but because they must draw on the ideas of others, they are still directed by, and draw upon, institutional ideas, but act to balance these with each other to create a unified institution—though this, of course, is never wholly achieved. As Pierson (2004: 136–137) writes of the *institutional* entrepreneur: ‘Mobilization for institutional reform typically creates very difficult collective action problems. Well-situated and creative actors may play a crucial role in framing reform proposals so as to motivate participants and fashion coalitions. If institutional reforms are often “common carriers” for multiple interests, then entrepreneurial action may be necessary to craft these solutions and persuade the disparate parties to work together in pursuit of them.’ The ability of an actor to be an institutional entrepreneur, Pierson continues, is largely structurally determined by ‘the position of particular actors with respect to multiple social networks...[who] are especially well suited to engage in “skilled social action”’. In this

action we clearly see the coming together of both institutional and agential action—highlighting the importance of both structural and agential explanation.

Path tendency and confluence junctures

An integrated theory should produce coherence throughout: from its micro foundation up to its macro claims. Therefore, any explanation of incremental change must be incorporated into present causal explanations of radical change, utilising the same structures, actor rationality, and agential ability.

We need therefore to theorise action during incremental change, even when there is no challenge to the ideological path dependency. We need this theorised mechanism to exhibit similar characteristics to the present mechanisms in HI, such as path dependency and critical-juncture, which already explain radical change at a macro level. I have therefore introduced the terms *path tendency* and *confluence juncture*, as cousin mechanisms to the established terms of path dependency and critical-juncture. These terms have been produced by inductive theorising; so they are most clearly understood during the empirical examination. But they can be usefully introduced in this theoretical section. Path tendencies are perpetuated by policy entrepreneurs seeking new policy emphasis. They can draw on many roots, from remnants of old ideas, to ideas from contiguous institutions, and exhibit weak but significant positive feedback and path-like traits. An institution, at any one time, may have a number of path tendencies within it. Competing path tendencies are ideologically similar and amenable because of the work of ideological path dependency, which is strong in a non post-critical-juncture environment. However, the very sub-conscious nature of how path dependency works

means that competing actors are often unaware of their compatibility—as a result (and I demonstrate this empirically) there is distrust between tendencies and an inability to engage in collective action. At this stage in the process it can appear that the ideational structures are impeding incremental change. However, with the action of an institutional entrepreneur, tendencies can be made to understand their shared ideology, lack of fundamental conflict, and begin to work together. We may call this moment a *confluence juncture* (if you can forgive the pleonasm): the name invoking the idea of coming together, and also echoing the established HI notion of a critical-juncture but very clearly marking it as something different. A confluence juncture is a period of stabilizing and building momentum, and has none of the sort of wrenching antagonisms of critical-junctures—we will empirically fill out this theoretical notion as we go on to look at the stages of incremental change in the Party.

Finally, I would add to Pierson that the success of the institutional entrepreneur is not only based on their position within social networks, but also on issues of charisma, the flexibility of their own set of ideas, and contingent events outside the institution, with political parties this is the other competing parties, as well as the social and economic environment. Finally, we must acknowledge the role of time, in particular the path tendencies themselves must have time to develop, to form policy and social networks, before they can emerge and be impactful on the wider institution.

How entrepreneurs act

Power within an institution is asymmetric: unsurprisingly, not all actors hold equal agency. Some powerful actors, through interaction with others, seek to shape an

institution. This ability empowers two activities: *agenda setting* and *veto actions*. These two actions are employed by all three types of entrepreneur, so briefly we can think of them as a collective. The first activity of agenda setting, writes Blyth (2003: 698), sees party actors as entrepreneurs 'who actively modify agents' beliefs about what their interests are.' It is, therefore, more manipulative than openly agonistic. Consequently, we can understand one of the failures to enact change as a failure to introduce persuasive new ideas into the institution that might serve to alter the prevailing cultural norms, or ideational structures.

The second activity of vetoing behaviour, in stopping something undesired from happening, rather than attempting to enact a desired outcome, does not require actors to have recourse to new ideas, rather they need only shut-down action using their material position. Furthermore, veto behaviour is often more pervasive in an institution than agenda setting because it can be practised more insidiously, as a form of inertia, and at a lower level of power: the gatekeeper can keep the message from the king, even if he cannot take his own message in its place. The importance of material structures is arguably more evident in the *vetoing behaviour* of powerful entrepreneurs than their agenda setting. Here we see that it is where actors are placed in the decision making flow of the institution, what money and patronage they control, which allows them to shut down decision making. However, entrepreneurship, where an attempt is made to alter prevailing ideational structures, is *also* impacted by the same material considerations (alongside ideational considerations) which impact vetoing behaviour. Finally, it should be noted that entrepreneurs may favour one activity over the other; or they may practise both in equal measure. Theorising this behaviour leads us to ask a number of important questions (*mutatis mutandis* Tsebelis 2002: 283): Who are the

agenda setters? Who are the actors whose agreement is necessary for a change in the status quo? How many exist? What are their locations? How do they make decisions? Are they single individuals or collective? Do they have stable or shifting internal coalitions? These questions will shape any empirical analysis regarding entrepreneurs, and allow us to map the key points within an institution where change is resisted or enabled.

We move now to the two rival prongs of the institutionalist fork: rational choice institutionalism (RCI); and sociological institutionalism (SI). I give an outline and critique of each approach; then look to signal HI's distinctiveness, whilst also, where possible, signalling crossover. I reject the possibility of borrowing from RCI; but highlight that borrowing from SI is imperative in order to develop an account of incremental change within an institution—or what Margaret Weir (1992: 188) labels 'bounded innovation'.

3.3. The limits of rational choice institutionalism (RCI)

Rational choice institutionalism sees institutions as originating by the conscious choice of individuals to find a means of solving collective action problems (Hall and Taylor 1996). The focus is primarily on rules and common incentives that serve to make more predictable the consequences of actions and thus facilitates the decision-making process of actors. Institutions are utilised as a means of limiting the variability of outcomes. Group compliance within the institution is explained by actors maximising their self-interest within the ordered, explicit, and helpful limits the institution sets (Peters 2007:

51). However, rational choice institutionalism's conceptualisation of institutions 'in terms of systemic synchronic equilibrium' (Skocpol 1995: 104) means that questions of change are not prioritised. Such analyses tend to be synchronic rather than diachronic, with emphasis on how a decision was achieved at a particular time. When change does occur it is the result of the conscious decision of actors so that it silences how actors' preferences can be shaped sub-consciously by institutional or exogenous factors. As Sanders (2006: 42) writes, for rational choice institutionalism, what is of interest 'is the microcosmic *game*, the particular interaction of preference-holding, utility seeking individuals *within* a set of (stable) institutional constraints'. Consequently, the approach restricts itself to synchronic explanation of institutional stability.

However, rational choice institutionalism's strong advantage is that it provides a clear tool-kit for the manner in which actors interact with each other within an institution. It is readily able to model outcomes using mechanisms developed within rational choice theory. These mechanisms categorise distinct rational behaviour which leads actors to consciously create institutions to solve specific problems. Actors desire to contain free-riding and shirking; to ensure utility maximisation; to predict outcomes by ordering similarly rational and consistent reactions to incentives and constraints by other actors; to solve the "problem of the commons" (self-interest producing unwanted depletion of resources) and the "principal agent problem" (the need for disinterested carrying-out of orders); and the reaching of equilibriums so that action can be taken (Peters 2007: 47–69). It is this advantage of having clear and repeatable mechanisms for individual action that forms RCI's critique of historical institutionalism. For, as Katznelson (1998: 195), writes, if 'empirical particularity [in historical institutionalism] is to be favored over conceptual generality...then how, if at all, should more extensive

concepts...be used to interrogate specific historical constellations?...How should these instances be constructed to make them potentially deployable as units for comparative study?’

Katznelson (1998: 195) favours the ‘empirical particularity’ over ‘conceptual generality’ that underlies my motivation to develop upon the party models that at present dominate the literature on party change. Historical institutionalism, I argue, presents an analysis that is culturally specific and historically situated and so we are able to produce a rich account of an event or process. But this comes at a price: for though historical institutionalism has a theoretical framework, it wrongly eschews the more precise theoretical tools made available by rational choice theory in its preference for empirical specificity (Katznelson 1998: 196). In doing so it sacrifices the sacred-cow of much political science: generalisability. This problem is a prevalent concern for research which attempts to move beyond (or away from) the positivist paradigm. We are presented with the problem that if we cannot generalise and simplify how then can we begin to conceptualise the complex historical processes that determine change; for to set off, so to speak, without specific tools that conceptualise exactly how actors operate, is surely to risk becoming lost in the wood?

Katznelson argues that historical institutionalism must adopt the tools of rational choice theory— particularly relating to the manner in which actors maximise their strategic interests—in order to sharpen its analysis and to allow it to form generalisable conclusions for its research. Katznelson argues that HI cannot address the endogenous factors in the formation of institutions (that is to say, the agential role) without RCI. I maintain, however, that such an appropriation of tools would be ontologically inconsistent. To begin, we must reject Katznelson’s suggestion of an amalgam of HI

and RCI (this amalgam has also been encouraged by Hall and Taylor 1998a; 1998b). Katznelson does not address certain ontological questions so wrongly assumes that HI and RCI are compatible, when it is rather the case that they are irreconcilable (for the silence in American Political Science towards ontological issues in Institutional theory see Marsh *et al.* 2004). Ontologically HI is incompatible with RCI because the latter identifies institutions as the products of observable behaviour by actors and does not acknowledge that there are structures within institutions that are independent of agents, that are possibly unobservable to the analyst, and which impact on agency. Furthermore, epistemologically the approaches are incompatible because HI acknowledges that both the analyst and the political actor are subjective, do not hold perfect information, and are affected by ideas in their interpretation of their environment. As Hay and Wincott (1998: 954) outline: ‘Historical Institutionalists reject... the view of the rational actor on which the [RCI] approach is premised. Actors cannot simply be assumed to have a fixed (and immutable) preference set, to be blessed with extensive (often perfect) information and foresight and to be self-interested and self-serving utility maximizers’.

Consequently, we can see that it is problematic to ally rational choice institutionalism to the framework adopted in the case study because the approaches are ontologically mutually exclusive. HI does not reject all of the preoccupations of rationalism. However, HI does not *borrow* from RCI: rather, it addresses notions of rationality and develops upon them, finding more complex answers to the same concerns.

3.4. Learning from sociological institutionalism (SI)

Sociologists have paid particular attention to two areas of institutional theory: the cultural symbols present within the social world which enter institutions and facilitate stability and desired outcomes; and institutions acting within a social ecology (Jepperson 2002: 229–239). Sociological institutionalism has been particularly active in developing mechanisms by which change enters an institution as a result of its situation in a wider ecology. These mechanisms, as we will see, can be usefully incorporated into HI to advance an understanding of incremental change.

Cultural symbols

SI's interest in cultural symbols emphasises that certain institutional preferences are affected by wider social beliefs; these 'forms and procedures', write Hall and Taylor (1996: 946) should be seen as culturally specific practices, akin to the myths and ceremonies devised by many societies, and assimilated into organizations, not necessarily to enhance their formal means-ends efficiency, but as a result of the kind of processes associated with the transmission of cultural practices more generally'. SI, therefore, is concerned, in part, with how institutional practice is a reflection of wider social practice. An over-emphasis on this factor can lead to structural determinism (Hay and Wincott 1998); however, if we balance its impact with an actor's potential ability to re-assess, or re-shape, or choose to re-enforce, such social mythmaking, then we are presented with a key explanation of change, or lack of change. Such society wide structural symbols are prevalent in the production of social justice policy (for a seminal monograph see Edelman 1977). We must, therefore, take account of this observation

from sociological institutionalism in any historical institutionalist approach. Indeed, doing so strengthens my theoretical framework without adopting some of the structural determinism of SI. What we are interested in here is the *relevant* place of environmental factors—particularly the environmental factors that socialise an actor before they enter an institution but still remain relevant once they are in it. There is, of course (as in so many factors), a reciprocal relationship at work: certain socialisations—by class, by education—will make an actor more likely to join an institution and prosper within it; also, the institution can also be instrumental in the creation and perpetuation of those societal myths to which it subscribes. From this we are able to explain to what extent institutional behaviour is attributable to endogenous or exogenous factors: a key issue for apportioning responsibility for change. Indeed, if we ascribe certain institutional behaviour as caused by the exogenous restrictions of societal myths then we are not, *per se*, offering an *institutional* explanation of change at all (see Parsons 2007). If the inner workings of institutions are to retain causal relevance, therefore, we must offer societal myths as relevant but not deterministic: the myths must be, in part, shown to be re-imagined within the institution.

Social ecology

Alongside cultural symbols (which can be understood, in part, as pre-environmental factors; that is to say, they affect the actor, primarily, prior to institutionalisation), SI is concerned with what it terms *social ecology*. The intention here ‘is to emphasize the dependence of institutions on their environment and their ‘embeddedness’ in society and economy,’ writes Peters (2007: 112). ‘It also points to the extent to which

institutions may be in explicit or implicit competition with one another for resources and even survival, whether they be in the market or in the budgetary competition of government.’ We have, therefore, a second environmental interest: how contemporaneous changes in the environment (in our case study, the changes in voter opinion, and in the behaviour of other parties) affect an institution. Such an emphasis is of particular interest to a study of political parties, which, of all institutions, are notably in explicit competition with other institutions, a competition which is resolved in the environment of voter preference.

How this helps HI explain incremental change

Now, HI can be accused of somewhat ignoring the *continuous* impact of exogenous factors, in favour of the necessary attention brought to the endogenous shaping of action. What is needed, therefore, is for the environment to be brought back in to analysis, but with measured relevance. How then, can we discern the relative impact of the environment in shaping institutional behaviour? How sensitive is an institution to environmental changes? HI has suggested that an institution tends towards insensitivity, with change only occurring significantly when a notable disconnect occurs between environmental and institutional preferences. It is only then that agency moves away from conformity towards introducing new ideational interests to the institution. I argue that an increased attention to continuous (rather than punctuated) environmental factors offers, in part, a way of developing this restrictive way of explaining change. Therefore, historical institutionalism must borrow this *sensitivity* from sociological institutionalism.

The issue at play is: How do we explain incremental change when HI advocates a logic of appropriateness? Now, the impact of insights from sociological institutionalism—that institutional actors are cognizant of their institution’s relative position in the ecology of institutions (a clear observation for political parties)—should temper the view of change as punctuated by critical-junctures, somewhat. It remains accurate to say that significant change takes place at punctuated moments (though I argue that we should not *overstate* the extraordinariness, or rapidity, of these moments); however, change also takes place within overall continuity, and we need a mechanism of explanation for this—especially when we wish to *emphasise* overall continuity but are presented with empirical data that clearly shows *some* degree of change has taken place.

So, how can this be done? Well, an understanding of evolutionary (or incremental) change has recently developed within HI, which, though acknowledging critical-junctures, also allows for change between these junctures. Work done by Streeck and Thelen (2005); Thelen (2010); and Mahoney and Thelen (2010) posits useful mechanisms to explain incremental change. To this we can add work done by Lustik (2011) and Tang (2011), which brings in environmental explanation alongside institutional explanation, and successfully links the two.

Incremental change

Streeck, Thelen, and Mahoney, though key historical institutionalists, have productively moved beyond the rigid, and stability focused, aspects of HI which rely predominantly on causal critical-junctures causing punctuated change (a criticism of HI which is

becoming increasingly calumnious). ‘All three varieties of institutionalism,’ write Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 7), ‘provide answers to what sustains institutions over time as well as compelling accounts of cases in which exogenous shocks or shifts prompt institutional change. What they do not provide is a general model of change, particularly one that can comprehend both exogenous and endogenous sources of change.’ The incremental change Streeck, Thelen, and Mahoney are seeking to describe is different—less radical though no less significant over time—from that which takes place at critical-junctures: they call it incremental change through displacement. In ‘instances of [change through] displacement’, they write, ‘change occur[s] not through explicit revision or amendment of existing arrangements, but rather through shifts in the relative salience of different institutional arrangements within a ‘field’ or ‘system’’ (Streeck and Thelen 2005: 22).

Streeck and Thelen (2005: 1–39) posit two causes of institutional incremental change through displacement which are relevant to political parties: reactivation and invasion. Streeck and Thelen (2005: 20) begin by making two observations of institutions which permit this form of incremental change: firstly ‘while some institutional arrangements may impose a dominant logic of action, these typically coexist with other arrangements, created at different points in time and under different historical circumstances, that embody conflicting and even contradictory logics.’ This is particularly so with umbrella parties operating in first-past-the-post-party systems, such as the Conservative party. Second to this, they also make the observation that there remains within an institution ‘possibilities of action that institutions neither prescribe nor eliminate’. It is from these two observations that breathing space for the political actor is to be found.

Reactivation

So, displacement allows an institution to change in the absence of a critical-juncture. The change will be incremental and *unradical*, but it can occur. Following from the first observation (the coexisting of dominant and vestigial institutional arrangements), actors, whilst remaining largely conformist, can advocate ‘the reactivation or rediscovery of...suppressed historical alternatives [by working] creatively with institutional materials that are at hand...but submerged by more dominant or more recent practices’ (Streeck and Thelen 2005: 20). Such change is amenable to political parties who find their ideas widely accepted—there has been no disconnect with the long term ideational interests of their environment, no contingent moment—but are nonetheless trailing in the polls, and therefore not achieving the key institutional goal. There can be in this scenario no radical influx of new ideas (for how could that be justified?), but there can be reactivation of dormant ones, thus creating change by displacement, not revolution.

The *manner* in which this takes place, and the reasons for it, will be empirically shown in the next chapter. Though I should add here to this theoretical point—and will also empirically show—that dormant ideas do not re-emerge unsullied; rather they merge, in a compromise fashion, with dominant ideas. As a result, reactivation operates within, and serves to propagate, an unradical form of displacement that Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 16–17) call *layering*: ‘[The] processes of layering,’ they write, ‘often takes place when institutional challengers lack the capacity to actually change the original rules. They instead work within the existing system by adding new rules on top

of or alongside old ones.’ As a result, we have only partial, or unclear, displacement—and, therefore, *incremental* change (see also Pierson 2004: 137–139).

The potential validity of the mechanism of reactivation is given further theoretical strength by Lustik’s (2011) work on evolutionary theory. Moreover, Lustik emphasises the exogenous source of this endogenous change, therefore linking environmental and institutional factors. In particular, Lustik is concerned with how exogenous factors, understood using evolutionary theory, can cause incremental change even in low agency situations, where institutionalisation tends to lead to a desire for general conformity. Indeed, Streeck and Thelen (2005: 22) make a similar connection when they write that ‘exogenous change is often advanced by endogenous forces pushing in the same direction but needing to be *activated* by outside support’.

Lustik elaborates on this idea of the environment *activating* endogenous forces by borrowing from evolutionary theory the term *exaptation* (as opposed to adaptation). Lustik (2011: 25) writes that:

A classic example of exaptation in evolutionary biology is the theory that the use of feathers by birds to facilitate flight was occasioned when early forms of feathers evolved as warmth providers for species that did not fly. Following changes in the habitat or skeletal arrangement of these species, variants of these organisms competed successfully by using their feathers as primitive wings, and not just for warmth...Accordingly we may say, not so much that feathers were “pre-adapted” for flight...but that they were, by unguided evolutionary processes, “ex-post-adapted” under newly available circumstances, that is, “exapted.”

In Lustik's term, reactivation becomes something more nuanced, and more interesting. The dormant force, previously used for one purpose, now discovers a new adapted purpose within the institution, one that it need not have been intended to be used for, *per se*, but one that it is eminently suitable to tackle. From this we can draw two key theoretical conclusions regarding instrumental change. Firstly, we should not expect dormant forces to reactivate in the same manner in which they were used: because (as stated previously) of *layering*; but also (as stated above by Lustik) because of *exaptation*—that is to say, the new environment encourages a new use for the dormant force so that it performs somewhat differently, though still effectively.

The second key conclusion is that it helps us explain how limited agents, who are closed to radical adaptation, can nonetheless read the environment and *exapt to survive*. 'Indeed, a great strength of evolutionary theory,' writes Lustik (2011: 28), 'is that it can solve the problem of how designs are produced that solve particular problems without having been produced *with the intention* to do so.' We can, therefore, lessen, somewhat, explanation for success that is based on the bold instrumentalism of change agents. Rather, we can see that an actor's facility to *change* is facilitated by the structural, and historical, resources within their institution—for these historical structures do not only act to create stability.

Invasion

SI usefully terms invasion as the input of ideas into the institution from other institutions, or the ecology of institutions. However, to help explain incremental change it is helpful to label different types of invasion, which the literature at present does not

adequately do. Therefore, we will create the terms *radical*, *neutral* and *mimicry invasion*. Radical invasion is clearly more common at critical-junctures. Such critical-junctures provide opportunity for radical shifts, caused by the entry of new actors with foreign ideas, which are strongly challenging to orthodoxy. However, other forms of invasion, less radical, can take place incrementally. This can happen either as neutral or mimicry invasion.

Firstly, following from the observation that institutions do not proscribe all behaviour, actors, whilst remaining largely conformist, can advocate new areas of consideration. There are often areas where an institution could have a policy, could even have a policy that supports prevailing ideational interests, but which it simply has not considered before. Moving into this untrammelled space, therefore, allows for incremental change without conflict with received ideas. These new areas can then act subtly on more established positions once they are accepted into the institution, thus increasing incremental change. This we can call *neutral invasion*, for the new practice appears neutral when it enters the institution.

Secondly, actors can be attracted to practices which appear to be working successfully within other similar, and competing, institutions. This can lead to ‘the importation and then cultivation by local actors of foreign...practices’ (Lustik 2011: 21) from other institutions—which we can term invasion as a result of mimicry: that is to say, *mimicry invasion*. Now, this form of invasion by mimicry is again particularly prevalent to political parties under certain circumstances. These circumstances, which I will flesh out empirically, are prevalent within the current cartelised party system. When there is no insurmountable ideological gulf between the two central parties, radical invasion of ideas at critical-junctures becomes less likely, but mimicry of small ideas

causing incremental change, concomitantly, becomes more likely. The reason is threefold: Firstly, institutional inefficiency and uncertainty—that is to say, trailing in the polls—is understood *not* as a battle of ideology, but a battle of emphasis and presentation (that is to say, small ideas). Therefore, incremental change, by testing new small ideas, is seen as the key to success. Secondly, a party is less resistant to mimicking some small scale ideas that *seem* to work for the other party, for they seem to be the explanation for a difference in success. Moreover, the adoption of foreign small scale ideas are not feared, for they cannot be a “Trojan horse” for antithetical ideas—because there is no vast ideological antithesis between competing parties. Finally, the professionalization of parties has increased cross party networks, which makes the exchanging of small ideas with other parties (if only by osmosis) more likely.

So, we can see that HI, by considering the environment more—and by being sensitive to SI’s understanding of the ecology of institutions—can develop its explanation of change. *Incremental change* should be the key explanation of change for political parties with low ideological differences with their competitors, and who are not operating in a post-critical-juncture environment. In such circumstances there is no openness to, or even source of, radical new ideas; rather, to reiterate, incremental change is a consequence of reactivation of dormant endogenous ideas by exaptation; neutral invasion of untrammelled exogenous ideas; or mimicry invasion of small (tried and tested) exogenous ideas from the opposition.

3.5. Generating an hypothesis

Despite its rigorous theoretical reflection, HI aims always to remain grounded in real world problems and explanation, and selects its cases accordingly. ‘Very frequently,’ writes Thelen (1999: 373) ‘historical institutionalists begin with empirical puzzles that emerge from observed events or comparisons.’ HI’s theoretical insights, therefore, are only useful inasmuch as they help us to *identify*, *state*, and *solve* empirical puzzles. Institutional theorists have always actively engaged with applying theory to case studies—analyses which are then used to develop the theory. We see, for example, DiMaggio (1991) explaining the development of civic art museums in the US from 1920 to 1940; Immergut (1992) examining the development of health policy in France, Switzerland, and Sweden; Tsebelis (2002: 248–283) examining European Union institutions; Hall (2005) explaining the process of European Monetary Union; Montpetit (2005) on the Canadian parliament; Thelen (2006) on vocational training in Germany; Aldrich (2006) on political parties in the US; and Murphy (2012) on changes in the Irish welfare state from 1986 to 2010. Even this small selection is indicative of the variety of case studies HI has addressed. Indeed, HI’s strength is its multiplicity of interests, and its persistent claim to the commonality of human experience, and the possibilities of mutual learning across political analysis. It is my intention to add the examination of an out-of-power political party to this roster. It is a subject wholly in keeping with HI’s previous studies; though political parties have, on the whole, been under-studied in favour of examining public sector bureaucracies—arguably due to the strong presence of the party model literature, which has preoccupied theoretically minded analysts of political parties.

The wealth of previous case studies gives confidence to HI's theoretical claims: they are not mere deductive assumptions, but rather inductively rich formulations that can be drawn upon to sensitise the analyst to ask certain questions when embarking on a new case study. First and foremost, therefore, what HI provides is means to generate a hypothesis, or to state a puzzle. And it is here that we must begin so that we can shape an analysis of the Tory party's social justice policy away from some of the deficiencies identified in the literature review.

Identifying and stating the puzzle

What then is the puzzle of the post-Major Conservative Party? Bale (2010: 6) states that the puzzle is 'why and how the Party proved unable (or unwilling) to [change]...and why it suddenly decided to do things so differently from 2005 onwards.' But such a stating of the puzzle does not emerge—as it should—from theoretical foundations. Rather, Bale seems to be informed—despite claims to the contrary—by the general media and Tory received opinion that 2005 was a watershed moment; for there is nothing in HI's theoretical insights regarding path dependency, critical-junctures, and institutions that would lead us to *presuppose* change post-2005, then state that explaining this should be our guiding puzzle; indeed, theory would lead us to the opposite hypothesis. It appears that Bale misunderstands what path dependency is, and then mislabels the change enacted by Cameron after 2005 as a significant shift in path dependency. Bale bookends his account with intimations to theory; and yet he never uses theory to order his argument. For example, when Bale (2010: 373) states that 'Lilley's [1999] Butler lecture was a critical-juncture', he appears to be only after

colloquial emphasis, as if to say: this was an “important moment”. For Bale wrongly uses this HI term: a critical-juncture is a moment of institutional change; it is not a moment when the institution rejects the opportunity for change, and favours inertia. This is not mere semantics: Bale’s inability to appreciate the cause and function of critical-junctures leads him to wrongly identify how change occurs in institutions, and the extent of the possibility of change in the Conservative party after 1997, and in particular post-2005. (Though Bale more effectively conceptualises leadership agency restrictions in recent unpublished work on organisational reform: see Turner and Bale 2012). Bale states the puzzle almost well—what took them so long? is an adequate opening question—but the idea that the Party changed quickly post-2005 is flawed: for such an hypothesis begs the question (in the *petitio principii* sense); it is excessively agential; and it throws out all institutional theorising. The puzzle, therefore, needs to be stated differently. HI leads us to ask: Did the Party change significantly *at any point* post-1997; were new initiatives (particularly Cameron’s) significant change or incremental change; and how could these changes happen within continuity? Our hypothesis from this puzzle needn’t be empirically filled out, for this is to be done inductively following the empirical study. But we can make a theoretically informed hypothesis regarding the type of change we are likely to see in the party over the opposition period. From HI, we can say that if we cannot identify an ideological crisis then no radical path dependent change could have taken place. Therefore, we are likely to see incremental change, and change within overall continuity, with all four opposition leaders. This incremental change will be based on disparate tendencies, drawing ideas exogenously, via mimicry and neutral invasion, and endogenously via exaptation of residual path tendencies. Finally, across the institution we are likely to

identify the action of policy and institutional entrepreneurs doing work to facilitate incremental change; but that ideological entrepreneurs will be shut out.

I will now proceed to test this theoretically derived hypothetical statement using empirical analysis. My case study will be predominantly, but not exclusively, focused around the Party's social justice policy, as I argue that this policy change is indicative of broader interactions, constraints, changes, and forms of inertia, in the Party as a whole. Firstly, however, it is necessary to briefly present the methodology of my analysis. By doing so we can be sure that the tools used to test our theoretical hypothesis are appropriate and will produce reflective and rigorous explanation.

4. Methodology

For the case study, I have examined the manner in which party actors, the electoral environment and party institutional structures interact in the process of party change around the single policy line of social justice. What makes the area of social justice particularly beneficial as a case study is that it reflects trends, intentions, factions, and norms within the party. As Page (2010: 154) wrote whilst the Conservative party was in opposition: ‘The emollient tone adopted by the Modern Conservatives in relation to both poverty and social justice reflects their desire to return to the political “centre”’. Indeed, social justice policy renewal, whilst in opposition, potentially offered the Tories a “Clause IV moment”—and so how this policy path was navigated should reveal much more about the party than other, less visible, and less image defining, policies. Changing—or rather, supposedly changing—social justice policy became the party’s *auto de fê*: how they performed this ritual was a matter not just of the policy reflection itself, but also of how this represented and potentially resolved deeper issues within the party.

