HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

POLITICAL THOUGHT, ELITES, AND THE STATE IN MODERN BRITAIN

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In general it seems to me a primary condition of national health that there shall be free and abundant contact between the most advanced culture and the masses, that due pains shall be taken 'to marshall well the ranks behind', and keep the whole army together. Where there is a great residuum of ignorance and stupidity, everything is dragged down…But if ever this contact was needful it is now and here; for evidently what has put the finishing touch to our confusion is the fact that the residuum of ignorance and stupidity has become our master and our judge…Just when the religious tradition had been dethroned by scepticism, and the constitutional tradition by radicalism, a new sovereign was crowned who knew nothing of either. Ignorance was proclaimed king, and an authority set up.

> Before whose fell approach and secret might
> Art after art goes out, and all is night![1]

It is well worth pondering Seeley's gloomy cultural assessment delivered to the Ethical Society of Cambridge a few years before his death in 1895. It is not so much the pessimism attendant upon the era of mass politics and society that is so arresting. He was quick to acknowledge a brighter, more hopeful prospect in the passage which followed. It is more the idea, so fervently expressed, that national life is best served by the existence of an intellectual elite whose abiding concern is to tend the cultural well-being of the less advanced majority – to furnish and communicate moral truths, a vibrant atmosphere of thought, and a body of ideas that would at once provide unity and direction to society as a whole. He was not alone in entertaining these hopes, but instead expressed a common outlook among the leading thinkers of his day: despite very real divisions in the intellectual elite centring on such questions as free thought versus religion, tradition versus radicalism, imperialism versus 'little Englandism', all sought a prominent role for intellectuals in defining the central 'public' values and identities of their society through their scholarship and personal conduct alike.[2]

This mantle of the 'public moralist' was emphasized by Stefan Collini in a landmark study of 1991.[3] It became apparent from Collini's book that political thought was an especially important medium of the intelligentsia's efforts – in its mid- to late-Victorian heyday – to raise the moral tone of society, to impart an ethic of truth, integrity, and common purpose at the highest and lowest level alike. Recent studies of both political theory and intellectual culture alike in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century have confirmed the broad cultural

[1] J. R. Seeley, 'Ethics and religion', in The Society of Ethical Propagandists, ed., *Ethics and religion* (London, 1900), p. 14.

[2] For alternative models of the role of the intellectual in society, particularly as these developed in the twentieth century in Europe and America, see J. Jennings and A. Kemp-Welch, eds., *Intellectuals in politics: from the Dreyfus Affair to Salmon Rushdie* (London, 1997).

[3] S. Collini, *Public moralists: political thought and intellectual life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991).

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significance enjoyed by the former; but they also shed light on other disciplines and professional practices through which intellectuals sought to maintain a strong cultural hierarchy in Britain. They make clear, too, that the era of the 'public moralist' extended well into the twentieth century – albeit progressively fragmented by rival conceptions of the tasks that intellectuals should perform in the cultural life of their society. This longevity occurred despite an avowedly 'non- or even anti-intellectual' culture in Britain, which was in turn linked to a conception of British character as essentially pragmatic.[4] Five main distinguishing aspects of 'public intellectuals' in Britain during the 'golden age' of the turn of the century have emerged in recent literature: their exclusivity; pursuit of intellectual inquiry within distinctive English 'national' traditions; adherence to an ideology of 'liberal pluralism'; commitment to social improvement through individual exertion; and accordance of a purely formal role to the state. It will be argued in the conclusion that these concerns have been all but eclipsed in the second half of the twentieth century, thereby rendering obsolete the very category of the 'public intellectual', despite widespread interest in, and nostalgia for, the latter.

I

The keen sense of public mission which animated the British intellectual elite during the later decades of the nineteenth century was accompanied, if not fuelled, by an equally strong sense of elite identity that was, on the whole, fiercely maintained. This was variously manifested, not least in the keeping of common company. For example, while Herbert Spencer generally avoided high society – particularly its ceremonial and 'conformist' aspects – he none the less found the heavy presence of distinguished intellectuals at the Atheneum a pleasant daily tonic after his election in 1868.[5] A confident sense of superiority was also fairly typical. Thus, the leading rationalist, Leslie Stephen, felt moved to assert that between the 'thoughtful' in society who wanted a religion based on philosophy and the 'vulgar' who could yield to religion only at the level of superstition there lay an unbridgeable gulf. He certainly made no attempt to conceal his distaste for Salvation Army evangelism.[6]

The distance which the intellectual elite set between themselves and those whose tastes and beliefs they attempted to mould and shape continued in evidence as the twentieth century advanced. This is emphasized, first of all, in an exquisite study of Bertrand Russell's social and political thought before 1938 by Philip Ironside – a great

[4] See T. W. Heyck, 'Myths and meanings of intellectuals in twentieth-century British national identity', in *Journal of British Studies*, 37 (1998), p. 196.

[5] Collini, *Public moralists*, p. 18. Illustrations abound of Spencer's inability to mix freely in upper-class circles, despite ample opportunities to do so. For example, he refused the free admission he was offered to the opening of the Great Exhibition in 1851 as a journalist for the *Economist* – 'neither then nor at any time caring to be a spectator of State-ceremonies or royal pageants'. Thereafter, however, 'many days and half days were passed with pleasure and profit in studying the arts and industries of the various European peoples'. H. Spencer, *An autobiography* (2 vols., London, 1904), I, p. 373. On another occasion, in 1874, he was invited to an 'At Home' at the Foreign Office in honour of the emperor of Russia. However, he felt compelled to decline the invitation on account of the existence of a dress code. When the hostess permitted him to attend in 'ordinary evening dress', he again sent his apologies, pointing out that 'to make himself a solitary exception in so conspicuous a manner on such an occasion would be even more repugnant to him than conformity itself'. D. Duncan, *The life and letters of Herbert Spencer* (London, 1908), p. 185.

[6] Leslie Stephen, 'The aims of ethical societies', in The Society of Ethical Propagandists, ed., *Ethics and religion*, pp. 251–2.

and rare triumph of an approach to the analysis of ideas which combines psychology and intellectual history.[7] Ironside locates Russell firmly within the 'clerisy tradition' inaugurated by Coleridge, Arnold, and Mill and sustained by Lawrence, Forster, and Eliot in the twentieth century, and suggests that his 'political philosophy' is incomprehensible in the absence of due consideration of that tradition. Notwithstanding the disparity between Russell's professional authority as a philosopher of mathematics and his status as an 'intellectual' grounded in extensive social and political commentary, Ironside argues firmly in favour of a close connection between the two. Not only was Russell's credibility built upon his scholarly activities; he used his popular writings to press the case of a society in which recondite knowledge – the production of which was his forté – would be tolerated, if not esteemed.[8]

Two points of interest emerge here. First, Russell – like others who formed the 'clerisy' tradition – assumed a permanent and unbridgeable gulf between the intellectual elite and those who were less mentally favoured. As Ironside so shrewdly observes again, Russell's outlook was marked by an inveterate bias towards elitism – something which he shared with Mill – in the priority he attached to the intellectual type of character when otherwise proclaiming the value of diversity. It could not be otherwise for someone who once professed 'indifferen[ce] to the mass of human creatures'.[9] Second, however, there is a further twist in the irony which Ironside mentions regarding Russell's involuntary association with the Idealist tradition (which he played an instrumental role in discrediting on technical grounds) on account of his perpetuation of the 'clerisy' ideal. His intellectual ancestors – Coleridge, Arnold, and Carlyle – had drawn upon Idealist philosophy to support the idea of transcendent values, decipherable only by a priestly caste. But furthermore, Idealism in and after T. H. Green was to become a primary platform for narrowing the divide between the educated and non-educated classes. Green himself notably preferred company that was distinctly below his professional rank. The memoir of Green by R. L. Nettleship states that 'He was drawn to plain people, to people of the middle and lower class rather than of the upper, to the puritans of the past and the nonconformists of the present, to Germans, to all that is sober-suited and steady-going.'[10] Green's disciples – Bosanquet, Muirhead, and Barker – also circulated widely throughout society, engaging freely in social as much as scholarly work in their endeavour to forge a common culture that would befit the new democratic age.

