T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism

Matt Carter

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Contents

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Preface

This book is a corrected version of my doctoral thesis (University of York, 1999). It offers a revised understanding of the political thought of the British idealists. Instead of seeing them as ambiguous supporters of state action, or confused Liberals caught between the shift from individualism to collectivism, I show how their work is better understood as a leading element in the formation of a new doctrine of ethical socialism, which became influential on socialists within the Labour Party.

The key objectives of the book are, first, to identify the nature of idealist philosophy and political thought, and why it was predisposed to assisting the growth of a new form of socialism; secondly, to demonstrate that Green and his followers adopted a consistent approach to questions of political philosophy, particularly the question of state action; thirdly, to show how idealism impacted on Christian socialism; fourthly, to show how idealists developed a tradition of ethical socialism, and how this affected their approach to Liberalism and to party politics; and, finally, to make clear the connection between the idealists and ethical socialists such as R.H. Tawney.

This book adds significantly to the literature of the area, by offering a clearer analysis of the political thought of the British idealists and its true impact. It also helps to identify the philosophical foundations of progressive socialism in Britain, a tradition which is often referred to but whose roots have not been explored in depth. This book shows that there is a direct connection between the ethical socialism of figures like Tawney in the Labour Party and the philosophical work of the British idealists such as T.H. Green. It is undoubtedly the case that these ideas have also been influential in Labour circles other than Tawney.''s and this work, particularly the Conclusion, points the way for further study in this area.

Acknowledgements

This work was originally conceived whilst I sat as an undergraduate in the classes of Professor David Marquand and Dr. Bob Stern at Sheffield University. Professor Marquand taught me about the progressive tradition of thought within British socialism. Dr Stern's lectures were on the philosophy of Hegel. It appeared to me then that there was a connection between the two and I am indebted to their teachings for this.

The synthesis of these two courses was found at the University of York, during my studies for an MA in Political Philosophy. Peter Nicholson was persuaded by a colleague and myself to run a course on 'The British Idealists'. Whilst perhaps leaving me with more questions than answers, this course provided the link between my two undergraduate studies. I am fortunate that Peter Nicholson went on to become my supervisor for my doctoral study. For his thorough analysis of my work, his unmatched knowledge of the topic and his patience over many years, I am very grateful.

There are numerous other colleagues who have provided me with help and assistance, including Alex Callinicos, Maria Dimova-Cookson, David Howell, Linda Lofthouse, Sue Mendus, Caroline Moore and Colin Tyler. I am grateful to colleagues who have attended Political Theory Workshops, at which versions of this thesis have been presented, for their helpful comments, and also to two anonymous referees for the *History of Political Thought*.

I would like to thank the staff at the following libraries: University of York library; York Minster library; Borthwick Institute library, York; British Library, Boston Spa; Manchester City library; John Rylands University library; University of Newcastle library; London School of Economics and Political Science; W.E.A. archive, Temple House; Lambeth Palace library; Senate House library; National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh; Bodleian library, Oxford; Christ Church College library; Oxford

City library; Balliol College library; Sheffield University library; Sheffield City library.

I wish to thank the editors and publisher of *History of Political Thought* for permission to incorporate material from my article 'Ball, Bosanquet and the Legacy of T.H. Green', which appeared in Vol. XX, No. 4 (1999).

Finally, I would like to thank Erica and my family for their support and interest. *Sine qua non*.

Introduction

The former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and socialist writer, Roy Hattersley, has told how he was asked by journalists during the 1987 general election campaign what were the philosophical foundations of his socialism. All he was able to say, he recalled, was 'T.H. Green'.[1] This book is an attempt to offer some explanation for how an explicitly Liberal thinker like Green could have influenced ethical socialists in the Labour Party such as Hattersley.

The idea that there is some connection between the British idealists and the doctrine of English socialism is not new to academic circles. There has been much discussion over many years about the true influence of Thomas Hill Green and his followers and the debate in the literature appears to have divided into two distinct camps.