The use of a single case study can be labelled problematic: in particular by those who advocate naturalism, or positivism, or quantitative methods (or, indeed, all three) in the social sciences. However, I argue for the benefits of single case studies by, as Flyvberg (2001: 77–78) writes, recognising that ‘the “generalizability” of case studies can be increased by strategic selection of *critical cases*... [These] atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic

mechanisms in the situation studied.’ The case of Conservative social justice policy, using Flyvberg’s formulation, is ideal for producing specific conclusions, as well as more general ones that can be applied to other cases. The intention here is to use a case study to test ‘commonly observed patterns of gradual institutional change that allows us to classify and compare cases across diverse empirical settings’ (Mahoney and Thelen 3: 2010). The limitations of small-N studies, therefore, are overcome by the bridge provided by theory, allowing us to cross the river of disparate cases and communicate with other institutional analysts. The Conservative party is prominent as one of the most electorally successful in Western democracy; it has many typical qualities, such as its pragmatic neo-liberalism, but it had also experienced atypical circumstances—its thirteen year sequestration in opposition—that has made manifest certain mechanisms of change that would remain hidden in other cases. Therefore, its policy on social justice can be hypothesised as not only partly indicative of other changes within the party; but also, the party as a whole can be seen as potentially indicative of changes throughout other Western democratic political parties, both in regard to the content of certain policies, and in the manner in which change has taken place.

We are therefore opening up the black box of internal party mechanisms—and seeking explanation of change *over time*. Opening up the black box is crucial because here things are less neat, and arguably more interesting; and positing large scale, ordered and balanced behaviour, produced by rational and informed self-interest—as can be presented by party models and party system models—becomes problematic in light of this. As Mary Douglas (2002: 21) advisedly writes, in an attempt to encourage more institutional analysis at the micro level: ‘smallness of scale gives scope to interpersonal effects. The whole field of psychology is located here, along with

irrational emotions.’¹ We should not, therefore, be uninterested in messiness—rather small scale interactions within an institution should be described in spite of this: for even if they cannot be tidily summed up in the manner of large scale activity, it is my intention to demonstrate that behaviour does follow discernible and transferable patterns framed by the character of the wider institution.

Mapping party policy change is empirically intensive; the theoretical focus of my research, however, has facilitated the selection of indicative data. I have mapped Conservative social justice policies since 1997 by examining the party’s manifestoes, speeches by key actors, and published policy literature. This mapping tests my hypothesis of policy change heavily determined by previous norms and practices. An understanding of the institutional resistance that led to this occurrence is evidenced by semi-structured interviews with party actors. I have given a capsule biography of my interview subjects in a footnote when I first introduce them; this is because, though some are well known, others are not, and their position and role in the party are important in contextualising their insights. The data from interviews is crucial because it reveals the internal workings of the party, of which official speeches, initiatives, and policy launches are only the emergent result. It gives us a sense of the make-up of the party personnel, their received opinions, their disagreements, and their decision making processes. Such factors are not always evident in the official party literature, because,

¹ Douglas (2002) goes on to argue that rational choice theory *can* in fact handle this supposed small scale irrationality. Here we part ways; I having argued in the previous chapter that it is HI that is more adept at combining both interest *and* ideas based behaviour.

by its very purpose, it leaves out that which is incongruous with the dominant path dependencies of the party, and seeks to present harmony where there is discord.

Fig. 2: *Interviewees and their key roles:*

Nick Boles MP	Founder Director of Policy Exchange.
Jesse Norman MP	Written extensively on modernisation. Former Policy Exchange Fellow.
Charles Barwell	President of National Convention; Chair Finance Committee; Chair party conference 2010.
Stephen Dorell MP	Secretary of State for Health 95–97. Leader bid 1997.
Sir Stephen Sherbourne	Political Secretary Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher; Chief of Staff to Michael Howard during leadership.
Nick Hillman	Special Advisor to David Willetts MP Minister of State Universities and Science.
Gary Streeter MP	Vice-Chair Conservative Party 2001–02; former CCF Chair.
Guy Hordern MBE	Former director Renewing One Nation; current CCF Trustee.
Peter Franklin	Special Advisor to Greg Clark MP Minister of State for Decentralisation and Planning Policy.
Alex Deane	Chief of Staff 2004–May ‘05 Tim Collins MP, Shadow Education. Ch. of Staff David Cameron until Oct. 2005.
Matthew Oakley	Head of Economics and Social Policy at Policy Exchange; former Economic Advisor at the Treasury.
Anonymous	Senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships.

Ryan Shorthouse	Researcher SMF. Researcher to David Willetts, Shadow Education 2005–2007; Adviser to Maria Miller, Shadow Family Minister, 2007–10.
Kathy Gyngell	Fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies. Chair Addiction Working Group, Social Justice Policy Review.
Matthew Hancock MP	Economic adviser (later Chief of Staff) George Osborne, Shadow Chancellor 2005–2010.
Baroness Stedman-Scott	Chief Executive Tomorrow's People; Deputy Chair Social Justice Policy Review.

Such interview data must be interpreted with the requisite caveats. As Burnham *et al.* (2004: 205) write: ‘elite interviewing is characterised by a situation in which the balance [of knowledge] is usually in favour of the respondent’ and, perhaps, we might add, the balance of economy with the truth. This data, therefore, is contextualised alongside policy texts produced by these actors, or secondary texts, such as newspaper articles.

An understanding of how Cameron and other key actors have increased their ability to enact change in social justice policy by presenting to the party a particular strategic context, and by filtering, and absorbing, new ideas through the side channels of new organisations, will be evidenced by also analysing texts produced by broader social actors operating within that environment, such as lobby groups and think-tanks. Think-tanks can function as plausible deniability for institutional actors, or an external route which circumvents internal institutional inertia. These think-tanks, such as the influential CSJ, can be understood as organisations within an ideational institution—

though adjunct to the material institution. Therefore, they can feed ideas into the party, but are given greater agency from the material restrictions of the party. This penumbra of policy organisations provides one of the means to understanding, therefore, how an institution is able to reform itself, in part, and produce change within continuity. Interviews with key actors in this area therefore provide a strong part of my empirical evidence.

Yet interview data is not taken to be irrefutable. But then, how should the researcher feel about ascribing motivations, or unarticulated cognitions, to individuals, when they (the research object) may not readily ascribe such labels and behaviour to themselves, and may even seek to deny them? It is, indeed, a human tendency to believe that one's own agency—at least at a cognitive, if not an action, level—is largely unrestricted. Especially with powerful individuals, the tendency is comfortably to believe that one can think for one's self. Yet ideational path dependencies suggest that actors do not consider all options available to them, but rather favour actions that fall within dominant ideas, especially ones that self-justify the social order on which they prosper. To assert such a realist epistemological description (that is to say, that there are causal factors which impact change which cannot be readily evidenced by plain observation but can be inferred using empirical data which is informed by theory) it has been necessary to reject some claims made by actors and rather put forward my own explanation. It is tenable to do this, however, because the argument is supported by the requisite evidence—from other actors, and from a broad account of policy options and ideational tendencies.

I have ordered my empirical research at times diachronically, and at times synchronically. My intention is not to give a blow-by-blow account of everything that happened from 1997–2010. Rather, it is to uncover particularly salient examples of institutionally impacted decision making in the area of social justice policy. As a result, my emphasis tilts somewhat towards accounts of how particular institutionally defined groups and individuals interacted to produce new Tory social justice policy—or not to produce anything new—at particular moments, or over particular salient periods. I tend to jump forward diachronically, therefore, at certain moments, to get quickly to the next salient institutional moment; or to return in time to source another institutional seam over a given period. Firstly, the oppositional period from 1997–2004 is examined to uncover the beginnings of change which set the stage, so to speak, for more explicit actions later on. I then focus on the opposition period from 2004 to 2010; for this begins with the forming of the Centre of Social Justice, an instrumental think-tank which put social justice policy front-and-centre of Tory concerns and efforts at rebranding. This moment is also of particular interest to institutional theory as it marked the formation of, if not a new institution, a new organisation within an institution, and hence it unearths examples of how future patterns of decision-making can be set in place by early decisions in organisational structure and recruitment. However, I do not look to suggest a decisive break at this point; rather I highlight continuity with past practice, and only incremental change (begun in the first half of opposition) which culminated with the exaptation of the aristocratic sensibilities of the Party. The empirical study that follows, therefore, is based around mechanisms and processes, not media events *per se*. This is because it is through institutional action, not personality based anecdote at the elite level, that we see how incremental change takes place. Firstly, I introduce the

relationship of Conservatives to social justice policy, and what social justice policy consists of. I have divided the Party's institutional action into the following areas: the reaction to the 1997 defeat as uncertainty not crisis; the shutting out of radical change and the expunging of ideological entrepreneurs; the beginnings of *incremental* change with mid-level actors; the parallel rise of disparate mid-level policy entrepreneurs along path tendencies; the incremental change of material structures under Howard; the role of elite policy entrepreneurs; the co-ordinating action of Cameron as an institutional entrepreneur; and finally the role of contingency in facilitating the confluence juncture of path tendencies under Cameron.

5. Empirical Study

Theoretical questions, though of defining importance, can quickly become recondite when left in splendid isolation from empirical analysis. This chapter gives an explanation of how and why the Party changed through the opposition period. But also of importance here is to highlight how historical institutionalism shapes empirical findings. This could have been done in a number of ways: for example, I could have conducted a broad historical account of party change over the period. However, this approach has already been admirably executed by Tim Bale (2010). And though there is certainly no immutable reason why Bale's study should not be superseded, or at least paralleled, by other broad accounts, his study has served to demonstrate the difficulty, perhaps, of being both definitive in empirical scope whilst remaining theoretically reflective. As a result, he uses historical institutionalism largely to provide categories (ideas, interests, individuals, institutions [Bale 2010: 7–20]) with which to order his empirical account, an account that remains primarily descriptive. With so much to cover, this is understandable; and it leads us to the conclusion that theoretical work is more fully demonstrated in action if it is applied to a single empirical line, not a broad one. Consequently, rather than examine the Conservative Party broadly over their opposition period, covering all aspects of policy and institutional change, I have chosen to examine the formation, and oscillation, of a single policy line (though it is also, I will argue, a crucially indicative one): issues of social justice.

The intention, therefore, is to use empirical analysis to highlight theoretical questions, as much as to present an empirical account, *per se*. Consequently, the goals

of my empirical analysis—balanced between these two concerns—are as follows: To map how the Conservative Party has formed its beliefs about social justice by looking briefly at the history of this belief formation. To look specifically, and empirically, at the formation, deliberation, and variation in belief during the 1997–2010 opposition period, and ask: what does the Party believe causes problems regarding social justice and what does it offer as solutions to these problems? To uncover areas of contention and disagreement within the party, why these occurred, how they were expressed, and how they were resolved. To explain these empirical findings using tools from historical institutionalism.

Now, following from this empirical work, the intention, in conclusion, is to encourage further study, both of the Party broadly and of single policy areas, which utilises historical institutionalism. As Burnham, *et al.* (2004: 69) write, empirical research ‘enables hypothesis testing and development [but] can also suggest how the hypothesis might be usefully refined or reformulated.’ We should see research and theory, therefore, as engaging in a reciprocal relationship towards the formation of understanding and explanation. This characterisation of research belies the false binary between deductive and inductive reasoning and rather sees research as an interactive process between both methods of generating theory and handling empirical data (May 2001: 32–37).

5.1. The Conservative Party and Social Justice Policy

The Conservative Party was internally created in the nineteenth century from already established political elites (Ramsden 1998: 20). The Party is indeed still represented by, and serves to represent, those elites. As Richard Seymour (2010: 82) argues in his exciting—if verbose—polemic on the Party, the Tories remain driven by a certain economic ‘structural logic deeper than electoralism’. That is to say, there are certain economic interests that must remain unbroken regardless of electoral vicissitudes. However, within this logic, the Party has by no means been uninterested in issues of social justice during its long history. It is electorally, and morally (such as it is common for politicians to have, to some degree, an internalised moral component to their behaviour), unfeasible for a party not to have policy, as well as some form of overarching principle, around social justice. Therefore, over time, and from within the activity of a party institution—out of which policy grows—there must sprout the answers to the key questions of social justice; and the answers to these questions must be harmonised, often implicitly, to Seymour’s *deeper economic structural logic*. These questions are, for example: Why *are* poor people poor? And concomitantly: Why am I rich? That is to say, is the reason structural or agential, and how do these interact? What are to be considered social problems that a government should seek to tackle: should we include all or one of, for example, crime, marriage breakdown, teenage pregnancy, drug taking, obesity, anti-social behaviour, debt-defaulting, long term unemployment, homelessness, mental and physical illness, truancy, malingering, and so on, and so on, into the whirligig of what the Conservative Party have broadly labelled “Breakdown Britain” (see: CSJ 2006). Why are poor people affected by social problems? And in

what manner do they cause them? How do we solve these problems? What should the state do and what should individuals do? That is to say, who is responsible? What does solving a problem look like? That is to say, what are our goals and our priorities? Do we genuinely intend to solve them? These may seem to be an unmanageable number of questions but they are the typical central issues that impact the formation of policy (see Titmuss 1974: 132–135; Hill 2003: 73–76). These questions are important because an analysis that is sensitive to ideational structures is aware that institutions first construct, in part, the problems which they claim to be able to solve. And they construct them in a manner that is harmonious to both their ideology and the ethical worldview that operates within their ideology. This is not to say that this worldview is explicitly voiced when policy is formulated; often, the opposite is the case, and it is the unspoken answers to the above questions which shape decision-making. However, the possibility that institutional behaviour is relevant to this unspoken shaping is often under-emphasised. The individuals within institutions, who formulate policy in order to address the above questions, do often deliberately mislead the public in order to forward alternative agendas; but as often as not they have faith in what they do: they believe themselves to be genuine and good people seeking real solutions to problems of social justice. Consequently, explanation for their behaviour is not to be found in intimations of nefariousness, but rather in uncovering the multifaceted manner in which their world views, and norms of behaviour, are constructed. As Kimmel (1977: 3) perspicaciously wrote regarding institutional policy formation, sometime before my own period of study:

The most serious issues...are not the ones that involve conscious deception, although such cases are certainly significant for their public policy implications and interesting from the

standpoint of scientific analysis. Rather, [we should be] most deeply concerned about authorities who are as involved in their symbolism as the non-elites under their dominance.

Social justice policy is not only about solving the problems of the poor, therefore; it is also about finding explanations (at times self-serving explanations) for the social order. But to uncover such behaviour—wherein the political actor has no intention to be deceptive or even disingenuous—is more complex than the mere identification of deception. Indeed, when it comes to institutionally constructed world views, the institutional actor is likely—for a range of reasons—to be the first to be *unaware* (or at least, if not wholly unaware, lacking in deep reflection) of the constructed nature of their decision making. Therefore, my study explains not only how the Conservative party explicitly tackled the above questions whilst in opposition, but how the history of ideas within the Party and the structure of decision making and change making within an institution, predisposed them to frame the questions in a certain manner.

The mere fact that the Party became interested in issues of social justice as a cornerstone of their modernising agenda should not be surprising; nor should it be understood as signalling change *per se*. As Jesse Norman² (2011) noted to me: ‘the Conservative Party has always been interested in social justice, let us not forget that it was Conservative politicians who passed a whole swathe of reforming legislation in the 1870s, it was Peel who repealed the Corn Laws, the most important legislation of the 1830s’. What we are interested in here is the particular form that interests in social

² Dr Jesse Norman is the Conservative party MP for Hereford and South Herefordshire (2010–present). He has written extensively on issues of modernisation and social justice within conservative thinking (see Norman and Ganesh 2006; Norman 2010). He joined Policy Exchange in 2005.

justice took in the 2000s and how this came about and filtered up through the institution. However, as Norman continued, though it may be ‘a complete barbarism to suggest that social justice is not a crucial part of this party’s deliberation and has been for many years, that isn’t to say that it’s the same view that Labour had, it’s quite different in some respects, Labour’s view of social justice was very much about income, it was a very economic view, because the Labour Party had fallen in with a certain finance, economic based view of capitalism...but it is culture which is more important.’ And it is in this nuanced articulation of concerns, protecting economic interests whilst addressing social justice issues with a heavy cultural emphasis rather than economic redistribution, that we see how institutionalised ideological concerns and path dependencies begin to frame problems in certain ways; and therefore can only answer problems and formulate policy in certain ways.

Reflecting on how the party approached social justice during opposition, Norman (2011) remarked to me that: ‘There are different strands of what we would call modern Conservatism, a kind of civic strand, the rule of law, and then the fraternal strand, which emphasises communitarian experiences, and a third strand which is religious.’ These strands interacted and oscillated in influence within the party institution during opposition—and explaining their relative movement forms a through line in the analysis. Therefore, we will proceed by examining the mechanisms by which these strands operated in the opposition period to engender incremental change, ultimately forming a conclusion on how we might characterise the Tory approach to social justice policy that culminated in Cameronism. Hugh Bochel (2011: 18–19) puts forward four possible characterisations: that Cameronism is a *variety* of Thatcherism; that it is an off-

shoot of One Nationism; that it is an off-shoot of Blairism; or that it is a complicated amalgam of all these. This thesis favours the last description and attempts to reduce the complexity by detailing the specific institutional mechanisms that produced incremental change in opposition. It outlines how Thatcherism provided a co-ordinating path dependency; how One Nationism provided an expected source of new ideas (rather than a “return” to old ideas); and Blairism provided mimicry invasion of new ideas. Alongside this, we add the neutral invasion of Christianity, and the role of specific types of entrepreneurs.

But first it is necessary to examine the condition of the Party immediately after the 1997 defeat, and to emphasise that this moment should not be understood as an ideational critical-juncture that might have precipitated radical change.

5.2. There is no critical-juncture here: uncertainty not crisis

After the landslide Tory defeat of May 1997 the Party was in deep uncertainty. It was out of power, therefore an explicit role of the institution was no longer functioning—that is to say, day-to-day jobs that many of its senior members did, they no longer did; its finances were in decline and they had trouble meeting basic expenditures (Bale 2010: 76–77); at the same time its membership was getting smaller in number and older in average age; and much of the infrastructure of Conservative Central Office (CCO) and the opposition offices in parliament was inadequate. As Fletcher (2012: 185) writes, ‘when the new team arrived in the Opposition block at the Palace of Westminster, they found the phones had been disconnected. The task of organising an efficient office from scratch took such a long time that letters were frequently not answered for many months, according to Sebastian Coe...’ Finally, it had lost a degree of external support for the actions of the institution. But two things must be said about 1997 that explain why the defeat did not become a critical-juncture for the Party—as one might expect in a moment of so called “crisis”. These two things explain, indeed, why the 1997 defeat was not a moment of crisis for the Party at all: that is to say, following the HI understanding that a “crisis” is a moment that either precipitates a period of radical change or withering away for an institution (see Blondel 2006: 726–729). Rather, it should be understood as a moment of *uncertainty*, where reshaping the institution to meet actors’ interests must take place through incremental not radical change.

No material crisis in 1997

Firstly, the material problems facing the Party were emphasised by, but *not caused by*, the landslide defeat of 1997. There is that memorable line of Warren Buffet's: Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked. In the same vein, electoral defeat can reveal, or suddenly concentrate attention on, systemic material faults in the institution. But in 1997, when these faults (of falling and aging membership, and the need to liquidate assets into cash-flow) were acutely revealed, they were understood as being caused by longstanding issues and that they *coincidentally* apogeed in the late 90s alongside Labour's landslide—to paraphrase a comment made to me by Charles Barwell³ (2011), a senior figure in the volunteer section of the Party. Indeed, he suggested, the problem can be traced back as far as the fifties. And, overall, much of the material nature of the Party was not changed in the post-'97 opposition—despite certain changes in voting initiated by Hague's *The Fresh Future* initiative (most of which have since been partially rescinded: see Kelly and Lester (2005) for an overview). Upon being appointed leader, Hague embarked upon a reform of the democratic structures of the Party in an apparent attempt to strengthen leadership accountability to the membership. He took direct control—along with his senior advisor and former ASDA boss Archie Norman—in drafting a white paper published in 1998 called *The Fresh Future*. Lees-Marshment and Quayle (2001: 204) outline the swathe of organisational changes which Hague's paper enacted:

³ Charles Barwell was President of the National Convention, the senior body of the volunteer section of the Party, was on the Party's Board from 2007–2011 and was Chairman of the Finance Committee. He was Chair of the Party conference in 2010.

[T]he Party adopted a unified constitution... established a fourteen-member board to act as the supreme decision-making body... relating to party organisation and management, [and created] the National Conservative Convention [comprising] national, regional and area officials... Fourthly, the Conservative Policy Forum was established...with the aim of allowing ordinary members to take ‘a more active role’ in policy development... [There was] the introduction of one member one vote in the final stage of future leadership contests... Finally, a new single youth organisation, Conservative Future, was created.

Hague’s extensive restructuring sought to revive the grass roots by giving a much greater role to the voluntary core of the Party than before. This newly democratised party would then strongly involve the members in the appointment of leaders and in the formation of policy. However, it is questionable how genuinely transformative Hague’s restructuring was—and whether it demonstrated an increase in the control the grass-roots enjoyed. Though Hague’s initiative met with some success—for example the high average age of party members was reduced by a campaign to attract more young people to the Party (Charmley 2008: 280)—the extent to which his restructuring devolved power is limited. In reality, the new institutional bodies formed were invested with little decision making power that could not be usurped by the leadership (see Lees-Marshment and Quayle 2001). The whole enterprise, therefore, can be more accurately characterised as a disingenuous means of empowering the oligarchy of senior party figures; and merely a symbolic act of “modernisation”: for, as Richard Kelly (2003a: 94) writes, ‘the democratic element was diluted in the interest of centralised party management’.

But, at the same time, we should not exaggerate the extent of the power of senior figures; indeed, the desire to increase power can be read as a reflection of the leadership's perception that their power was relatively weak in the Party, and they moved to consolidate what they had. As Barwell (2011) told me of the financial structure of the Party: 'Some associations are rich in assets, they own property; if one looks at the Party nationally, the assets are 100s of millions of pounds worth of property, but it's tied up in buildings, constituency chairman sitting in large committee rooms that are used a dozen times a year...but there is a huge reticence to change, to sell any asset or to think in a business like way.' Because, Barwell continued, 'the leadership don't own the assets: I don't think there has been very much change.' Indeed, the internal financial problems of the late 1990s were not systemically addressed—they could not be because of the largely inert material structure of the institution—but only temporarily dealt with through the pecuniary benison of Michael Ashcroft (a notably agential response to a structural problem). Charles Barwell (2011) outlined, with some degree of bluntness, the relative powerlessness of the Party leadership when facing material structural inertia within the Party at large: 'The Party? There is no such thing as the Party!' he exclaimed. 'There is Conservative Campaign Headquarters, [then] there is Conservative Central Office—it is the private office of the leader of the Party and it's been like that since Disraeli's time, and it has a budget, it just funds the organisation in Westminster, some research, the website, funds staff at a national level, and a few [local] agents...[And then] local associations want to be responsible for themselves, to then be independent and make their own political decisions and organisational decisions.' It is clear, therefore, that what binds the Party together, so to speak, is not direct rule, and not an ordered, enforced, material hierarchy, but a shared, often implicit,

understanding of beliefs. This is not to say that it is a loose organisation, because it should be clear that such a form of institution *can* be highly effective in keeping opinion in line. However, materially, in many respects, the Party is not really one “organisation” at all—that is to say, in terms of who owns what and who is accountable to whom. As Barwell (2011), with perhaps just a touch of lamentation, went on to observe: ‘I’ve been an area deputy chairman and a regional deputy chairman then president of the National Convention: at no point did I feel that the constituency chairman was under my line management. I have no means of firing a constituency chairman, apart from on a disciplinary matter if they have been fraudulent or brought the Party into disrepute.’ However, an “institution”, when it is understood as having an ideological constituent, can incorporate an umbrella of organisations and bind them together to function as an institutional whole; ideational structures, therefore, become key to over-riding, or balancing out, possible organisational disparateness.

Therefore, material problems in an institution can be considered causal factors in change not by dint of their severity, but only by the degree to which they can be dealt with. And in the Tory case not much could really be done about the material set up of the institution, other than getting the finances temporarily in order, and playing around with how the leader was elected, both of which were achieved to a manageable level by 2000 (Bale 2010: 76–77). But the leadership of Hague did not necessarily place these material or technical changes as being intertwined with ideology (though they did attempt to make this association at the publicity level). For what really matters in the engendering of greater ideological change is how material changes might be framed in regard to persuasion of members of the institution; or alternatively how they can be used explicitly to initiate ideological change through direct control. But neither of these

links could ever be strongly made, or directly achieved, by the party leadership because no great material change could actually be made to take place. Consequently, stemming from this, there was hardly much sense of a pioneering, all's-up-for-reconsideration, attitude.

Indeed, the material resistance of the institution seemed to foreshadow its ideational resistance. Moreover, the very material set-up of being the opposition party acted to weaken the ability to organize and enact change. As Stephen Dorell⁴ (2011) pointed out to me: 'In particular in opposition the leadership is a sort of network, though even that is not as strong as it needs to be (until Cameron). The rest of politics in opposition is much more dispersed, there wasn't really a serious debate going on: there was the leadership and there was reaction.' So, there are *physical* reasons why change becomes difficult: actors are not meeting up as once they did; old networks break down; there are fewer MPs to organise talks and round-tables; there is less money donated to right-wing think-tanks, and hence fewer think-tank sponsored events. All of which can be considered to be straightforward material barriers that any actor must face in order to enact change: for many, however, these barriers merely added to an unrealised mental inertia and never cascaded to the extent of a crisis, wherein we might have seen radical alteration. The type of backbencher who remains after a large electoral defeat increases this mental inertia. Logically, they are from the safer seats, and are therefore farther from the centre ground. Moreover, they are often less attuned to the reasons for the defeat; and they act

⁴ Stephen Dorell was MP for Loughborough 1979–97; and is MP for Charnwood 1997–present. He was Secretary of State for National Heritage 1994–95, and Secretary of State for Health 1995–97. He ran for leader of the Conservative Party after the 1997 election.

as a continuing connection to the past. As Stephen Sherbourne⁵ (2011) remarks: ‘In my experience it [change] is a very slow process indeed. The people who had been elected...they haven’t suffered: if you’re a backbench MP, then frankly you’re in exactly the same position on the opposition benches than on the government benches. So the party leadership may be desperate to change, but you don’t have the same impetus, you’re okay: you’re back in parliament.’ And for those who did see the barriers, and wanted to remove them and reform networks, they had to wait it out, as time was needed for the mending.

No ideological crisis

So, there was no great material “crisis” that could be quickly fixed, either symbolically or tactically. But more importantly, there was also no great ideational “crisis”. The key, overwhelming, point here is this: the 1997 landslide was not interpreted by the Tories as an ideological defeat; it was, conversely, an ideological triumph. Dorell (2011) is quite clear on the matter: ‘the Party [in the late 1990s] was more interested in doctrinal purity: it felt more like an academic department discussing the things that were of interest to the party than it did a group of people who were interested in the things that concerned people on the doorstep.’ And Nick Boles⁶ (2011) nostalgically remembers how ‘Michael Gove, Ed Vazey, and me, we tried to set up a magazine to make the case for

⁵ Sir Stephen Sherbourne was Political Secretary to Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher; and Chief of Staff to Michael Howard during his leadership of the Party.

⁶ Nick Boles is MP for Grantham and Stamford 2010–present. He was involved in the founding of the think-tank Policy Exchange in 2002 and served as its Director 2002–2007.

change and we went around trying to raise money for it, and basically there was no real appetite for anything like that.'

This sense of ideological triumph despite electoral defeat is also to be inferred in the texts of the period. In Hague's (1998) conference speech in Bournemouth, for example, he repeatedly and proudly references the central tenants of Conservative ideology that had been in place for a generation: 'Look at the battles of the last 20 years,' he orates. 'We fought the ideas of state control and intervention with a British belief in enterprise and freedom. And we won. We fought the defeatism over trade union power with a British optimism and refusal to be defeated. And we won. We fought the economics of the madhouse with British common sense.' He then moves on to the continuing bugbear of Europe, stating: 'The vision of a closely integrated federal Europe, which inspired good and honourable men in the aftermath of war, does not meet the needs of our continent today.' There is, indeed, no sense in this speech that past practices are set to be abandoned in any significant fashion. However, it is important to note here that ideological path dependency is not something pejorative *per se*; it is quite understandable, even comforting: it allows one's head to be kept when all about are being misplaced—it gives order out of confusion and external rejection; it gives a worldview that is familiar; and when the world seems to be largely in concert with this view, there is a very strong compunction to keep the view in place, as we learn from HI's logic of appropriateness, as the cost of stepping from the path dependency become increasingly severe. As Paul Pierson (2004: 21) writes: 'In the presence of positive feedback', which the Tories had received in 1997 for their ideological convictions, and *had* received since the late 1970s, 'the probability of further steps along the same path increases with each move down that path. This is because the *relative* benefits of the

current activity compared with the once-possible options increase over time. To put it a different way, the costs of switching to some previously plausible alternative rise.’

For the Tories post-1997, the *once-possible option* would have been something like One-Nationism, or even nineteenth-century liberalism. But it would have been quite irrational for the Tory leadership to initiate, and the party as an institution to accept, such a radical change in direction; rather, it is much more rational, within bounded-rationality and the expediencies of path dependency, to stick with the relative security of the present paradigm, and try to figure out a way to make it work again. The suggestion that the success of Thatcherite neo-liberalism had permanently cut-off the Tories from its past, be it One-Nationism, or even nineteenth-century liberalism, was shared by a number of prominent conservative philosophers, such as Roger Scruton and John Gray (O’Hara 2007: 162). In a published debate with David Willetts, Gray (1997: 145) argued that ‘Labour has absorbed all the enduring truths that were once preserved in conservative philosophy. It has accepted the essentials of the reforms of the Thatcher era. It does not contest the legitimacy of liberal capitalism...Conservatism has been undone.’ Gray (1997: 161) goes on to conclude that ‘the continuity of tradition has been breached—in part by the market forces which the Right celebrates. In a post-traditional society the Right can neither cleave to the past nor commit itself to the present.’ The key observation here, and it is of course shared by theoretical observations in historical institutionalism mentioned above, is that once ideational change has become embedded through positive feedback in an institution then that change is irreversible. This is firstly because the ways of thinking in the institution reward appropriate established beliefs and because new ideas are shaped in this environment. But secondly, and as

importantly, the successful ideology has reshaped the wider landscape in which it operates, so that it now hegemonically dictates the terms of debate: a successful ideology in part creates the material reality in which it is successful, rendering past options as alien to that reality. It was, therefore, never possible for the Tories to return to previous ways of thinking and generating policy. What I would add to Paul Pierson's view of path dependency, however, is the additional fact that past options *can return* in an unradical and reformed fashion, in order to precipitate *incremental change* via exaptation. I outline this process later on (see §5.4.).

