

THE IDEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

W.H. Greenleaf

THE BRITISH POLITICAL TRADITION



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VOLUME I
The Rise of Collectivism

VOLUME II
The Ideological Heritage

VOLUME IIIi
A Much Governed Nation
Part One

VOLUME IIIii
A Much Governed Nation
Part Two

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Volume II

The Ideological Heritage

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1983 by Methuen and Co., Ltd.
This edition published 2003
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

© 1983 W. H. Greenleaf

Typeset in Times New Roman by Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Greenleaf, W. H.

The British Political Tradition.

Includes index

Contents: v. 1. The rise of collectivism.-v. 2. The ideological heritage.

1. Great Britain – Constitutional history.
2. Great Britain – Politics and government.
3. Great Britain – Foreign relations.
4. Political Science – Great Britain – History. I. Title.

JN118.G83 1983 320.941 82-18871.

ISBN 978-0-415-30299-9 (set)

ISBN 978-0-415-50950-3 (pod set)

ISBN 978-0-415-30301-9 (volume II)

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original book may be apparent.

THE BRITISH POLITICAL TRADITION

W.H. GREENLEAF

VOLUME TWO

THE IDEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

ROUTLEDGE

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We construct our world as an interpretation which
attempts to restore the unity which the real has lost by
our making its diversity explicit.
B. BOSANQUET, *Logic*, II.IX.1 (i)

ERRATA

p. 24 n. 19	'iv. ii, (vol. ii, p. 33)'
p. 65 n. 161	'James Mill'
p. 121 n. 97	'[1959]'
p. 133 line 22	'serfdom'
p. 192 n. 15	'A. Maude'
p. 215 line 7	'lawmaking'
p. 226 n. 140	'p. 398; . . . p. 87.'
p. 231 line 28	'an earnest'
p. 237 n. 201	'Donoughue' (also pp. 472 n. 26; 473 nn. 30, 32; 474 n. 33; 475 n. 38; and 497 n. 117)
p. 247 line 2	'unemployed.' ²³³
p. 247 line 13	'Governor-General and Viceroy'
p. 273 n. 38	' <i>Laissez Faire</i> '
p. 274 n. 44	'at p. 15.'
p. 286 n. 110	'as well his'
p. 298 line 19	'Bills'
p. 298 n. 172	'Business, Sel. Cttee Spec. Rep.,'
p. 300 line 33	'Allen'
p. 307 line 11	'formally'
p. 311 n. 8	'p. 8'
p. 320 line 8	'through price, capital'
p. 330 n. 95	' <i>Opportunity</i> (London, 1965),'
p. 331 line 32	'1957'
p. 345 n. 167	'Paperfront'
p. 415 line 18	'expression to political'
p. 419 n. 25	'five years'
p. 439 n. 104	'Dalton's'
p. 452 line 3	'exposition'
p. 502 line 14	'shall, by electing'
p. 540 line 11	'told here is'
p. 542 line 8	'sub-headings given under individual'
p. 545	sub 'Cecil, Lord Hugh', sub-headings should be indented
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ABBREVIATIONS

ASU	Anti-Socialist Union
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
BCA	British Constitution Association
BL	British Library
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CDA	Co-operative Development Agency
CPC	Conservative Political Centre
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CRD	Conservative Research Department
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Compact edition, Oxford, 1975)
H.C. Deb.	House of Commons Debates
H.L. Deb.	House of Lords Debates
HLRO	House of Lords Record Office
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IS	International Socialists
IWC	Institute for Workers' Control
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
KCA	<i>Keesing's Contemporary Archives</i>
LCC	London County Council
LPDL	Liberty and Property Defence League
NAF	National Association for Freedom
NEC	National Executive Committee
NEDC	National Economic Development Council
NGL	National Guilds League
NLF	National Liberal Federation
NU	National Union
NUA	National Unionist Association
NUCA	National Union of Conservative Associations
NUCCA	National Union of Constitutional and Conservative Associations
NUCUA	National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Compact edition, Oxford, 1971)

x Abbreviations

Parl. Deb.	Parliamentary Debates
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PRA	Personal Rights Association
PRO	Public Record Office
SDA	Social Democratic Alliance
SDF	Social Democratic Federation
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SPGB	Socialist Party of Great Britain
<i>TLS</i>	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>
<i>Trans. R. Hist. S.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
UPW	Union of Post Office Workers
USRC	Unionist Social Reform Committee