What I will term the traditional view has maintained that Green's influence on the development of socialism was indeed significant. Adam Ulam perhaps offered the most substance to support his analysis of philosophical idealism and English socialism, but many of his contemporaries, from political philosophers like Sabine to practising socialists such as Sidney Webb, also identified a clear connection between T.H. Green and socialist thought.[2] Bowle summed up the thoughts of many when he argued: '[t]he first foundations of the Socialist State were laid by Liberal humanists and its legislation enacted by statesmen trained, as was Asquith, in this Oxford way of

[1] Hattersley, speech in Ripon and York St. John's College, York on 24 May 1995.

[2] A.B. Ulam, *The Philosophical Foundations of English Socialism* (Cambridge Mass., 1951); G.H. Sabine and T.L. Thorson, *A History of Political Thought* (Orlando, 1973 [1st ed. 1937]), p. 667. Also see E. Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century: Imperialism and the Rise of Labour* (London, 1951) Vol. V, pp. 140–1. Sidney Webb claimed that around the work of Green and Toynbee there had grown a 'distinctly Socialist mode of thought': *Socialism in England* (London, 1893), p. 75.

thought'.[3] Indeed this argument was so persuasive as to lead commentators to see Green's influence in a wide variety of realms, from the creation of the welfare state to the establishment of a Labour Party.[4] Randall puts it at its strongest, when he argues: 'It is hardly too much to say that [Green's] social thought dominated the British Labour Party, in its non-Marxian divisions, down through G.D.H. Cole and Harold J. Laski'.[5] It must be said, however, that despite a wealth of different assessments of the idealists' influence, there was little provision of academic argument to support these claims.

Perhaps because of this latter point, the general presumption of a causal relationship between idealism and socialism has come under serious attack over the last thirty years or so. Melvin Richter's detailed textual and historical study of Green's thought acted as a catalyst for a general reassessment of the idealists' influence and specifically their impact on socialism.[6] This has been complemented by many contemporary studies into their political thought, spearheaded by Michael Freeden. Freeden is critical of the notion that Green had an influence on socialism, claiming that his ideas reflected rather than directed changes in political thought during the period.[7] Indeed there is now a growing body of literature that challenges the idea that Green and his colleagues contributed anything radical to the debate about the 'social question' whatsoever.[8]

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[3] J. Bowle, *Politics and Opinion in the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Introduction* (London, 1954), p. 276.

[4] G. Fry, *The Growth of Government: The Development of Ideas about the Role of the State and the Machinery and Functions of Government in Britain Since 1780* (London, 1979), pp. 45, 53; A. Warde, *Consensus and Beyond: The Development of Labour Party Strategy since the Second World War* (Manchester, 1982), pp. 36, 66–9; Peter D'a Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877–1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late–Victorian England* (Princeton, 1968), p. 44; J. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought* (New York, 1950), p. 286; P. Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett And The Christian Religion* (Oxford, 1987), p. 157; E.C. Midwinter, *Victorian Social Reform* (London, 1968), p. 47.

[5] J.H. Randall, Jr, 'T.H. Green: The Development of English Thought from J.S. Mill to F.H. Bradley', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 27 (1966), p. 218.

[6] M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and his Age* (London, 1964). See also P. Clarke, 'Liberalism', *History Today,* 33 (March 1983), pp. 42–3; S. Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L.T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1983 [first published 1979]), esp. pp. 43–6.

[7] M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (London, 1978), p. 18.

[8] I.M. Greengarten, *Thomas Hill Green and the Development of Liberal-Democratic Thought* (Toronto, 1981). Likewise in his study of the formation of the Labour Party, Henry Pelling argues Green contributed little to New Liberalism and was not read either by the working-class or by socialists: H. Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880–1900* (Oxford, 1965 [first ed. 1954]), p. 11. Clarke argues that

The pendulum of academic opinion about the role of idealism in the formation of socialism has swung back considerably. It is the purpose of this work to discover where the true balance lies. I show that, while some of the more exaggerated claims about Green's influence are without foundation, the effect of the idealists' work on the development of socialism has been dismissed too swiftly. I do this, not by adopting any of the potential fallacies of ideological research which Freeden rightly identifies, but through a detailed analysis of the idealists' philosophy and ideology and its connections with socialism.[9]

The central claim of this book is that Green and his followers have played a significant role in the creation of a type of ethical socialism that has been adopted by figures such as R.H. Tawney. The role of the idealists was to establish a new philosophical settlement centred around an epistemological understanding of the world which emphasised its inter-relation, a moral and spiritual personality which acted as a counterbalance against materialistic assumptions and the rise of science, and an intertwined and organically related society, with individuals only able to achieve their potential with the assistance of their community. I claim that, just as empiricist philosophical assumptions could be said to have underpinned Classical Liberalism, idealism helped to shape the development of a new and different political tradition.