The basic content of the Tory reading of the '97 defeat is well summarized by Dorey (2011: 171): 'The logic of this perspective was, naturally, that the Conservative Party ought to respond to New Labour's resounding victory by being unequivocally neo-liberal on economic issues and public service reform, and social authoritarian on social and moral issues: the Party needed to reaffirm its Thatcherite ethos, and its disillusioned supporters would return in droves.' Yet Dorey's interpretation of this reading—that it was *palpable nonsense*—misses the mark. It was, rather, quite explicable that institutional actors should read the political environment in this way. Furthermore, they continued to do so, particularly in regard to Europe, the economy, and social responsibility, *throughout the opposition period*. In summation, this ideological path dependency consists of: small state rather than corporatism; British sovereignty rather than increased European integration; neo-liberal economics; and social responsibility based around the family unit. (See §2.3. Whiteley *et al.* 1994; Hill 2007; Heppell and Hill 2008; 2009; 2010.) The triumph of New Labour confirmed for the Tories both the underlying electoral logic of this Conservative neo-liberal approach, and its principled rightness. And it is this sense of *rightness* which remained unflappable in the minds of

most Tories. As Nick Hillman⁷ (2011) said to me: ‘Though we are not an ideological party, I think our fundamental beliefs about the power of institutions, the importance of having a free market capitalist system, the importance of individual liberty, all those things have proven to be right...It’s wrong to think that the historical lesson from previous defeats is that you have to change what you stand for; I don’t think we did change that much previously: our underlying philosophy is well attuned to the nation, but people emphasised the wrong things.’ I would call this attitude ideological path dependency; Hillman labels it fundamental beliefs: but setting aside this semantic disagreement, it is clear that there is consistency at play in the Tory mind here, a continuity that goes deeper than the vagaries of electioneering.

Differentiating ideological structures from policy emphasis

The Tory actor reasonably adjudged that if something had gone wrong in the election of ’97, and in the preceding years, it could hardly have been with their ideological principles. Dorey’s critical assessment stems from a reading of the opposition period that conflates ideological path dependency and policy emphasis: the first of which is less mutable and was understandably reinforced by the ’97 election. The second is more mutable and did change over the opposition period—but Cameron’s ability to change *policy emphasis* leaves him wrongly credited as being more astute than his predecessors, more ideologically flexible, and leaves his predecessors with the calumny

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of spouting palpable nonsense. For changing policy emphasis in the early years of opposition is difficult, even if desired. This is made clear in Green's excellent theoretical work on Tory electoral strategy (Green 2005; 2011). When we understand that policy emphasis strategy is motivated by the institutional actor's perception of the electorate's *perception* of ownership, and not as a pure manifestation of core beliefs, we are less likely to see a discontinuity in core beliefs in the opposition period—and to conflate it with discontinuity in policy emphasis. As Green (2011: 762) writes:

We do not need to rely upon core vote or party-base interpretations to understand the electoral strategies of political elites. We can understand the issue strategies and positions of unpopular political parties via long-standing reputations on issues and the changing nature of issue ratings over time...Popular parties, by definition, have a wide range of available issues on which they are rated positively. Less popular parties have only their existing owned or best issues. To focus on traditional issues may mean parties fail to update their image, but these strategies are not driven by an appeal to the issue concerns—or positions—of the party base, but by vote-seeking objectives.

Understanding Tory *electoral policy emphasis* during opposition in this way means we should not suggest that there was a radical change over the period because the core ideology of the party was less front-and-centre of publicity and policy proposals after 2005. The conventional view is to say that Hague, IDS, and Howard, to a greater or lesser extent, obtusely and myopically expounded traditional Tory views because they could not think in any other way; and out of fear, and some incompetence, appealed only to the base. But a path dependent ideology does not work in such an explicit

fashion, so that it is constantly articulated in a group. What is more the case is that path dependent ideology remains constant, and largely under articulated. Movement in policy emphasis is dictated, rather, by a reading of the electoral environment; that is to say, what it is thought the electorate will accept from an unpopular party: then movement takes place *within* the path dependency to articulate new positions. When a party is most unpopular the leadership's positions are closest to the core of the path dependency; but this does not mean that the core beliefs are any more or less *believed in*. When it is more popular it can find new positions to articulate, but these never break with the core beliefs, they stem from them. And just because core beliefs are no longer emphasised does not mean they are not present; indeed, they are ever-present as a foundational guide.

Both Hague (with *Renewing One Nation*, see below) and Howard (with the *I believe* speech, see below) attempted to add new ideas to their core beliefs but retreated because of lack of positive feedback. Cameron succeeded; but not because he abandoned core beliefs, but because he had a successful strategy to add to them, had an environment that gave positive feedback to this adding, and had an institution to support him in this adding by providing policy content. For Cameron still holds the central path dependent views of his predecessors. Cameron is an old-school man in his founding beliefs; as Stephen Dorell (2011) said to me: 'What Cameron believes—I have an advantage over most in that I've known Cameron virtually since the early days after he was a student [in the late 1980s early 90s at the Conservative Research Department]: and he's expressed broadly speaking the same views ever since. I'm not saying his views don't change, but his set of values were formed early on and are authentically expressed.' One can assume that Cameron was not proclaiming any particularly radical views back at

CRD in the late 1980s. The fact is that Cameron no longer *needed* to emphasize his fundamental and recognizably Conservative views by the time he became leader: firstly, because some of them (notably Europe) had largely gone away as salient issues; and secondly because the Party could now win votes in areas which had previously been undiscovered or unapproachable.

What I would add to Green's clear analysis is a concomitant institutional component: the ability of an actor to add new policy emphasis to core beliefs is *not only* dictated by a reading of the electoral environment; it is also dictated by the ideas the actor has to work with in the moment, ideas which have been generated over time by the institution and with which the institution has become more or less comfortable. But this takes time, for certain institutional work needs to have already been done for the new ideas to emerge, be accepted as non-threatening, and then succeed in the wider environment. One of our main tasks here is to track how this takes place, *even when* path dependency remains in place and there has been no critical-juncture.

But first, some more evidence to demonstrate that ideological change was rejected by the party. In a moment of institutional "crisis" we are liable to see strong senior ideological entrepreneurs appear; we are liable to see strong new ideas come from *outside* the institution; ideas that are alien to the history of the institution; we are liable to see a period of conflict as vested interests and inertia are defeated and the institution is wrenched in a new direction that ensures its future existence by more closely relating its practices to the new exigencies of the wider environment. And we are likely to see concomitant significant material changes that cement the power of the new actors.

Indeed, HI has often described, and been best placed to explain, *this type* of institutional change (often placing this radical change in a punctuating fashion along a linear period of inertia). Yet none of this was seen in the Tory Party in the post-1997 opposition period.

5.3. Radical change shut out: expunging ideological entrepreneurs

My intention in this section is to show that throughout the opposition period no radical change occurred in the Party; and to explain why this is wholly to be expected. In particular, I examine the actions of Ken Clarke, Michael Portillo, and to a lesser extent Peter Lilley, and explain that they failed to enact change because they tried too much (rather than trying too soon) and each in turn threatened the core of the ideological path dependency. Each of these actors touched upon different core beliefs: Ken Clarke with Europe; Portillo with homosexuality; and Lilley with the size of the state. Each of these actors was expunged on these issues. But the perceived threat to each of these issues went away with time during opposition: the reason for this was not radical change in core beliefs, but a series of reframing or neutralising ideas: it is different for each issue and they need to be looked at one by one. It can be noted now, however, that crucially it was only once each of these core ideologically issues went away as “issues under threat” that other, less radical, changes could march ahead under a banner of amity. Furthermore, each of these three actors was somewhat too prominent at the moment they made their calls for change. This is an advantage in moments of ideological crisis which precipitate radical change; but when there is no ideological crisis, changes, even less radical ones, suggested by prominent individuals can appear overwhelming and are viewed with cynicism. The prominent actor is thought to be pursuing personal objectives, and to be prepared to sacrifice the sacred cows of the institution on the altar of ambition. As a result, institutional resistance intensifies and mid- and low-level actors label this rogue entrepreneur as disruptive of norms and practices. Consequently, the individual, and their relatively small coterie of elite supporters, are quickly shut

down, their efforts at transformation inoculated against—often to such an extent that the ideological path dependency is left even stronger than when they began their campaign for change. As, for example, David Willetts said of the Lilley shut-out: “‘It raised the “no entry” sign over various party taboos, and it made it much harder to make changes to policy.’” (Quoted in Snowdon 2010: 61).

Divisions over Europe

Crowson outlines the highly active debate around Europe, and European Monetary Union in particular (now better known as the Euro), under Hague. ‘The internal disciplining of Party members,’ writes Crowson (2007: 66–67), ‘which culminated in the expulsions of Julian Critchley and Tim Rathbone for backing Pro-European Conservative candidates...further highlighted internal feuding...The Conservatives were still perceived as a divided party.’ Yet, this volatility almost wholly disappeared after Hague, with relative quietude during the leaderships of IDS, Howard and Cameron.

Barwell (2011) remembers that in the 2001 leadership election ‘there was no real understanding of who IDS was, just that IDS was not Ken Clarke...and that’s down to one word: Europe.’ Indeed, Ken Clarke’s support of further European integration marked him out as a potentially radical threat at a moment when the Party was looking for reassurance. In 1999, for example, Clarke shared a dais with Blair in the launch of the Britain in Europe Campaign: an unconscionable rapprochement at a time of institutional uncertainty (see Tran 1999). But the defeat of Ken Clarke in the leadership election of 2001 did much to quieten the issue of Europe (see Alderman and Carter

2002), so that ‘the Tory Party,’ as Charles Barwell continued, ‘is now mostly settled on Europe.’ The removal of Europe as an issue is down to several reasons, none of which need be credited to Cameron. Rather, Cameron has merely benefited from its removal and been able to capitalise on the attendant cohesiveness, relatively speaking, that the extinguishing of the issue has produced—a cohesiveness which has allowed him to focus on other “modernising” issues such as social justice policy. Firstly, UKIP acted to bleed away single issue supporters and splitters from the party; the reduction of MPs post-1997 meant that the number of pro-Europe MPs reduced in ratio, for they were the MPs that tended to have smaller majorities; that the public perception of European monetary union, especially after the 2008 crash, has meant that all parties have distanced themselves from pro-European statements—and certainly joining the Euro is no longer a politically relevant issue, as it was quixotically made to appear in 2001 with Hague’s “save-the-pound” campaign. But Cameron has not moved away from the issue, or ideologically wrenched his party in a different direction (as evidence by his realigning to the right of the party’s European parliamentary grouping); the issue merely faded away due to a number of easily explicable institutional circumstances, and one massive contingent circumstance (the crash). Cameron could only have been successful in dampening emphasis on Europe for tactical purposes because the institution no longer perceived it as being under ideological threat. The *less* it is mentioned the more ideologically sound and uncontested it has become. As W. Richard Scott (1991: 181) writes, reflecting on the impact of lesser-mentioned ideational structures: ‘when beliefs are widely shared and categories and procedures taken for granted, it is less essential that they be formally encoded...’ Indeed, it is quite superficial to think that a Tory Party

that no longer mentions Europe as much is *ideologically* different from the institution ten years ago that did.

Divisions over gay rights

Of Michael Portillo, the second elite actor who challenged the path dependency in the early 2000s, Peter Franklin (2006) wrote on ConservativeHome: ‘David Cameron, unlike Michael Portillo, doesn’t want to dump core Conservative principles. Like any good and-theorist he believes that we need to *complete* our Conservatism, and thus broaden its appeal, by embracing issues such as environmentalism, social justice and civil liberties.’ It is moot whether this is a fair characterisation; but it is certainly the case that Portillo was *perceived* in this way, as wanting to dump rather than expand on principles. Cowley and Stuart (2005), for example, in their distribution of Conservative MPs from socially liberal to socially conservative (which they mark, based on voting record, from –3 to +3, respectively), score Portillo a somewhat centrist –1. Whereas Ken Clarke scores –3. And yet, issues of social progressiveness were more readily ascribed to the former; even though Portillo was on the backbench during much of this period, and therefore free from the restraints of front bench loyalty. The *perception* of Portillo as a threat to core values is mixed up with issues of homosexual equality and with Portillo having mentioned that he had homosexual experiences as a young man (see, for example, articles in *The Economist* 1999; and *The Independent*, Sylvester 1999, for how a link was constructed between Portillo’s change of attitude to policy and his sexual identity).

The issue of homosexual equality was most active in the early 2000s but would gradually dissipate, to a relevant (but not total) degree, by the Cameron period. Hague, as leader, enforced a line of resisting the progress of gay rights. As Hayton (2010: 495) observes, ‘liberal-minded Conservatism, even if it reflected Hague’s own personal preferences, was short-lived. The most obvious reason for this is that it did not reflect the opinion of the majority of Conservative MPs.’ Hayton notes that only three Tory MPs voted to lower the age of consent for gay sex to sixteen in 1998; and that Hague imposed a three-line whip against the Labour government’s first attempt to repeal section 28 in 2000. Hague’s actions seem to suggest that a high-degree of institutional restraint was being placed on him regarding this issue, significantly limiting leadership agency—despite the fact that, as Hayton (2010: 493) remarks, ‘electoral necessity demanded that Conservatives recognised the changing society in which they had to operate.’ The support this observation gives for institutional theory is clear, though Hayton leaves it implied.

Tactically, Howard allowed for free votes on the issues of civil partnerships. ‘At times,’ write Cowley and Stuart (2004: 1), ‘the debate took place almost entirely between the Conservative Parliamentary Party.’ On a third reading, 43 voted for, 39 against, with 30 abstentions. But really, it was the Labour Party that advanced the issue; it was Labour’s progressive move, with the Tories only reacting. And when Labour succeeded in passing gay rights legislation, each step removed the issue from the volatility of Tory in-fighting. As Alan Duncan (Tweedie 2008) said in a *Times* profile: ‘All credit to Tony Blair for his legislation. I think it was probably his greatest achievement, actually.’ Indeed, Cameron has not faced a symbolic legislative test on the issue. Which is a pity: as such observations do much to support a criticism of the

prevailing idea that Cameron later made a great agential gesture in favour of gay rights: there is no reason to suppose he would have done so if the institutional situation had not been in his favour. For conflict around sexuality and family issues had largely been resolved by Cameron's time, freeing him up to make a "bold" and wholly unrisky declaration in favour of gay equality. Hayton (2010: 498) remarks that Cameron, for example, 'made clear that any tax break for married couples would also apply equally to people in civil partnerships,'—though Hayton does not make the point that this would have been by then, of course, a legal obligation, not a party political choice. Hayton also overplays somewhat that being against gay rights in the Tory Party was somehow *more* Thatcherite, and creates a false dichotomy of modernisers and traditionalists based on this single issue. As a *Telegraph* (Tweedie 2008) profile on Duncan had it: 'In winning stalwarts over it probably helped that Duncan was a Eurosceptic, economically dry and a man of traditional manners.' Indeed, many of the supporters of progressiveness were Thatcherites; and many of those opposed were highly critical of the social consequences of Thatcherite policy.

This is important to note when correctly tracking how incremental change in the Party played out. The objection to homosexual equality legislation had its origins more in a revanchist Christianity than some clear legacy of Thatcherism (this is further explored in §5.5.). The organisation and tone of the objection was in many ways something quite new, a product of a politically engaged Christianity that had begun developing networks over the previous decade. This can be seen by again looking at Cowley and Stuart's (2005) distribution of Conservative MPs: in the +3 most socially conservative column we have the seven former members of the reactionary and *uber*-Thatcherite Monday Club: Andrew Rosindell, Gerald Howarth, Teddy Taylor, Angela

Watkinson, David Wilshire, Anne Winterton, and Nicolas Winterton—upholding the argument that resistance came from traditionalists. However, we also have seven members of the Conservative Christian Fellowship (CCF): Andrew Selous (Director of CCF and later Iain Duncan Smith’s PPS [IDS scores a +2]), Alistair Burt, Ann Widemcombe, Gary Streeter (CCF Director), Edward Leigh, Julian Brazier (CCF patron), and Desmond Swayne (CCF patron)—many of whom were far from Thatcherite neo-liberals, and were concomitantly arguing for an increased emphasis on social justice issues. And, more importantly, whereas the erstwhile members of the Monday Club were all soon to shuffle off or wade away, the CCF members were actively involved, as we will come to see, in a new generation of policy formation.

In part the difficulty in correctly labelling the motivations and character of each side of the gay rights issue in the Party stems from the unclear and contested interpretation of the legacy of Thatcherism—which contained elements of economic liberalism and social illiberalism. This is due to an inherent quality in all ideologies: they are often fissured with contradiction, as they emerge out of a plurality of inherited positions. Ideological path dependencies do not need to be inert and theoretically sound to succeed; often they succeed through near domination, stemming from partial coherence, and partial swallowing up of older beliefs. The very incompleteness of their intellectual project, however, provides the contested space where contradictions are argued over, control of interpretation is negotiated, and incremental change is created. Ideologies must be *largely* agreed upon in order to create a path dependency. But a *wholly* agreed upon path dependency would not create any movement, would not produce any new policy emphasis: like the oyster with no grit inside its shell, there would be no traction.

And this is understandable: institutions contain internal tensions because the human mind contains internal tensions. Given bounded rationality, at moments of institutional uncertainty we should expect to see difficulty in actors' abilities to organise a singularly effective response. Agency then appears along this very fault line of competing actor interests informed by bounded rationality: one only has choice, so to speak, when one is *unsure* as to what choice to make. What gives institutions a causal role is that they act to arrange multiple agent behaviour, through moments of uncertainty, in a particularly effective (if slow) manner, using logics of appropriateness. As a consequence, in this institutional space of disagreement, in moments of uncertainty not crisis, we see different groups pushing only for *incremental change* based, firstly, on different interpretations of the path dependency; but also due to a number of other mechanisms which are explored in the next section.

So this was the background against which Michael Portillo's agenda of modernisation was set—an agenda when coupled with issues around homosexuality made it difficult for it to succeed. Portillo's rejection of the Thatcherite legacy—she was reportedly 'bewildered' by his change (Walters 2001: 176)—freed him to interpret the election as a contingent event that should mark a critical-juncture in the Party's history (see, for example, Portillo 1997, where he defended gay rights and the needs of lone parents; or 1999, where he defended public services). But this reading significantly differed from the prevailing interpretation within the Party. As Stephen Sherbourne (2011) reflected to me: 'people who began to talk about modernisation, like Portillo, led people to say: what's he on about, where's he taking us? I don't think Michael Portillo quite knew what he was talking about.'

The Portillo faction recognised the need for significant reform and yet were unable to effect more than brief and moderate change (see, for an assessment of Portillo's attempts to impact the Party, Alderman and Carter 2002; Heppell and Hill 2010). It is argued here that the splitting of the vote between Clarke and Portillo in 2001 limited change at this point; this is an example of material electoral structures facilitating resistance. But, I argue, ideationally the institution would have proved equally resistant to change had one or the other being elected). This was in part due to the resilience of the ideational path dependency. However, it was also due to the sequence of events immediately after the election; and the faction's lack of material resources to influence the Party, such as a control over funds; patronage of decision-making bodies; and imprimatur on policy documents. Portillo did not return to the House of Commons until November 1999 by which time Hague's organisational restructuring and policy review were complete. The moment of the leadership election immediately after the defeat, when Portillo's ability to re-direct the Party would have been at its highest, was lost. Hence, we see the importance of initial developments in directing the possibility of a contingent moment precipitating a new path dependency; and that *material* and *ideational* factors are key in the instigating of change. After the Kensington and Chelsea by-election, Hague appointed Portillo to the Shadow Chancellery, thus keeping him away from the issues—such as health and education—upon which he most wished to express reformist opinions (Walters 2001: 14). Although Portillo was able to influence policy—notably, he secured the renunciation of Hague's no tax increase guarantee (Dorey 2003: 129)—his advice was increasingly rejected. Portillo did have the option of resignation—and he and Francis Maude threatened to do so seven times (Walters 2001: 35)—but such a move would have been shooting himself in the foot for a new pair of

shoes. And so his position tied him, for the immediate period, to Hague and the Shadow Cabinet.

Around the material structures of the institution the Portillo faction was weak: they had little influence over the funding of the Party, a key resource for influence over policy. As Kelly (2003a: 92–93) writes, after 1997, Party fund-raising became ‘even more synonymous with a handful of wealthy contributors.’ The businessman and Hague supporter ‘Michael Ashcroft was appointed Treasurer in 1998, largely because his own donations had ‘kept the party going’...to the tune of over £1 million a year’. Consequently, the financing of the Party was linked to the retention of largely Thatcherite ideas and made alternatives, at the very least, financially unappealing. Portillo’s failed attempt to enact reform left it open for the Hague leadership to formulate policies that did not notably differ from past practice. Throughout the period the Party emphasised—or constructed—the problem of economic migration, terming such immigrants ‘bogus asylum seekers’ and stating that the Conservative Party would reduce their number (see Collings and Seldon 2001). They also produced policies that would reduce the amount of people claiming welfare benefits, particularly those who were “fit to work”; and promised a Draconian approach towards the possession of any illegal drugs (see Conservative Party 2001). These policies represented a Party which, rather than changing, had become further entrenched in its Thatcherite past.

Lilley moves too much not too soon

Peter Lilley’s notable moment came when he gave the R. A. Butler Memorial Lecture at the Carlton Club in April 1999. In the lecture he questioned the Tory reputation on

public services, noted that they were perceived as wanting to sell-off the NHS to the private sector, and that any policy commitment to reforming public services had to be preceded by a clear commitment to the value of those public services. ‘Conservatives today must renew public confidence in our commitment to the Welfare State,’ spoke Lilley (1999), ‘...But we will only do so if we openly and emphatically accept that the free market has only a limited role in improving public services like health, education and welfare.’ The lecture was roundly condemned from within the Party as an unnecessary repudiation of Thatcherism; as an un-conservative embracing of the size of the state; and at a time when Labour were advocating public-private partnerships, outside of the general political consensus. Then Shadow Foreign Secretary, Michael Howard, thought it ‘dangerous’; though Lilley received support from the modernising Shadow Chancellor Francis Maude, who thought all should ‘calm down’ (Snowdon 2010: 60) and who soon after made a commitment to match the increases in education and health spending made by Labour.

Lilley suffered for his apostasy because he was operating from within the leadership and had no hinterland from which to gain support. His motivation for the speech *had* come from his involvement in the grassroots *Listening to Britain* exercises (which we examine in §5.5.)—but the network of people involved in that project was not yet powerful enough to constitute a significant institutional force. Notably, however, it is wrong to label Lilley as a singular moderniser. Close to Anne Widdecombe, he is often seen as on the right of the Party, and scores a socially conservative +3 on Cowely and Stuart’s (2005) scale. Where Lilley went wrong was that he was not acting out of his own and the Party’s Tory instincts but out of electoral panic. He had yet to find a language that could stay within the Thatcherite path dependency, and do the sort of

ameliorative work that could gain votes, inspire the Party and allow them to move towards, if not an embracing of public services, an embracing of the social justice and community cohesion objectives that those on the left aim for public services to provide. In this respect, we see that institutions can make better choices than individuals; if by *better* we mean that which are palatable to the institution. Lilley correctly identified the need for the Party to embrace concerns that were more than economic. But in his agential move, he moved too far, and touched the live wire of the size of the state. His objective was potentially effective, but the tools were outside of the path dependency. However, as we will see, with time, lower level entrepreneurs, filtered through the institution, and staying, therefore, comfortably with the path dependency, were able to formulate a more successful set of policies. When we understand it in these terms, we can reject the argument that the Party was merely *not ready* for what Lilley had to say—and the follow on argument that it *was* ready by the time of Cameron, and had therefore *fundamentally* changed by the time of Cameron. Rather, what Lilley attempted was a radical, agential and elite inspired move for radical change, when what was necessary, and what we will see happened with time, was an incremental, institutional, and mid-level inspired move for change which can then be *managed* by elite actors.

Therefore, having seen how the Party rejected radical change advocated by elite actors during the years immediately following defeat, we can now outline what change did take place. This change was incremental, stayed within (and was facilitated by) path dependency, and emerged from mid-level actors.

5.4. *Incremental* change can take place: the role of path tendency

What is required is some development of the theoretical tools of historical intuitionism to better enable us to explain *incremental* change within institutions which are *not* in a post-critical-juncture environment. As Harty (2005: 61) writes on the growing theoretical relevance of incremental change as an explanation for the survival of institutions through adaptation: ‘Incremental change is similarly believed to be motivated by the need to reduce the uncertainty connected with existing institutions. However, this type of change is more likely to be a form of institutional adaptation because institutions are reformed or revised in response to an environmental factor rather than substituted with new institutions.’ (We should note that here a new institution with regard to the Tory Party would constitute a new *ideational* institution, that is to say a new ideology, rather than the more literal change of the material institution into something other.) What we see with the Tories is a high degree of *uncertainty* in the late 1990s after the environmental shock of an electoral defeat, and a concern that the institution is no longer fulfilling the interests of its actors. Uncertainty is mitigated, but also confused, by the concomitant feedback of ideological continuity with the electoral environment. This uncertainty and confusion cannot be resolved in a radical manner, therefore. Alternatively, the institution falls back on established beliefs and practices and examines how these can be adapted to enable change.

How this happens requires further examination of the process of incremental change within the institution of the Tory Party. Consequently, we must further nuance two key

theoretical ideas: path dependency and ideological entrepreneurialism. Firstly, we can introduce the mechanism of what I have labelled “path tendency” within path dependency. Path tendencies can be formed from differing sources: firstly, from residual path dependencies that have adapted to survive under the new path dependency by taking on its central ideological framework, and then undergo a mutated re-emergence at a time of uncertainty, such as the contemporary iteration of One Nationism. As Pierson (2004: 135) rightly observes: ‘previous “losers” are often a catalyst for institutional change’. This is because they have fewer sunken costs in the status quo, be these material or ideational investments—yet they have often remained in the institution under the new order and watched it, if not fail, become unstable. But we should note that these “past losers” have not existed outside the institution in splendid isolation since the delegitimisation of their position; rather their interests have been partially changed in the intervening years. They will not play the “game” (to borrow the evocative rational choice word, but not its epistemology) of institutional negotiation in the same way: because they have learnt from past failure; because the electoral environment is irrevocably changed since the last game; and because they have inevitably altered their beliefs having operated under the new path dependency for many years—and ultimately exapted to survive (a term which is much more amenable to explaining the action of *path tendencies* within non-radical incremental change, than being associated with radical movement between path dependencies). Exaptation occurs because the environment, through institutional actors interpreting that environment, seeks elements of residual path tendencies that can be used to enact incremental change, and discards others. So, we see that the process of change is begun by instrumental

actors (namely policy entrepreneurs) but they select ideas that are residually available internally in the institution: then use them in a new way.

Political parties are more accommodating of dissenting factions than other forms of institutions because dissident members can find support away from the leadership. This existence of an old latent or new emergent path-tendency, however, does not undermine the general conception within HI that ‘past options are no longer viable alternatives’ once a critical-juncture has been passed (Mahoney 2000: 516). For though an ideological path dependency may be superseded at a critical-juncture, this does not mean that it fades completely; rather, it may partly rise to prominence again at a future moment of institutional reflection. This is because the path dependency remains as a residual idea, a path tendency, in the thinking of certain actors, even if this idea is subordinated to more immediate interests—such as promotion and the acquisition of power—in the intervening period. The residual path dependency, however, should not be understood as being identical to that left behind at the critical-juncture: the contemporary Tory modernisers have some ideological antecedence in One Nationism, but they are also notably more progressive and neo-liberal than their forebears—that is to say, they seek market and third sector solutions, rather than state intervention, to progressive concerns. In this sense, it is not possible to implement path-reversal and undo previous decisions; what is possible is to form a new path tendency that is influenced by both the present dominant path (Thatcherite neo-liberalism) and a residual path (One Nationism).

Indeed, this characteristic of path tendencies is most explicit in British political parties. The first-past-the-post-electoral system in the UK creates large umbrella parties and limits the possibility of factions breaking away to form new parties that are able to

have a significant impact on the political environment. Consequently, the system permits the on-going existence of intra-party factions or tendencies despite the contrary interests of the leadership (Webb 2000: 174). Within this system, a dissenting actor can remain an active member in a party institution for a considerably longer period than would be the case within a non-party institution; though this dissent must still remain within certain ideological restraints. When the dissenting actor is at the leadership level then his or her motivation—as was the case with Portillo, for example—can be understood through notions of power maximisation. However, as Webb (2000: 175) writes, ‘while internal party groups in Britain may be self-interested to some extent, ideological motivations are central.’ (Though for ideology here I would read “policy emphasis”).

Therefore, any account of change within overall continuity in the Party since 1997 must map these emergent and residual ideas. By this we are able to explain how changes in social justice policy content, attitude and presentation can be enacted without an ideological rupture in the Party. What we see is that a policy entrepreneur often is not able to—or wanting to—perform an ideological shift but what they can do is find a way of introducing new ideas (often from the source of a residual path dependency, which re-emerges as a more benign path tendency) in a way that is productive of some degree of change but which is not anathema to the overall ideology of the institution, especially if the new ideas are framed in a certain way that is simultaneously progressive and orthodox.