PREFACE

As explained in the General Preface (see vol. i, *The Rise of Collectivism*, p. xi), this study of the British Political Tradition will be complete in four volumes of which *The Ideological Heritage* is the second. This is an attempt to show how the basic tension between libertarianism and collectivism is reflected in arguments of state; how our three main political doctrines have both stimulated and reacted to the growth of government intervention and the proliferation of public agency; and how they have dealt with the problems of individual liberty involved. The potential range of material is vast and so the case-studies and reviews presented are merely illustrative and (in the context of the whole) might well seem arbitrarily selected. I could have chosen other (and some might say, better) instances, but I am fairly certain that those given are reasonably representative of the most important domestic aspects of the creeds concerned. As it is, a number of specific studies originally undertaken has in the end had to be excluded for reasons of space. I suppose I might have crammed in a wider exemplary array if individual topics, theories, or writers had been more cursorily examined. However, I wanted the great part of what was treated to be dealt with, not of course at definitive length or anything like it, but in a way that gave some scope for more than the baldest summary. This seemed particularly necessary in respect of works at the opposite ends of the scale of political sophistication. With the consciously theoretical polemics (like those of Spencer, Cecil, or Tawney) it is always desirable, or even necessary, to give at least some indication of the general principles intended to provide the explanatory base of the policies presented; while in the case of the brawls and altercations of the ideological hustings, it is important to show how commonplace the themes are and this can only be done at the cost of a certain amount of repetition. Naturally critics could always do it better. Well, let them do so; they will find (oddly enough) a relatively untilled field. For myself, I was always most conscious of having astonishingly few guides to follow at least at the level of generality required in this sort of survey. Perhaps the hint implied by this strange deficiency or neglect should have been taken and the task let severely alone; though this would, in turn, have left an enormous, and wholly indefensible, gap in an account purporting to cover British politics as a whole.

xii Preface

The various debts I owe are as indicated in the General Preface. But I am happy to acknowledge again the particular help given by the Nuffield Foundation; also the permission to cite from documents in the House of Lords Record Office and from Crown copyright material in the Public Record Office.

May 1982

W. H. GREENLEAF
Swansea

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PART ONE

THE RANGE OF IDEAS

We hear a great deal of Whig principles, and Tory principles, and Liberal principles, and Mr. Canning's principles; but I confess that I have never seen a definition of any of them, and cannot make to myself a clear idea of what any of them mean.

WELLINGTON, 1828, cited in P. GUEDALLA, *The Duke*, 1931; repr. 1940, p. 364

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I

DOCTRINE AND INTERPRETATION

The Spiritual . . . is the parent and first-cause of the Practical. The Spiritual everywhere originates the Practical, models it, makes it: . . . For as thought is the life-fountain and motive-soul of action, so in all regions of this human world, whatever outward thing offers itself to the eye, is merely the garment or body of a thing which already existed invisibly within; which, striving to give itself expression, has found, in the given circumstances, that it could and would express itself – so. This is everywhere true; and in these times when men's attention is directed outward rather, this deserves far more attention than it will receive. T. CARLYLE, 'Latter-Day Pamphlets', 1850, in *The Works*, 1871-4, xx. 251-2

THE CENTRALITY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

. . . speculative thought is one of the chief elements of social power. . . .

It is what men think, that determines how they act; . . .

J. S. MILL, 'Considerations on Representative Government', 1861, in *Collected Works*, 1963ff., xix. 382

THE DIALECTIC between the growing pressures of collectivism and the opposing libertarian tendency is the one supreme fact of our domestic political life as this has developed over the past century and a half. Of course, the antithesis has displayed itself over a wide range of institutional changes.¹ But it has perhaps been more starkly revealed in the conflict of doctrines, and for this reason alone it is appropriate to begin a detailed examination of our political tradition with a review of the ideological attitudes involved. Certainly no such discussion can be complete without some substantial reference to this theoretical dimension of our heritage. Yet it is curious – very strange indeed – how many works purporting to study our public affairs simply ignore completely this aspect of things. Presumably such concentration of attention is