The essential features of this new idealist-inspired ideology were: a belief in a common good, which could unite the interests of different individuals; the support for equality of opportunity, to help create a less class-ridden society; a positive view of liberty, meaning more than simply freedom from interference; and the belief in the role of the state as more than a 'policeman', but as the representative of the whole community and able to help shape social conditions for the better. It is these features which distinguished the idealists' work from traditional liberalism, and these elements which they turned into a justification for socialism.

Before I enter into the detail of the work, I think there are two initial challenges which need to be disposed of. The first is a methodological point about the definition of ideologies. The second is an historical claim about the influence of the idealists.

Green was more 'a moral regenerationist' than 'moral reformist' and was certainly not an architect of the welfare state: P. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 14–15.

[9] M. Freeden, 'The Stranger at the Feast: Ideology and Public Policy in Twentieth Century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol. 1 No. 1 (1990), pp. 9–34.

Methodological Issues

First of all, my argument could face a challenge on the level of methodology and more specifically the nature of political ideologies. The notion that the idealists could have had an influence on socialism has faced criticism from a variety of commentators each of whom has a different understanding of socialism. For example Melvin Richter uses socialism as though it was synonymous with an attack on private property or the development of communism. On this view, as the idealists supported property and attacked communism, he claims they could not be socialists.[10] Meacham too appears to adopt without explanation a specific understanding of socialism which he then uses to dismiss the influence of idealism. The idealist-influenced Christian Social Union could not be explicitly socialist, he argues, as 'it assiduously kept its distance from doctrines such as worker control or state ownership'.[11] Freeden agrees with Richter and Meacham, but he uses a different means of measurement. Freeden accepts that socialism does not necessarily contain attacks on private property. However for him it does contain ineliminable concepts such as equality and it is Green's failure to embrace equality that defines him as a liberal not a socialist.[12]

Indeed as soon as one examines the literature on socialism, two pitfalls become apparent. On the one hand, commentators have too readily accepted an understanding of the term socialism without any wider justification. This causes difficulties, as the various interpretations of socialism are usually different and sometimes mutually exclusive. It is relatively easy to create a narrow definition of what represents the essentials of socialism. It is more difficult to gain unanimous agreement on it. Adopting what appear to be incontestable definitions of socialism usually results in arguments about where to place certain historical figures, who have been widely accepted as socialists, but who fail to meet the criteria established as the 'essential' elements of socialism.

For example, Parekh argues that all versions of socialism contain four values or principles: an acknowledgement of the sociality of

[10] Richter, *Politics of Conscience*, p. 288.

[11] S. Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform 1880–1914: The Search for Community* (Yale University, 1987), p. 98.

[12] M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 79–84, 190. Other writers also adopt one definition of socialism and use it to rule out a link between idealism and socialism. For example, Gertrude Himmelfarb argues that Arnold Toynbee advocated radicalism not socialism, because when he called himself a socialist he meant 'social reforms rather than the abolition of private property': *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York, 1991), p. 278.

humans; recognition of social responsibility; the promotion of co-operation in economic life; and the idea of planning. Planning is so important to socialism that Parekh claims all socialists advocate some form of it.[13] However by defining a set of features that represent socialism, Parekh excludes writers who reject one or more of these principles. For example, where would the Christian socialism of F.D. Maurice, who rejected substantial state action, be placed? William Morris, Glasier and Blatchford focused less on planning than on moral and ethical questions but, on Parekh's view, this could mean their work was not defined as socialist.