Secondly, path tendencies can be formed from the beliefs of an outside institution that have partially harmonised into the institution under study, such as we will come to see with the Conservative Party and contemporary Christian groups; finally, it can be

the result of actors consciously trying to find new, under-explored, areas that are amenable to the path dependency, utilising the tools of layering, mimicry and neutral invasion, such as we will see with the work of Policy Exchange and those labelled as the *uber*-modernisers.

Path tendency works in the same manner as path dependency but it is weaker—it is not as resistant to environmental rejection as path dependency, is more liable to fail early on in its exploration of new policy, but is similarly more successful if it establishes itself because it is non-threatening to the overall ideology. That is to say, it is highly prone to positive feedback loops, and repetition by actors due to a logic of appropriateness regarding beliefs and preferences once it is seen to be succeeding. However, because path tendencies are based around policy emphasis and not ideology (and we have previously shown how these differ) they are more amenable to other competing path tendencies in the institution. Differing tendencies must be ideologically compatible; therefore, we do not see any radical confrontation: but we do see differing areas of policy emphasis—both in regard to subject and content—depending on the histories of tendencies. The compatibility, in a broad sense, of competing tendencies within an institution is shaped by the overarching path dependency—which ensures that disparate groups within the institution, often operating with weak material contact with each other, can ideologically cohere at a given point in the stages of incremental change by subconsciously moving in a broadly similar direction having followed a logic of appropriateness and the repeating of ideological norms in the way they view the world.

The coherence of differing path tendencies can be made manifest if suitably guided by certain pliant actors—in our case, most notably, though not exclusively, David Cameron. What we see, therefore, is a clear causal role for institutions, which act above

and beyond the specific intentions or foresight of individual actors or even groups of actors. This leads us to an exciting theoretical breakthrough for historical institutionalism: that path dependency *enables* change, albeit incremental change. This insight overthrows the established criticism that HI is only capable of explaining inertia and stability. Path dependency *enables change* because it acts as an organising principle, meaning that change does not need to be guided by continual fiat at the elite level, but rather can operate in varying areas of the institution, especially at the mid-level, and somewhat disparately—but it will nonetheless stay within non-radical and permitted guidelines.

We will now go on to give empirical content to these theoretical mechanisms and examine how policy entrepreneurs worked within specific path tendencies to enact incremental change around social justice policy.

5.5. The path tendency of small “c” Christianity

Christianity has always been an implicit part of much Conservative Party practice; but it has only been in recent decades that religious belief, and in particular a Christian belief, has become a factor in the making of party policy. This is not to say that it has become dominant; rather, that its prominence has increased—in particular its organising function across disparate elements of the institution. The touchstone organisation for this rise is the Conservative Christian Fellowship (the CCF), formed in December 1990 (CCF 2000) by two ambitious students at Exeter University, Tim Montgomerie (who went on, as we will follow, to be IDS’s chief-of-staff) and David Burrowes (now chairman of the CCF, an MP, former PPS to Francis Maude and present PPS to Oliver Letwin). Gary Streeter⁸ (2011) spoke to me of how the emergence of the CCF was something quite new at the time: ‘It was a combination of people wishing to express their Christian faith in a political arena,’ he reflected, ‘in a way that hadn’t been done for 200 years, working it out as we were going; and 20 years ago people were saying: how could you possibly be a Christian and involved in politics, it doesn’t quite fit. Now there is a much better understanding of faith and the public sphere.’

Crucially, the CCF did not begin as a political organisation operating within the Party to further a policy agenda. For most of the 1990s, as it gained relative popularity

⁸ Gary Streeter MP for Plymouth Sutton 1992–1997 and South West Devon 1997–present; Shadow Secretary of State for International Development 1998–2001; Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party 2001–2002; Chairman of All Party Parliamentary Group Christians in Parliament 2010–present; and former Chairman of the CCF.

within the parliamentary party and the party at large, it went largely unnoticed by the leadership: seen as a somewhat inert extra-parliamentary concern. As Guy Hordern⁹ (2011) commented to me: ‘The CCF up to then [1997] had really existed for the encouragement of Christians within the party; it was more to do really with meeting together to pray, to share the faith. It was less focused on policy and ideas, and more focused on encouraging fellowship between Christians.’ By the late 1990s, however, with the Party in opposition, the CCF, under the influential leadership of Tim Montgomerie, began to become more active in the arena of policy debate.

In this respect, we can label these actors as *policy entrepreneurs*, as opposed to the more threatening ideological entrepreneurs examined in the previous section. Policy entrepreneurs operate within path dependencies rather than challenging them from without. Their goal is to further different policy emphases, creating new path tendencies. The motivations and means for such a move will be unpicked as we continue.

Listening to Britain’s Churches

The project known as *Listening to Britain’s Churches*, said Hordern (2011), ‘took [the CCF] in a new direction.’ This was the initiative that the CCF linked to Hague’s and Peter Lilley’s more highly publicised *Listening to Britain* policy research exercise; but over the coming years it would be the smaller of the two endeavours, unbeknown to the

⁹ Guy Hordern MBE is an influential grassroots figure in the Party who has had repeated access to the leadership. He is a former councillor and director of Renewing One Nation; and a current Trustee of the CCF.

actors involved at the time, that would prove to be the more influential. As Peter Franklin¹⁰ (2011) said to me: ‘in the event that [Listening to Britain’s Churches] turned out to be a rather better, rather more substantial piece of work than the main consultation.’

Tim Bale (2010: 83) writes of the *Listening to Britain* research exercise that: ‘[Pollster] ICM’s private research likewise suggested that...[it] had “made absolutely no impact whatsoever” and was rapidly running out of steam”.’ This observation is certainly true; but to evidence it, as Bale does, as the salient take-away of the exercise, even a decade later, is a classic example of the prejudicing of events over processes, of the immediate impact of an act (in the manner of the journalist reporting for a deadline) over the long term impact of subterranean movements of an institution. The *Listening* exercises, and most notably the sub-exercise of *Listening to Britain’s Churches* (on which Bale (2010) has little to say, perhaps because it was not much of a media event), had a significant impact on the Party as an institution and was to prove with time, and largely hidden from general sight, to be the generator of plethoric steam: for it taught mid- and low-level operators in the Party about organisation, about forming policy ideas from without the Party hierarchy, or partially without—and crucially it taught that small “c” Christianity could be an organising factor, ideologically but also materially; that is to say, connections were made—the exercise looked at over a hundred charities (Horder 2011)—people were introduced to others who were of a like-mind on a more

¹⁰ Peter Franklin is a CCF member; former member of Renewing One Nation; member of 2004 Howard Policy Unit; and since 2005 an advisor to Greg Clark MP Minister of State for Decentralisation and Planning Policy. With Greg Clark he worked on the Economic Failure and Welfare Dependency Working Group for the CSJ’s Social Justice Policy Review.

socially orientated Conservatism; and networks began to emerge: networks that could not have emerged if directly administered by the leadership. As Hordern (2011) remarked, ‘many of the people we went to see [for *Listening to Britain’s Churches*], I knew them, because I had built up that knowledge over many years’. There was here a font of untapped social capital possessed by a number of CCF members; but the exercise released this individual agency—despite being relatively low down in the institution—to generate policy and research, and to a quality of greater breadth, imagination and difference, then the leadership had achieved.

By the end of the 1990s, there was emerging within the CCF a sense of a particularly Christian approach to policy that was increasingly at odds with the status quo. If one examines the pamphlet output of the CCF, or their quarterly magazine *Conservatism*, one sees a growing interest in specific policy recommendations in both editorials and articles, and an increased attempt to influence the terms of debate during this moment of institutional uncertainty (see, for example, Burkinshaw (ed) 1999; 2000). ‘Partly it was about wanting to bring an edge of compassion into the Conservative Party,’ says Gary Streeter (2011). ‘The 80s were very much about pounds, shillings and pence: it was possibly a little harsh.’ We see, for example, that in the first interim report of the CCF’s *Listening to Britain’s Churches* consultation (CCF 1998: 3), the recommendation is made that ‘special help should be given to churches and other community-based initiatives that are either preventing or healing the effects of family tension’. The emphasis here is put on the need to restore local peculiarity and loyalty to local institutions (CCF 1998: 13); and ‘how local, voluntary compassion...can be strengthened and developed’ (CCF 1998: 21), in particular, when working with lower

income groups. In a further report from the exercise, the CCF (2000: 4) list ‘The ten principles of compassionate communities: 1. The existing social safety-net must be protected. 2. We must rise to the challenge of helping those that welfare is failing...10. Public policy must protect beneficiaries’ rights to a choice of welfare models but soft alternatives should be avoided in order to protect the independent sector’s efforts to rebuild sustainable behaviour.’ These principles, and the report as a whole, would not have looked out of place in the Party’s 2010 manifesto: but at the time they presented a new area of policy emphasis which began to be mooted around mid-level policy entrepreneurs.

However, it is important here to also note that modernising changes in policy emphasis, moving towards a more beneficent Conservatism, were not the whole story of the CCF at the time. Notably, in regard to Labour’s plan to give age-of-consent parity to gay and straight sex, an anonymous (CCF 1998: 9) editorial in the *Wilberforce Review*, the Fellowship’s in-house monthly magazine, launched in 1992, calmly notes that: ‘it is worth remembering...American research suggests that paedophilia is three times more common amongst homosexuals¹¹ [and] in the year to June 1997, 871 men died of AIDS in the UK because of homosexual intercourse.’ One of the publicity successes of the Tory Party has been that this type of homophobia almost wholly disappeared from Conservative public discourse during the 2000s. The presence of this possibly contradictory modernising preference (pro-social justice, anti-gay) demonstrates that a purely rationalist and agential explanation of change is insufficient. We see here that

¹¹ I could not check the verity of this statistic as no reference is given.

ideas are not being generated purely from reading the electoral environment and presenting a “modernising” progressive set of policies in response. Rather the source of change, with regard to this path tendency, emerges from ideas generated in a contiguous institution, which neutrally invade the party institution in order to resolve uncertainty with a new set of policy emphases. However, these new ideas, coming from another institution, are not necessarily initially utility maximising without the aid of an institutional entrepreneur who can make the new ideas more broadly fit with the goals of the party. I will bring out more the actions for this as I examine later how the various change-focused groups in the Party, alongside the CCF, began to emerge and interact with each other.

The CCF under Hague

Under Hague, the CCF were, geographically at least, at the centre of Party power—Tim Montgomerie and Guy Hordern had a desk at Conservative Central Office, Smith Square (Hordern 2011), as directors of the *Renewing One Nation* team, launched in October 2000, which grew-out of the *Listening* exercises and continued to advocate many of the same ideas (see *Renewing One Nation* 2000; 2001). Notably, the team was initially funded by Lord Kalms outside of the Party’s usual funding channels; and so they had a degree of autonomy from the need to produce immediate media ready sound-bites and policy lines, and were able to begin to think more broadly (Franklin 2011). They had some influence under Hague, especially around family policy: a number of policy ideas appeared in the 2001 manifesto that were in keeping with CCF priorities around families, such as upwards of a £1000 married couple’s tax allowance and

increasing tax credits for those with a child under five years of age (see Conservative Party 2001). But ultimately their research and proposals, especially around localism, volunteering, and charities, did not become a central part of policy emphasis, and did not feature prominently in the 2001 manifesto. Nick Hillman (2011) talks of ‘a big row about what the 2001 manifesto should look like. There was a big William Hague speech [in 1999]: *Come with me and I’ll give you back your country*; so there was a discussion about how much it should be based on *that line* of argument...Certainly,’ Hillman continued, ‘Tim Montgomerie had done a lot of good work by 2001: but it hadn’t seeped upwards...There was a conflict with the sort of views taken by the old more Thatcherite think-tanks, the Centre for Policy Studies, the IEA, the Adam Smith Institute, who were still quite influential, more influential than they are now: during the William Hague period they were still listened to.’

But the importance here is not the immediate influence of Montgomerie *et al.* on the Party leadership; it is their long-term influence on both the party leadership and the party membership—by this point they had gained an incremental material and ideational foothold within the institution: and this is by far the most important factor. However, because they did not impact the Party at an elite media level, but rather initiated long term mid-level processes, their importance has been downplayed (see, for example Bale 2010; Dorey 2011, who argue that little modernising of social justice policy began under Hague). We can see here, however, that a sense of change being enacted institutionally, and not just by high profile personalities, sensitises the analysts to look for evidence of the source of later transformations within small incremental moves. We see here, with the emergence into policy influence of the CCF, or rather particular policy entrepreneurs involved with the CCF, how the strengthening mechanisms of path

tendencies work in a similar manner to path dependencies, but because they are based in policy emphasis and not ideology, they are of course weaker and less intractable. We see that the path tendency is strengthened by early agential decisions (the decision to join the *Listening* exercise); by positive feedback (a desk at CCO is assigned); and by sequencing (association with the leadership is bright but they do not burn too early and therefore become extinguished too soon); that material funding and networks are crucial; but so too is an ideational source which is new (Christianity) but not threatening to the neo-liberal path dependency.

The CCF and Renewing One Nation transitions to Iain Duncan Smith

After the 2001 election these CCF mid-level players remained when other more senior backroom figures exited (though Nick Wood, notably, stayed as press officer under IDS). The Renewing One Nation team kept their desk at CCO and were ready to advise the new leader Iain Duncan Smith. It had survived largely because of its lack of *prominent* impact under Hague. Rather, its presence crossed over the change in leadership and provided an institutional continuity that was of greater importance than the somewhat constructed separation of eras that different leaderships might suggest. In an institution, especially at the mid-level, the clock is rarely reset when a new leadership arrives. This is especially so with political parties where actors are less replaceable than with other institutions. In many ways, and somewhat unintended at the time, one of Hague's significant contributions to change in the Party was the approving of the setting up of this small research group, a policy off-shoot, in all but name, of the CCF. As Peter Franklin (2011) said to me: 'It [Renewing One Nation] is quite a foundational body, it

was an incubator for lots of what would later come out of the CSJ [Centre for Social Justice].’ And it was the Centre for Social Justice that would prove to be the most enduring achievement of this low-key movement that started in the late 1990s.

But first IDS had to take a famous journey: to the Easterhouse estate in Glasgow, in January of 2002. As a consequence of this visit, ‘Helping the Vulnerable’ became the title of the Party spring forum in March. As Duncan Smith (2003), a devout catholic, said in his speech at the forum in Harrogate: ‘Our agenda is so vital for people in vulnerable communities like Easterhouse, Glasgow. I will never forget my visits to them.’ The authenticity of IDS’s Easterhouse conversion has remained moot—Bale (2010: 154) writes that ‘some in the Party found it hard...to believe that Duncan Smith’s damascene discovery of poverty...was anything but opportunistic’. However, we do not need to understand the event in primarily instrumental terms; and we should not label it as some massive agential leader action which was then imposed on the Party. Rather, it should be read as the next in a series of mid-level institutional movements that had begun back with the CCF in the late 1990s. In this manner, it becomes more credible that the ever-building focus on issues of “compassionate Conservatism” and social justice should continue in this way. Mapping long-term institutional change frees the analyst, therefore, from having to put too much faith in the authenticity of a singular politician, and thus we bridge the gap between what might be a specific actor’s more steady beliefs and what might be merely protean tactics. For one can support the evidence of individual action with more general movements in the institution. Indeed, IDS *may* have been moved by the poverty of Easterhouse; and, simultaneously, he *may* have been tactically aware of electoral exigencies. Indeed, the

constant negotiation between *beliefs* and *tactics* in the language of the leadership means that it is often difficult to unpick one from the other. Consequently, leaders are not always the clearest indicators of what an institution believes *if examined in isolation*. What is of greater interest than IDS's individual journey is that the means by which he might express his new sympathy, utilising policy and language that adhered to Tory ideology, and with which he might then disseminate his new ideas through the institution, did not appear suddenly *in a great light*. Rather, they appeared after a number of years of incremental changes, which became emergent at the leadership level (if, ultimately, only temporarily) at this moment. One can hypothesise (deductively extrapolating from the logic of HI theory), that these institutional movements are far more important than the singular event of Easterhouse; and that it is likely (though not inevitable, for we should not be deterministic) that some *other event* would have manifested the growing policy of compassionate Conservatism. It must be understood that Easterhouse was not a contingent event, therefore (as indeed were some events of the opposition period, see §5.10.); but an event caused by institutional change. In this understanding, an actor does not merely operate within the explicit rule bounds of an institution to exercise their own instrumental will (be that belief based or tactical); rather, the institution actively shapes and provides the language for that instrumentality. We see again, therefore, that the causal variable (what enacts incremental change) is primarily not solely the external environment, and not solely the actor, but the institution filtering up new ideas which make sense of the external environment for the actor: and IDS at Easterhouse is a prime example of this

There is such a thing as society...

In retrospect, the most significant policy text of this period—though in many ways it reads as much as a broad mission statement—was a collection of essays edited by Gary Streeter (2002): *There is such a thing as society*. It is, indeed, remarkable how many subsequently high profile ideas, and well-known phrases, initially appear, or at least collocate for the first time, in this text. It contains essays by prominent members of CCF, who articulate their social justice focus on policy alongside the traditional neo-liberal priorities: Streeter (2002: 5) writes that: ‘Everyone knows that the party is for the aspirational, the high-fliers, and the entrepreneurs. That must remain true whilst shifting our focus, our resources and our language behind those less fortunate. Everyone matters.’ Guy Hordern (2002: 151–152) writes of how ‘the solution [to promoting responsible fatherhood] lies in looking away from Whitehall and towards local communities. The last ten years have seen a flowering of family support services provided at a local level by a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations.’ And Peter Franklin and Melanie Malluk Batley (2002: 225) write, in a notable presaging of the language of the later “Big Society”, that ‘public funding *per se* is not the problem,’ but that government must create ‘funding mechanisms that empower donors, volunteers, providers and recipients.’

But this book is also notable for marking the early coming together of CCF originated thinking with other individuals who were not of the same background. As Franklin (2011) said to me: ‘A lot of the people involved in this *were* religiously inspired, though by no means all. Oliver Letwin is a self-described atheist; David Willetts an agnostic: but yes there is that Christian democratic element, that whole sort of Wilberforce legacy.’ The Christian element is crucial; but it also, ultimately, had to

be transcended if the ideas being promulgated were to appeal widely in the Party and beyond, and not just be seen as the interests of a single group. Consequently, also included in *There is such a thing as society* is an essay by Oliver Letwin (2002: 48–49) who, in a somewhat theoretical piece, links compassionate Conservatism and social justice policy to the core neo-liberal path dependency of reducing the state and decentralisation: ‘Interventions by the state often undermine multidimensional relationships,’ he writes. ‘Only the renewal of community institutions offers vulnerable people a sustainable possibility of escaping from cycles of deprivation.’ And David Willetts (2002: 55), who is somewhat less severe on state reduction, continues to develop his ideas of civic Conservatism and public private co-operation, writing that ‘we have a responsibility to our fellow citizens and it includes a responsibility that can only be discharged *through effective public policy* as well as through personal and private action.’ [my italics] (For a more detailed examination of the ideas of Letwin and Willetts, see §5.8.) Finally, the book is given the imprimatur of the current leader Iain Duncan Smith.

CCF ideas are presented to the Party

Soon after the publication of *There is such a thing as society*, IDS gave the CCF’s 2002 annual keynote speech, known as ‘the Wilberforce Address’. (Instructively, Hague, IDS, and Cameron each gave this address while they were leader of the Party, but Howard did not. I mentioned this to Guy Hordern, but he would not be drawn on it.) In his speech, IDS continued with the new policy emphasis of helping the vulnerable, whilst tying it to more established Tory and Christian concerns around the preservation

of the family unit. ‘The most fundamental institution,’ said Duncan Smith (2010: 81), ‘of any free and sustainable society is the family.’ At the 2002 conference, International Development Shadow Caroline Spelman, a committed Christian and closely loyal to IDS, introduced the theme of ‘There is such a thing as society...’ to the Party at large, a significant minority of whom, says Hordern (2011), through the previous five year’s work by the CCF and its off-shoots, were familiar with her tone and receptive to it; but many others had yet to be convinced (see Bale 2010: 164). One of the failures here was that the dominant message from the conference came from Theresa May’s now famous ‘Nasty party’ speech, which was somewhat well-received by the public but met with a degree of resistance from the Party grassroots at a conference that was riven with disagreement on policy emphasis (see, for an account, White and Perkins 2002). Interestingly, though the ‘nasty’ epithet is attributed to May, its use can be traced back to Andrew Cooper (2001: 18), who writes of the need to avoid policy, such as opposing the repeal of section 28, that perpetuated ‘the common caricature of Conservatives as nasty and intolerant’. Cooper, former Head of Strategy at CCO under Hague, is now Cameron’s Director of Political Strategy. The etymology of the ‘nasty’ label is only of small matter: but it is indicative of how events attributed by the media and some academics to elite level actors can be traced to activity at a lower level of the institution

Overall, the failure at this point in the early 2000s to successfully articulate new ideas, without alienating broad institutional support, explicitly demonstrated that modernising objectives had to be brought about in a non-threatening manner. To be successful they could not be linked to a discrediting of established practices and the *rightness* of the Tory self-image. Indeed, an institution that is largely held together by ideas and myths of past and present does not welcome such an explicit attack. For new

ideas to be absorbed by the institution they would have to run in tandem, and not against, already appropriate beliefs.

What Iain Duncan Smith achieved as leader with social justice policy

So, as can be seen, it was not the case (as has become the dominant narrative) that IDS was *emancipated* from the leadership, and embarked upon his interest in social justice policy largely after his removal, when he was out of the limelight. Dorey (2011: 177) typifies this majority report when he writes: ‘The other key progenitor of a new mode of Conservatism prior to Cameron’s election as Party Leader was Iain Duncan Smith, who, once he was freed from the constraints and responsibilities of being party leader, devoted himself to addressing poverty and social disadvantage.’ This assessment firstly underplays the importance of mid- and low-level players in the institution, who were the real drivers of change in this period, in favour of the overly agential leader focused explanation. Secondly, it wrongly sequences IDS’s interest in “compassionate” policy to *after* his leadership; therefore, it is not as able to identify *why* IDS failed as leader and what this says about the Party. In certain ways IDS was John the Baptist to Cameron’s Jesus Christ: he had many of the same ideas around social justice policy, but was less charismatic. The failure of IDS’s leadership has created a lot of empirical noise around assessments of change in the Party in the 2000s (in the social science sense of “noise” as being data which is returned but does not have causal relevance and so obscures a clear reading). Analysts wrongly label time-specific and epiphenomenal factors (that is to say they are not part of any wider or longer causality) as being instructive about the period of opposition as a whole. As if the IDS period marked a halt

or vacuum in the “modernisation” project because the Party had acted to halt new ideas, which even IDS realised once he left office. But IDS’s leadership was a local failure of management, of publicity and of personal loyalty. (As Nick Hillman [2011] remarked: ‘One of the problems IDS had to get people to be loyal to him, was that he had not been loyal to people himself’.) But it was not a failure to champion new ideas; to label it so is wrongly to suggest that these ideas suddenly emerged with Cameron, which is empirically not the case and theoretically (as far as HI is concerned) highly improbable. As Hillman (2011) said to me: ‘People have this view of IDS that he was a terrible leader but now he’s rehabilitated himself. But he did one very important thing as leader: he basically said that nothing we announce or do should ignore vulnerable people, and pretty much the edict of every press release, every speech was meant to talk about how our policies were meant to help vulnerable people.’ See, for example, Duncan Smith’s (2003) speech ‘A Fair Deal for Everyone’, where IDS introduced such policies as a patient’s passport and the scrapping of university tuition fees and linked them to a need to increase fairness for those most at need.

Iain Duncan Smith fails as an institutional entrepreneur

Understanding the IDS leadership as part of the on-going change process of opposition is important when we are mapping how non-crisis institutions move incrementally to develop new, but ideological coherent, policy emphases; and to be clear that they do not suddenly change radically under a new leader. It remains of instructive relevance, however (and once we have acknowledged IDS’s recognising of mid-level CCF policy entrepreneurs), to say that IDS *failed* is in his inability to straddle competing

“modernising” groups within the party. That is to say, he failed to be an institutional entrepreneur. At around the same time Duncan Smith made his progressive 2003 ‘Fair Deal’ speech, for example, the Party read in the *Guardian* (Watt 2003) that: ‘fresh infighting erupted after the Portillo favourites, Mark MacGregor and Rick Nye, were ousted from Conservative Central Office last Friday. To the dismay of modernisers, Mr MacGregor has been replaced as chief executive by the former Eurosceptic Tory MP Barry Legg.’ Also at this time, IDS appointed John Redwood, the *bête noire* of those seeking a new dawn, to the shadow bench.

However, to read this internecine conflict correctly we must understand that the *Portillistas* were perceived at that time as different in kind from the later *Cameroons*. They were seen as more of an ideological threat (see §5.3.). And the importance of this is relevant to later assessments of Cameron. IDS *was* too much allied with the CCF group; but a failure of cross-party understanding at the time meant that it was as yet unclear that competing groups shared similar objectives, which could have increased trust, lessened the sense of ideological threat, and allowed them to tactically put dissimilarities aside. What is important here is less the nature of the individual leader but the nature of the institutional terrain they are surveying at the time. In 2003, there *were* still salient issues, such as Europe and family policy, that did represent an ideological threat and which needed to be expunged or reframed before co-operation between competing modernisers could ensue.

Hayton and Heppell (2010: 8), who give IDS a correct and fair assessment, also evidence one of the key examples of IDS’s failure was his inability to join competing modernising groups: ‘The Hague era,’ they write, ‘had witnessed the gradual embedding of a divide over social, sexual and morality-based politics. How this should

be managed was an issue when Duncan Smith faced a parliamentary division on the adoption of children by unmarried and same-sex couples in November 2002...Duncan Smith imposed a three-line whip and demanded the PCP endorse a strongly socially conservative position.’ Eight MPs defied the whip, including Clarke and Portillo, and 35 abstained. And John Bercow resigned from the front bench. (Bercow at the time was closely allied with the small progressive policy group “C-change”—and produced, with Nick Hillman (2011), the groups only pamphlet, which was ultimately pulped before it was ever distributed.) In a similar vein, in March 2003, IDS, along with seventy other Tory MPs, voted for an amendment that opposed the repeal of Section 28. Thirty Tory MPs voted against the amendment (and by implication *for* the repeal). David Cameron sagaciously abstained. O’Hara (2007: 317) writes that it was IDS’s ‘support of this amendment that was taken as marking the Tories’ decisive, and ultimately disastrous move back to the right.’ O’Hara is not clear on *who* was doing the taking, however; it is perhaps the agential everyman behind which the analyst takes cover. I argue that it is simplistic to read IDS’s actions as marking a retreat from modernisation. Certainly, IDS’s actions indicated to mid-level but influential actors in the wider party institution that he could not be trusted on *certain* “modernising” objectives which were important to them: and in consequence they manoeuvred against him. As Alex Deane¹² (2011) remarked to me: ‘When IDS fell, I was a research fellow at Policy Exchange, so I was in and out of the Party a lot...it needed something to happen, and no-one likes to put the knife in, but it had to be done, a plane chunk of that was being operated out of Policy

¹² Alex Deane was Chief of Staff 2004–May 2005 to Tim Collins MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education. He was seconded to CCO during the 2005 election. He was then Chief of Staff to David Cameron until October 2005, in Cameron’s role as Education Shadow.

Exchange, actually.’ And it was, after all, Francis Maude who wrote to Michael Spicer, chairman of the 1922 Committee, asking for a confidence vote on IDS’s leadership. However, the primary take-away from the IDS period is that his downfall was due to a lack of managerial competence and charisma, not of “modernising” ideas or a failure to attempt change. Indeed, the record of Duncan Smith’s leadership regarding Tory attitudes and policy towards homosexuality, for example, is not *wholly* in the negative. In July of 2002, reporting on Alan Duncan’s public acknowledgement that he was gay, becoming the first sitting Tory MP to do so, the BBC (2002) wrote: ‘In a letter [to Alan Duncan] Mr Duncan Smith said: “I understand how difficult it must have been for you to have made such an open statement about your private life. What you have done is honest and will not affect you in any way politically in the future... let me take this opportunity to wish you the very best and give you my personal support.”’ The same BBC (2002) article also repeated rumours that the previous week David Davis had been replaced by Theresa May as Party chairman because ‘he was blocking Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith’s more inclusive agenda.’ It can by no means be said that IDS was a policy entrepreneur on this issue—and some in CCF had in the past produced literature that was openly hostile. But there is evidence to suggest that IDS was not a veto player (see §3.2.) on the issue, either; he did not seek to stop it in its tracks, but rather to manage its advance. This management was overly cautious, unsuccessful, and ultimately it was a key failure of his leadership. However, his actions did signal possible future negotiation on the issue, a key issue between different modernisers, if only it could be framed and handled correctly. One can hypothesise the counter-factual that had he been managerially competent, other moves with regard to compassionate Conservatism may have been enough to placate the metropolitan modernisers (who we

will go on to examine in §5.6.) , and allowed issues of gay rights to remain moot but not leadership threatening. Overall, it should be a matter of note, as we continue in this study, that in the area of modernising ideas on social justice policy, as Peter Franklin (2011) said to me: ‘strangely enough (because IDS’s departure was precipitated by the modernisers) the Howard leadership was a good deal less modernising than the IDS leadership.’