On the other hand, Idealist-inspired effort to promote greater cultural contact between the educationally privileged and the less fortunate in society was ineluctably driven by assumptions of the worth and necessity of such an elite. This is clear from Seth Kovan's chapter on Henrietta Barnett in an illuminating and multifaceted collection of essays on post-Victorian intellectual life dedicated to the memory of the historian John Clive.[11] Henrietta Barnett was the stalwart wife of Canon Samuel Barnett, who had

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[7] Philip Ironside, *The social and political thought of Bertrand Russell: the development of an aristocratic liberalism* (Cambridge, 1996).   [8] Ibid., p. 212.

[9] Ibid., p. 37. This attitude was at least a slight improvement on the contempt for the common man which Beatrice Webb seemed to find rife among fellow intellectuals in the 1920s, for example, Keynes, Haldane, and even G. D. H. Cole. See *The diary of Beatrice Webb* (4 vols., London, 1982–5), IV, pp. 94, 95, 97.

[10] R. L. Nettleship, ed., *Works of Thomas Hill Green* (3 vols., London, 1889), III, p. lxii.

[11] Susan Pederson and Peter Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians: private conscience and public duty in modern Britain: essays in memory of John Clive* (London, 1994).

been groomed for a life of self-sacrificial labour in the slums of East London through the influence of Green and Arnold Toynbee. The Barnetts found purpose and self-fulfilment in ministering to the cultural and moral needs of the downtrodden, and in the course of her work Henrietta found much that was worthy of emulation in their lives – not least, the habits of mutual assistance and solidarity. Ultimately, however, she never questioned the superiority of her class, and its authority to determine the contours of the unifying culture whose end she served so tirelessly.[12] The same conclusion emerges from Standish Meacham's account, in *After the Victorians*, of the attitudes and beliefs which informed the architectural work of Raymond Unwin. While deeply committed to the 'aesthetic' socialism of Ruskin, Morris, and Carpenter, Unwin and his partner Barry Parker designed houses and communities from his own class perspective: for example, he was insensitive to the 'psychic' need of the respectable working class for wasteful parlours and favoured instead one large communal room that had a deep 'lived-in' feel to it; and he embraced with enthusiasm the ideal of the Garden Suburb as the sure-fire recipe for success in promoting class integration (rather than its abolition), and as a means of imparting more wholesome 'manners and habits' from the well-to-do to the less well-to-do.[13]

The dominance of the culture of the intellectual classes was vigorously maintained by exclusionary educational policies, particularly in the arcane field of classics, as has been well brought out in a remarkable feat of scholarship by Christopher Stray.[14] In so far as nearly all university entrance scholarships in the prestigious institutions of Oxford and Cambridge were devoted to classics (and mathematics), only those who had benefited from a classical education in the public schools effectively gained entrance before 1914.[15] This did not produce a totally closed intellectual elite: in another example from *After the Victorians*, Leonard Woolf's cleverness enabled him to compensate for the financially reduced circumstances of his family, winning a scholarship to St Paul's and then a classical scholarship to Trinity College, Cambridge. The Hellenism which he imbibed at both levels became a seminal influence on his social and political analysis subsequently.[16] Nevertheless, such examples are rare, and the sustained privileging of a classical education, despite the progressive erosion of its near monopoly of the curriculum of the learned classes after 1870, created the '*lingua franca*'[17] of the latter right up until the middle of the twentieth century.

Evidence abounds in Stray's book of the tight class, national, and gender identities which initiation into the English world of classics in its heyday imparted. There is, for example, the spectacle of Henry Sidgwick and Edward Bowen swapping quotations from Horace on a walking tour;[18] of classical composition and translation providing the

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[12] Seth Koven, 'Henrietta Barnett (1851–1936): the (auto)biography of a late Victorian marriage', in ibid., p. 45.

[13] Standish Meacham, 'Raymond Unwin (1863–1940): designing for democracy in Edwardian England', in ibid., p. 96.

[14] Christopher Stray, *Classics transformed: schools, universities, and society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford, 1998).   [15] Ibid., pp. 183, 260.

[16] F. M. Levanthal, 'Leonard Woolf' (1880–1969): the conscience of a Bloomsbury socialist', in Pederson and Mandler, ed., *After the Victorians*, pp. 152–3.

[17] The term is Ernest Barker's, used to describe classics as the common denominator among teachers of various humanistic subjects at Oxford at the turn of the century. *Age and youth: memories of three universities and father of the man* (Oxford, 1953), p. 17.

[18] Stray, *Classics transformed*, p. 153.

most stimulating hours of those who had mastered its rigours;[19] alarming spoof portraits of female Muslims as senior Classics, should women be admitted to Oxbridge and compulsory Greek abolished;[20] of the exclusion of 'ordinary' Greeks from the paeans to Greek civilization written by 'liberal humanists' like Richard Jebb, Richard Livingstone, Gilbert Murray, and Alfred Zimmern;[21] and of the condescension of public school education officials at the Board of Education towards the municipal official.[22]

As Stray points out, the study of classics underwent a long and complex process of 'declassicization', fragmentation, and marginalization between the middle of the nineteenth and the middle of the twentieth centuries, becoming just one specialism among many and its substantive content stripped of any special exemplary status. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, classics reigned supreme in the academic curricula of schools and universities alike, its dominance ensured by the transcendent world of truth whose existence Anglicanism confidently vouched for. Within this classics-defined world of high culture, the study of the language and culture of ancient Greece enjoyed particular influence, symbolizing a timeless world of humanistic value which a leisured aristocratic class was best placed to appreciate. A century later, however, classics had been 'dethroned' in the curricula, giving way to a plethora of modern studies.