On the other hand, given that there are few agreed features that distinguish socialism from other political ideologies, this leaves open the disconcerting prospect that socialism is simply an amorphous notion and that it can be interpreted as meaning anything: in other words, 'We are all socialists now'. This potential for vagueness, which is particularly unhelpful for the modern student trying to trace the history of political ideas, was well appreciated by commentators at the time. As Young argued in his *Portrait of an Age* in 1936: 'Any one who set himself to collect all occurrences of the word Socialism in the Victorian age would probably conclude that it might be taken, or made to mean everything which a respectable man saw reason to disapprove of or to fear: Macaulay detected Socialism in Wordworth's *Prelude*'.[14]

For the purposes of this book I need to establish just what I understand by the term socialism. In doing this I will reject the view of those commentators who believe there is one essential definition of socialism. This appears too open to challenge from others who disagree with these first principles and regard thinking which lacks them as socialist nonetheless. Yet I do not want to claim that socialism is so general a doctrine as to make it meaningless.

Instead I believe it is useful to see political ideologies such as socialism as themselves complex groupings of different political concepts. Within every single ideology, there is a distinct collection of ideas and concepts whose order and status separate off one ideology from another. Freeden, whose work is pre-eminent is this field, argues that the morphology of concepts is the determining factor in how ideologies are to be understood. '[I]deologies', he argues, 'are particular patterned clusters and configurations of political concepts. An ideology is hence the macroscopic structural arrangement

[13] B. Parekh, 'Introduction' in B. Parekh (ed.), *The Concept of Socialism* (London, 1975), pp. 10–11.

[14] G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England* (London, 1977 [first published 1936]), p. 169.

that attributes meaning to a range of mutually defining concepts'.[15] In other words, it is the relationship between different political concepts that determines the meaning of the ideology.

So, for example, different traditions of socialism may have at their core the same three concepts: say, equality, freedom and the role of the state. However the inclusion of the notion of workers' rights by one tradition will lead to a transformation of the meaning of the other concepts. In this new relationship, the interpretation of the concept of freedom may be altered because of the importance of liberty in the work-place. Another socialist tradition may regard the removal of the iniquitous property system as primary. This could have an impact on the concept of equality, leading to its interpretation as a justification for common ownership. Another still may disregard both the above notions as unimportant and instead place the idea of 'community' at the heart of socialism. Again this introduction would affect just how the concepts of freedom, equality and the state interrelate. On this view each of these traditions, however different, has the chance to stake its claim for the title of socialism. Each may remain distinct as an ideology and yet legitimately share the same name.[16]

Seeing socialism in this way is helpful for my thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it means I do not need to offer one definitive meaning to the ideology of socialism — a task that, even if it were achievable, would be a lifetime's work in itself. Instead I show how the idealists have influenced one specific tradition of socialism, namely, ethical socialism. Secondly, the fact that there is more than one interpretation of socialism helps me to explain why the idealists could be both advocates of socialism and opponents of it at the same time. Notwithstanding their connection with some form of socialism, the idealists were hostile critics of 'economic socialism', which they regarded as anti-democratic and rooted in a materialistic view of human society. This was not a confusion on their part, but a recognition of the different meanings of the term. Nor does it undermine my argument. On the contrary, understanding the idealists' criticisms of economic forms of socialism is helpful in order to identify the different cleavages within their socialist ideology.

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[15] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 54. While I occasionally use the terminology formulated by Freeden in this book, I do not follow it systematically.

[16] This appears to be the approach of Marc Stears, in his work on socialism and pluralism. While the two projects clearly share a similar methodology, this work has a different central thesis. See Marc Stears, 'Socialism and Pluralism: A Study in Interwar British Ideology', D.Phil Thesis, Oxford University (1997).

This still leaves unresolved a number of issues. Firstly while I may not have to offer one overall definition of socialism, I do need to justify my use of 'ethical socialism'. By referring to ethical socialism I am clearly not offering a new term to the discussion of the topic.[17] Ethical socialists are frequently discussed in the literature on the period, with examples including Blatchford, Morris, Ruskin and Glasier. What makes their work 'ethical' as opposed to other traditions of socialism is not immediately evident, however. Some commentators appear to use the term ethical socialist disdainfully to include anyone on the left with vague, romantic or unrealistic views.[18] For example, Pierson argues that ethical socialism, in the form articulated by writers such as Ruskin, 'possessed little intellectual coherence'.[19] Whatever the merits of these criticisms, it is important to make clear that I am not claiming that the idealists influenced these ethical socialists.