The founding of the Centre for Social Justice

Iain Duncan Smith had gradually begun to rely on CCF founder Tim Montgomerie more and more during his short leadership; until in the summer of 2003 IDS appointed Montgomerie as his political secretary and Chief of Staff. ‘The idea,’ said Franklin (2011), ‘was that the CCF ideas would become incorporated increasingly into what the party was doing anyway, but by the time Tim was really sort of beginning to sort out some of the problems with the leadership, it was sadly too late.’ Because the CCF / Renewing One Nation initiative had become so close to IDS by 2003, it was unceremoniously rejected alongside him. As Alex Dean (2011) remarked: ‘The Conservative Party has a certain level of institutional personnel, which goes relatively unchanged, but lots of individuals who are in key areas, Tim Montgomerie being a classic example, they went, and I think that is probably healthy.’ But when we understand ideational change as happening *through institutions and actors*, and operating on many levels, we are also sensitive to the fact that people and ideas do not necessarily vanish when actors lose elite power; if, that is, they have ideational momentum and networks within the institution, especially networks which are

ideationally connected to, but not materially consumed by, the institution. And this is what happened, quite unsurprisingly, to compassionate Conservatism when IDS lost power. Indeed, Peter Frankin (2011) talks of the ‘direct *refoundation* of Renewing One Nation in the CSJ.’

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) was created in 2004. Though Iain Duncan Smith was a necessary public face of CSJ, and quickly became deeply involved, the initial nuts and bolts of setting-up the think-tank were largely done by Montgomerie and its first director Philippa Stroud, who was a prominent member of the Conservative and Christian community in Birmingham (Horder 2011). The CSJ allowed small “c” Christianity and compassionate Conservatism to develop a rich range of social justice policies without the need to negotiate the tandem interests of other modernisers, which had been the weak heel of IDS’s leadership. As we will see, when they returned to influence, the difficulty of this cross-party negotiation had considerably reduced, and paved the way for a successful coming together of ideas. Indeed, that the CSJ actors partially removed themselves from the Party became crucial to their future success. It should be noted, however, that this tactical removal was not agentially inspired: it was the result of material necessity. Not only was IDS out of favour, but the very mechanics of setting up a think-tank slows one down. As Nick Hillman (2011) reflected: it ‘takes a while; they have to find offices, they’ve got to raise money, and donors frankly need to know which way the wind is blowing.’ So again we see that material restraints act on ideational objectives; and it is material structures as well as agential decisions that determine outcomes: and that they interplay in the final explanation of the success of an idea.

The overall role of the CCF path tendency

We will return to the CSJ later on when we examine Cameron's policy review in more detail. Suffice it here for us to finally reflect on the Conservative Christian Fellowship. So, we should ask, why could the CCF bring new ideas into the institution when others could not? It is the case that what kept Conservative small "c" Christianity alive through Thatcher and Major—a sort of self-claimed *Wilberforcean* conservatism—was the external institution of the church, with its cultural social symbols of fellowship and altruism (though these, of course, are highly contestable concepts) which operate outside of the party institution and can hibernate ideas as a sort of surrogate operation. It is important for institutional actors, outside of the rare moments of crisis, not to think they are being radical, but to be able to claim continuity with the past, and small "c" Christianity provided this. So that when the CCF acted to bring new ideas into the Party, ideas bred in an external institution, there was not the resistance one would usually expect because they came in under a neutral guise of placidity and were interpreted as the reactivation of a traditional Conservative religious position.

Key here is to borrow sociological institutionalism's use of cultural symbols and institutional ecology to enrich our causal explanation (see §3.4.). Whereas we've already demonstrated how an actor's material interests are conceptions which are shaped by the inheritance of ideas *within* an institution (so that, in our case study, the means by which uncertainty in the Tory Party after 1997 was addressed was through the delimits of the established ideological path dependency), looking to sociological institutionalism allows us to broaden the field of our understanding. Actors do not exist within singular institutions in splendid isolation; indeed, the way in which they understand the world is a product of multiple ideational and material structures. SI

theorists Friedland and Alford (1991: 249) write of how '[t]he central institutions of contemporary Western society—capitalism, family, bureaucratic state, democracy, and Christianity—are simultaneously symbolic systems and material practices. Thus institutions are symbolic systems which have non-observable, absolute, transrational referents *and* observable social relations which concretize them. Through these concrete social relations, individuals and organizations strive to achieve their ends, but they also make life meaningful and reproduce those symbolic systems.'

It would not be possible to examine all the interacting frames of reference experienced by a Tory actor; but we can certainly highlight the most explicit, especially those which actors self-identify with. In times of institutional uncertainty, therefore, we can see that certain actors turn to the values of other institutions which they are simultaneously members of, which offer guidance to a way forward. This is particularly the case in moments of non-radical uncertainty when incremental change is possible. As Friedland and Alford (1991: 251) note, these broad social institutions are adhered to because 'they provide individuals with vocabularies of motives and with a sense of self'. It is this ethical vocabulary, the language of ideas, the language, indeed, of telling oneself that this is *a purpose driven life*, which becomes increasingly prevalent. We are not speaking here of a normative assessment of policy decisions. We are not saying that Tory Party policy is morally sound because it is couched in ethical language—such assessments can be put aside for the purpose of this analysis. What is the case is that for an increasing tendency in the Party, ethical, Christian-based, language, and a concomitant understanding of the world (all of which shapes an actor's preferences) began to inform policy. Furthermore, actors *believed* what they said had an ethical and not a self-interested dimension. And it is this self-belief which guided the tendency

during the time of institutional uncertainty. So we can say that because institutions exist in an ecology, then in times of incremental change ideas can come from other, more stable (in an actor's perception), institutions.

We must add three short points to the explanation before concluding. Firstly, logically, if actors are already established within a multiple institutional environment, we should assume, as in a ven-diagram, that the ideational structures of those institutions somewhat overlap. Consequently, osmosis of ideas between those institutions is relatively straightforward, which leads to non-radical, neutral invasion. We see this quite clearly with the Conservative Party and Christianity. Secondly, idea transfer may be present continuously but is mainly relevant at moments of uncertainty when actors are more instrumentally searching for new policy emphasis and may revert to the guidance of more stable institutions. However, we should not assume that Christianity offers a constant type of idea that is non-changing. A sophisticated understanding of institutional reactivation recognises that residual ideas do not necessarily manifest at a later date with the same content. The Christianity prevalent in the contemporary party is contemporary itself—it is highly motivated, politically engaged, and mixes a sense of community engagement with sexual politics. It has therefore been exapted. That is to say, it functions in a particular way which makes it useful to the contemporary institution—which is not necessarily how it functions in the other institution or how it has functioned in the past; therefore, our emphasis should not be on how the Tory Party is informed by Christian ideas *per se*; but rather how Christian ideas have been made to work for the contemporary party. And, indeed, can be used by non-Christian actors. What we see then is a dual process both of the past, that is to say historically delimited, and not of the past. We do not see a reversion to

pre-neo-liberal Christian ethics, but a use of Christian ethics in a particular way which develops upon, but is also harmonious to, neo-liberalism.

Finally, we should highlight that this is not merely about the transference of ideas. For the material element is crucial for these ideas to succeed. And so we see the drawn out process of filtering these new ideas through the material structure of the party, in the forming of contacts and networks, of think-tanks and policy documents, and meetings with the leadership. Whereas Christian ethics may have provided some of the language, many of the ideas, and much of the personal drive, it was the Tory Party and its established material structures that gave it the arrow-head of a political movement. As Peter Franklin (2011) reflected to me on the whole rise of small “c” Christianity in the Party, and the reactivation of older forms of beliefs: ‘Well, it was always there, certainly in some people, but it never had the, well, it was there, but there as a personal, until all of this started, there was never a modern political framework to express it; the key point of all of this, is that it has provided a framework, which engages with the larger framework of politics and policy making, that didn’t exist before, the intellectual framework, the policy framework, and the sort of social capital, the contacts with both like-minded people in the party but also outside of the party, like front line practitioners, if you were to say what changed: it’s that—it went from individual, to collective, before it was trapped within people and not out there, it didn’t have a “political” existence before, and now it does.’ That is to say, to turn the descriptive words of someone involved into the theoretical words of HI analysis: actor centred beliefs were given causal power once they were organised through an institution. Indeed, ideas only have traction, only have *causal existence*, through institutions: and in a way we can say that existence is only relevant if it is *causal* existence, otherwise the ideas are purely

epiphenomenal. Consequently, one can be quite tempted to say that ideas, as far as we're concerned with causality, *only exist* within institutions.

CCF, however, was not the only path tendency to emerge after 1997. Indeed, this is to be expected. In non-crisis situations, disparate mid-level actors are given the freedom to address uncertainty free from leadership dominance. So, we are liable to see a variety of trickling sources of new ideas. We will now go on (and step back in time, for chronology is not the arbiter of explanation) to examine the emergence, make-up, and mechanisms of a progressive path tendency which initially competed with CCF in the forming of social justice policy and the modernising agenda: that of the metropolitan modernisers.

5.6. The parallel rise of other mid-level policy entrepreneurs

The rise of what we can label the metropolitan modernisers, really for want of a better term, began to coalesce after the 2001 defeat. The metro mods were a continuation of Thatcherism but they, by being partially outside the party, were better able to envisage how to create incremental change through neutral invasion, layering, and mimicry invasion, all within the stable path dependency. As Nick Boles (2011) observed: ‘think-tanks can be ahead of politicians, be where politicians are not’, because they have the freedom to explore and not be tied to immediate policy launches and their attendant scrutiny. The resulting leadership election after the 2001 defeat saw the continued expunging of Clarke and Portillo and their challenge to the Party. Clarke left little legacy; by that point both the Tory Reform Group and Bow Group, two camps that might have picked up the Clarke baton, had waned quite notably in influence. As a result, Clarke was unable to foment the sort of institutional network that might have taken his ideas forward.

The setting up of Policy Exchange

But Michael Portillo did leave a legacy, despite, or indeed because of, his defeat in the leadership election. Portillo did remain a high-profile presence on the backbenches during the 2001–2005 parliament, but it was his ideas, and not the man, that would continue. The rise of the metropolitan modernisers can be seen as advancing the remnants of Portillo by being less threatening and distancing themselves from his divisive image. Nick Boles (2011) recalls that ‘the thing that happened before 2001 was

Michael Portillo had organised a number of dinners, discussion groups, I went to two or three, they were small but they had a purpose, they weren't just a social event. I went to some; David [Cameron] went to some. We talked about what the party should do. They were happening before and after he came back into parliament, but before he went back into the shadow cabinet.'

Out of the residual ideas and networks of Portillo's leadership campaign came the proposal for the short lived C-Change, which briefly operated within the party as an exploratory group for new ideas; and Policy Exchange, a think-tank which operated outside the party, was long-lived and ultimately highly influential. Key to the setting up of Policy Exchange was Michael Gove and Francis Maude, both of whom had been very involved in Portillo's career. Gove (1995) was Portillo's biographer, and an acolyte of Portillo but without (at the time) any of the baggage; and Maude had run his leadership campaign. Also involved, and highlighting that there were strong modernising elements in Hague's leadership, was Archie Norman—Hague's close ally and former Chief-Executive of the Party.

A Blue Tomorrow

Nick Boles was not involved in the behind-the-scenes set up and funding of the think-tank—but Boles had come to the attention of Maude through his editing in 2001 of the influential policy book *Blue Tomorrow*, with Michael Gove and Ed Vaizey (who were low level actors at the time, neither of whom would become MPs until 2005, and are now, of course, prominent ministers). This set of essays on policy and the state of the

party is remarkable both for the subsequent careers of a number of people involved and for constituting an organising and fertile statement from the metropolitan modernisers.

In their introduction to the collection, Vaizey, Boles and Gove (2001: 2) write of the need for ‘...being more humble about the capacity of the state to provide solutions, encouraging pluralism in our political life and the provision of public services and recognising that that innovation springs from respecting the individual, the quirky and the local.’ Notably, neither Portillo nor Clarke was invited to contribute, despite sharing many ideas, and with Portillo, many networks, with those writers who did contribute. There was the intention with the editing of the book, and the choice of its tone, to advocate a change agenda without drawing the ideological fault lines which had characterised the discord of the Portillo and Clarke approach. European monetary union, for example, is little addressed and no explicit position is asserted. There is, however, certainly no sense of renouncing Thatcherism in *Blue Tomorrow*. Stephen Sherbourne (2001: 51), for example, writes that ‘in post-Thatcher politics, the Conservatives have won the ideological battles and it’s a waste of space to try and invent ideological differences [with Labour] where none exist.’ Sherbourne (2011) reflected to me that ‘after ’97 the Party was really confused, was very confused about what it should do...because they thought they’d been quite successful; indeed, they had for a long time this sort of craving for an equivalent to Clause IV—but actually thought to themselves: there’s nothing particularly horrible, we have no particular policy to throw out of the window, which Labour had’. What *Blue Tomorrow* represents, therefore, is not the search for an ideological change; but the search for new policy emphasis within existing ideological parameters.

Unlike their party colleagues at CCF, the metropolitan modernisers displayed a strong interest in business and the economy. However, this established interest is given a new emphasis by addressing the needs of businesses to be socially responsible: both for the interests of society but also for their own profit interests when operating in a marketplace that demands such responsibility. Steve Hilton (and Antcliffé 2001: 111), later to become Cameron's director of strategy, but at this time unknown outside of this circle of mostly young metropolitans, prophesises that 'a new generation of managers is rising to the top of many of the world's leading companies: individuals who are socially concerned and who have progressive ideas about what their companies could do to help make the world a better place.' This panglossian tone is then articulated to the traditional agenda of reducing the state: and not just in areas of corporatism, such as the privatisations of the Thatcher era, but onward to areas of social responsibility and behaviour, where the newly altruistic and nimbly effective private sector are eminently more suitable to operate: 'Why not look to the private sector,' writes Hilton (and Antcliffé 2001: 112), 'for creative solutions to more entrenched social problems—where human, not just financial capital is required? It's companies, not government, that have the greatest understanding of how people's minds work and how they can be motivated to change.' His proposal can be seen as an example of creating incremental change through *neutral invasion*: his policy emphasis is to bring the private sector into social justice policy, an idea wholly in-keeping with neo-liberalism but not previously considered; thus he is pushing into new policy space which allows for new emphasis, allows the Tories to talk about social justice and appear refreshed and caring, but without risking any of the ideological apostasy that venturing into such an area had

previously threatened: an act of political legerdemain that was to prove highly successful for him.

Differences with CCF

Both the CCF and the metropolitan modernisers can be seen in this period advocating a retrenchment of the state from areas of social policy: but the two groups offer different replacements. Whereas the CCF emphasised the handing over of state activity to charities, the metropolitans looked to business. But the general sentiments of *Blue Tomorrow* were being echoed by work being done through CCF and Renewing One Nation: though the metropolitan modernisers were somewhat unaware of this, seeing the IDS leadership as largely stony ground for their ideas (Boles 2011). Indeed, no one from the CCF was invited to contribute to *Blue Tomorrow* despite sharing a number of its sympathies and having beneficial research and policy ideas as a result of the Renewing One Nation and *Listening* exercises. A key explanation for this can be seen when Vaizey, Boles and Gove (2001: 2) write that they ‘also want to see a Conservatism which is more sensitive to the changing social mores of Britain.’ A call is made for a more inclusive attitude to ethnic minorities, women, and homosexuals. It is the latter emphasis that marked out a patch of disputed territory between the two modernising groups. This was both in tone and in regard to specific policies: in *Blue Tomorrow*, we have David Gold (2001: 124) writing: ‘I wonder whether it is appropriate for politicians to seek to influence people’s lifestyles through taxation’, calling for an end to the married couples tax allowance, a policy strongly supported by CCF modernisers. Yet we should not over emphasise how *pioneering* or *progressive* the

metropolitans were on issues of equality: they themselves acknowledge that all they were doing was recognising reality, not seeking to shape it. In this sense, the move can be understood as a prime example of *mimicry invasion* leading to incremental change (see §3.4.); they saw issues of equality as being successful for the opposition, and impeding their own success, so sought to get up to speed. New Conservative MP Mark Field (2001: 134) argued that, ‘the notion, for example, that a gay man should be influenced in his voting intentions only by his sexuality rather than his views on free market economics...is perverse and almost insulting.’ The intention of the metropolitans, therefore, was not so much to push a radical agenda, but to neutralise the issue of homosexuality, realign party policy emphasis with wider social opinion, and then move the debate towards more salient neo-liberal issues. As Nick Hillman (2001) observes, ‘there was quite a lot a gay people attracted to Conservatism by Margaret Thatcher, there were more gay researchers working on the 4th floor of Portcullis House, which was kind of the Tory floor, than straight researchers: that is not a party that is likely to be deeply homophobic.’ The metropolitan modernisers’ position, therefore, was not alien to the party institution, it did not mark a break from the past, and it certainly was not a mark of an ideological shift. It merely sought to emphasise in policy what was already established both in society and across the party institution itself.

The CCF modernisers objected to this, but not because they were more beholden to the Conservative past, or because they were more intractable with regard to a certain Thatcherite social conservatism. As Nick Hillman (2011) said to me: ‘there is a slight difference, and this is where you’re right to talk about the CSJ: there are some young Conservatives, where they are very religious, are more socially conservative, and the big break around social issues is how strong your religious opinions are and how

strongly you bring them into politics.’ The presence of a strong religious basis for policy was not something traditional, as the CCF modernisers have been wrongly labelled: it was something quite new. It is, rather, perfectly in keeping with standard Tory practice to recognise gay rights once they have been largely accepted by the rest of society and pushed through by an opposition party. As Hillman (2011) remarks: ‘I think we did follow rather than lead. The one place I give the Labour Party credit is they’re a bit better at reacting to social change, but we get there in the end.’ It is important, therefore, to correctly identify the source of the difference between the CCF and metropolitan modernisers.

The anti-homosexual pro-marriage emphasis of the CCF path tendency was generated by religiously inspired, though by no means dominated, policy making, which became ultimately manifest in the CSJ; *not* in a residual policy line stemming from Thatcherite social conservatism. Its presence in the institution was *permitted* because of the Thatcherite legacy of social conservatism: the disputed inheritance of Thatcherism, and the incoherence of the Thatcherite project in regard to social policy (a conflict between paternalism and individualism), allowed this interpretation: therefore anti-homosexual policy emphasis was by no means alien to the institution. This gave the CCF an anchor by which they appeared to be in harmony with past practices of the institution. But their policy was more intractable than previous Conservative social policy, which would have been more amenable to eventually acknowledging changing social mores. Their reluctance to do this was because of the intractability of their religious position. As a consequence we can see that reactivation of older ideas of compassionate or Wilberforcean conservatism, which was the source of incremental change in social justice policy as outlined previously, can also cause tension if those

older ideas, incubated in an external institution, have changed somewhat before re-entering the party institution—as we can see here, where they became attached to a strong family policy. We can call this form of reactivation: *mutated re-emergence*. And in many ways this form of reactivation should be expected, because ideas do not stand still. If they are to be kept alive, even residually, in the first place, they must be harboured someplace, so that they can be later reactivated: and in this time of harbouring we should expect them to change somewhat. It is the nature of the mutated virus (if you pardon the imagery) to be familiar to the organ so that it can re-enter, but to be changed enough so to be energised to succeed anew.

The ultimate point here is to criticise the majority argument that Cameron's forwarding of a homosexual equality policy emphasis marks a strong *ideological* break from the past. Firstly, we see that those metro mods in favour of the policy emphasis are largely mimicking the wider environment, and they see the policy as in keeping with, and clearing the way for, more ideological policy. Secondly, strong resistance to the policy comes not from actors who have interpreted that the Thatcherite path dependency objects to it. Largely, resistance comes from the mutated re-emergence of small “c” Christianity, which has changed to become more vociferous. This mutated re-emergence found an anchor because it was partially familiar; and, through the partial incoherence of Thatcherism regarding actions of the state in social matters, it had something to latch on to. But it was ultimately dampened by the metro mods (for a number of reasons which I will continue to explore) not as something traditional, but as something new. This argument is, of course, in keeping with the logic of historical institutionalism: which looks to identify a through-line of ideological stability in non-crisis institutions.

The role of Policy Exchange

Gary Streeter (2011) reflected to me that ‘for about 6 or 7 years I was saying, and one or two friends in London, where are all the Conservative think-tanks? If you are on the brink of government again [in 2003/4] you should be seeing a lot of activity bubbling away, new ideas and all that, but there was nothing happening.’ This changed with the setting up of Policy Exchange, which marked the first time new emerging ideas had an organisational focus (though they were soon to be joined by the CSJ). Former Director of Policy Exchange Nick Boles (2011) talked to me of how a think-tank ‘becomes then a meeting point for people who might otherwise be turned off or frustrated. It creates a safe space where you can think your thoughts, which are no longer isolated thoughts.’ Notably, Boles highlights that this is not just about harmonious ideas but about the material practicalities of money and venues to facilitate the interplay of shared ideas. ‘It’s essential,’ he says, that there is a social aspect to it. ‘That’s why all movements must be linked to dining groups and lobby groups and ginger groups [small exploratory policy groups] and all that, to be mixing with others: that’s just as important as the ideas.’ Boles concluded that ‘there are lots of good ideas but they don’t get anywhere because they don’t have a team of people pushing them forward.’ And so we see that ideas do not create their own causal force; an idea does not succeed because it is *the best idea* for realising actors’ goals; rather, it is this combined with more prosaic realities of networks and persuasion and influence: and there is nothing inevitable, or utility maximising, in this process. This strong material network marks Policy Exchange out from other sources of modernising ideas in the period which were less successful.

What we see at Policy Exchange is a think-tank that pushes the idea of research-based policy over ideologically driven policy. As Policy Exchange researcher Matthew

Oakley¹³ (2011) remarked: ‘we believe in free market, localist type policies...the one thing we are really proud of, and has to be at the forefront of what we do, is the evidence...it’s about saying: here’s what the evidence suggests.’ That Policy Exchange should frame and understand their work in this way is hardly surprising; for a group that is closely involved in non-radical incremental change we should expect them to speak of their policies not as radically ideologically motivated but as ideologically neutral (which is spurious, but in times of established path-dependence awareness of ideational structures is at a low point). The argument is that mere “common-senseness”, or inductive empirical reasoning, produces incremental policy change without threat. And so we see emphasis on results; that the results of organisations at the local level and in the private or third sector are better than those of the state—without acknowledging that the very engagement in comparing results, of prioritising results as a justification for change, or the choosing of which results matter (the number of employed, say, over the nature of their work or income inequality), are themselves ideological decisions. In this behaviour, ideational structures sub-consciously shape perceptions away from the awareness of ideology; and embolden the actor in the belief that their policy decisions are inevitabilities.

Comparisons to other think-tanks

By comparison to Policy Exchange, one should briefly mention the historical footnote of Red Toryism (coined by Philip Blond [2010], who also created the think-tank

¹³ Matthew Oakley is Head of Economics and Social Policy at Policy Exchange; and a former Economic Advisor at the Treasury.

ResPublica, whose imminent demise has been widely predicted [Deane 2011]). Chronologically ResPublica's emergence follows Policy Exchange by five years, but its low impact needs only passing attention; and analytically it is instructive to place it next to the success of Policy Exchange. Red Toryism was attractive to the party leadership because of its marketing potential—marketing being the most superficial and ephemeral indicator of change in a party. It offered an umbrella term under which could be placed many of the new ideas in policy that had come from elsewhere, a sort of idea framework after the fact. One is reminded of the joke about the French politician who remarked that: I can see how this all works in practice but how can we make it work in theory. Of course, the Tories *had* an idea framework already, it was called neo-liberalism, but because of marketing exigencies, and some of their own myopia regarding the guiding nature of their ideology, they did not overly articulate this fact. But Red Toryism had no long-term historical presence in the party; it had not risen from within at the mid-level, or through associated institutions; and it did not have strong long-term networks within the leadership. Moreover, it was unnecessary: a façade on an already firmly built institution—and so it passed. Red Toryism was the late symptom of a movement not the cause of one.

Policy Exchange learnt their style, if not their policy emphasis, from the recently successful though now in decline, Centre for Policy Studies: the closeness to *emerging* leaders, the high degree of policy focus, and astute marketing. Gone was the older style of the Adam Smith Institute, where one lucubrated and quietly assumed that the political moths would seek out one's ideas. As Denham and Garnett (1998: 11) write, in the only recent monograph on British think-tanks (though see also Pautz 2012), 'a

distinctive new think-tank model has developed [since the 1980s]...labelled *advocacy tanks*...These groups combine a strong policy, partisan or ideological outlook with aggressive salesmanship...The format chosen for their output is, typically, short pamphlets and papers, rather than books and monographs.’

Policy Exchange certainly fitted this model producing numerous pamphlets and policy launches throughout the 2000s. Reflecting on the research work of Policy Exchange, Boles (2011) commented on their specific contributions: ‘the environmental stuff, that wasn’t part of or initially an area of focus, that was done more by Zac Goldsmith, Steve Hilton and David himself; whereas localism, decentralisation, empowerment, that’s very Policy Exchange, as well as public service reform, a democratic view of public services; whereas charity and volunteerism comes more from, say, the CSJ.’ We see, therefore, the disparate nature of the modernisation process. Ideas come from different areas, in small packs that cohere, rather than a single radical line. Because there is no new ideology or path dependent shift with incremental change, it tends to be more bitty and coheres through networks; also, when ideas enter a party institution, they inevitably are brought partially together by structured rules, such as a leadership election and leader incumbency, and general elections where a manifesto is produced (as we will later examine with Cameron). All of this disparateness is kept in order by the largely sub-conscious adherence to the ideological path dependency. This adherence was acknowledged by Boles (2011) when he concluded, on the innovativeness of Policy Exchange, that: ‘I don’t feel there were actually any Thatcherite ideas that we had to repudiate.’

However, a new, well-organised think-tank can create a lot more political steam than one might assume from the relative non-radical nature of its engine. New does not

necessarily have to lead to ingenuity. But often the mere presence of young, well-dressed and articulate actors, talking of, at least, ways in which *policy emphasis* might change, can create a feeling of innovation. As Streeter (2011) remembered of Policy Exchange in the beginning: ‘it wasn’t revolutionary, and it wasn’t particularly driving anything, but it was *about*’. The think-tank is powerful because it is at the centre of influence and creates a feeling of change greater than its contribution. As Denham and Garnett (1998: 200) observe ‘the phrase “climate of opinion” thus figures...as a rationalization for change in a democratic polity, whether it reflects opinion in the wider electorate or just ideas expressed within the charmed circle of government and echoed by cheerleaders in the press’. What Policy Exchange was adept at was creating momentum around policies, such as decentralising the planning of new low-income housing (see Hartwich 2005); encouraging philanthropy from the super-rich (see Mitchell and Davies 2008); simplifying the tax system as a stimulus to growth (see Kay 2008); or toll roads as a source of income for future public road building (see Lipson 2008), which allowed them to address new areas, often involving community cohesion and issues around poverty, but in a manner that emphasised that the solution involved the reducing of the size of the state in favour of the private sector. These new policy areas can be categorized as engendering change through neutral invasion (see §3.4.)—areas which were not at odds with the institution but had been under-explored by it. In particular when concepts such as “community cohesion” are fluid, and can be constructed in such a way as to be amenable to already held ideas (see Hancock *et al.* 2012).

So, by the IDS leadership Policy Exchange was present as a source of new ideas on social justice policy. But IDS's inabilities, as previously argued, as an institutional entrepreneur meant that their ideas did not immediately filter up to the elite level. However, this relative obscurity gave the think-tank time to form networks, generate policy ideas and raise money. With IDS's, and by association the CCF's, temporary rustication after 2003, Policy Exchange became more prominent and slowly began to materially infiltrate the Party institution. What we see here is material change before ideational change: which highlights their inter-relatedness, and how one can facilitate the other. Under Howard, as is widely uncontested, ideational change slowed. But we must give Howard key agency in the engendering of a number of material changes to the party institution which would facilitate future incremental change around modernisation and social justice policy. We examine the mechanism of these changes in the next section.

5.7. The incremental change of material structures

Michael Howard's leadership was inaugurated by a bloodless coup and swift coronation, wherein the PCP organised to circumvent the new election structure of the Party—significantly abetted, one must say, by the singular decision of Ken Clarke not to stand—and nominate only one candidate, offering the grass roots a mere *fait accompli*. As Alex Deane (2001) remarks: 'It was a party that was well accustomed to having fixing mechanisms'. The action demonstrated the malleability of the material structure of the Party, which can be made to serve ideational ends. However, one should not read the transition from IDS to Howard as having a strong ideational basis: the main motivation being one of managerial competence. Indeed, the absence of a contested leadership election meant that the inbuilt rules of the institution did not fulfil their function of surveying the ideational tendencies of the institution and seeking to harmonise them. The material rules of leadership elections *can* bring together ideational strands; but this wasn't able to happen under Howard. Political parties have rule based procedures to aid the management of competing interests—something which aids incremental change much more so than in non-democratic institutions. Because of the absence of the contested election, however, different path tendencies were unable to view one another's ideas adequately and possibly see their commonalities.

I believe...