Much had happened along the way. For example, attempts had been made in the last decades of the nineteenth century to rescue the notion of a transcendent world of value embodied in classical civilization, and classical civilization alone, from a religious framework whose credibility was increasingly brought into question. Greek had increasingly given way to Latin – a new 'exemplary' focus of classical learning which corresponded to conservative perception of the need for 'stability', 'discipline', and 'rigour', both in an intellectual sense and in the qualities required of citizens in the maintenance of empire. The demand for the teaching of Latin was especially sustained by middle-class parents, anxious to put down a status marker for their offspring in the state-funded grammar schools. The sacred status of the 'text' in the study of ancient Greece and Rome had been challenged by the rise of disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology which brought non-literary evidence to bear on the subject. The need to defend the cultural value of classics before as wide an audience as possible had brought forth a Classical Association, with local societies, which stood its ground against the more pedagogically motivated Association for the Reform of Latin teaching. Of especial significance, however, are the interwar attempts of the humanistic elite, led by 'mandarin' intellectuals like H. A. L. Fisher, James Bryce, and J. W. Mackail (and Barker) to prolong the existence of classical culture – albeit through the predominance of Latin over Greek and within a 'pluralized' curricula – as the basis of intellectual and political culture in Britain. The emphasis on 'specialization' in accordance with 'types' of children allowed classics to continue to exert a powerful shaping influence on the cultural life of Britain through a tripartite system of education: 'full classics' representing 'culture' furnished at the exclusive level of public school, and the occasional grammar school; 'discipline' instilled through Latin in the grammar schools; and 'practice' pursued through technical subjects in the 'Board' – secondary modern – schools. This hierarchy survived into the 1950s when compulsory Latin as a requirement for all subjects was dropped at Oxford and Cambridge.

[19] Ibid., p. 59.   [20] Ibid., p. 163.   [21] Ibid., p. 226.   [22] Ibid., p. 238.

So crumbled a tightly interlocking system of elite education. Once compulsory Latin went, the ability of public schools to maintain their aura of exclusivity became increasingly difficult. Not least, a considerable proportion of the pupils themselves favoured the abolition of Latin, much to the chagrin of headmasters like Robert Powell of Sherborne, accustomed to the less questioning schoolboy ethos of an earlier age.[23] The long reign of Britain's Victorian intelligentsia – integrated by a classical education that dominated both secondary and university education – must surely end here, although the emphasis lies as much on the reign's duration as on its abrupt termination.

II

Another significant feature of Stray's book is the evidence it gives of an 'English' tradition of classical scholarship which was defined against the dominant German model. While the latter was heavily erudite, it was deemed 'mechanical', lacking in the literary subtleties and fluency that marked English scholarship at its best. This was because in England, classical scholarship was the pursuit of the 'gentleman', reflecting his 'character' and possessing value precisely because it was character-forming for those who read it.[24] In addition, the 'ideal' that was believed to be quintessentially embodied in the classical world was considered central to the cause of 'England' against the 'material' pursuit of power by Germany at the time of the First World War.

The emphasis on 'national traditions' of intellectual inquiry is becoming increasingly prominent in the work of historians, not least, historians of British culture and political thought. One important area where this has been developed is in the study of Marxism. Edwin A. Roberts has examined the flourishing Marxist culture of intellectuals across a wide range of disciplines in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and argued for the existence of a distinct brand of 'Anglo-Marxism'.[25] It has to be said at the outset that this book is deeply marred by appallingly low standards of book production: errors of typing, spelling, grammar, and syntax are legion. But the thesis is interesting and original, and deserves serious consideration none the less.

Roberts's book sustains (although strangely without mentioning) the earlier work of David Blaazar, which argued that the vibrant forces of the intellectual left in the interwar period were not in thrall to any 'foreign' creed and party (particularly that of Soviet Communism and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)) but drew substantially upon native political resources.[26] This approach developed in critical reaction to the views of contemporaries such as Orwell and scholars such as Neal Wood who were writing during the height of the Cold War.[27] While Blaazer considered the era of the Popular Front in the context of a 'progressive' British tradition stretching back to the era of the 'Rainbow circle' of Hobson and Hobhouse, Roberts looks explicitly at British Marxism in the 1930s and beyond.

Roberts maintains that Anglo-Marxism emerged in the 1920s when communist theory began to take hold in the universities and connect with existing intellectual currents in Anglo-Saxon culture; it was not, that is to say, the work of contemporary Marxist intellectuals like G. A. Cohen with which it is often associated – rather, the

[23] Obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1998.   [24] Stray, *Classics transformed*, p. 211.
[25] Edwin A. Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists: a study in ideology and culture* (Lanham, MA, 1997).
[26] David Baazer, *The popular front and the progressive tradition: socialists, liberals, and the quest for unity, 1884–1939* (Cambridge, 1992).
[27] Neal Wood, *Communism and British intellectuals* (New York, 1959).

latter is held to represent the revival of an older tradition. Chief among these intellectual currents was an increasingly dominant analytical tradition of philosophy in its stand-off with the Idealist school; in this form, British Marxism became apparent in the ideas of Maurice Cornforth and John Lewis. But other native currents included a pervasive liberal culture, a cross-fertilization which is best illustrated in the writings of Harold Laski. Before this time, Marxism was divorced from the mainstream of British intellectual life: it led a fairly precarious existence in the enclaves of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and among guerrilla groups on the left which had been inspired by the Bolshevik revolution. In so far as the study of Marxism was possible from the texts that were available in foreign languages, it became the specialist province of 'proletarian philosophers' – autodidacts such as T. A. Jackson who worked in studious disregard of the mainstream intellectual culture of his time.

Roberts's study is in many ways pioneering. He rightly stresses the dearth of attention given to communist theory in Britain; while there have been single studies of Marxist intellectuals like Rajani Palme Dutt and John Strachey,[28] a work which considers such prominent figures in the movement alongside lesser-known luminaries in the humanities, for example John Lewis and A. L. Morton, and once prominent but now forgotten communist spokesmen of science, like J. D. Bernal, has not been forthcoming. While he stresses the sympathy with, and often loyalty to, the Communist parties of both Britain and the Soviet Union exhibited by such figures, he also argues that creative and sometimes objective scholarship existed alongside this commitment. The integrity of Anglo-Marxism, he believes, was especially apparent after the debacle of Hungary: instead of submitting to the line of the CPSU, the 'New Left' developed innovative forms of study and theory that were not incompatible with the British Marxist tradition that was already solidly established. Only later did the New Left jettison native traditions for continental models of Marxism.[29]

But while Roberts's work is illuminating, the commitment of the figures he considers to the wholesale transformation of society – inspired by revolutionary change in a distant country which hitherto had excited little interest among the British intelligentsia – remains intriguing. How did enthusiasm for such an extreme political cause develop from an essentially liberal intellectual tradition that stressed the central importance of individual cultivation, and the adoption of what James Fitzjames Stephen termed 'generous and high-minded sentiments upon political subjects, guided by a highly instructed, large-minded, and impartial intellect'?[30] It is ironic but none the less relevant that the same classical education which helped to define such priorities proved eminently serviceable to the cause of communism: the combination in the former of analytical rigour and versatility in languages supplied Rajani Palme Dutt with an undoubted advantage in decoding Leninist communiques from Moscow.[31] It is also true that the radical wing of the British intelligentsia around the turn of century – embodied most notably in John Morley – had in some sense opened the way towards the reception of communism through their scathing dismissal of the 'temporizing' spirit of parliamentary politics: in his essay *On compromise* (1874) – now the subject of a fine

