**Handout 1: Central themes of traditional conservatism**

**Tradition**

Conservatives value tradition for the following reasons:

* The organic society reaches out into both past and future and cannot be severed from its roots if it is to survive.
* Intellectually imperfect humans should look to tradition and history as guides to action, rather than to human reason and abstract theories.
* Tradition – including cultural tradition – can provide a sense of identity, security and stability for psychologically imperfect humans.
* From a pragmatic perspective, if something has survived for a long time, clearly it works. ‘What has stood the test of time is good and must not be lightly cast aside’ (Edmund Burke).

**Authority**

Conservatives value authority for the following reasons:

* Authority is an essential feature of the organic and hierarchical structure of society, where ‘natural governors’ make the key decisions in the common interests of the whole society.
* Authority is a form of social glue which binds psychologically insecure people together and gives them a sense of rootedness, identity and stability.
* Since human nature is morally flawed, only the exercise of authority from above can prevent a descent into chaos and disorder.
* Conservatives have tended to link authority to wisdom, in that, by training and accumulated experience, those in authority come to know ‘what is best’ for everyone - implying paternalism.

**Define the following terms:**

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| **Paternalism** |  |
| **Hierarchy** |  |
| **Pragmatism** |  |

**Traditional conservative ‘one nationism’**

Originated in the C19th in Conservative PM Benjamin Disraeli’s fear of the growing economic divide between rich and poor – ‘two nations’ – and the consequent social unrest and disorder; his solution was limited welfarism to help the poorest in society.

This Tory paternalism is not premised upon the pursuit of either equality or freedom, but upon a pragmatic desire to prevent social rebellion and hence preserve the power and privileges of the ‘natural governors’. As Disraeli said, ‘If the cottages are happy, the castle is safe’: that is some degree of caring for the poor will prevent social unrest or even revolution, and will ensure that the social stability of the natural hierarchy – and dominant position of the ruling class – is maintained.

Tory paternalism is also premised upon a concept of *noblesse oblige* – a duty to social compassion towards those who are at the bottom of the natural, God-given, organic hierarchy through fate and not through any fault of their own.

Conservatives have thus supported ‘one-nation’ principles for both pragmatic and moral reasons. The pragmatic basis for one nationism is the fear that widening social inequality - the ‘two nations’ of rich and poor Disraeli feared – will threaten the established order by fuelling pressure for social revolution. The moral case for one nationism rest upon paternalism, a belief in guidance and support being exercised for the benefit of those who cannot act in their own interests.

Because of its pragmatism, Toryism does not perceive itself as a doctrinaire ideology, but it does, nevertheless, have clearly identifiable theoretical principles, such as the organic society and mistrust of human nature.

**Briefly answer:**

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| **Why is Toryism anti-egalitarian?** |
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| **Why do conservatives value the nation?** |
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| **Why do conservatives value tradition?** |
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