The Howard leadership did attempt to mark a new more progressive Conservatism in its early stages; and at this point it seemed to the metropolitan modernisers that they had

some traction at the elite level of the party. Most notably, Howard sent out his 'I believe' statement in an email to party members, as well as publishing it in the *Times*. The statement contains elements that echo the socially minded modernising agenda: Howard (BBC 2004) declared: 'I believe there is no freedom without responsibility. It is our duty to look after those who cannot help themselves...I believe in equality of opportunity. Injustice makes us angry.' Yet one should not overplay the degree to which these statements looked to break from past practice; indeed, they neatly link social justice sentiments only to further established Tory ideological lines. Howard, for example, also states that: 'I believe people are most likely to be happy when they are masters of their own lives, when they are not nannied or over-governed...I believe that the people should be big. That the state should be small.' And, in a veiled dismissal of the notion of relative poverty: 'I do not believe that one person's poverty is caused by another's wealth. I do not believe that one person's ignorance is caused by another's knowledge and education. I do not believe that one person's sickness is made worse by another's health.' The take-away from this statement has largely been that it was overly progressive for Howard's true opinions, and that he eventually moved more to the right to appeal to a fabled core vote (see, for example, Roth 2004; or Evans 2008). The 'I believe' statement was based on Michael Howard's leadership victory speech the day he was declared leader. However, and this would prove telling, that speech had not been written by Howard but by Francis Maude, prominent metropolitan moderniser and founder of Policy Exchange. 'It was actually pure Cameroon,' says Stephen Dorell (2011), 'the trouble was, Francis wrote it, Michael read it out, then went on being Michael, which was nothing to do with parts of his speech.' However, because of the attention during the 2005 election on issues of immigration and taxation, which are

understood as traditional Tory policy positions, one should not overly emphasise the unusualness of the ‘I Believe’ statement. Though we do see here a mention of social justice issues, the main through line of the ideological path dependency is very clearly still present, and, indeed, re-enforced by these statements. What we see in the Howard leadership is not a wild shifting in *ideology*—beginning with ideologically different views at the beginning which are then reigned in: for the Maude penned speech was never radical. However, it did contain the potential to generate new policy emphasis which eventually was not capitalised on. Indeed, Howard’s leadership was to prove a mish-mash of policy ideas. However, this was not because the party had still to *ideologically* change (and with the spurious implication that it would soon do so under Cameron). The reasons the statement was unfruitful are outlined below. Some of the reasons acted as impediments to incremental change; however, others were, in fact, ultimately facilitators of it, but which needed to be *got out of the way*, so to speak.

Howard restricts influence of emerging path tendencies

As a senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships (2011) remembers, in a reflection shared by other interviewees, ‘we all knew that Michael Howard was never going to be prime minister.’ As a consequence it is clear that it was difficult for Howard to motivate enthusiasm behind his decisions. What we see here is a more tactical and agential response by actors in the institution to the leadership. Yet the consequence of this judgement of Howard was not so much disobedience but a sort of unenthusiastic adherence. Of all the leaderships, Howard’s was the one that most distanced itself from the emerging modernising ideas coming from the mid-level of the

institution which we have previously mapped. The personnel change from IDS to Howard was much more severe than any of the other leadership changes during the opposition period (Crick 2005: 437–438). As a consequence, there was a notable severance of ideational continuity: in particular, from the rising path tendencies being developed by the CCF modernisers and the metropolitan modernisers. Indeed, the CCF, and the CSJ after 2004, as CCF trustee Guy Hordern (2011) remembers, was almost wholly ignored by Howard. Indeed, Stephen Sherbourne (2011), Howard's Chief-of-Staff, remarked on reflection that, 'it is very, very, unusual for the Conservative Party to have any religious aspect to their thinking at all...When Michael Howard became leader, I think he was quite uneasy about the Christian elements'. This was less a lack of valuing their ethically informed position, but more a caution towards sending the wrong message to the electorate—that the party was in some way mimicking changes that were then occurring in American politics. But this caution meant that Howard was cut off from a rich new source of policy emphasis that would later prove to be fruitful. Moreover, Howard did not have his own network which could link him to developing ideas in the mid-level of the party. Stephen Sherbourne (2011) reflects on how 'Michael Howard had basically left politics...so he wasn't somebody who had a team around him at all'.

Rather than carry forward emerging ideas, Howard prioritised a lack of divisiveness in the party: above all he saw his singular mission as leader to return the party to a professional and unified state. As a result, he also cut himself off from the metro modernisers, less he upset the IDS grouping. As Sherbourne (2011) remembers, 'Michael Howard was determined that there should be no bitterness so he went out of his way to be assiduous with Iain Duncan Smith and his supporters, not to give too

much room to modernisers, who the IDS camp might have thought had ousted IDS—Francis Maude was kept really out of it until after the election’. Howard, for example, voted against an increase in tuition fees in 2004, despite his personal preference, in order to continue the policy line begun under IDS and to avoid division along lines of path tendency. This plan was highly successful, and was a necessary step in the progress of incremental change.

Howard consolidates the leader’s material influence

Howard had authority in the institution and wielded a material influence far greater than IDS or Hague. Howard, for example, says Sherborne (2011), ‘closed down the European debate, completely closed it down’. Howard increased his material control over the PCP by a canny three-step move: he decreased the size of the shadow-cabinet (Maude was not offered a role), thus reducing the number of actors with elite influence—helpfully Portillo and Widdecombe both refused positions but remained quietly at the back; then he increased the number of MPs with a party or shadow title (a hundred of the 165 MPs were given some sort of job or sinecure), thus reducing the number of backbenchers with no sunken costs in the status quo (Crick 2005: 437); finally, he arranged for Hague, Clarke, IDS, and Major to meet as a council of elders, so to speak, thus reducing the likelihood that they would talk out of turn and criticise the leadership. However, all of these moves, tactically astute as they were, served to enforce an inertia of ideas in the party over the coming years. Howard was also a disciplinarian; as evidenced, for example, by the deselecting of Howard Flight MP and candidates Adrian Hilton and Danny Kruger for various off-message remarks in the run-up to the

2005 election. We see, therefore, as the material agency of a leader increases, as they exercise more power over what is discussed, who has what appointment, and who is able to voice dissent—that is to say, as their veto power increases, the flow of ideas in the institution decreases. And there is a slowdown in ideational incremental change; for incremental change benefits most when mid-level, and some elite, actors are afforded a degree of autonomy (on the whole unintentionally) to explore new ideas. However, concomitantly, if new ideas are already present at the mid-level—as with the Party—then an increase in discipline and a decrease in suspicion and divisiveness *can* eventually create an institutional atmosphere which encourages the coming together of path tendencies, as they begin to see the professional rewards of working together, and begin to better understand their shared ideology.

Lynton Crosby improves Central Office efficiency

The Australian political advisor Lynton Crosby, in particular, did much to improve the material efficiency of the Tory command under Howard: improvements to communication, motivation, speed of response and the sharing of information. ‘We were originally at Smith Square, it was known as CCO, then we moved to Victoria street and Lynton Crosby rechristened it CCHQ, because,’ as a senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships (2011) recalled with a friendly laugh, ‘it sounded, well, more dynamic.’ The Tory CCHQ was now on two open plan floors, ‘Google-afied’ as Barwell (2011) referred to it, rather than the ‘rabbit warren’ of CCO Smith Square; and the research and press departments were more closely integrated, with desks positioned near to each other, to improve the quality of messaging: press

releases could now be more aligned with rich areas of policy. As the same senior source went on to recall (2011): ‘We pushed too much on immigration...but I actually think the organisational structure was better in 2005 than in 2010, in terms of who was in charge, Lynton Crosby gave a very clear sense of direction.’ Press secretary Guy Black and his deputy George Eustice (later to be Cameron’s press secretary) were also instrumental in the tight running of the command and the closer communication between the leadership and desks at CCHQ. This drive to improve professionalisation came from witnessing the clear success of Labour communications over the previous decade; as Sherbourne (2011) reflected on the process: ‘each party learns from the other’. What we see here is mimicry invasion; the adoption of methods and ideas from other parties that are not antithetical to the path dependency but allow for the creation of incremental change—the change here is in material structures, but it paved the way for the later mimicry invasion of ideas.

The new professional environment, however, did not foster an environment of sharing a disparate source of ideas. The leadership shut itself off from the wider environment of the institution, from think-tanks and mid-level actors; and at CCHQ it tended to dictate rather than listen: as a senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships (2011) notes, ‘the research department at this point gets its direction much more from the leader: we need to be doing x, y and z.’ As a consequence, the immediate impact of the changes was to increase the agency of the leader. Howard’s lack of success was because he did not use this increase in agency to act as an institutional entrepreneur. But he should not be criticised for this: the very necessary act of increasing discipline and organizational efficiency precluded this simultaneous act. We should add, however (to give due instrumental credit to Cameron

as we approach him), that Howard was also temperamentally not predisposed to modernisation—so that we can hypothesise that if he had had longer as leader, and had begun to have the opportunity, post-professionalisation, to begin to bring together path tendencies, he may not have chosen to do so. As Sherbourne (2011) remarked, ‘he [Howard] really does believe in controlled immigration; he really does believe in a fairly strong law and order policy...[so] it was very hard to expound on that modernising agenda because we hadn’t got it properly formulated and Michael Howard wasn’t the person to do it.’

Howard brings in new elite actors

Yet, at the same time, we do see significant personnel movement around Howard, of people connected to metropolitan modernisers. This was primarily initiated by Rachel Whetstone, the advisor closest to Howard. ‘It was all rather disorganised,’ says Sherbourne (2011), ‘she brought in, in a rather sporadic way, Steve Hilton, and later on a bit of Danny Finkelstein. She was very good at drawing in these people; she was very close to Policy Exchange; that was very good as well.’ Similarly, we see during this period the appearance of Cameron: Howard appointed him a vice-chairman of the Party in 2003, local government spokesman the following year and then the influential post-of Head of Policy Co-ordination. Finally, and crucially, Howard appointed Cameron to Shadow Education after the 2005 election, giving him the profile from which to conduct a campaign for the leadership. Likewise, George Osborne, too, makes his first elite level appearance under Howard. At the end of 2004, Howard appoints him Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury; and after the election defeat he was moved up to Shadow

Chancellor. What we see here is the analytical necessity to not merely sum up the significance, or the identity, of a period by its elite *policy* pronouncements—and to reduce Howard's leadership, and the impact on change in the Party, to the 2005 manifesto and the 'Are you thinking what we're thinking' campaign. By the end of the Howard leadership many of the pies were already cooked and ready for Cameron's hosting. Firstly, Howard had created a professional and less divisive party; he had finally dampened—through his own agency alongside changes in the environment—the contentious issues of Europe and Homosexual equality; and he (through the strong influence of Rachel Whetstone) had brought modernisers into strategically important positions at the elite level—and though they did not immediately alter policy, their presence was primed.

Howard's key impact on institutional change, therefore, was material. He created a more efficient party which would better disseminate within, and communicate without, a modernising agenda. What he lacked was an ideas source for what that agenda should be. This was in part agential—he did not ultimately believe in much of what the emerging tendencies had to offer. But it was also because those tendencies, of CCF and the metro mods, had yet to realise their commonalities around social justice policy. Moreover, their mutual suspicion was compounded by the fall-out of the leader change. But Howard's successes, in revamping CCHQ, in placing modernisers in key positions, demonstrates the material preconditions necessary for ideational change and the key role of agency at the elite level (even though we have been attempting to heavily contextualise elite agency). For though emerging path tendencies came from the mid-level of the party, to be successful they ultimately have to make in-roads at the elite

level. Indeed, to have lasting impact, mid-level policy entrepreneurs need to either enter the elite level or influence elite level policy entrepreneurs. Key, therefore, in mapping incremental change is to account for the activity of elite level policy entrepreneurs and how they operate within the party institution. This we will look at in the next section.

5.8. *Le eminences grise*—the action of elite policy entrepreneurs

David Willetts and Oliver Letwin are the most successful policy entrepreneurs in the Party over the entirety of the opposition period—and this activity has certain peculiarities that are key to their success and also to an understanding of the mechanisms of institutional change. Firstly, we will examine the history of Willetts's and Letwin's ideas, and explain how these two thinkers have contributed to change in the ideas of the party in opposition around social justice policy. But crucially we will also examine the nature of their material position in the institution, their role and their networks, and use this HI understanding to explain the change they helped engender.

David Willetts's ideas

It has been repeatedly asserted that 'David Willetts's contribution to Conservatism is more substantial than that of anyone else at a senior level in the Party since the downfall of Margaret Thatcher' (Garnett and Hickson 2009: 155; quoted in Dorey 2011: 174; paraphrased in Dorey, Garnett and Denham 2011: 70). This view of the standing of Willetts as a party thinker is echoed from within, with Jesse Norman (2011) remarking to me, by way of warning, that 'it would be a very bad modern history of Conservative thought that didn't include David Willetts's pamphlet for the Social Market Foundation, which he wrote for Danny Finkelstein'. A long time thinker on modernising Conservatism, Willetts, as early as 1992, was writing of a dual approach to policy, incorporating market economics and community cohesion (see Willetts 1992: 139–141). Nick Hillman (2007), Willetts's long-time senior advisor, remembers that when 'David

Cameron was asked which book had influenced him the most he said one of David's books, either *Civic Conservatism* or *Modern Conservatism*.⁷ And there is much that is Cameronite in early Willetts. In *Modern Conservatism*, which garnered far more attention in the 2000s than on its publication in the early '90s, Willetts (1992: 141) wrote that: 'the market and the community arguments together explain the remarkable consensus in most advanced Western nations that some sort of welfare state is both necessary and desirable.' Willetts writes of a moral obligation to our compatriots and of expressions of solidarity regardless of economic exigencies. This policy emphasis was to be continued in *Civic Conservatism*, where Willetts (1994: 40) notes that 'the welfare state may help a modern economy to function efficiently but ultimately we can only justify taking approximately a quarter of our entire national output through coercive taxation by some moral appeal resting on our obligations to fellow members of our community.' Indeed, Dorey, Garnett and Denham (2011: 71) identify a definite move from *Modern Conservatism* to the later *Civic Conservatism*: 'there was now a less triumphalist tone in eulogising economic neo-liberalism', they argue.

Willetts's key contribution to Conservative thinking in the 1990s, and we see it again in his debate with John Gray (see Gray and Willetts 1997), was not just to emphasise the need for Conservatism to address social issues but to couple these to economic issues. Willetts argued that community and economy are not mutually exclusive but mutually supportive (see Hickson 2010). Neo-liberalism provides the economic growth to improve the quality of life in society by increasing competitiveness and self-interests. But in so doing it does not undermine community values as the nature of market exchange requires the building of trust and co-operation between actors; this is further ensured by the respecting of traditions embedded within institutions, which

remains the key principle of Conservatism. Community cohesion, in fact, is undermined by state intervention that replaces individual trust with state mandated interaction. Dorey, Garnett and Denham (2011: 71–72) may feel that Willetts is less confident in the market's ability to deal with non-economic problems by the time of 1994's *Civic Conservatism*; and is more interested in the development of values as a countering bulwark. But we should not mislabel Willetts's argument as challenging to the neo-liberal paradigm; rather, it broadens its scope to argue that community minded Conservatism is a means of supporting neo-liberalism; and that neo-liberalism can support communities if *coupled with* (rather than *replaced with*) a set of ethical and localised community values. Willetts, therefore, is not an *ideological* entrepreneur—that is to say, unlike Portillo and Clarke, he has never been perceived as strongly threatening the ideological path dependency of the Party—rather he has sought to broaden its scope and emphasis (he is, after all, a former director of the Centre for Policy Studies). As Hillman (2007) reflected on Willetts's intellectual legacy, Willetts's argument is that 'there isn't a complete tension between Thatcherite economics and the social side, civic Conservatism, Big Society, they are all about the same thing: little platoons.' Consequently, Willetts has consistently emphasised localism: as Shadow for Trade and Industry, for example, he argued that one should resist 'ludicrous central government intervention on issues such as crime prevention and hand powers back to communities' (Branigan 2005).

Willetts as outsider

Despite Willetts's ideas being in harmony with the merging path tendencies, and the fact that many of his emphases proceeded the emerging of these groups, it is notable that he was never as closely involved in Policy Exchange as Maude, Letwin, Portillo, Gove, and so forth, or of course Nick Boles, even though Policy Exchange's founding principle was the advocating of localism. Likewise, though we see Willetts involved in family policy and conducting a report on the Quality of British Childhood in 2007, he establishes only peripatetic links with the CCF and CSJ, who are at the institutional hub of change on these issues. We need, therefore, to tread carefully when attributing a causal role to Willetts's ideas. It is evident that he predicated and advocated many of the ideas (outlined above) which were to become popular in the 2000s; it is less clear that he instigated the change to these new ideas. If we look at ideas uncoupled from institutional machinations and material constraint we are liable to make the erroneous assertion that an idea is the cause of a proceeding one merely because they echo. But really Willetts did not have a major influence in the main streamlines of ideational change, which was not top down instigated but middle up—though of course one is hardly suggesting that he did not have an important and relevant role in the further *advocating* and development of these ideas once they had gained traction. It is interesting, therefore, to examine Willetts the man and his action within the institution in order to explain this process. For with Willetts we see that an elite level policy entrepreneur may have more of an advocacy role than a generative role around incremental change in non-crisis situations.

As important to the non-radical nature of Willetts's ideas is that he has never materially threatened elite power. As Alex Deane (2011) says, also referring to Oliver

Letwin, whom we will also address further on in this section (though he operates somewhat differently to his cabinet colleague): Willetts and Letwin ‘are probably the two cleverest people in the parliamentary party, they are incredibly gifted, very smart, very academic: *not very charismatic*. They don’t have that extra something that makes someone a leadership contender... They are the perfect figures for the role they come to fill; which is to say, able, intellectual advisers *without* the potential of leadership of their own, of the generation slightly above the people they are helping.’ It is key to the success of an elite policy entrepreneur, therefore, that their advice is not understood as materially threatening: the *éminences grise* must not covet the throne. Also, unlike mid-level policy entrepreneurs, they are not as deeply embedded in singular path tendencies linked to particular groupings or think-tanks outside of the party. ‘Mr Willetts has gone from Young Turk to Elder Statesman,’ wrote Fraser Nelson in a *Spectator* profile of 2006, ‘having missed out on the political celebrity which was so widely forecast for him when he entered Parliament.’ It is an apt description, and this unanticipated role is much the reason for Willetts’s *type* of influence. The *non sequitur* of studying ideas regardless of institutions becomes clear: for we misinterpret the situation if we say that because Willetts’s ideas predated Cameronism, and were (in part) proleptic, that they necessarily had causal influence. A “history of ideas” is not necessarily the “history of the cause of institutional change”, for we must couple the history to material factors. Having backed David Davis not Cameron in 2005 (though purportedly for tactical not policy reasons, see Nelson 2006), Willetts was not invited to be involved in the initial policy reviews of 2005–07: he was in this period at a tepid distance from the real furnace of ideas.

This distancing, we can say, was a result of a tactical miss-step by Willetts; but it is more than that. As Ryan Shorthouse¹⁴ said to me of Willetts: ‘I always found with my experience of working with him that he was a bit of an outsider, he was not really in the CSJ, you know, religious...So he didn’t fit in with that category...equally, though he supported Cameron, he was never really in the inner circle; and the inner circle there is people like Steve Hilton, Rohan Silver, Ed Llewellyn, it’s a very tight circle...’ At the same time, Shorthouse observed, ‘David Willetts was very respected, particularly for the amount of output he had given...[and yet] because he’s very honest, thoughtful, and wanting to deliberate over a policy...I think sometimes the inner circle see him as a little bit of a loose cannon politically.’ For we should not overstate how much intellectualism actually gives one an advantage in the policy ideas arena, where what one knows is important, but it must then be channelled through the right groups to gain support: in many ways the most successful policy entrepreneurs are able to couple, or even subordinate, their intellectual concerns to their networking opportunities and coercive influence. Indeed, reflecting on this issue, Nick Hillman (2011) wryly noted that ‘no one has ever become prime minister because he is regarded as more intellectual than other politicians.’

¹⁴ Ryan Shorthouse is a researcher for the Social Market Foundation. He co-wrote with David Willetts the report of the Inquiry into the Quality of British Childhood 2007. He was adviser to Maria Miller, Shadow Family Minister, 2007–10.

Willetts as mentor

One area where Willetts is influential at the institutional level, however, is the nurturing of acolytes: he tends to attract young intellectuals who are interested in the wonkery of policy research—an area of politics which is largely ignored by a great deal of politicians and aspiring politicians. Boles (2011) remarked to me: ‘I mean a lot of politicians are not that interested in policy, are not policy wonks’. This is largely due to pre-socialisation: actors are aware of a certain atmosphere within the party that favours a certain style. As Jesse Norman (2011) (who played down his philosophy PhD in interview, considering it not to be relevant to party politics) notes: ‘The Conservative Party doesn’t attract very many intellectuals; it has traditionally attracted people who have achieved distinction in many walks of life: professions, military, public service.’ As a consequence, those individuals who are more policy and idea minded tend to form networks and find an affinity of interests. Shorthouse (2007), one such Willetts acolyte himself, noted, for example, that the Bow Group, long a centrist think-tank and networking club for young Tories, was closely informally linked to Willetts in the mid-2000s, with many of its administrators working in his office. Shorthouse was political secretary at Bow Group, for example; and Chris Skidmore, now an MP, and Charlotte Leslie, now an MP, both worked in Willetts’s office and were also involved in Bow Group (with Skidmore as chairman) in the mid-2000s. It is in this area, as much as any—though it is difficult to track and certainly operates below the media radar—where Willetts sets the agenda for a future generation of the institution, seeding the debate for the next set of mid-level policy entrepreneurs. Indeed, the congruity of Willetts’s thinking with that of Bow Group is quite in evidence in the group’s essay collection *Conservative Revival* (Philp ed. 2006), where its members, most aged in their twenties,

and many of whom would go on to hold higher positions in the Party (such as Philp himself, who was a candidate in 2010), layout their Willettsian progressive policy vision for the future.

Willetts remains secure as the intellectual of the Party. As Hillman reflects (2011), summing up his boss's friendly rivals: 'When you think about it, throughout the late 80s and the 90s and noughties, which other Conservative was writing books that bring as many things together as David? Alan Duncan? John Redwood wrote a book but they were more like manifestoes. David's books weren't this; they were presenting a coherent philosophy—Oliver Letwin was doing speeches.' And yet an intellectual can at times be isolated if they are as interested in the seminar room as the cabinet room: and with Willetts these two are fairly balanced.

The ideas of Oliver Letwin

Willetts contrasts interestingly, therefore, with the now Minister of State for Policy at the Cabinet Office, Oliver Letwin, who is the Tory insider *de jour*, with 'family roots' as Hillman put it to me, in the Party. His mother and father, William and Shirley Letwin, were key figures in the CPS, as *filis* was to be too: *plus ça change...* (there is, perhaps, something about contemplating Letwin that leads one to try out a bit of French). He has been the key elite policy entrepreneur during the opposition period; and has repeatedly focused on social justice policy and the individual's relationship to the state. In his writings, Letwin echoes Willetts's articulation that the poor are not an economic problem but a social one. In the SMF pamphlet *The Purpose of Politics*, Letwin (1997: 146) writes that 'the defining characteristic of the underclass is not, of

course, its poverty—the poor have, as the callous cliché has it, always been with us. The special and new phenomenon is the presence within our societies of a large number of persons who are fundamentally alienated from the civilisations of which those societies are the embodiments’. Framing the central issue of poverty in this manner leads one to present cultural and community based solutions rather than statist and economic ones. Letwin, therefore, places the same degree of emphasis as Willetts on the importance of rebuilding communities through civic virtue and individualism. However, Letwin sought to add to Willetts’s thesis by developing his own approach, which he initially called “civilised Conservatism”. ‘David Willetts,’ wrote Letwin (1999: 12–13) has proposed ‘civic Conservatism’; but this captures only the *part* of the theme (the rebuilding of voluntary and local associations and institutions) which he stresses...[Whereas] within the name, a civilised Conservatism, we hear the echoes of the felt, the experienced, the understood, the familiar, the inherited, the cherished, the fundamental, the sure, the stable, the secure, the sound, the right and the British.’ This is not merely a semantic move by Letwin in order to christen his own take on the analysis, though it is, of course, this in part (revealing, perhaps, of his academic background); rather, it is indicative of the broadness of Letwin’s concerns. Whereas Willetts is often preoccupied with one area of policy, namely localism followed by families followed by tertiary education, Letwin is a wider more blue-sky thinker. Indeed, in many ways, this less anchored approach has facilitated his more fluid movement about, and influence on, the institution.

Letwin notably expanded on his idea of a “civilised Conservatism” as Shadow Home Secretary under IDS in a set of speeches which have been preserved by the CPS in a collection called the *Neighbourly Society* (Letwin 2003). In the collection, Letwin

emphasises the core path dependent approach of reducing the state. ‘We can set people free,’ he says (Letwin 2003: 46), ‘without setting them adrift, but if, and only if, we are willing to tame the State: to seek to improve the quality of people’s lives, as we once sought to improve their standard of living, by diminishing the role of the State as the comprehensive provider of all, the comprehensive regulator of all, the setter of every target and the monitor of every performance.’ Notably, Letwin here separates the quality of someone’s life from their (economic) standard of living, thus obviating the argument that income inequality is the cause of social alienation. Indeed, in the history of Letwin’s ideas, we see the link to why he in particular, as well as other Tory leaders such as Maude and Osborne, and thinkers at Policy Exchange, later became so interested in Richard Thaler’s new concept of Nudge policies (see Thaler and Sunstein 2009), which were briefly in vogue at the end of the decade, based on research in behavioural economics. Thaler’s Nudge policies (exemplified by ideas such as putting average energy use for one’s area on utility bills) was attractive to the party because it offered possibilities of changing behaviour, and thus improving *quality of life*, and the difficult concept of happiness, without having to increase government spending or address economic inequality. Rather, an improvement in happiness is instigated by small changes, often acted sub-consciously on individuals.

We should not overstate, however, how much Letwin’s thinking was a break from past practice. As Bruce Pilbeam (2005: 162) has noted, ‘many Conservatives since the Thatcher era have appeared defensive when confronted by accusations of being uncaring individualists, with frequent attempts to correct misinterpretations of the “no such thing as society” thesis.’ Pilbeam observes that Michael Howard, for example, argued in the 1990s that Thatcher did not mean to denigrate society but to advocate

neighbourliness. In many ways, Letwin was merely carrying on this approach (indeed, using the same term) and seeking to link it to a broad renewal of core Conservative principles regarding tradition, history and the tried and tested.

Letwin as agenda setter and veto player

Where Letwin has been more influential than Willetts, however, is in his ability to place himself in positions of real influence to set the agenda—that is to say, his material impact as a veto player has been greater than that as a policy entrepreneur, wherein he has acted to spur and filter the policy generation of others. Indeed, Oliver Letwin had his feet placed in numerous pies throughout the entirety of the opposition period. He was instrumental both in the early stages of the CSJ and Policy Exchange. As Kathy Gyngell¹⁵ (2011) observed, in setting up CSJ, Duncan Smith ‘did have Oliver Letwin’s total support, intellectual support, without that his whole enterprise wouldn’t have had the kudos and the seriousness with which it was taken.’ There is a certain imprimatur, therefore, which successful policy entrepreneurs carry, which gives them great influence on new projects, and which stands alongside, or over, their material influence, such as patronage, donations, appointments and so forth.

Following from this, Letwin’s influence was no greater in evidence than when Cameron appointed him to head the policy review process of 2005–2007. ‘Mr Letwin,

¹⁵ Kathy Gyngell has had high-level access to the Conservative Party leadership since the 1980s and is a long-time research fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies. She chaired the Addiction Working Group for the CSJ’s Social Justice Policy Review.

as head of the policy review process,’ wrote Tim Montgomerie (2006) in a ConservativeHome blog at the time, ‘certainly has much more day-to-day influence on Mr Cameron than the Shadow Education Secretary [Willetts].’ And it was in this position, hands on and coercive as it was, that allowed him to exercise influence at an elite level (as we will see more clearly when we examine the social justice policy review later on in §5.9.).

Interestingly, Letwin’s power has been *relatively* increased because it is clearly demarcated; he, like Willetts, is not a challenge to the leadership. As Alex Deane (2011) recalled, this is easily explained: ‘of the two, Letwin has more zap than Willetts, but Letwin you may remember had a disastrous ’01 election campaign, where he sort of went AWOL for a couple of days. It’s an interesting period in his life. You and I may forget that, Joe Public voter definitely has; his parliamentary colleagues...definitely haven’t.’ So we see that elite policy entrepreneurs are nuanced characters in the progression of incremental institutional change. They are quasi-backroom actors who are often, for certain reasons, cut-off from a clear seizing of the leadership but find themselves in positions of intersection between competing path tendencies. Letwin is facilitated by an embracing of a broad modernising agenda which does not break from, but rather enforces, the path dependency of neo-liberalism—but neither is he so embedded in particular areas of policy that it hampers his manoeuvrability. Letwin himself has clearly articulated the need for this intellectual balancing act in his introduction to a history of the Conservative Research Department: policy researchers, he writes (Letwin 2009: 2), need ‘to occupy a space between the rough and tumble of sheer electoral politics and the calm waters of the intellect’. In comparison, Willetts, arguably the *purer* intellectual, has not been as influential as Letwin in securing

influential veto positions and negotiating the rough and tumble. For example, Willetts took the weight of the political fallout in 2007 over the leadership announcement that they would not open any more grammar schools. However, whilst in the backroom Willetts has, somewhat quietly, nurtured a generation of mid-level, and low-level, players who have an interest in policy.

We see, therefore, the shape of the institution, its incremental changes, its emerging path tendencies, its guiding neo-liberal path dependency, its streamlined material structures, its increasing discipline, and its elite policy entrepreneurs in agenda setting positions, leading up to the ascendancy of Cameron. What we have is an institution not in need of radical change; not in need of a *wrenching* into electability; but one, especially around issues of social justice policy, which is ripe for co-ordination. An institution that has found the only primary means for its incremental change: from within. However, what is also clear is that the agency of elite actors is still necessary to maximise the potential for change. So, we will now examine the role of the Cameron leadership, the specific action that Cameron took around social justice policy, and how this was facilitated by the institution and the wider environment.