Just as it is possible to have more than one tradition called socialism, it is possible to have more than one tradition of ethical socialism. While the term ethical socialist may not be new, I am identifying a tradition of ethical socialism that is distinct from the concept as it has often been defined. The account of ethical socialism I will discuss has two central defining features. Firstly it is a socialism that places individual moral development and character above simple state reforms. While there are some prerequisites to individual fulfilment that must be maintained by the state, it recognises that however beneficial state action is, it cannot simply force through social improvement. Instead the state has the responsibility to maintain the conditions which will enable individuals to live moral lives. This definition of socialism is ethical because it rests on an optimistic view of human nature and the potential for free individual moral development. It lies in opposition to economic socialist doctrines that rely on mechanistic views of human nature and the motives for individual action.

Secondly this doctrine holds that individuals are bound together through organic social relations that mean individuals can reach

[17] When discussing socialism, other writers have used the division between economic and ethical socialisms. For example, Greenleaf argues that socialist doctrines revolve around two ideological concepts: efficiency, planning and state control, on the one hand; and freedom, self-realisation and the common good, on the other. See W.H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, vol. II: The Ideological Heritage* (London, 1983), p. 350.

[18] Cf. G. Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History* (Beckenham, 1985), pp. 32–7.

[19] S. Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism: The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (London, 1973), p. 140.

their potential only through the help of others. It is a *social*ism, recognising the importance of the community to individual self-fulfilment. As J.S. MacKenzie argued:

> Individualism means the view that a community is simply a collection of individuals, while Socialism means that there is some intrinsic bond (an organic unity or a general will or a common good) connecting the individuals of which a society is composed.[20]

Such an ethical socialism is best represented by the work of R.H. Tawney and this study will culminate with an examination of his work. But my task is first to identify the roots of such a tradition. I believe that they are to be found in the work of the British idealists.

There is also a broader point that needs to be resolved about why this doctrine should be recognised as a version of 'socialism' at all. As is clear from the discussion so far, I do not believe it is possible to offer one definitive account of the essential features of this or any ideology. Yet this does not make distinctions between different ideologies meaningless. Freeden argues that while ideologies do not have one single list of core concepts, they do have concepts that would commonly be associated with them. Furthermore the dividing of theorists into one ideological camp or another is not a scientific process, but is based partly on their self-definition and partly on how they were regarded by their peers.[21] In this way, I believe it is legitimate to regard the idealists' work as contributing to the development of a version of socialism if I can prove they discussed issues commonly associated with socialism, they often regarded themselves as socialists and were also regarded as socialists by others.

Finally, I need to clarify two issues about the relationship between idealism, ethical socialism and liberalism. Firstly, it is often assumed that there is a direct correlation between political affiliation and political ideology.[22] Therefore it might be thought somewhat strange that a doctrine of ethical socialism could be developed by a group of largely self-defined Liberals. In a detailed examination of their views towards the different political parties in Chapter Five, I will show that there is no necessary connection between liberalism and support for the Liberal Party. Indeed some idealists rejected the Liberal Party while maintaining support for New Liberalism. Others adopted a belief in socialism but held that concurrently with a support for the Liberals in Parliament. Whatever their different approaches, I will show that it is plausible for the idealists to have

[20] J.S. MacKenzie, *Outlines of a Social Philosophy* (London, 1918), p. 20.
[21] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, pp. 82–7.
[22] Freeden details the criticism of this type of approach in *Ibid.*, p. 24.

helped develop a concept of socialism which eventually took root in the Labour Party.