[28] For example, J. Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: a study in British Stalinism* (London, 1993); N. Thompson, *John Strachey: an intellectual biography* (London, 1993).
[29] Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists*, p. 270.
[30] J. F. Stephen, 'Liberalism', in *Cornhill Magazine*, 5 (1862), p. 72, reprinted, with notes, in J. Stapleton, ed., *Liberalism, democracy, and the state in Britain, 1862–1891: five essays* (Bristol, 1997).
[31] Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists*, p. 61.

critical edition[32] – the latter was projected as a far cry from the purity of the intellectual realm of 'truth' which the give and take of political practice only ever succeeded in corrupting. It also has to be borne in mind that – as a recent article has stressed – Marx himself was no stranger to British political and intellectual life, and although in no way connected to the intellectual elite, nevertheless did shape a substantial number of his ideas under the influence of political events and debates in Britain in the aftermath of Chartism.[33]

Yet if it is true that British Marxism was not the 'aberration' in the intellectual life of the country that Wood maintained it was, it did represent a deep rupture in the concerns and beliefs of an intelligentsia which hitherto – while fiercely partisan – had not considered its primary role to be that of serving (let alone in a paid capacity) an organized political movement. As Joseph Hamburger noted long ago, drawing on Bagehot for support, doctrinaire politics have been the exception rather than the rule in Britain,[34] and have been invariably short-lived. There is surely no precedent among the 'respectable' figures whom Roberts cites as earlier models of the 'committed' intellectual – Hobbes, Milton, Harrington, Carlyle, and Mill[35] – for Palme Dutt's insistence in 1930 that 'First and foremost he [the intellectual] *should forget that he is an intellectual* (except in moments of necessary self-criticism) *and remember only that he is a Communist...like any other Party member.*'[36] Nor, for the most part, did that essentially liberal intelligentsia ever shift its focus of patriotic loyalty abroad, but instead remained steadfastly loyal to the institutions and traditions – if not always to the culture – of their own country.[37] In addition, for all the ground which communism won among intellectuals, particularly in the 1930s, probably the majority were hostile; and while Communist popular front organizations managed to attract liberal writers such as E. M. Forster (who co-chaired the National Council of Civil Liberties),[38] this was accompanied on the latter's part by a deep contempt for communist intellectuals like J. D. Bernal and their role in the destruction of the recognizable face of 'England'.[39] Ultimately, psychological explanations of the hold of communism on intellectuals are indispensable. As Philip Ironside has noted in relation to Russell, the embrace of foreign utopias (however much through indigenous conduits) became an obvious antidote to the loss of the sense of 'assurance previously provided by the apparent stability and continuity of the Liberal tradition'.[40]

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[32] John Morley, *On compromise*, ed. John Powell (Edinburgh, 1997).

[33] Miles Taylor, 'The English face of Karl Marx', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 1 (1996), pp. 27–53.

[34] J. Hamburger, *Intellectuals in politics: John Stuart Mill and the philosophic radicals* (New Haven, 1965), p. 1.   [35] Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists*, p. 264.

[36] Quoted in Heyck, 'Myths and meanings', p. 212. Original emphasis.

[37] See Julia Stapleton, 'Political thought and national identity in Britain, 1850–1950', in S. Collini, B. Young, and R. Whatmore, eds., *Essays in British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (2 vols., Cambridge, forthcoming), II: *History, religion, and culture*. Mill is an obvious example of a thinker who despised the general culture of his fellow countrymen but who recognized their strengths in the political realm and the superiority of the political system which had ensued.

[38] Roberts, *The Anglo-Marxists*, p. 73.

[39] E. M. Forster, 'The challenge of our time' (1946), in *Two cheers for democracy* ([London 1951]; 1965), pp. 64–9.   [40] Ironside, *The social and political thought of Bertrand Russell*, p. 157.

III

It is certainly the case that the British intelligentsia visibly fractured after the First World War, under the strain of a liberalism – inexorably tied to an ethic of progress – which was fast losing its credibility. On the one hand, largely through the Bloomsbury influence, it turned away in revulsion from the Victorian project of aiding society to pull itself up by its bootstraps, pursuing instead, the 'private' values of friendship and artistic achievement. On the other hand, it took a decisive lurch to the left, rejecting – in theory, if not in practice – the educational and material privileges which had spawned an intellectual elite in previous decades.[41] But the rift was never total, nor the renunciations final and absolute: Bloomsbury values co-existed with, sometimes even informing, the assumption of clear 'public' responsibilities,[42] and while a culture of the left may have been strong at a popular level, it famously yielded to 'apostasy' in a number of high-profile elite cases. This created – it has been claimed – the stereotypical image of the 1930s as the misguided 'red decade' in the Cold War.[43] Furthermore, liberalism proved a deeply embedded fixture of the intellectual landscape, and one that was capable of endless permutations necessary to ensure its survival.[44] At the heart of British liberalism in the decades covered by this review were three seemingly enduring and interlocking values: a theory of agency that focused squarely upon the individual, a recognition of the ineradicable plurality of purpose in society, and a formal approach to the state.

One of the most ingrained and persistent obstacles to the project of 'improvement' pursued by the intellectual elite since the late nineteenth century was a conception of the need for the 'spontaneous' realization of goodness – to use Green's parlance – and an antipathy towards the enforced pursuit of collective ends, however noble. This insistence effectively put paid to any utilitarian-inspired schemes for cultural reform and uplift, as did the realization – in the interwar years – that an additional problem with corporate solutions to the problem of cultural malaise was likely to be an homogenization of taste, probably along popular lines.[45]

Indeed, so ardent was this prejudice against collective approaches to the improvement of mankind that the strong British tradition of utilitarianism had itself acquired a forceful 'liberal' shape through one of its leading nineteenth-century advocates, Herbert Spencer. In an important new study, David Weinstein maintains that Spencer made indefeasible 'moral rights' the basis of his utilitarian theory.[46] This interpretation runs counter to previously held views of liberal utilitarianism as an oxymoron. Weinstein maintains that Spencer never wavered in his conviction that 'the maximization of happiness' constituted the ultimate ethical principle; however, it is equally clear from Spencer's *Social statics* of 1851 onwards that integral to this commitment to moral consequentialism was a conception of the 'conditions' necessary

[41] For example, while a communist, John Strachey put his son's name down for Eton. Hugh Thomas, *John Strachey* (London, 1973), p. 145.

[42] Pederson and Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians*, p. 21.

[43] S. Croft, 'Forward to the 1930s: the literary politics of anamnesis', in C. Shaw and M. Chase, eds., *The imagined past: history and nostalgia* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 147–70.

[44] I have emphasized the resilience of a 'national' strain of English liberal thought which stood apart from the dominant 'progressive' form in 'Resisting the centre at the extremes: "English" liberalism in the political thought of interwar Britain', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (forthcoming).   [45] Pederson and Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians*, pp. 21–2.

[46] D. Weinstein, *Equal freedom and utility: Herbert Spencer's liberal utilitarianism* (Cambridge, 1998).

to maximizing utility. These were not to be determined by an enlightened legislator as 'expediency' dictated; rather, they were 'static' requirements formed as 'corollaries'[47] to the law of equal freedom – the right of every human being to use his faculties to the utmost. In so far as faculty-maximization was achieved, the greatest happiness itself would ensue. 'Moral rights', then, were 'strategies' or 'practices' necessary to 'our most essential pleasure-producing activities'.[48] They guaranteed that individuals would remain sacrosanct as civilization advanced, distinguishing the emergent stage of 'industrialism' founded on free contract from the compulsion of 'militancy' which preceded it.