5.9. Path tendencies and an institutional entrepreneur

In this section we examine David Cameron's opposition leadership from 2005–2010. We define Cameron as an institutional entrepreneur (see §3.2.): the most successful form of entrepreneur in non-crisis incremental change. In such an institutional environment to be a confrontational ideological entrepreneur is likely to be unsuccessful; this is because, as Pierson writes (2004: 137), 'entrepreneurial action requires the construction of coalitions and innovative framing of issues,' as a result 'actors who straddle significant social networks are especially suited to engage in "skilled social action".' In this scenario too strong a set of beliefs is a disadvantage. Cameron can clearly be understood as an institutional entrepreneur, more focused on cohesiveness and arbitration than on points of radical policy of his own devising. As Kathy Gyngell (2011) observed, Cameron's 'whole thing has been to bring people with him...but then he is too scared to take up an issue on principle.'

Agency of elite individuals is still important

It is important in describing Cameron not to be caught up in superficial indicators of change, and not to exaggerate the difference between Cameron and his predecessors. Though the Cameron leadership publicised vitality and difference, institutional theory sensitises us towards being sceptical of such image marketing. As Matthew Hancock¹⁶

¹⁶ Matthew Hancock is MP for West Suffolk 2010–present. He was economic adviser (later Chief of Staff) to George Osborne, Shadow Chancellor 2005–2010.

(2011) remembered of the first months of Cameron's leadership: 'I was an economist at the Bank of England, and George called straight after the election and asked would I join them and do the economics. At this stage policy was an entirely open book, we were very clear from the off that none of the policies from the election were any longer party policy. And that's one of the attractions of a job like that. *Now, that's all well and good in theory* but there were still very strong perceptions as to what the party stands for.' The interesting aspect here is that even those involved at the elite level can believe, to a certain degree, that they are open to thinking wholly anew—yet in this openness, in this moment of uncertainty, as Hancock realised, one is inevitably guided by ideological path dependencies operating implicitly. Yet the inherent incompleteness of ideologies means there is still manoeuvre for *path tendencies*, largely dictated, as we have seen, by institutional work that has gone before. However, at the elite level, these tendencies must be recognised, engaged with, and co-ordinated.

The importance of Cameron the individual should therefore be noted. A Cameron-esque actor was not inevitable in the Party. Though the institution was well positioned for his arrival, this did not determine it: there is still, therefore, a strong agential role for leaders in the cause of incremental change within institutions. Likewise, there is still a role for contingency. Had Cameron not beaten David Davis the outcome for change in the party would have been different; and it was by no means inevitable that he would win. As Stephen Dorell (2011) reflected: 'It's a surprisingly superficial process that leads to an individual becoming party leader...Cameron was successful and the party conference created the opening for Cameron to follow through with the modernisation agenda, but you've first got to win a leadership election. It was an historical accident

that Cameron was the stronger candidate over Davis in 2005; we should avoid determinism: history always looks inevitable in retrospect’.

Cameron’s key leadership actions

Cameron made four clear moves as leader: he brought together the emergent path tendencies and advocated to the party how they cohered and stayed within the ideological path dependency; he used mimicry invasion (on the NHS and spending, as well as polling methods) to learn from Labour and sold this learning to the party; he used neutral invasion to introduce issues on the environment and the participation of women and ethnic minorities; finally, he rebranded the party to symbolise change. We will examine each of these moves; importantly, we will emphasise how they were not only agential achievements, but were made possible by ideational and material institutional work that had gone before; as well as certain propitious contingent events in the electoral environment, such as the end of Blair and the financial collapse. However, amongst this structural explanation we must give Cameron his due: it needed his skilled agential action to see favourable institutional circumstances become change at the elite policy level of the party.

Rebranding and the use of mimicry and neutral invasion

During non-crisis periods, when the leadership requires the muted support of the party to enact change—rather than fighting against resistance in the party—it relies heavily on emerging policy ideas. These ideas sometimes directly influence elite decision-making;

at other times, they act to set the mood in the institution to be receptive of elite decisions. Leadership action, therefore, is heavily institutionally structurally determined. However, the leadership does have more agency in areas of marketing, and where they can introduce single policy ideas using mimicry and neutral invasion. Whereas Michael Howard spearheaded the presentational and organisational mimicry of New Labour, Cameron's team realised that there were key policies that had to be imitated from Labour in order to dampen them as electoral points of difference between the parties. This opened up the space which the leadership used to give new emphasis to social justice policy. Crucially, the leadership made the decision, announced in 2007, to match Labour's plan to increase spending by 2 per cent in real terms for the next three years (Osborne 2007). Sherbourne (2011) observed, however, that 'keeping to Labour's spending plans had nothing to do with Conservative philosophy, it was pure electoral calculations'. The intention was to avoid the accusation that the Tories were purely an economic party of cuts—matching spending would silence the issue and the Tories would 'not go in to the election with a big tax cut' (Anonymous 2011), for it was understood that this had not benefited previous electoral campaigns. Freed from the dominant message of tax cuts, the Tories could then concentrate on pushing the modernising agenda of social justice policy, the environment and inclusiveness (we look more closely at the interaction between economic and social policy in §5.10. because this ephemeral mimicry of Labour spending was a key factor in bringing together path tendencies).

From early on Cameron also embraced the traditional Labour support of the NHS. As a senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships (2011) recalls, a decision was made that 'the Conservative Party had to clearly demonstrate that it was a

party of the NHS.’ In order to achieve this, we see Cameron, particularly at the 2006 conference, repeatedly emphasising the Party’s support of the NHS, ‘a public service’, writes Bale (2008: 3), ‘that he can convincingly claim (because of his son’s disability) to know something about’. Cameron (2006) attacked the policy of the patient’s passport, advocated by IDS, which would subsidise private health care: ‘As rising expectations demanded a better NHS for everyone,’ stated Cameron, ‘we put our faith in opt-outs for a few’. In its place he promised to resist cuts to the NHS purportedly being made by Labour. Recognising the popular support for the NHS, Cameron was happy to attach the Party to it; but in doing so he articulated the mimicry in a tone that was suitable to the party. ‘In a Conservative Britain,’ he concluded, ‘professional responsibility will provide the answer to rising expectations in the NHS.’ We should not read these issues of mimicry invasion, therefore, as radical ideological shifts. The party accepted the policies because they had proven to be successful for an opposition that was not ideologically different from them (a quality of the cartelisation of parties, see §2.5.) and Cameron was able to frame them as facilitating certain shared goals, namely election, but also the concentration on non-economic policy.

Cameron—with a strong input from Steve Hilton—also began to introduce issues on the environment, and on the participation of women and ethnic minorities in the party. He was seen bike riding, made a visit to the Arctic Circle, and ‘urged people to “vote blue, go green” in the lead up to the 4 May council polls’ (BBC 2006). We should note, however, that interest in the possibility of the environment as a Conservative issue began as early as Thatcher in the 1980s (Norman and Ganesh 2006; Norman 2011). In 2004, before Cameron, and from a man who would hardly wish to be identified as a moderniser, we have John Redwood (2004: 259) empathetically writing that: ‘All of us

are concerned about the environment...Most of us also feel a responsibility to the generations to come and to the animal kingdom that tries to live alongside us on our planet.' We see, therefore, that it is not so great a leap from Conservatism to conservation. The embracing of the environment was a form of neutral invasion, which permits incremental change to occur within an institution by identifying a policy that has not been previously explored, or perhaps only under-explored, but is in no way challenging to the path dependency. Rather, it offers a welcome expansion of its concerns.

Cameron pushed hard to increase the number of prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) who were women or from ethnic minorities, in order to make the party more reflective of the country it sought to govern—but also as a symbolic act of change. As Childs and Webb (2012: 165) write, in their comprehensive survey of women and the Party, 'efforts to deliver a more representative parliamentary party and to make the party more electorally competitive over women's issues constitute a significant part of Cameron's strategy.' Likewise, the intention to attract more ethnic minorities was a central priority, which did cause 'rumblings of unease in the traditional Tory press' (Bale 2006b: 28). However, as Childs and Webb (2012: 99) demonstrate, there was not strong institutional resistance to Cameron's acknowledgement that women were underrepresented in the party—that is to say, the idea was not antithetical to the institution, it therefore can be understood as neutral invasion—though there was increased resistance to his methods. Their surveying of members found that 74.2% of men and 74.8% of women approved of primaries in which candidates went through a series of public votes to win nomination (which can be seen as an attempt to break

patriarchal patronage); and a plurality accepted a priority list drawn up by the leadership. However, only 14.8% of men and 20.9% of women approved of a compulsory minimum number of women at the short-listing stage; and a plurality disapproved of training programmes for female, black and ethnic minority candidates.

So, what we see is not institutional resistance to the idea—for it was not a radical ideological change—but more of the traditional objection by constituency offices to interference from CCHQ, and the perceived loss of “good people” from change engendered through the preferred candidates list. ‘There was some unhappiness with the A list’, remembers Barwell (2011), ‘and I speak as someone who was on the candidate list and not on the A list. It brought an end to a lot of people who had worked bloody hard; it brought the end to their political career.’ And yet Barwell, and many voluntary members, welcomed that the action ‘brought a new complexion to parliament [and] it does mean that we have more very able women.’ Indeed, those PPCs who were put in place through the A list, including women and ethnic minorities, met little resistance. ‘When they [the constituency members] meet the candidates,’ says Barwell, ‘they think actually these are bloody good, we can pick someone from these. I know of almost nowhere where someone from the A list who was then selected had a really difficult time beyond the first few weeks; they all worked so damn hard it was very impressive.’ It can be exaggerated how hard Cameron pushed on this issue, and how hard the party resisted: rather, Cameron’s action was more in keeping with incremental change, looking to bring the party with him in a non-confrontational style. Cameron’s actions created the idea of a more inclusive party (and in part this was materially realised) and the party as a whole supported this. It did not, however, lead to a reflective change in electoral support. As Green (2010: 684—685) demonstrates, between the 2005 and

2010 elections the Conservatives made little headway increasing their electoral support from women; also, the increase in Conservative vote share was significantly greater (at 3.85%) in areas of lower quartile ethnic minority populations than in areas of upper quartile ethnic minority populations (at 2.5%). The symbolic success of the move, therefore, was less in electoral terms and more in the institution's own sense of itself; the action helped create the mood for a party that was seeking to also place emphasis on other new policy areas, in particular in the area of social justice.

Finally, Cameron's rebranding of the party can be understood as the most superficial of his changes, and it does much to distract one from deeper, longer forming and more meaningful processes. As a senior source close to both the Howard and Cameron leaderships (2011) remembers, during the period 'there was huge rebranding going on, led by Stephen [Hilton]. He got new people in like Anna-Maren Ashford, who came from an ad agency.' Ashford rubbed-out the long held Tory logo of a raised Torch and replaced it with a pastel zig-zaggy swirl of a tree; the dark blue livery became light blue; and we saw Cameron embrace technology with regular updates of webcameron, where he spoke directly to voters through the Conservative website. But these moves should be understood as signifying nothing but themselves.

The bringing together of emerging path tendencies

The first major decision Cameron made as leader was to launch a policy review into six areas: national and international security; public service reform; social justice; quality of life; overseas aid, globalisation and global poverty; and economic competitiveness.

Most of these reviews were exercises that had little impact, or were domineered by a single individual (such as John Redwood who was given the economic competitiveness brief, whose report reflected their own ideas and was never going to have strong support in the leadership or across the party). However, the social justice policy review, given to Duncan Smith and the CSJ, was more impactful. By the launch of this policy review in 2005, the CCF and then the CSJ had managed to create a foundational network of contacts with actors in the third sector, as Franklin (2011) recalls: ‘through Renewing One Nation we found a lot of people to come up and support [the review]’. This network of contacts was way beyond what the Party proper had achieved; and the CSJ was able to further build upon the network during the review to produce a report and policy proposals, and eventual roll-out strategies, more advanced than any of the other review reports—all of which had little lasting impact.

The singular effectiveness of CSJ may have been different had Policy Exchange become involved in the process; but as Nick Boles (2011) acknowledged: ‘If Policy Exchange had done one, people would have said, well, Policy Exchange and the leadership are just one and the same, and that would not have been useful, these things only have value if they get outsourced; if they are permanently hemmed in by short term political constraints they are valueless, especially once your team, as it were, is in control of your political party.’ The Centre for Social Justice, therefore, was put in charge of a policy review precisely *because* of their lack of influence. As Boles (2011) went on to remark: ‘Obviously CSJ do their stuff and they do it very well, but they were so directly set up by IDS, and IDS himself was outside at that point, so that he could do one [a review]’. Indeed, there was no intention by the leadership that the CSJ should produce a high impact report. Its later impact was not agentially driven by the party

leadership; as far as the leadership was concerned the significance of the report was an unintended consequence. ‘Everybody wants something tomorrow,’ remembers Deborah Stedman-Scott¹⁷, ‘be they didn’t get it—they got it when it was ready.’ The report’s success came from years of previous institutional developments in ideas and networks.

The social justice policy review

The social justice policy review involved more researchers, more interviews, and more sub-reports than any of the other reviews. It was a moment that was tactically seized by the CSJ—led by the energy of IDS—and was to prove a key moment in the increase of their influence. The already established strong links of the CSJ to the third sector were exemplified by the appointment as deputy chair of Deborah Stedman-Scott (2011), who first met IDS on his visit to the Easterhouse estate, where the unemployment charity she heads has an operation. They remained in contact—and she was on hand to be asked to join the review a few years later. ‘This was an absolute in-depth look,’ said Steadman-Scott (2011) of the review. ‘Never once did someone say “this is the answer we want”.’

The CSJ appointed a secretariat to oversee the Social Justice Policy Review, and also divided the project into separate working groups that each conducted their own research and wrote their own reports, which were collected, for the diagnosis report, under the title *Breakdown Britain* (Fraser 2006; Fforestfach 2006; Stancliffe 2006;

¹⁷ Baroness Stedman-Scott OBE is Chief Executive of Tomorrow’s People, an influential national charity which helps disadvantage people find employment, 2005–present. She was Deputy Chair of the CSJ run Social Justice Policy Group, part of the Party’s policy review 2005–2007.

Gyngell 2006; Callan 2006; Clark 2006) and for the policy report *Breakthrough Britain* (Fraser 2007; Fforestfach 2007; Robson 2007; Gyngell 2007; Callan 2007; [Steadman-] Scott and Brien 2007). The secretariat comprised: IDS as chair; Debbie (later Baroness Steadman-) Scott as deputy chair; Philippa Stroud, Director of the CSJ; Greg Clark (closely aided by Peter Franklin), who also headed the Economic Failure and Welfare Dependency Working Group; Orlando Fraser, who headed the Third Sector Group; Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach, who worked on Indebtedness; Kathy Gyngell on Addictions; Ryan Robson on Educational Failure; and CSJ researcher Samantha Callan, who headed the Family Breakdown Group (and who would later work with David Willetts on the separate Childhood Review). The CSJ based their research around what they labelled as five key “paths to poverty”: addictions; family breakdown; worklessness and economic dependence; educational failure; and indebtedness.

The strong emphasis from the *Breakthrough Britain* report was that more use should be made of third sector organisations to carry out work at present done by local authorities—in areas of children’s services and child protection, job seeking, drug abuse and homelessness. Organisations such as *Tomorrow’s People*, for example, whom Baroness Scott also represented, were understood to be more effective at returning people to work, and more importantly, keeping them in work. The move to the third sector was not necessarily framed as a way to cut spending. Organisations such as *Tomorrow’s People* receive the majority of their income from government contracts, rather than foundational trust money or donations (Stedman-Scott 2011). To think of the entire project as merely a money saving device, therefore, is to miss the different strands that came together in the CSJ report, and went on to be included under the

umbrella term “Big Society”. As Matthew Hancock (2011) insists: ‘people wrongly characterise the Big Society as a mask for cuts, it’s not. It just happens that the cuts are necessary because of the mess left from the economic crisis, it is inevitable’. Though it may be counter argued that this is a mere convenient slight-of-hand, we can see that early thinking in the area does not prioritise reducing spending—neither is the method expected to do so: charity organisations do not work for free when they take on local authority contracts. There was, it should be said, a certain supply-side fiscal thinking to be seen: with the argument that helping people back to employment ultimately raises tax revenue (Steadman-Scott 2011); coupled to a reduction in demand for other government services: ‘To these savings must be added’, said the report ([Steadman]-Scott and Brien 2007: 22), ‘the broader fiscal returns of reduced health-expenditure, reduced crime, and increased [personal] spending.’ This fiscal benefit is then coupled to the social benefits of a reduction in crime, and finally the individual benefits of being in employment, which is linked to higher self-esteem, and more stable family environments. The emphasis here is more on the idea that work is an absolute good that improves quality of life, rather than emphasising, say, the nature of the work, or its relative perceived value or status within the rest of society. This attitude passes over to the voluntary sector, with Fraser’s (2007: 36) report recommending not only to ‘encourage greater volunteering in poverty fighting TSOs [third sector organisations]’ but also it pushes for the need ‘to engage vulnerable and under-privileged communities in volunteering themselves.’

The main thrust of the argument comes, however, not in terms of reducing spending, or supply-side economics, but in other areas. Firstly, the third sector organisations are favoured because their *results* are perceived to be better than those achieved by the public sector. This is set against an asserted ideological position that the state is

systemically inflexible and poor at achieving improvements in results. '[T]he public sector', writes Fraser (2007: 44), 'is instinctively cautious and risk averse.' And that it is less empathetic (that is to say, its civil servants act as mere functionaries) in an area that is better suited to caring individuals who work with organisations that are hands-on. And so the reports echo the shift—seen previously being advanced by Willetts and Letwin—of Conservative thought from economic indicators (and issues of economic deprivation) to quality of life, ethical engagement, and emotional issues around ideas of “happiness”, all of which it perceives can be increased through more than wholly economic means. Finally, we have a through line of the Christian idea of community altruism and good works *done by the individual*—an ethical dimension one does not get if one works through the state. ‘The Christian roots,’ suggests Fraser (2007: 68) ‘of most social action and reform in Britain are well known...[F]aith groups still undertake a vast and disproportionate amount of poverty-fighting and caring for the most vulnerable...Examples include young evangelicals who have committed to living and working in some of the most disadvantaged parts of Bristol, London, and Manchester, often producing sustained reductions in crime through their youth work.’

There is here a strong push for an increase in donations to charities, and an increase in volunteering (for the good it does both the traveller and the Samaritan); however, the most impactful proposals are around the privatising of government contracts in areas of social justice, disability provision, unemployment initiatives, counselling, drug rehabilitation, housing support, and so forth, to the third sector. So what we have is *not* the advocating of a reduction in state spending *per se*; but rather a reduction in the state’s involvement in the administration of public services. That is to say, a privatising of certain public provisions to the (paid) third sector based on the ideological principle

that the state is too unwieldy to deliver such services. Interestingly, though, we see less with the CSJ an emphasising of the systemic inefficiencies of the state and more an emphasis on the inherent ethical virtues of the third sector, in part with regard to—though by no means exclusively—faith based groups. As Kettell (2012: 283) writes, in one of the few analyses of the religious influence on Conservative social policy, ‘the idea of promoting an expanded role for religious groups in the provision of welfare and social services lies at the very heart of the Big Society plan’. However this emphasis harmonises well with the metropolitan modernisers, who concentrate more on localism by presenting the state as inherently flawed and unable to manage large systems. This position is highlighted, for example, in a pamphlet issued through the Social Market Foundation (Tate ed. 2005) on the eve of Cameron’s succession, where fifteen senior Tories, including Cameron, Osborne, Letwin and Willetts, lay out their central position on the state. Greg Clark’s (2005: 127) essay is indicative when he writes that there is ‘a model of running our public services in which politicians are in charge...State Centralism...’ This, argues Clark, involves imposing centralised targets, funding, over-bureaucratic audit and inspection, and rigid terms and conditions, all of which makes it *more difficult* to deliver on fairness and social justice issues. This critique of the state was therefore eminently conducive to the findings of the CSJ regarding the high functionality of the third sector—which incorporates smaller, more manageable systems, not only run by charities, but also community organisations, professional associations and clubs: as first defined by James Douglas (1983), former director of the Conservative Party Research Department (see also Ware 2011).

An underpinning of Christian ethics

Even where it is not explicitly stated in the CSJ social justice report, there is reported evidence of a (most often implicit) Christian ethos shaping the work of the CSJ during the policy review. Kathy Gyngell (2011) remarked to me that ‘there was quite a strong faith based part to it...quite a lot of people Philippa [Stroud] put me in touch with were from faith based groups, which were absolutely admirable...Most of the people there, that would have been a common denominator certainly, a shared belief in Christian ethics, other people were more actively Christian, David Burrowes [CCF founder, Deputy Chair of the Addictions Working Group], Samantha Callan [CSJ senior researcher]...Personally I felt comfortable. Philippa’s Christianity was perhaps the least comfortable for me, the evangelical, I’ve never been keen on, well she didn’t really, well she did a bit, that’s the bit I was most uncomfortable, because I am not pro-evangelism.’

Following to some degree from this, there is an emphasis on improving quality of life and community cohesion through the family; and government policy to encourage nuclear families—something less seen with the metropolitan modernisers. ‘We do however argue,’ writes Callan (2007: 106) in the report, ‘against current fiscal policies which disadvantage couples because, financial considerations aside, lone parents rarely choose that status, enjoy raising children on their own, or want their own children to become lone parents themselves.’ And by eliding correlation and causality, Callan concludes that: ‘Children raised by two parents tend to do better across a whole range of variables as our earlier volume made clear, so it seems somewhat perverse for policy not to do all it can to support rather than penalise this family model.’ The CSJ report holds off on proposing a married couples tax credit (this they did more confidently later,

see Centre for Social Justice 2010); but they do suggest spending on counselling retreats, writes Callan (2007: 55), by ‘stimulating the market for such care and opening up opportunities for the third sector and private providers to meet demand.’

It’s about beliefs not just money

It is important to be aware of these primary rationalisations for the report as it avoids the mistake of arguing that the embracing of the third sector—what became known later as the Big Society—was primarily fiscally motivated. It was not: the ideas long predate the financial collapse of 2008. In the CSJ policy review, what is being argued is that the third sector should be embraced *even if the state can afford to run services*; that is to say, even if no spending cuts are required. The exigencies of deficit reduction after the financial collapse of 2008 meant that reducing spending became *also* a justification for the project—and it led to a shift in the balance of emphasis from paid third sector work to volunteer third sector work (something easier said than done). But that spending cuts should be seen as a ruthless pragmatic decision was understood as a negative by Tory actors, who would have preferred the action of moving to the third sector to be perceived as a positive principled step away from the state—not just a money saving device. The ideas present here, as we have been mapping throughout the thesis so far, for social justice policy and the language of the Big Society, came from long term emergent path tendencies in the institution, which were shaped by dominant ontological conceptions of the functionality of the state. Not from elite agential reactions to environmental factors, such as responding to the financial collapse with money-saving policy. And this is a process which we should expect once we have been sensitised to

institutional explanations of incremental change. As Matthew Hancock (2011) recalls: 'spending cuts is exactly what people remembered of the previous Conservative administration. The fact that we were not going to match spending cuts *clouded out* the Big Society stuff.'

It is reasonable to conclude that all of the 2005–2007 policy reviews were used to stall time in order to organise the releasing of policy by the leadership in an organised fashion. And many of the reviews had little impact on that policy and served only as presentational exercises. As Shorthouse (2011) commented of a later, separate, report he wrote with David Willetts, but using it to reflect on the whole three of four year period of reviewing policy: 'I don't think any of the policies were taken forward into the manifesto, which I think shows that the review process wasn't taken seriously enough, that it was slightly presentational. I do remember Steve Hilton saying: "let's put all the meeting notes and background notes you've done in the appendices, so that it fills out the report, so that it looks beefy"; and that's great, but are they taking the policies seriously? I wasn't completely wholly convinced about that; or whether it was just messaging, the Tories are talking about childhood, they're talking about nice things.'

The policy review reports were also used as publicity: to give the public the impression that the party was being reflective; and to give varying tendencies within the party the impression that they were being listened to. But the policy review was not a free-for-all where anything would be considered. I asked Gyngell whether it was generally just known that there were certain issues that weren't going to be talked about, such as taxation? 'Yes, they were not going to be talked about,' answered Gyngell

(2011), ‘because we had our topics hadn’t we. Oliver Letwin had set the topics: he’s not stupid.’ And so we can see that the leadership *intended* to manage the process quite closely. And this was a success, with the exception of the CSJ Social Justice Policy Review—which was genuinely and significantly impactful: but in spite of, not because of, the *initial* attitude and intentions of the leadership.

Coupled to this was a sense of those involved in the CSJ that they had, in a manner, *nothing to lose*. As Gyngell (2011) comments: ‘IDS was the least popular person on the planet, no one thought on IDS’s back they were going to get preferment.’ As a consequence of IDS’s tarnished reputation, and his disconnection from the usual channels of authority, the logic of appropriateness broke-down, the discipline of norms that keeps one in line in return for approbation. However, when this occurs behaviour must still be directed if it is to be successful. What replaced it was the path tendency that had been growing for nearly a decade and had begun with CCF. And it was because the institution of the party, at the mid-level, had already set up, over a considerable period of time, and through the varied interest, and occasional uninterest, of previous leaders, a group of people genuinely committed (within their own particular ethical rationalisation and contiguous path dependent ideology) to this area of policy that it strongly emerged at this point to take the baton. This was not agential and leader led, a moment created out of thin air by Cameron; it came from the mid-level structures of the institution, which fed up a policy emphasis to the top.

Coming back to the institution

But eventually semi-independent think-tanks, such as the CSJ, have to come in from the cold if they are going to influence change. ‘It was inevitably a political process,’ says Gyngell (2011). ‘I don’t mean they asked me to skew the evidence, they never did, but they asked me to arrive at everything far too soon: That is the tension, isn’t it: they had a time span. It wasn’t that they pre-planned it; it’s just that the media side and the presentation side took over.’ And so we see that only a certain amount of freedom is granted to an exploratory path tendency to investigate new routes of policy; once it is potentially successful, and gains the support of leadership, the agency of mid-level policy entrepreneurs becomes more curtailed by institutional entrepreneurs who seek to direct the policy toward more instrumental concerns, such as publicity and electioneering.

Second to this is that once a new policy emphasis enters more directly into the institution it begins to compete with the agendas of other policy entrepreneurs; and compromise or competition becomes an issue that must be managed successfully by institutional entrepreneurs. Though the CSJ has merged somewhat with the other modernisers, often crossing speakers and messages with other groups, they are at times seen as a group apart, marked somewhat by their small “c” Christianity, and the concomitant policy positions that are implied. Indeed, the various modernising strands have not perfectly harmonised to this day; and there are still differences between these tendencies: for path dependency may *group* and direct like-minded behaviour across an institution, it does not make it identical. ‘I think that one of the things avoided by going into coalition,’ remarked Nick Hillman (2011), ‘was a bit of a battle between the CSJ type Tories and the Policy Exchange type Tories on something like tax breaks for

married couples. So though both Policy Exchange and CSJ were both important in giving us a human face again, there were tensions, there wasn't a single movement towards change.' The absence under Cameron, as we have previously shown, of significant Labour legislation on gay rights, was fortuitous in not highlighting some areas of tension between the tendencies.

Though in the run up to the election, in the year or so when policy was being formed, Cameron sought to aggregate the interests of competing tendencies, this is not to say that other, slightly lower down, actors, followed this compromise. As Shorthouse (2011) reflected: 'There was...Oliver Letwin, Steve Hilton, Samantha Callan from the CSJ joined us for a time, there was a lot of disagreement, on you know, the marriage policy, whether we should be providing support for relationships...it wasn't a collaborative, cooperative, consensual operation that would lead to a compromised position where an outcome was made, it would just be debated and then people would go away and probably try and stop anything from happening, I felt for example that Michael Gove would stop policy.' So we have a dual process here: we have a leader as institutional entrepreneur, looking to aggregate interests, then actors just below the leader level acting as veto players and policy entrepreneurs. Indeed, in times of incremental change, the policy entrepreneur is much more likely than the institutional entrepreneur to use veto tactics to further tendencies they support, while at the same time adhering in public to the compromise strategy of the leader. At this time the secular modernisers, such as Michael Gove, Francis Maude, and to an extent Oliver Letwin, had a greater number of actors than the CCF modernisers, such as IDS and Philippa Stroud, in key veto effective positions. As a result, the CCF tendency only got policy through that was harmonious with the rival tendency, or provided some utility for

them. The CCF modernisers were a great source of ideas and image friendly associations with volunteer groups and charities that helped fill-out some of the ideas of the secular modernisers—to give ethical content to their largely systemic account of state inefficiency; but the secular modernisers also acted to filter-out the emphasis on (straight) family units which was so key to the belief emphasis of the CCF modernisers.

However, influence at the elite level is not the only evidence of having a causal institutional role. As we have shown, what a party *is* is not merely what its manifesto *is*—or who has direct influence on the words in the manifesto. Such a conceptualisation leads to reductive explanations that centre on a select few elite actors. Equally important is the effect on the mid-level and grassroots of the institution, the setting of an understanding of shared beliefs which is then open to the changes being made by the leadership—and this is where the path tendency of the CCF, CSJ and the leadership of IDS has been also impactful. So, we see with Cameron the interaction of structure and agency; the institution and the institutional entrepreneur. Whereas Cameron was key in recognising the potential of the CCF tendency after the social justice policy review, and its synergy with many of the ideas of the metropolitan modernisers, he did not create these ideas—they emerged from within the institution. From a leadership perspective this was an unintended consequence; therefore, we see that explanation of incremental change must have this strong institutional focus for causality. The institutional entrepreneur has a key role, but in only so much that they can work with institutional ideational and material context. Moreover, and finally, they must work in an, often contingent, environmental context. In the last section of the empirical study, therefore, we will examine how the broader context enabled Cameron to enact incremental

change. How it was necessary for him to read the political environment; but also how the environment fortuitously and unpredictably presented him with the possibility to further the acceptance of change within the institution and the bringing together of emergent path tendencies: particularly with regard to the 2008 financial collapse.