Secondly, any examination of the idealists' ideological views must offer some definition for liberalism as well as socialism. Typically the two traditions are regarded, in Freeden's words, as 'compact, hermetically sealed' packages.[23] To call the idealists' ideology ethical socialism might appear to be collapsing different and possibly distinct ideologies into one incoherent mass of beliefs. There are two responses to this criticism. On the one hand, at the time there was often little difference between progressive liberalism and ethical socialist beliefs. As Freeden argues: '[t]o compartmentalize ideologies into prefabricated categories called socialism or liberalism flies in the face of the evidence. Ideologies are modular structures, frequently exhibiting a highly fluid morphology'.[24] It should therefore come as no surprise that certain ideologies were able to span both traditions. The best study of the development of socialist ideas from Radical beginnings is found in the work of Willard Wolfe.[25] However Wolfe fails to grasp the importance of idealism in this respect. For him, the liberal ideas that have been influential on socialism are basically the essentials of old Radicalism: a natural theory of rights; utilitarianism; individualism; and opposition to large-scale government.[26] While Wolfe is correct to claim that there was a clear exchange of ideas between liberal and socialist camps at this time, I am identifying a different group of influential shared concepts: such as, the common good, positive freedom and equality of opportunity.[27]

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[23] Freeden, 'The Stranger at the Feast', p. 15.

[24] Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 88.

[25] W. Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrines 1881–1889* (New Haven, 1975). Wolfe is not the only one to identify a tradition of thought spanning liberal and socialist ideologies. Fred Inglis argues Green represents a tradition of social reformism that has been influential on socialists such as Anthony Crosland: *Radical Earnestness: English Social Theory 1880–1980* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 51, 137–141. While I agree that there are comparisons that can be made between the two, Inglis does not offer much textual evidence to support his claim, and I believe this leaves his argument vulnerable to the sort of criticism made by Freeden: 'The Stranger at the Feast', pp. 17–20.

[26] Wolfe, *From Radicalism to Socialism*, pp. 1–9.

[27] It is not possible in the thesis to deal with the question of the possible links between Green and a different Liberal who is often associated with the development of socialism: J.S. Mill. It is certainly true that there are similarities between aspects of the work of Green and Mill, but their political theories were founded on different philosophical assumptions, and I believe this explains why their conclusions were often very different. For an assessment of the connection between the two, see P.P. Nicholson, 'T.H. Green and State Action:

On the other hand, the real distinction I identify is not between different ideologies, but within them. Specifically, there were different approaches within both socialism and liberalism. The development of a New Liberalism was the rejection of much of Classical Liberal thought and marked a distinctive move towards a union between liberalism and progressive forms of socialism. And it was this Classical Liberalism and its associations with unfettered competition, abstract individualism and a *laissez-faire* state that the idealists opposed.

It is true that the definition of Classical Liberalism has itself been a matter of much recent debate. Some writers have claimed that Classical Liberalism has never existed either in theory or in practice. For example, Andrew Vincent has recently demonstrated that there was much disagreement within Classical Liberal circles about exactly how concepts such as individualism and negative liberty should be interpreted.[28] Furthermore William Lubenow argues that as a doctrine *laissez-faire* was never actually practised, as early Victorians had already established a pragmatic approach to state intervention, balancing competition and a desire to reduce suffering.[29] Whatever the truth or otherwise of these claims, it is certainly true to say that idealists and many contemporaries believed the doctrine of Classical Liberalism was real. This doctrine therefore acted as a marker for the development of their thought. For the purposes of this book I will take the essential elements of Classical Liberalism to be those that the idealists themselves identified: abstract individualism; a *laissez-faire* state; and unfettered competition.

Historical Issues

Having answered the key methodological questions around the central thesis of this book, I now deal with a second group of concerns, which I have termed 'historical issues'. These arise because, as I have already noted, there exists a large degree of scepticism about the impact of idealism and the unity within the group of idealists. Before entering into the real argument of the book, I need to justify this historical project by surveying the spirit of the age.

Liquor Legislation', *History of Political Thought,* Vol. VI No. 3 (Winter 1985), pp. 534–40; P.P. Nicholson, *The Political Philosophy of the British Idealists: Selected Studies* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. Study V; H. Holloway 'Mill and Green on the modern Welfare State', *Western Political Quarterly,* Vol. 26 (1973), pp. 550–65.

[28] A. Vincent, 'Classical Liberalism and its Crisis of Identity', *History of Political Thought,* Vol. XI No. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 143–61.

[29] W.C. Lubenow, *The Politics of Government Growth: Early Victorian Attitudes toward State Intervention* (Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 9–12, 181.