Three significant points in the understanding of Spencer's thought emerge from this analysis. First, Spencer's adherence to the notion of individual moral rights must not be construed along 'natural rights' lines; they were grounded, rather, in customary practice which evolved with sociability itself. 'Recognition' of the principle of equal freedom entailed recognition of the existence of moral rights which in turn set the boundaries of that freedom. Liberty was not licence: contrary to the interpretation of Hobhouse and, more lately, Tim Gray, Spencer's theory of freedom was one which entailed 'self-restraint' rather than self-indulgence, respecting the autonomy and capacity for faculty-exercise in others as well as oneself.[49] In this respect, as Weinstein so suggestively remarks, Spencer's theory of freedom is inherently a theory of 'virtue'.[50] This is a far cry from the cruel 'Social Darwinist' face of Spencer, celebrating the 'struggle for survival' and the 'survival of the fittest': under Weinstein's analysis, this face merely amounts to a belief that those societies in which happiness is maximized, those in which talents are expended to the full and desert best matched to effort, develop an incalculable competitive edge over their illiberal rivals.[51] Secondly, far from producing a 'rationalist' theory of utility, Spencer turns to empirical justification time and again. Empirical argument also enabled Spencer to revise the conditions under which utility could be said to flourish, in accordance with his perception of social and political changes; thus, he retreated from his early argument in favour of land nationalization on the ground that the English people were not yet ready to administer such a scheme along lines which recognized the fruits of 'faculty exercise' in others – that is, landlord compensation. Growing conservatism underpinned by increasing resort to 'empirical utilitarianism' also explains Spencer's propensity to distinguish 'moral rights' proper from 'political rights' – principally the suffrage – whose relationship to utility was much less central. Third, Weinstein makes clear that one of the possible weaknesses of Spencer's moral theory is its persistent grounding in egoism: unlike J. S. Mill (who otherwise shared Spencer's liberal utilitarian concerns) Spencer never envisaged the element of mutual sympathy necessary to sustain an advanced utilitarian society as emerging from anything other than extension of concern for individual well-being. On the other hand, given its commitment to universal hedonism – conceived, *contra* G. E. Moore, in moral terms rather than the 'naturalistic' one of 'mere survival' – the happiness of *all* members of society is regarded by Spencer as imperative, not simply that of the greatest number.[52]

The insistent moral and juridical quality of Spencer's utilitarianism, then, emphasizes a reluctance among British intellectuals to sacrifice the individual upon the altar of a greater collective good. At its root lay a strong antipathy towards egalitarianism and suspicion of the 'authority' upon which it was alleged to rest. Spencer's aversion to both

[47] Ibid., p. 90.   [48] Ibid., p. 91.   [49] Ibid., p. 64.   [50] Ibid., p. 62.
[51] Ibid., p. 66.   [52] Ibid., p. 145.

is manifested in his attitude towards Rousseau and Kant respectively. He was incandescent at comparisons that were drawn between his own theory of equality and that of Rousseau, particularly suggested by their shared interest in education. Refusing point-blank to allow a book on Rousseau to be dedicated to him, he emphasized that 'the equality alleged [in *Social statics*] is not among men themselves, but among their claims to equally-limited spheres for the exercise of their faculties'.[53] His contempt for Rousseau and his 'absurd' notion of primitive equality were shared by other intellectuals of his own – and a slightly later – age, most notably Henry Maine, and later H. G. Wells.[54] Like these other figures, Spencer was highly conscious of the difference between 'English' and 'continental' liberty, although in his case, it was levelled specifically against Kant rather than Rousseau. While Weinstein mentions this in a footnote and points out the misconceptions on which it was based, it deserves greater prominence. Spencer believed that for all the similarities between his own theory of freedom and that of Kant, they were ultimately distinct on account of Kant's emphasis upon the external restraints on action posed by the necessity to consider its effects on others, and his own emphasis upon 'freedom of action', the presence of others notwithstanding.

Kant, native of a country in which subordination to authority had been all along very marked, looked at this matter from the side of restraint…With me, the converse happened. Being one of a race much more habituated to individual freedom, the primary assertion was that of a claim to free action – not of a recognition of subordinations, but the assertion of a *right* subject to subordinations.[55]

The question naturally arises of whether all this emphasis upon freedom of action, of maximum faculty exercise, and of mutual recognition was simply an ideological foil for the ruthless competitiveness of laissez-faire capitalism. It is certainly significant that Spencer's indefeasible 'moral rights' amount to 'property rights, exchange rights and contract rights'.[56] He was indeed much concerned to justify and celebrate the market system as the most efficient mode of production that mankind had yet enjoyed, for all the apparent harshness which – he freedly admitted – it had engendered. Much of Spencer's optimism regarding the manufacturing and commercial society of his day must be seen as a counterforce to the heavy 'ambivalence' which marked the attitudes of many of his mid-Victorian contemporaries, and which Graham Searle has now extensively and suggestively explored.[57] But his stress upon rights has a darker side of its own: the haunting, almost Orwellian picture of capitalism's obverse – a sharply divided society of 'regulators' and 'regulated' – which he drew in later polemical writings.[58] Spencer, like Burke and Maine before him and Hayek afterwards, was deeply impressed by the moral code on which capitalism rested, a code entailing notions of trust and honour embodied in 'practice' as civilization had developed.[59] Legislation such as the

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[53] Spencer to W. H. Hudson, 7 Jan. 1903, in Duncan, ed., *Life and letters of Herbert Spencer*, p. 466.
[54] See H. Maine, *Ancient law: its connection with the early history of society and its relation to modern ideas* ([1861]; London, 1905) p. 87; and H. G. Wells, *A modern utopia* ([1905]; London: n.d.), pp. 332–4.
[55] H. Spencer, 'The filiation of ideas', in Duncan, ed., *Life and letters of Herbert Spencer*, p. 539.
[56] Weinstein, *Equal freedom and utility*, p. 208.
[57] G. R. Searle, *Morality and the market in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p. 7.
[58] See, in particular, his essay 'From freedom to bondage', in T. Mackay, ed., *A plea for liberty* (London, 1891), pp. 445–70, reprinted in Stapleton, ed., *Liberalism, democracy, and the state in Britain*.
[59] On Burke and the origins of commerce and manufacture in the 'spirit of nobility and the spirit of religion', see *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790; Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 174; on

Company Laws[60] could strengthen that code, but not subvert the economic system by which that code was vitally framed, nor indeed the code itself, which was the key to social evolution.