1 See vol. iii, *A Much-Governed Nation*.

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premisses on the assumption that politics, being a very down-to-earth and practical (not to say sordid) activity, may most appropriately be regarded as a matter of power centres and pressures, manoeuvre and accommodation, institutions and procedures, ambition and advantage, and that ideas or theories as such do not have much to do with it: 'Ideas! my good sir? There is no occasion for them' as de Quincey wrote on one occasion. If they do come in, it is merely as a sort of rhetorical superficialities, a means of persuasion, justification, or concealment, 'a language of representative feelings' (to cite the opium eater again), at worst a way of sustaining interest-begotten prejudice. On these terms the role of ideas, like the utterances of Mr Daubeny in *Phineas Redux*, might be no more than to create confusion and mystery, to be purposely unintelligible.² Or, if camouflage and deliberately obfuscatory intent of this sort are not involved, sheer inadvertence may rest at the heart of the matter. As Mallock once wrote (discussing Conservative doctrine), when men are busy with details in 'the heat of party warfare' they have little time to be

mindful of what seem to be abstract principles. It is true indeed that they have to make constant appeals to these; but they make them in haste, without leisure for calm reflection, and the more eager they grow in their arguments, the less clear they grow as to the final points they are arguing for.³

Yet while all this does, of course, point to a vital aspect of the truth, completely to neglect the leading or direct part ideas may none the less play is itself intellectually shallow and may be positively misleading. For it can only result in an abstract and one-sided understanding of what politics is about. Carlyle summed up the matter aptly: 'On the whole', he wrote, 'Institutions are much; but they are not all.' And his contemporary J. S. Mill referred with justice to 'that dullest and most useless of all things, mere facts without ideas'.⁴ Indeed the omission is not simply boring or without value, it is impossible: a fact without a framework of perception to give it being, status, and meaning is quite inconceivable.

So far as the study of politics is concerned, then, the error entailed by the neglect of thought is of very considerable moment, and this in respect of both the psychology and the methodology of the matter.

In the first place ideas of one kind or another do sway or determine

2 T. de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821; Penguin, 1981), p. 79; A. Trollope, *Phineas Redux* (1874; Panther, 1973), p. 60.

3 W. H. Mallock, 'The Philosophy of Conservatism', *The Nineteenth Century*, viii (1880), p. 724.

4 T. Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' (1829), *The Works* (People's edn, 1871-4), vii. 243; J. S. Mill, 'Michelet's History of France' (1844), in *Dissertations and Discussions* (London, 1859), ii. 133.

people's actions. It is sharply evident that men and women are prepared to kill and maim for an ideological cause, a conception, for instance, of a united Ireland or of an Ulster separated from the Catholic republicanism of the south. And short of such harsh extremes, beliefs still have a substantial effect: the notion of a culturally independent Wales free of insidious Saxon influence; of a classless society; of the free enterprise economy; or any of the multitude of opinions of greater or less scope, sense, or absurdity, that appear from time to time in the political marketplace. Their very occurrence there indicates a motivating significance. In the end it might seem that, after all, politics is really about nothing but ideas: general notions of right and duty, democracy, authority, power, property, and the like; and also about specific questions in which a strong evaluative element is involved such as, What ought to be the place in our society of the trade unions and should their powers be limited in some way? What can justify a claim to 'fair shares' in the distribution of the national product? Should the object of policy be to maintain or reduce differentials of income or housing? Can special treatment in respect of, say, educational facilities be adequately vindicated? Of course, all this might be put in terms of interests, demands, and claims. But what are these even but conceptions of concern that have to be identified and substantiated? It is significant, too, that even the most blatant *realpolitik* is invariably accompanied by a case made in its behalf, a decent respect being due to the opinions of mankind in this regard. As well, if anything is to be done in politics it is invariably thought best it should be clearly conceived. So for this reason and because, too, others have to be persuaded to support the goals in question, the elaboration of some kind of social philosophy is inevitable to try to give direction and unity to the matter in hand.⁵ The significance of theoretical themes is thus substantial, not to say fundamental. Many years ago, Gustave LeBon put the nub of the matter in the broad terms appropriate to historical analysis on the grand scale and gave Marx and the sociologists of knowledge the lie direct:

Les grands bouleversements qui précèdent les changements de civilisations, semblent, au premier abord, déterminés par des transformations politiques considérables: . . . Mais une étude attentive de ces événements découvre le plus souvent, comme cause réelle, derrière leurs causes apparentes, une modification profonde dans les idées des peuples. Les véritables bouleversements historiques ne sont pas ceux qui nous étonnent par leur grandeur et leur violence. Les seuls changements importants, ceux d'où le renouvellement des civilisations découle, s'opèrent dans les opinions, les conceptions et les croyances.