As the dominant philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century, idealism had an impact on two levels. Firstly idealism provided a useful mechanism for resolving the political, social, philosophical and religious dilemmas of the Victorian era. The unifying and synthesising nature of idealism meant that, between two apparently intractable views, the idealists could find a middle way. In the debate about the state, the idealists saw no problem in supporting both state action and individual freedom. While the religious orthodox were rejecting the discoveries of biology and geology, and scientists were abandoning the mysteries of religion, the idealists maintained a position which combined the theistic and scientific. Caught between character and circumstances, the idealists used both as the explanation for the motivation of moral beings. I argue that this vision of ideas as organic and interrelated underpinned the idealists' political thought and had significant implications for the development of socialist ideas.

But whilst the impact of idealism as a philosophy should not be underestimated, on its own it remained a largely academic notion. For the purpose of this thesis it is important that idealism was turned from a complex philosophy into a practical political doctrine. This is what T.H. Green did first in Britain, and with possibly a greater effect than any other idealist. His views had a practical impact on politicians' views of the state, the development of religious doctrines, and the social philosophy of the day.

Within Oxford, idealism was dominant for almost a generation. In the decade 1866–76, the concentration of idealists emerging from Balliol's ranks was at its greatest. Out of Balliol's doors in this period walked William Wallace, Henry Scott Holland, R.L. Nettleship, Bernard Bosanquet, C.S. Loch, A.C. Bradley, A. L. Smith, Charles Gore, D.G. Ritchie, J.H. Muirhead, Arnold Toynbee and F.C. Montague. Its influence at Oxford was not even restricted to Balliol College: F.H. Bradley at University College and Sidney Ball at Oriel were included in its supporters.[30] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Oxford's social and political groups were dominated by idealists. Numerous clubs were led or strongly influenced by idealists, such as the Oxford Charity Organization Society, the Oxford University Home Rule League, the University branch of Guild of St Matthew, the Church Reform Union, or the groups in support of Serbian students.[31]

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[30] *Manchester Guardian* (24 May 1918), p. 4.

[31] The Oxford University Home Rule League had Hobhouse as its assistant secretary and both Sidney Ball and D.G Ritchie were members: A. Kadish, *The Oxford Economists in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1982), p. 21. The Guild

Another society, the Social Science Club (SSC), which was established in the 1880s and chaired by Sidney Ball, was typical of the sort of clubs in Oxford at this time. The society was organised around discussion, speakers and academic papers, with the purpose of finding solutions to the social problems that all felt were so pressing. As Ball himself argued, the purpose of the SSC was 'not propagandism but knowledge of facts and actual difficulties. For the obstruction [to the progress towards socialism] in Oxford is not so much want of sympathy as of elementary knowledge'.[32] Membership of the SSC was particularly varied, including academics, students and members of Oxford's working classes.[33] Those regularly in attendance included Herbert Samuel, who was also Honorary Secretary, Ritchie, Hobhouse, W.S. Hewins, and C.P. Scott.[34] There was also a strong bias in the society towards speakers from the Fabian society, including Sidney Webb, William Clarke and Graham Wallas. Topics for discussion were less focused, from the Eight Hours movement and modern industrial evolution to the failure of socialist experiments in Paris during the 1848 revolution.[35]

But idealism's influence was never restricted to university lecture rooms or social clubs. I want to challenge directly the notion that idealism never 'travelled far beyond the walls of academe' or that it provided only an emotional atmosphere rather than an intellectual

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of St. Matthew had strong links with the Fabians at Oxford and Ritchie and Ball got involved there: S. Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford, 1996), p. 118; *Oxford Magazine* Vol. IX No. 6 (19 November 1890), p. 104. Ball worked with Green and Toynbee on the Church Reform Union, and he was nominated by the latter to be secretary: A. Kadish, *Apostle Arnold: The Life and Death of Arnold Toynbee 1852–1883* (Durham, NC, 1986), pp. 257 n. 51, 261 n. 50. The Oxford committee of the Serbian Church Students' Aid Council was run by Holland, with Ball Chairman of the Oxford Serbian Committee: 'Serbian Theological Students in England', *The Times Educational Supplement* (28 February 1918), p. 92; S. Ball, 'Serbians at British Schools', *The Times Educational Supplement* (24 January 1918), p. 36.