IV

Spencer was of course renowned for his attack upon the state as an instrument of social reform. But however negative his attitude towards the state, the latter occupies a central position in his political thought, as it did in that of a wide variety of his contemporaries as well. James Meadowcroft has recently drawn attention to the ubiquity and importance of the state in English political theory in the decades enclosing the turn of the century, contradicting a prevalent view that the state was an extremely weak concept in Britain at that time.[61] Cécile Laborde has endorsed this view, although emphasizing that 'In contrast to France, there was not in Britain one encompassing idea (one might say "ideal-type") of the state, incorporating moral, legal and institutional elements. There were, rather, a number of state theories each concerned with distinct issues, such as sovereignty, community, individual character or liberty.'[62] Laborde uses the example of political pluralism in France and Britain to illustrate this point. The absence of a settled concept of the state is underlined by David Runciman's superb recent study of pluralist political theory.[63] In tracing the source of the problem to an inability to agree upon what constitutes the authority of the state, Runciman highlights an ingrained characteristic of British intellectual and political life more generally in the early decades of this century: a conceptual priority accorded to the institutions of civil society over those of the state.[64]

This is especially clear in Runciman's chapter on the pluralist writer, J. N. Figgis. Figgis was drawn to pluralist theory as an historian turned Anglican priest who was incensed by the presumption of the state in maintaining the established church. Figgis had been much inspired by the writings of F. W. Maitland, who himself had read with profit the great German theorist of the *Genossenschaftsrecht* – Otto Von Gierke – and had sought to bring the latter before an English audience. Early in the twentieth century, Figgis found a vindication for Maitland's ideas in the *Free Church of Scotland* appeals, in which a minority breakaway party of the Free Church of Scotland was granted the bulk of the church's property, successfully claiming that a recent merger of their church with the United Presbyterians went beyond the terms of its foundation. Figgis championed the cause of 'development' against 'fixity', arguing that groups were 'real persons' with an inherent power of growth and development. In doing so, as Runciman argues, he set

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Maine, see Collini, *Public moralists*, p. 273; on Hayek, see *Law, legislation, and liberty: a new statement of the liberal principles of justice and political economy* ([1973–9]; London, 1982), especially Epilogue.

[60] Weinstein, *Equal freedom and utility*, p. 207.

[61] James Meadowcroft, *Conceptualizing the state: innovation and dispute in British political thought, 1880–1914* (Oxford, 1995).

[62] Cécile Laborde, 'The concept of the state in British and French political thought', *Political Studies* (forthcoming).

[63] D. Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state* (Cambridge, 1997).

[64] José Harris, 'Society and the state in twentieth-century Britain', in F. M. L. Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge social history of Britain, 1750–1950* (3 vols., Cambridge 1990), III: *Social agencies and institutions*, p. 67.

up a disjunction between 'law' and 'life'[65] – not just in a temporary sense while existing law was under the influence of the odious 'fictitious' theory of group personality, but permanently. The truth of the matter, for Figgis, was that group life could never be contained within the four walls of a legal document.

Figgis's uncompromising argument emphasizes again the powerful influence of 'national traditions' on political thought; for while, like Maitland, he drew profusely upon Gierke's writings to bolster his case for group autonomy, he overlooked the very intimate connection which Gierke was anxious to make between 'law and life'. This lay at the basis of Gierke's attempts to substitute Roman Law in Germany with a native tradition of *Rechtsstaat*, itself developed from the strength of the 'ancient German idea of fellowship'.[66] While Gierke gave great prominence to the state as the most inclusive organization in society, Figgis denied the state any such status, preferring to think of it instead along the medieval lines of a *communitas communitatum* – that is, as a wider framework within which the plurality of civil society might be contained. But the state, as such, was granted only the weakest of authority by Figgis, principally because of an unquestioning belief in the benign nature of voluntary association and that the use of coercive power by the state could only be an unwarranted act of aggrandizement.

If Gierke found less than faithful disciples among pluralist thinkers in England, the same held also for Idealist writers like Bernard Bosanquet. Runciman emphasizes that Gierke was used by the pluralists to attack the position of Bosanquet, who of all English political thinkers was closest to Gierke in his insistence upon the state as the great unifying force in society. Yet Bosanquet differed from Gierke in developing a purely moral theory of the state, failing to produce the synthesis of moral and juristic elements which was Gierke's achievement.[67]

Maitland, too, took a different view of the relationship between groups and the state than his disciple, Figgis. While Figgis disliked the English concept of the trust by which the constraints of the 'concession' theory were circumvented, he did not press for compulsory incorporation (as Maitland seemed to do in 1900), regardless of whether the representatives of the group chose to recognize and register its personality as corporate in accordance with the 1862 Companies Act.[68] As Runciman perceptively points out, 'In arguing that it was up to the law to recognise what was "really" there, Maitland moves corporation law from the enabling to the deterministic mode'[69] – precisely what he found so repugnant in Hobbes. Again, though, the concern of Maitland – as of Figgis – was to gain acceptance of the idea that group personality exists, over and above the personality of individual members, even if, as Runciman also emphasizes, this made a legal framework for such recognition strictly otiose.[70] This was especially important in a nation like the English nation, which had developed a fine talent for forming associations for all manner of purposes, and of therefore flourishing independently as a people from the 'Macadamite' grasp of the state.

[65] Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, p. 133.   [66] Ibid., p. 58.
[67] Ibid., p. 78.
[68] However, Maitland made no such gesture towards compulsory registration in his 'Trust and corporation' article of 1904. He argued that 'a proposal to allow the courts of law openly to give the name of corporations to *Vereine* [associations] which have neither been chartered nor registered would not only arouse the complaint that an intolerable uncertainty was being introduced into the law (we know little of Austria) but also would awake the suspicion that the proposers had some secret aim in view: perhaps nothing worse than what we call "red tape", but perhaps taxation and "spoilation"'. Reprinted in J. Stapleton, ed., *Group rights: perspectives since 1900* (Bristol, 1995), p. 27.   [69] Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, p. 116.   [70] Ibid., p. 118.

If the English pluralists were notable for an 'ambivalence' towards the state, they merely reproduced an attitude that went back to Hobbes. But some were equally notable for an ambivalence towards 'groups' themselves. On the one hand, they celebrated the countervailing force which groups had provided against the sovereign state in English history; but equally, they were as capable of appreciating the tyranny which group life itself could practise upon its members and society more generally. This was especially the case with Ernest Barker, whose contribution to Gierke studies in the 1930s Runciman discusses in some depth.

Runciman is critical of Barker's attempt to forge a via media between the doctrine of the real personality of groups and the 'fiction' theory by conceding 'personality' to a wide range of groups, but 'legal personality' only. Such a solution, Runciman maintains, fails to meet the objection which pluralists like Maitland and Figgis were levelling at the reigning concession theory – that it simply did not recognize the idea of the 'real personality of groups'.[71] But this was precisely Barker's concern; it was out of a sheer nervousness about groups and their propensity to affect 'real personality' that he confined and weakened their nature so. In his introduction to Gierke's *Natural law and the theory of society* of 1934, he referred to groups as 'great Brocken-spectres, confronting us as we walk'.[72] Runciman is sensitive to Barker's anxiety in the 1930s that powerful groups may set themselves up as the new sovereign in society (a concern that represented a confirmation and indeed a magnification of the nagging doubts that he had had about groups – particularly trade unions – when he first explored pluralism before 1914),[73] not least on account of the course which 'group' politics based on race and nationhood had taken in Germany, Italy, and France. So it is odd that Runciman should profess puzzlement at Barker's apparent inability to see the point that his contemporaries were driving at.[74]

Runciman is also critical of the apparent absence in Barker's theory of any authority on the part of the state to endow groups with legal personality (and to create that 'mask' itself), and any indication of the source of the state's own legal personality.[75] But Barker did discuss the authority of the modern state in Western Europe, the Americas, and throughout the British Commonwealth – in terms of the 'articles of association' which it was the primary purpose of constitutions to define. The articles of association for the English state were thus drawn up in 1688; those of France in 1789.[76] The authority of the state for Barker thus resides in historical acts of agreement between rulers and ruled in society, rather than its possession of personality per se, and while history and logic rarely coincide, political theory is as much about myth and the cultural anxieties which drive its creation as it is about coherent, rigorous argument.