5.10. The role of environmental contingency in a confluence juncture

Sometimes things happen just because they happen—at least from the point of view of causality within the institution. That is to say, they fall outside of the causal paths that we have been tracing through the institution during the opposition period and are events in the wider environment that are key in facilitating the continued acceptance of incremental change. However, we should note that environmental, or exogenous impacts, are not the sole causes of change. Such explanation would cancel the institutional, endogenous, explanation we have been tracing so far. Rather, we see that a changing environment *can*, but by no means will, further catalyse what is already moving within the institution: especially if a skilled institutional entrepreneur, such as Cameron, is able to present the strategic environment to the actors in the institution in a manner that permits positive feedback for changes taking place.

As Green (2010: 671) rightly stresses: ‘David Cameron benefited from a new electoral context: one in which the Labour Party, and Tony Blair in particular, had lost credibility and trust over its action in Iraq, and where the Labour Party in government was beset by increasing unpopularity. William Hague, Iain Duncan-Smith and Michael Howard had all led the Conservative Party when the Labour Party was mostly significantly ahead in the polls.’ The advantageous environment provided Cameron with the means to enact change, and dampens the argument that his moves were strongly agential. Indeed, often as leader he was fortuitous, lucky. Both with his timing within the institution, after much mid-level path tendency work had already taken place, and then with the changing environment, which, often unexpectedly, aided the bringing

together of the Party. Most significant was the effect of the 2008 financial collapse, which did much work to highlight to the leadership how social justice policy harmonised with other interests and beliefs.

The 2008 financial collapse

Importantly, it must be clear that the financial collapse, far from being a challenge to Tory policy, was constructed to be a justification for it. Tory financial policy was not altered by the collapse, rather the Tories, alongside some in the other parties and the dominant media, were able to position the collapse as a “crisis” not of capitalism but of the state. It is worth tracing the development of economic policy under Cameron before outlining how this affected, and was linked to, social justice policy and modernisation in the Party: then finally this can be modelled into an overall HI mechanism of incremental change, and in particular its conception of individual leadership agency to enact change.

In the leadership election David Davis put forward a package of £35 billion of tax cuts paid for by spending cuts relative to inflation (that is to say lower spending rises). Whereas Cameron sought to mark a point of difference by refusing to lay-out a long term commitment to tax cuts in principle, following the argument that a government should share the fruits of economic growth over the economic cycle. In his leadership election speech Cameron (2005) talked of ‘a full-bodied economic policy not just a tax policy’. Immediately following the leadership victory, Cameron and Osborne appointed the politician and banker Lord Forsyth, alongside Sir Christopher Gent, former head of Vodafone, to chair a Tax Reform Commission, which sat for a year. It made forty proposals, including a flatter and lower tax rate, and that inheritance tax be replaced

with an expansion of the standard capital gains tax (with family houses exempt): the cost of these proposals to the Treasury was calculated at £21 billion. However, when set aside growth in GDP, the report (Tax Reform Commission 2006: 126) argues that ‘the static cost of these reforms is therefore modest’ and they would not need to be paid for by spending cuts; though it also acknowledges, somewhat hedging, that ‘in the absence of any dynamic model for the UK economy, it is not possible to quantify this impact [of tax reform] with absolute certainty.’ The leadership also appointed John Redwood to chair a Review Group on Economic Competitiveness, which reported in August 2007. Redwood, who was tasked with examining regulation rather than tax revenue, concluded that a ‘vast range of regulations on the financial services industry should either be abolished or watered down,’ wrote the *Telegraph* (Hennessy: 2007), ‘including money-laundering restrictions affecting banks and building societies. Mr Redwood's group also sees “no need to continue” to regulate mortgage provision, saying it is the lender, not the client, who takes the risk’.

The leadership eventually distanced themselves from these proposals. Forsyth's report, says Matthew Hancock (2011), senior advisor to Osborne at the time, ‘was good, but we were in favour of no unfunded tax cuts: and that was a point of differentiation and a surprise to some.’ Hancock outlines that ‘the economic message was stability before tax cuts, we had a long discussion about that...Can you imagine,’ he says, ‘if we had been arguing for tax cuts, the Tories would have been in trouble [after the crash].’ This policy line was argued out at the 2006 conference, and guided Tory policy proposals over the coming twelve months, with Cameron committing to match Labour spending, rather than proposing to reduce spending to fund tax cuts.

When the credit crunch began to unfold, therefore, Cameron was in a relatively stable position with regard to fiscal policy: he had not previously advocated spending cuts, so he avoided appearing as if the credit crunch allowed him to cut what he wanted to cut all along; and he had not previously advocated lowering taxes regardless of economic conditions. This was to prove propitious, as what had been a tactic to differentiate himself from David Davis, and to avoid early commitment to an economic policy long before a general election, now conveniently left him un beholden. In a speech in September at the London School of Economics, Cameron (2007) began to construct the “crisis” in a manner that chimed with Conservative economic thinking, making the argument that the central economic problem was individual and government over-indebtedness. ‘The analysis in that speech is basically completely accurate,’ says Hancock (2011), ‘and defined our thinking about the crisis.’ This speech is highly instructive as it moves through almost the entirety of Tory modernisation thinking in one continuous motion—though it is not rich in policy detail. In the speech, Cameron gives his solutions to the crisis as: ‘Government must regulate and tax enterprises less...We need a radical simplification of business taxes, to lower the rate and broaden the base [and]...We need decentralisation to promote public sector productivity. And overall, we need to share the proceeds of economic growth between higher investment in our public services and lower taxes.’ With the credit crunch duly presented as a crisis not of markets but of the *state*, the familiar neo-liberal solution is presented, though Cameron does add (somewhat incongruously) that investment in public services must be pursued *alongside lower taxes*. This framing of the crisis was highly successful and a crucial move during a period where the construction of events was still plastic. As Hancock (2011) recalls: ‘there were lots and lots of people on the left going round

saying markets had failed, but markets hadn't failed they had not been regulated properly.' The Conservatives were able to de-radicalise the interpretation of the crisis so that no ideological change would occur in response to the financial collapse (see Johal *et al.* 2012)—eminently suitable to, and indicative of, a party which was developing its policy around non-radical positions.

An unusual speech

But what is most interesting about the speech is that a third of it is dedicated to talking about social justice, an unusual move for a Tory leader giving a speech about economic policy. 'We should celebrate the benefits of globalization,' says Cameron. 'But we must also recognise our moral obligation to the people and the places left behind.' Indeed, it is at this very moment, or there about, that the leadership begins to understand how neatly the CCF/CSJ modernizing agenda of compassionate Conservatism, and the Policy Exchange agenda of neo-liberalism, individualism, and localization can harmonise. (Interestingly, Policy Exchange have recently grouped economic and social policy under the same brief for research: the two areas, says Matthew Oakley (2011), are 'intimately linked'.) It is the contingent event of the credit crunch that creates this joining; that brings together the two parallel emerging path tendencies in the institution—which have been kept broadly similar by their sub-conscious adherence to the neo-liberal path dependency—to serve under a *single* new path tendency, facilitated by a pragmatic institutional entrepreneur. We can label this joining a *confluence juncture*, where we have the semi-stable establishing of an institution wide path tendency. Though this new single *Cameronite* path tendency is by no means wholly

harmonious (such things never are) it marks the first time in opposition that a wide swath of the party begins to see how they can work together towards a new policy emphasis. Where the CSJ in *Breakthrough Britain* had talked of personal over-indebtedness as a cause of community breakdown and lowering of quality of life (see Fforestfach 2007)—this could now be used to simultaneously talk of government spending.

Cameron is a charming man

Cameron's particular qualities of ideological soundness and policy tendency neutrality, of fop charisma and noblesse oblige, of warmth, so to speak, and offering an ear to everyone, of easy going physical attractiveness (undoubtedly Cameron is the best looking Tory leader since Anthony Eden) all meant that he appealed to the party across tendencies. Furthermore, because he had risen so quickly he had not established enemies or bitterness that is the normal fall-out of a political career. As Bale and Webb (2010: 43) highlight, reflecting on the 2005 leadership election, 'surveys of Tory members showed Cameron winning comprehensively among those who believed that the party should move towards the political centre...[and yet] he gained the same share of support as Davis among those who thought the party "should remain firmly on the right..."'

On top of this, we have—and this is exhibited arguably more in his advisor Steve Hilton than in Cameron—an embedding of ideology in a "structure of feeling". As Finlayson (2011: 36) writes, this is 'something both more and less than an ideology...a number of trends...extending from the 1960s to the present, have cohered in a class of

people who experience themselves and each other as part of an ‘anti-establishment’ culture of self-possessing creative and innovative individuals who are capable, and desirous, of being economically and socially responsible for themselves and for the world as they see it,’ and, we should add, think others can be too. Such an attitude becomes an effective pose for a modernising project which adheres to an established ideology. For by no means should we assume that a modern style means that fundamental beliefs have radically altered, rather they have found a new form—with an extra button undone on the shirt, and the occasional absence of shoes. Upon his departure from Downing Street in 2012, *The Economist* (2012) praised Steve Hilton, the central organiser of Tory rebranding under Cameron, as well as a source of metro mod policy ideas, writing that: ‘In his visceral disdain for the state, reverence for local communities and commitment to enterprise, he might be the most deeply conservative figure at the very top of this government.’ It is in this area that significant policy and institutional work was done—and it was Hilton’s, and others, linking of neo-liberal economic policy to social justice issues, reduction of the state, volunteerism, third sector intervention, and lifestyle notions of individual happiness, where real incremental change took place. With Cameron and Osborne we see the exaptation of the aristocrat for the modern age: and it was such a mentality, freed from the “self-interest” and lack of pragmatism of the grammar school parvenus that had led the Party for a generation, which was necessary to make these institutional entrepreneurs successful (see, on the common touch of the contemporary aristo, Walden [2006: 11], who wrote at the time that a Cameron victory in the 2010 election ‘would be the biggest triumph of our new elites since the apotheosis of Diana. Such a result would also confirm one of our least

admirable national characteristics: the irresistible English urge to deference, in this case deference towards the privileged and well-to-do masquerading as themselves’).

This, then, is the character of Cameron’s agency. But Cameron’s ability to unite could never be wholly agentially driven; he needed the institutional work done by others; and crucially, as we see in this section, he needed the contingent event of the financial collapse. We see, therefore, and this is a key theoretical point, that contingent events are not necessarily destructive and the cause of radical change. If they are framed to undermine institutional path dependencies then they are, and they can produce radical change in their wake. However, if they are framed to *justify* path dependencies, then high profile actors can use them to bring an institution together under a common preference. In the LSE speech, and in a number of speeches subsequently, Cameron links his analysis of over indebtedness to wider social concerns. ‘Cheap credit,’ said Cameron, ‘has also increased the social problems associated with over-indebtedness.’ He talks of the need not to leave people behind in a growing economy; but Cameron does not propose redistribution of wealth, of course. The one policy the leadership did not consider after the crash was to raise taxes, this was a non-decision: for path dependency is in action where choices are understood as inevitabilities, as unavoidable, within which only sub-choices can be made.

Likewise, how to deal with the crisis was understood through decisions on monetary policy—the setting of interest rates, the supply of money—rather than fiscal policy—tax revenue, government borrowing and spending. This is highlighted in a key speech George Osborne (2009) gave to the RSA, ‘Policy making after the crash’.

Osborne asks rhetorically ‘whether, when you are already borrowing too much, you should deliberately try and borrow your way out of debt. David Cameron and I,’ he answers, ‘have consistently argued against this irresponsible course of action.’ In contrast, Osborne advocates that ‘by using monetary policy to manage demand and control inflation you can keep unemployment low and stable...[and] monetary policy should bear the strain of stimulating demand.’

Furthermore, in the 2007 LSE speech we see Cameron arguing that happiness and well-being for the poor are not generated by government micro-controlling state run services, or by reducing income inequality through fiscal policy, referencing a then recent IEA study (Johns and Ormerod 2007). This same issue was later addressed in an impactful Policy Exchange report by Saunders and Evans (2010) where they argued that variances in income inequality across a number of countries did not explain differences in social mobility, life expectancy, obesity, and other quality of life indicators: with the implication that policies directed towards relative rather than absolute poverty are ineffective; and that helping the poor should not involve reducing the gap between rich and poor. However, there had also been a minority criticism in the Party of this stance for a number of years. In a 2006 blog post-on conservativehome, Greg Clark (2006a) writes that the ‘Conservative Party as a whole must make crystal clear. Ignoring the reality of relative poverty was a terrible mistake.’ And Franklin (2011) recalls that a central intention of the report he produced for the CSJ with Clark was addressing the ‘key issue of relative and absolute poverty. Firstly with John Moore’s speech [of 1989]: that poverty doesn’t exist anymore—that was a very controversial speech, and in terms of showing that actually one didn’t have to subscribe to that point of view, and it was

authentically conservative to actually accept the concept of relative poverty...we felt that was an important ground to cover.’

Cameron gave adherence to this point in 2006. In a speech that year he declared (quoted in Dorey 2011: 183): ‘I want this message to go out loud and clear: the Conservative Party recognised, will measure, and will act on relative poverty’; a sentiment echoed in the ‘Built to Last’ policy statements of the same year. After the crash, however, and with the metropolitan modernisers having more influence on economic policy, issues of financial inequality were addressed less, in favour of issues of opportunity and “happiness” and “self-esteem”. In his LSE speech, Cameron talks of ‘an agenda which puts not the individual, not the state, but society at the centre of national life.’ Crucially, such an agenda would not need to impact significantly on fiscal policy, which was now being directed solely towards deficit reduction. Yet this was hardly a *volte-face*: with the concept of relative poverty and reducing income inequality being always alien to the party institution, the *clarity* brought by the financial collapse could be seen to have acted as a corrective, with emergent ideas which were incongruous to the ideological path dependency being pushed aside, and those amenable path tendencies, from the CCF/CSJ line and the metro mods, simultaneously embraced.

This argument goes counter to what is dominant in the literature, which often characterises the Tory response to the collapse as incoherent. Dorey (2009), for example, writes that ‘the Tories were initially unable to offer a convincing response to the financial and economic crisis facing the country’. The argument Dorey pursues is that because the Conservatives were strong proponents of neo-liberalism then a collapse of the financial sector inevitably put them at a disadvantage. This may have been the

case at an opinion poll level; but institutionally “reading” the financial collapse in fact helped clarify Tory beliefs and achieve unity around policy emphases.

Fiscal policy after the crash

The first fiscal policy implication of the crash was the decision to come off the matching of Labour spending, which *had* included cuts: in that the growth in spending was to be lower than the predicted overall growth of the economy, reducing the deficit over time as then forecast. Matthew Hancock (2011) describes an ‘agonising series of meetings’ in late 2007, where he, Cameron, Osborne, Oliver Letwin, Steve Hilton, *et alia*, realised that Labour’s spending cuts were not affordable—and much more had to be done in order to tackle the deficit. ‘So we put the whole thing into the context of a national effort on the national debt,’ says Hancock (2011), ‘which became more and more important as the crisis went on, and that *validated and supported the modernising message.*’ The leadership’s avoidance pre-crash of advocating cuts to fund tax decreases, meant that they felt justified in arguing for cuts to fund debt, or at least deficit, reduction. In this way, the Tories did not feel they had changed tack at all after the crisis in their central economic principle of stability; and though severe spending cuts was a new policy, it was in keeping with the principle of managing the fruits of growth over the economic cycle. Yet Hancock (2011) also remarks that ‘the need for economic credibility clashed with the need to modernise’, thus highlighting a certain sense of ambivalence as to whether their purity of intent on economic issues would be understood by the electorate. ‘As soon as we stopped matching Labour’s spending plans,’ says Hancock (2011), ‘we knew that we were then going to be fighting an

election based on investment versus cuts, because Labour would say: we will spend and those nasty Tories will cut your eyeballs out.’ Consequently a tough position on fiscal policy could not be advocated in isolation, it must be joined, harmonised, with other policy: ‘we needed to do more on social justice and Big Society,’ says Hancock. And the possibilities of doing this for electoral reasons matched the complementarity of the ideas because they had emerged from within the institution.

So, the Tory reading of the crash was three-fold: fiscal policy must be used to deal with the deficit; that demand in a recession is best tackled using monetary policy; and that poverty must be understood not in terms of financial inequality, but in terms of quality of life, and therefore better tackled not with fiscal policy but through other means, such as embracing the third sector, which is inherently better suited to engaging with individuals than the state. This led to a policy emphasis on improving regulation, cutting the deficit, and encouraging an individual increase in happiness and opportunity, which would be unlinked from mere income inequality and facilitated by the local and the third sector, all of which characterised the party’s policy emphasis from 2007 to 2010. This culminated in the 2010 manifesto, with its complimentary main sections of ‘Change the Economy’ and ‘Change Society’. In the first section we read (Conservative Party 2010: 5) that the priority is to ‘eliminate the bulk of the structural deficit over a Parliament,’ alongside, *inter alia*, improving international tax competitiveness and increasing the private sector’s share of the economy. In the second section, we read (Conservative Party 2010: 37): ‘Our public service reform programme will enable social enterprise, charities and voluntary groups to play a leading role in delivering public services and tackling deep rooted social problems.’ The manifesto goes on to outline

how policy will enable parents to start new schools; an expansion of Academy schools; a Big Society bank to fund local projects; a Big Society Day to celebrate the third sector; to employ measures of well-being rather than just of income; a National Citizen Service, beginning with sixteen year olds, to encourage volunteering; supporting families with tax credits for married couples and civil-partnerships earning up to £50000; flexible paternity and maternity leave; free nursery care from a diverse number of providers; and a commitment to not cut spending in the NHS.

Cameron's joining of path tendencies, his creation of a confluence juncture, received wide support from the party institution. Often the Tory Party will give a leader-backed tendency short-term support out of discipline. But the success of the tendency is possible over the long term only if it begins to make sense out of the environment, and to order uncertainty in a manner that is effective but non-threatening. This was achieved by Cameron by firstly improving polling numbers, and secondly by clearly articulating the cohesiveness of differing interests in the institution. It is at this point that discipline becomes conformity, and a tendency can lock in, passing its early stages of vulnerability to provide increasing returns and permanence. We see here that the balance will shift from resistant institutional structures to leadership agency. This is particularly so with newer members of the institution, at this point in opposition acting as PPCs, who feel a stronger affinity to the new leadership than some of the old guard on the backbench (see Redford 2012). As the 2010 elected MP Louise Mensch (2011) confirmed when she happily retweeted a quote of hers posted by ConservativeHome: 'RT @ConHome: Tory backbencher @LouiseMensch: The 1922 Committee doesn't speak for me or many of my colleagues: <~~ yes.'

However, we should note that this is a relatively weak lock-in compared to path dependency. The leader has not constructed a new ideological position, only a new set of policy emphases through the joining of emergent policy tendencies—conformity, therefore, is liable to be disrupted easily by future exogenously generated uncertainties. Yet, by the time of the 2010 election Cameron *had* become the first post-1997 opposition leader to present a largely united and “modernised” Party to the electorate. As Matthew Hancock (2011), who entered parliament for the first time in the 2010 Tory victory, said to me: ‘In David Cameron you have someone who brings all of these strands together [CCF and Policy Exchange], which hark back to an older Conservatism that understands all of these different influences and brings them to the table rather than trying to create some overall high philosophy...Cameron is a practical politician: he’s not an ideologue.’ So we see that, whereas Tony Blair with Labour, for example, exercised power by hegemony, Cameron exercised power by synthesis, by confluence juncture, aided by environmental contingency. Cameron was not an ideological entrepreneur, coming to the leadership with an external set of ideas; rather, he instrumentally operationalised emergent tendencies within the institution.

6. Conclusion

That two former Party leaders are in Cameron's cabinet, and all are on good terms with the retired third, is testament to the fact that not much blood was spilt in the changing of the Party in the opposition period—there was none of the internecine conflict enacted by Blair in the fierce changing of the Labour Party. If an ideological struggle had taken place, or even radical policy change, we would not see, most likely, such harmony between past leaders. Indeed, when we understand Cameron as an institutional entrepreneur, guiding competing path tendencies within a stable path dependency, as someone who carried on institutional work that had preceded him by many years, rather than some bold agential power maximising leader, we begin to see the incorrectness of statements such as that made by Dorey, Garnett and Denham (2011), who suggest: 'few could have anticipated just how bold and innovative some of [Cameron's] ideological pronouncements and associated policy stances would subsequently prove to be.' It is a statement which is prevalent in the literature and needs to be reassessed.

We have done so here by utilising the insights of institutional theory. In doing so, we have also developed upon institutional theory itself, leaving it better able to label the actors and describe the mechanisms involved in incremental institutional change; and at the same time keeping our new theoretical tools in harmony with established HI observations: indeed, utilising those very observations as the key framework of our explanation that *path dependency enables incremental change*. I will go on now to give a concluding summary of the explanation of the causes of change in the Tory Party and

social justice policy in opposition; followed by a summary of the theoretical mechanisms that have been used.

Change in the Conservative Party

As Elliott and Hanning (2012: 335) write, Cameron's 'embrace of the modernisation project was always more pragmatic than ideological'. As a consequence, its continued pursuance only made sense if it was to produce electoral advantage. Yet he only had the ideas to continue because other actors in the institution had been less pragmatic, and had developed these ideas when they had not been popular; therefore, mere agential strategizing, as we have seen, does not wholly explain their emergence and deployment. However, Cameron did make it happen when he had the opportunity to do so, and it was not institutional determinism. As Stephen Dorell (2011) noted to me: 'It isn't right to say that this was a pressure building, and it boiled over with Cameron's leadership; it's much more that Cameron by a series of historical accidents won the leadership and carried through an agenda that had been argued by others from a position of less influence.'

So, there was no critical-juncture at the 1997 election defeat; the electorate did not reject the ideas of the Conservative Party. It was not possible, therefore, for the Party to break from the neo-liberal path dependency that had defined it since the 1980s, because the values of the Party had not been illegitimated. Change, therefore, was always going to be difficult, for bounded rationality and the logic of appropriateness reasonably led actors to return to past ideas. And yet these past ideas could no longer be

environmentally successful when presented by the party; this was due to an irrational electorate which separated ideas about policy and ideas about political parties.

Change, as a consequence, could only ever be incremental, and come largely from within. At first the Party thought that change might mean discontinuity; this resulted in disarray as actors reacted harshly to ideological entrepreneurs, and looked to close down all forms of change. It took the Party some time to realise that it had the means of incremental change (which retained continuity with the dominant path dependency) at its disposal. Once this was realised, we saw the exaptation of the Tory aristocratic wing, for so long dormant, and its re-emergence as a “progressive” and beneficent force unsullied, somewhat, by the *arriviste* connotations of the New Right. What emerged could not, and did not wish to, usurp Thatcherism; nor could it reanimate One Nationism—rather, through layering, what emerged was a new Conservatism, which was harmless to past practices (indeed, served to reinforce them), but had the ability to present a new appearance to a lost section of the electorate who had always quite liked Tory ideas, and who did not much mind the new “meritocratic” aristocrat that was presented.

Coupled to this was the strategic realisation that through neutral invasion new areas of policy could be found—namely, the new policy area of environmentalism—that had not been previously defined, and proscribed, by the Party’s dominant ideology; as well as the mimetic invasion of New Labour ideas (such as the image of telegenic managerialism, or issues of welfare reform); and that previously alien ideas could be reframed and neutralised: such as gay rights becoming a pro-family issue. Alongside this were a number of beneficial contingencies, which HI cannot categorise other than to acknowledge their presence: namely, the financial collapse, the fall of Blair, and

Cameron's public speaking abilities, charm, and softness of face. So, as a result of mechanisms of incremental change, we saw an institution that was able to present new policies, whilst all along remaining within a neo-liberal path dependency—for how could it not have done, when all feedback confirmed its acceptance? Notably, the Cameroons were successful not *in spite of* their noble birth, but precisely because of it. The *noblesse oblige* of One Nationism—re-packaged, and toned down, for the modern age—proved to be the healing balm the Tories had in their breast pocket all along.

The discontinuity between the first three leaders as a group—Hague, IDS, Howard—and Cameron has, therefore, been exaggerated by work which is too focused on description, agentialism, and leadership personality. A more accurate analysis of the institution, and the application of an intuitionist framework, reveals a high level of continuity at an ideological level. This continuity has been shown in empirical work around social justice policy, which uncovered mid-level changes in the Party that occurred through the actions of, or during the tenures of, the first three leaders (particularly Hague and IDS), thus disproving the dominant idea that there were three leaders that produced general stagnation, and then one leader that produced rapid change. This area of argument is strengthened by lessening the view of Cameron as a change leader and ideological entrepreneur by uncovering ideological continuity in the post-2005 institution with the past practices of the Party. Therefore, though we may identify attitudinal, presentational, and some content changes around policy, these do not diverge from a strong ideological path dependence—which though specifically neo-liberal in nature can be more specifically characterised as pro-private capital and anti-state, as well as pro-agential individual responsibility, and anti-structural causality, that

is to say: the founding interests of the Party. In this way, Cameron's modernisation is fundamentally different from Blair's: for Cameron's "Big Society" really is but a small idea: and in no way challenges core Tory thinking. Indeed, an attractive next step in research that applies institutional theory to the study of British politics would be a comparative analysis of change in the Conservative and Labour parties over the last decades. The test for HI would be whether the same theoretical mechanisms could explain both (we hypothesise) radical change in the Labour Party *and* incremental change in the Conservative Party: one would want to see an explanation of each party's process of change that was complementary, that is to say mutually re-enforcing, and that remained parsimonious. It would make for a rich project, in both explanatory and theoretical terms.

Developing historical institutionalism

This thesis has shown that present theoretical mechanisms in HI are highly useful in explaining the process of change in an area of British politics. Furthermore, and crucially, the thesis has developed these mechanisms to improve HI's ability to explain *incremental* change; but without undermining HI's already well-established explanation of radical change from exogenous shock: indeed, the thesis has integrated these mechanisms into one another, so that the same process that can explain radical change, can also explain incremental change. The most significant theoretical contribution, therefore, has been to utilise the already developed understanding of path dependency in order to present an explanation of incremental change. Path dependency recognises that a logic of appropriateness around ideological issues still allows for a degree of

movement on policy emphasis. However, this movement also exhibits weaker path like qualities, which we have labelled path tendency. So, if the path dependency is experiencing external affirmation, there is no sense of crisis only uncertainty. Therefore, change is desired by internal institutional actors, but not radical change. Consequently, we will not see radical path dependent change; but we will see incremental change along lines of path tendency.

Path tendencies are created either endogenously, by exapting residual policy emphases in the institution: such as the reappearance in the opposition period of altered forms of One Nationism and aristocratic leadership. Or they are created exogenously, whereby they pass into the institution from complementary contiguous institutions, such as Christianity. These path tendencies form, or re-form, at the mid-level, where they have the time to create networks and generate new policy ideas. These new policy ideas find traction in the institution, where they do not threaten existing ideological path dependency. Rather, they use mimicry and neutral invasion, to present change which remains concerned with logics of appropriateness and established ideological norms. Such mid-level tendency movement is disparate, and not strongly co-ordinated by an elite. This is because strong elite co-ordination is met with suspicion in non-crisis situations; change is more effective when it emerges from within the institution.

We see at this point how path dependency acts as a co-ordinating factor: it is the institutional set up itself, its implied norms that delimit ideas, which ensure that differing policy emphases stay within permitted boundaries. However, mere institutional causality does not ensure the success of incremental change. So, whereas path dependency delimits and directs the movements of path tendency, agents remain crucial to the eventual effectiveness of the change. Firstly, we need the agency of mid-

level actors. These we have labelled *policy entrepreneurs*: this specific label allows us to differentiate them from the actions of other actors labelled in HI, specifically the common label of *ideological entrepreneur* (an actor that has a low presence in incremental change, and is rejected by the institution). Policy entrepreneurs are path dependent, but explore change along lines of path tendency. Secondly, we have used the established HI label of *institutional entrepreneur*, but given this actor a new and specific role in our explanation: the co-ordination of similar path tendencies. For though path tendencies *are similar* within a non-crisis institution, mid-level policy entrepreneurs are often unaware of this fact; they require, therefore, the action of institutional entrepreneurs to branch across the institution, to harmonise ideas, and to articulate how different ideas re-enforce each other: such as economic and social justice policy in the Conservative Party. Following a logic of appropriateness, it is (boundedly) rational for the institutional entrepreneur not to introduce radical new ideas but to draw upon emergent path tendencies which are finding incremental acceptance across the institution. This requires the successful handling of both mid-level policy entrepreneurs, and also elite policy entrepreneurs, who might seek to veto such moves. Coupled to this ideational joining, or *confluence juncture*, as I have labelled it, we will also see the incremental change of material structures, as we saw under Howard, which, though by no means inevitable, can have the unintended consequence of facilitating later ideational movement. Finally, we must be cognisant of the role of the environment, which unpredictably can provide favourable circumstances in which to highlight the complementarity of path tendencies, and also to provide for the institutional entrepreneur the sort of external positive feedback which will ensure the continued internal acceptance of his co-ordinating project.

But in summary, the key, and exciting, theoretical insight that this research has generated is this: path dependency does not *only* create stability followed by external shock, then crisis, and then radical change; rather, in a non-crisis situation path dependency actually works to *facilitate* incremental change. And from that insight, much interesting research work can be done, which does not rely solely on exogenous lines of causality; but presents, rather, a strong institutional and endogenous explanation for change.

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