[32] Letter from Ball to Wallas, 18 September [1887?], cited in Kadish, *Oxford Economists*, p. 25.

[33] A. Kadish, *Historians, Economists, and Economic History* (London, 1989), p. 106.

[34] Viscount Samuel, *Memoirs* (London, 1945), p. 13: *Oxford Magazine* Vol. X No. 5 (18 November 1891), p. 87, Vol. VII No. 15 (6 March 1889), p. 256.

[35] Samuel, *Memoirs*, p. 13. Hewins, who was a member of the SSC, records meetings of the group in Ball's rooms with Sidney Webb as speaker on 9 February 1889, and again on 25 January 1890 to discuss the 8 hours question: Hewins Papers, Hewins pocket diary, Box 126 Section 186 p. 14. See also *Oxford Magazine*, Vol. VII No. 15 (6 March 1889), p. 256, Vol. VIII No. 11 (5 Feb 1890), p. 180, Vol. IX No 5 (12 November 1890), p. 76, Vol. X No. 5 (18 November 1891), p. 87.

justification for social reform.[36] Idealism was felt in many forms outside of Oxford, in societies and discussion groups such as the London Ethical Society and the Synthetic Society.[37] In addition, the political ideas in Green's doctrines came to underpin a wide range of national social and political movements. For example, the Christian Social Union, established by Henry Scott Holland and Charles Gore, was strongly influenced by Green and idealists like Sidney Ball.[38] Its formal aim was to raise the awareness of the Church about social questions and its work often involved discussions with leading Fabians and other socialists of the day.[39] The settlement movement is another example of a reformist organisation inspired by the ideas of Green and his colleagues.[40] Toynbee Hall, 'the existential realization of Green's philosophy' as Himmelfarb called it[41], was one settlement created in the memory of idealist Arnold Toynbee and established by the hard work of people such as Sidney Ball, who was on its first Executive Committee.[42] Idealists were also involved in the creation of other settlements, such as Maurice House.[43] Finally, the Workers' Educational Association provides a excellent paradigm case for the influence of the idealists, with figures such as Haldane, Ball, Holland and later Tawney all closely involved in its maintenance.[44]

In addition, idealism was influential beyond the group of individuals that have already been identified. As well as the key figures, civil servants like Robert Morant, Michael Sadler, Members of Parliament such as Arthur Acland, Lord Milner, Herbert Samuel and even Prime Ministers, such as Asquith, all claim to owe some debt to

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[36] Freeden, 'The Stranger at the Feast', p. 19; *The New Liberalism*, p. 17.

[37] For a history of the London Ethical Society, see I.D. MacKillop, *The British Ethical Societies* (Cambridge, 1986). The Synthetic Society was organised by Gore, with its membership including Haldane and Pringle-Pattison: J. Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament 1895–1919* (Ohio, 1986), p. 6.

[38] Rose, *Edwardian Temperament*, pp. 19, 59; Kadish, *Oxford Economists*, p. 185.

[39] *Oxford Magazine*, Vol. VIII No. 6 (20 November 1889), p. 99, Vol. VIII No. 7 (27 Nov 1889), p. 108, Vol. VIII No. 16 (12 March 1890), p. 265, Vol. IX No. 3 (29 October 1890), p. 41.

[40] G. Stephens Spinks, *Religion in Britain since 1900* (London, 1952), p. 18.

[41] G. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, p. 243.

[42] J.A.R. Pimlott, *Toynbee Hall: Fifty Years of Social Progress 1884–1934* (London, 1935), p. 33. For the links between idealists and Toynbee Hall, see R.A. Evans, 'The University and the City: the educational work of Toynbee Hall, 1884–1914', *History of Education,* Vol. 11 No. 2 (1982), pp. 114–5.

[43] See Maurice Hostel Committee Minutes 1901–7, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 4036.

[44] Graham Wallas claimed that the idealists' Oxford 'has been the intellectual mother of the Workers' Education [sic] Association': 'Oxford and English Political Thought', *The Nation,* (15 May 1915), p. 227.