In this light, Figgis's intransigience over group personality must be regarded as somewhat freakish, a clear instance of a political theorist who was carried away by the cause of disestablishment which he was most concerned to serve. The more normal attitude of the English towards associational life was, by and large, immortalized by the

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[71] Ibid., p. 237.
[72] Ernest Barker, Introduction to Otto Gierke, *Natural law and the theory of society, 1500–1800* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1934), I, p. xvii.
[73] See his article on 'The rights and duties of trade unions', *Economic Review*, 21 (1911), pp. 127–52.   [74] Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, p. 237.
[75] Ibid., p. 228.
[76] Ernest Barker, *Principles of social and political theory* ([1951]; Oxford, 1961), pp. 205 n. 2, 57–8, 188–92.

Scotsman A. G. MacDonnell in his novel *England their England* published in 1933: the corporate spirit was confined to cricket.

> Just as they were parting outside the restaurant, Mr. Davies said: 'Oh, by the way, since I saw you last I've found out something about the English. There are two things you must never, never rag them about. One is the team spirit in cricket. You must never suggest in any sort of way that there are any individuals in cricket. It's the highest embodiment on earth of the team.'[77]

A similar hesitancy towards pluralist enthusiasms came to characterize other intellectuals and political thinkers in Britain this century besides Barker. A notable sceptic was Michael Oakeshott, for whom the achievement of the morality of the individual (in its struggle against the individual *manqué*) required a casual, instrumental approach to groups, one which stopped well short of the immersion of either the whole or a section of one's personal identity in a higher group being which Figgis presupposed. As Runciman rightly argues, Oakeshott kept his two models of association strictly apart, reserving *societas* – a strictly formal mode of association in terms of acknowledgement of common rules – for the state and *universitas* (association in the pursuit of substantive ends) for partial, voluntary, enterprise groups.[78] Runciman is arguably wrong, however, in suggesting that the ascription of personality to the state is necessary to generate the sense of loyalty which Oakeshott denies to voluntary societies and concedes to the state alone. As he himself quotes Oakeshott, the latter regarded the source of that loyalty as common acceptance of certain 'rules of conduct'. The most vital characteristic of these rules is that they are *enforced by the state*, thus underlining the similarities, rather than the differences (emphasized by Runciman) between Hobbes's theory of the relationship of *cives* to one another in terms of obedience to the commands of the sovereign, and Oakeshott's position. Moreover, another 'bond' of the state modelled on the *societas* as opposed to the *universitas* is the simple but none the less powerful one of patriotic pride – a characteristic of Oakeshott's own attitude to the English political tradition and one which places him at the end of a much extended line of Victorian intellectual descent rather than (pace Pederson and Mandler) the start of a new one.[79] This, too, does not require that the state be conceived as a 'person', real or otherwise. Furthermore, Runciman's rejection of Oakeshott's claim to have found a precedent for his model of the state as a *societas* in Hobbes's *Leviathan* is not quite convincing. It may be true that Oakeshott maintained that in civil association, 'minority' associations require no 'authorization',[80] quite contrary to Hobbes; but the authorization which Oakeshott had in mind here need not necessarily have been the 'command' model of authorization for which Leviathan is notorious and from which Hobbes himself backed away. Runciman discusses H. L. A. Hart's distinction between law founded on command and law founded upon general rule, that is, between coercive and enabling law.[81] It could well have been that Oakeshott meant only the former when he accepted the existence of small associations 'without authorization'; indeed, it is unlikely that he meant to give them a free reign, unconstrained by general rules, when all activities, including corporate activities, in a *societas* were governed by the latter, and by the latter alone.

Bertrand Russell had similar concerns to Oakeshott in that, although very differently

[77] A. G. MacDonnell, *England their England* (London, 1933), p. 48.
[78] Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, p. 54 n. 39.
[79] Pederson and Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians*, pp. 23–4. W. H. Greenleaf rightly underlined Oakeshott's 'deep and genuine patriotism', together with its 'rarity' in 1966. *Oakeshott's philosophical politics* (London, 1966), p. 84.
[80] Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, p. 25.   [81] Ibid., p. 112.

expressed and motivated, his too was the authentic voice of an 'aristocratic liberalism'. It is apparent from Ironside's study that at every ideological turn that he took, Russell seemed to reaffirm the ideal of cultivated individuality, unbeholden to any, much less the 'crowd' mentality of the common man. His brief flirtation with pluralist ideals was heavily influenced by the ideal of intimate, small-scale friendship developed in Bloomsbury circles, and in so far as it became a political ethic during and immediately after the First World War, it was as a critique of excessive, concentrated state power which inhibited the aesthetic and moral development of individuals in society.[82] The elevation of group loyalties and identities per se was therefore marginal to his taking up of the pluralist cause. Unlike G. D. H. Cole, who saw in pluralism limitless opportunities for expressing the 'natural genius of the people', Russell was impressed with pluralism's scope for the intellectually gifted minority in society to assert themselves to maximum effect.[83] Repeatedly, Russell returned to the privileging of 'leisure' over 'production', individual creativity over the achievements of the group mind, and intelligence over 'instinct'. His erstwhile Bloomsbury associate Leonard Woolf shared fully his sense of priorities,[84] as did survivals of Victorian liberalism such as Ernest Barker. For Barker, the virtues of 'leisure' – interpreted in the Aristotelian sense of pursuits that were desirable for their own sake (mainly involving the understanding and undertaken by individuals) – were far superior to those of mere 'recreation', and very much at a discount in interwar Britain. 'Perhaps', he wrote,

the monotony and uniformity of work sends us in reaction to the hazards of games, or the excitement of watching them, or the still greater excitement of betting upon them: perhaps the urban aggregation in which men now live make them unhappy unless they are crowding together to some common game or spectacle.[85]

There were, of course, attempts by intellectuals to make 'cultural contact' (Seeley's words) with the new democracy on terms that were more familiar to the latter than the classicist model on which Barker worked. J. B. Priestley best exemplifies such attempts to bring culture to the 'people' in forms that they would recognize. 'Englishness' for him was embodied in the urban, working-class setting from which Barker recoiled, although centred more on childhood memories of music halls and other associational forms which sprang from the life of 'ordinary' citizens in his native Bradford before 1914 than on sport. But as Chris Waters makes admirably clear, the heavily nostalgic element in Priestley's endeavours to reconstruct culture and national identity on populist lines militated against any lasting appeal.[86]

Arguably, the aspiration of the Victorian intelligentsia to produce a common public discourse adapted and survived best after the middle of the twentieth century through the work of John Betjeman.[87] An archetypal public figure, Betjeman's poetry, guide-books, and architectural interests provided a highly effective meeting-point of elite and popular culture. Significantly, Betjeman – like Priestley – was a 'freelance' intellectual,

[82] Ironside, *The social and political thought of Bertrand Russell*, p. 109.   [83] Ibid., pp. 134–5.
[84] Leventhal, 'Leonard Woolf', p. 159.
[85] E. Barker, 'The uses of leisure', an address delivered before the Second Annual Conference of the British Institute of Adult Education in 1923, in *Church, state, and study* (London, 1930), p. 266.
[86] Chris Waters, 'J. B. Priestley, 1894–1984: Englishness and the politics of nostalgia', in Pederson and Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians*, pp. 209–26.
[87] An excellent sample of his prose is in Candida Lycett Green, ed., *John Betjeman: Coming home: an anthology of his prose, 1920–1977* (London, 1997).

with no obligation to maintain the increasingly esoteric standards of academic scholarship. His 'common touch' may seem out of step with the concern of a previous generation of 'national intellectuals' to maintain their exclusivity; but the habits of cultural deference he stirred none the less eminently recalled the authority to which his predecessors aspired.