5 Cf. L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (1911; Galaxy Books, 1966), pp. 30-1.

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Les événements mémorables sont les effets visibles des invisibles changements de la pensée des hommes.⁶

Then, secondly – a related issue – it is a mistake to study institutions and interests as though they are simply empirical entities. For they are nothing of the kind, as Maitland saw clearly enough when he referred to ‘those spiritual things that we call “institutions”’.⁷ A political body – such as Parliament, a ministry, a local council, or a public corporation – is a group of people acting in a certain way in accordance with given legal rules, conventions, and the like in order to achieve certain purposes. And roles, rules, and ends are not tangible things like a building or the Speaker’s wig: they are conceptions or relations. So it is into these that an institution or an interest dissolves on analysis: a point R. H. Tawney once put succinctly when he wrote that ‘social institutions are the visible expression of the scale of moral values which rules the minds of individuals’.⁸ And consider the assertion of an infinitely greater and wiser man still. In his essay on the heroic in history Thomas Carlyle wrote:

It is the *Thought* of Man . . . by which man works all things whatsoever. All that he does, and brings to pass, is the vesture of a Thought. This London City, with all its houses, palaces, steam-engines, cathedrals, and huge immeasurable traffic and tumult, what is it but a Thought, but millions of Thoughts made into One; – a huge immeasurable Spirit of a THOUGHT, embodied in brick, in iron, smoke, dust, Palaces, Parliaments, Hackney Coaches, Katherine Docks, and the rest of it! Not a brick was made but some man had to *think* of the making of that brick.

But, Carlyle adds, ‘the *purest* embodiment a Thought of men can have’ is the thing we call “bits of paper with traces of black ink”’.⁹ So it is conscious statements of ideas and assumptions to which primary attention is due and which is acknowledged in this present volume.¹⁰

6 G. LeBon *Psychologie des foules* (1895; Paris, 1912), pp. 1–2. On the practical influence of ideas, see also the famous concluding passage of J. M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936; London, 1942), pp. 383–4.

7 F. W. Maitland, ‘The Survival of Archaic Communities’, *Law Quarterly Review*, ix (1893), p. 211.

8 R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (1921; London, 1943), p. 3. Cf. B. Webb, ‘The Nature and Classification of Social Institutions’, M. Adams (ed.), *The Modern State* (London, 1933), pp. 165ff.

9 T. Carlyle, ‘On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History’ (1840), *The Works*, xiii.153, italics and capitalization in original.

10 For a recent and specific example of the analysis of complex organization – local government in Britain – in terms of radical change in the *assumptions* (in this case about levels of public expenditure) of those working in it, see J. D. Stewart, ‘From Growth to Standstill’, M. Wright (ed.), *Public Spending Decisions: Growth and Restraint in the 1970s* (London, 1980), ch. 2, esp. pp. 11–13.

Nor is a conceptual element of this sort properly to be eliminated by a naturalistic mode of enquiry. Political behaviour cannot satisfactorily or simply be seen from the outside as a series of causes and effects, stimuli and responses; for the way a person categorizes and perceives his experience has to be considered and is fundamental. Moreover where another actor is concerned recognition of intention is involved. And in each case the value or assessment that determines the response is 'structure dependent' (to use the Chomskyan jargon) and has to be attributed to a context of conventions, to a culture, tradition, or way of life, what Professor Bruner called 'the traffic rules' in force in a person's mind. In his Herbert Spencer lecture he concluded that a theory of human behaviour which 'fails to make contact with man's conceptions of his world and his way of knowing', which 'sets these aside as epiphenomena', will 'neither be an adequate theory of human behaviour nor will it prevail in common sense.'¹¹

For this kind of reasons at the least, then, consideration of thought about politics must be granted primacy of attention; and the merely institutional study come along in its proper, that is in second, place. And if it is behaviour that is examined, this is done only to establish the concepts and relationships arising from or implicit in this activity and which are the real object of scrutiny.

IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

One of the mistakes oftenest committed, and which are the sources of the greatest practical errors in human affairs, is that of supposing that the same name always stands for the same aggregation of ideas.