But while Betjeman's demise is only a decade old, it would be rash to assume that the tradition of the 'public intellectual' which he helped to prolong well beyond its natural life, and with the aid of very special gifts, can be easily revived. With nostalgia for the public engagement of intellectuals growing in Europe and America,[88] it is salutary to recall the forces which have overtaken the values and objectives with which that species were inextricably associated earlier this century.

The ascendancy of relativism in the wake of the 'declassization' of all forms of knowledge is not the least major obstacle to the recovery of an elite-led culture whose working assumption is its own 'timeless' superiority.

Furthermore, the exclusivity of intellectuals in their 'public' heyday, so jealously guarded – as demonstrated in the recent studies considered here – has been irretrievably eroded. As Cardinal Heenan acidly (and presciently) remarked in the 1960s, 'everyone with two "A" levels is now an intellectual'. This observation, and the context in which it was made (the intervention of the laity in the highly specialized business of liturgical reform within the Catholic Church)[89] is a fine illustration of a point made by F. A. Hayek in 1949. He maintained that the proliferation of 'intellectuals' in the post-war period has led less to the growth of a knowledge-based society than one determined by 'secondhand dealers in truth', with all the opportunities for distortion which that entails.

This class does not consist only of journalists, teachers, ministers, lecturers, publicists, radio commentators, writers of fiction, cartoonists, and artists... The class also includes many professional men and technicians, such as scientists and doctors, who through their habitual intercourse with

[88] See Russell Jacoby, *The last intellectuals: American culture in the age of academe* (New York, 1987); and Michael Ignatieff, 'Where are they now?', *Prospect* ('taster' issue, 1997), pp. 4–5; 'The decline and fall of the public intellectual', *Queen's Quarterly*, 104 (1997), pp. 395–403. Christopher E. Mauriello has rightly questioned recent rhetoric on the subject of the 'decline of the public intellectual' in the twentieth century, arguing that it is a 'cultural construction' rather than an historical reality. He emphasizes that at the turn of the century, liberal intellectuals like Hobson, Hobhouse, and Masterman, whose work focused on the periodical *The Nation*, deployed the same rhetoric to strengthen their authority, reformulating the admittedly flagging ideal of the 'public intellectual' in accordance with their own 'scientific' beliefs and ends. However, it is evident that these thinkers vastly exaggerated the extent of 'decline': the Victorian 'men of letters' to whose precedent they appealed would include men like Bryce, Morley, and Dicey who were still alive and active in the literary world, while Ruskin, Morris, and Arnold were still well within living memory. The case is rather different now, with several generations of advanced intellectual specialization separating those in the 1980s and 1990s who would revive the tradition of the 'public intellectual' and the last, largely pre-war survivors of it. Here, the emphasis is indeed on 'death' rather than mere 'decline' – hence, 'revival' would seem an impossibility. See 'The strange death of the public intellectual: liberal intellectual identity and the "field of cultural production" in England, 1880–1920', *Journal of Victorian Culture* (forthcoming).

[89] Letter from Cardinal (John Carmel) Heenan to Evelyn Waugh, 20 Aug. 1964, responding to Waugh's concern at recent liturgical changes in the Catholic Church. Heenan wrote, 'I think that the leaders of the new thought (if that is not too strong a word) are not so much the young pops as the Catholic "intellectuals". This is what they call themselves and believe themselves to be. Everyone with two A Levels is now an intellectual.' Scott M. P. Reid, *A bitter trial. Evelyn Waugh and John Carmel, Cardinal Heenan on the liturgical changes* (Curdridge, Hants, 1996), p. 44.

the printed word become carriers of new ideas outside their own fields and who, because of their expert knowledge on their own subjects, are listened to with respect on most others. It is the intellectuals in this sense who decide what views and opinions are to reach us, which facts are important enough to be told to us and in what form and from what angle they are to be represented. Whether we shall ever learn of the results of the work of the expert and the original thinkers depends mainly on their decision.[90]

In other words, the intellectual exclusivity and associated creativity which underpinned the world of the public intellectual has been paradoxically replaced by a dilettante and moribund intellectual culture. This argument is compelling and important, even if the 'progressive' bias Hayek attributed to 'intellectuals' so conceived is disregarded (although this has more than a grain of truth in it too). To use an example of obvious appeal to Hayek, 'experts' such as Keynes (who was anxious to be his own publicist, based on his own personal judgement of public opinion and politics)[91] have given way to Keynesian ideologues.

Finally, the public intellectuals of a century or so ago – for all their maintenance of social and cultural distance – presumed the existence of an entrenched national community as the framework of their endeavour to create an enlightened democracy. Now, however, their invocations of 'England' and 'Englishness' are treated to the caustic process of 'deconstruction' in Cultural Studies programmes, holding interest only as the expression 'of a particular social group who sought to define the national character in their own, exclusive terms'.[92] But is it really the case that, for example, the 'England' which H. V. Morton went in search of in 1927 was merely a figment of his own narrow class imagination?[93] Surely the phenomenal demand for his book (thirty-six editions in the following twenty years) suggests that if the term 'class' has any application here it is so wide as to be meaningless; it also suggests that the project of individual and national uplift to which it made an outstandingly successful contribution had not died the late-Victorian death that some earlier commentators have presumed, but had rather found new cultural concerns (for example, the guide-book literature) on which to focus its effort.[94] However, with the erosion of English national identity and the uncertainty of any 'British' replacement, the future of the public intellectual looks bleak.

[90] F. A. Hayek, 'The intellectuals and socialism', *University of Chicago Law Review*, 16 (1949), pp. 417–33, reprinted in B. Caldwell, ed., *The collected works of F. A. Hayek*, x: *Socialism and war: essays, documents, reviews* (London, 1997), p. 222.

[91] Peter Clarke, 'J. M. Keynes, 1883–1946: "the best of both worlds"', in Pederson and Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians*, pp. 171–85.

[92] J. Giles and T. Middleton, eds., *Writing Englishness, 1900–1950: an introductory sourcebook on national identity* (London, 1995).   [93] H. V. Morton, *In search of England* (London, 1927).

[94] T. W. Heyck, *The transformation of intellectual life in Victorian England* (New York, 1982).