J. S. MILL, 'Chapters on Socialism', 1879, in *Collected Works*, 1963ff., v. 750

Of specific concern here are the forms of thought usually called ideologies or doctrines. I use these terms very loosely and simply, indeed synonymously, to mean a set of beliefs about political and social arrangements and intended primarily to justify action in respect to this environment, though the fullest statements of this sort additionally constitute a kind of explanation about the growth and structure of that context. Socialism is one such confluence of ideas and policies; Conservatism and Liberalism are others, though these do not, of course, complete the list of exemplary possibilities. But analysis of these entities is not necessarily a straightforward, and may not be an easy, matter, various problems of identification and interpretation being involved.

An initial point is that any political doctrine is not a simple concept: it

11 J. Bruner, 'Psychology and the Image of Man', *TLS* (17 December 1976), pp. 1590, 1591.

8 The Ideological Heritage

is a collection of aims, arguments, and assumptions. There are the purposes of some kind, a case or conclusion it is sought to establish; there are the techniques of argument used to sustain these ends and to make them as persuasive as possible; and there is the set of beliefs which makes the purpose credible and the arguments cogent and which constitutes the basis of the political views expounded.¹² Of course, these elements may not be kept wholly separate or be well worked-out but in principle they must be present or implicit. And each may be – almost certainly will be – a complex phenomenon in itself manifesting a notable variety of internal differences. For one thing there may be real or apparent disagreement between co-ideologists about the precise nature of the objectives to be sought, the means of their achievement, or the priority of their pursuit. Later chapters will show, for example, the great diversity of emphasis that can exist within a given ideology about the role and office of the state. Again the ideas concerned may be expressed in quite different languages of explanation, justification, and persuasion. The disparate idioms and concepts of religion, the moral life, natural science, the law, history, philosophy, and economics are alike commonly deployed and in no uniform fashion: fellow partisans can urge similar goals in very varied ways, and ideological opponents may make use of the same sort of argumentation drawn from a common world of discourse. Furthermore the level of delivery achieved will fluctuate markedly for not all doctrine is articulated on the same plane of expression. In a moment of frankness Campbell-Bannerman once referred to the rubbish for the groundlings that so often emanates from party platforms. Of the same style is the ephemeral effusion of the party diatribist with his chain of bald assertions. Here one is obviously dealing with the least sophisticated levels of ideological discourse, with (in Orwell's pejorative terms)

. . . a clique of self-advancers,
Trained in the tactics of the pamphleteer,
Where slogans serve for thoughts and sneers for answers. . . .¹³

But all this – the inevitable result of living and working not *in Platonis republica* but *in Romuli faece* – is properly distinguished from a more considered justification of position in which there is reference to, or examination of, some kind of general principles drawn perhaps from conventional norms of political behaviour and assessment, from ethical

12 Cf. my *Order, Empiricism and Politics: Two Traditions of English Political Thought, 1500–1700* (London, 1964), pp. 1–2.

13 G. Orwell, 'As One Non-Combatant to Another', in P. Larkin (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* (1973; London, 1978), p. 517. Campbell-Bannerman's sentiment is expressed in a letter to Garnet Wolseley (1 August 1886), Wolseley papers, cited in J. Wilson, *CB: a Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1973), p. 99.

criteria, or whatever it might be.¹⁴ And this in turn has to be differentiated from the mature exploration of a political creed deliberately set within the framework of a philosophy, a view of things as a whole. And at any level the case can be put with more or less skill and sophistication, systematically or otherwise.

In addition the emphasis of a political doctrine is always changing, continually being modified. Its exposition is subject not only to the spell of intellectual fashion, the current conventions of political debate, and the varied possibilities of different modes of expression, it is also, to an important extent, at the mercy of circumstance, the demands of a particular situation, and all sorts of external pressures. For it may (as already intimated) constitute a kind of rhetoric swayed by all the winds of obliquity to which the hustings are open. Its language is used as a means of action: with Cobden, said John Morley, a speech was a way of accomplishing something and always referred to practical performance of some kind.¹⁵ In political life how else should it be? But this does mean that the performer in that arena may use arguments and ideas that are more indicative of what he thinks will sway his audience than of what he himself deems convincing; and different contexts of blandishment and artifice may suggest a medley of themes not wholly conformable to one another. Unlike Goldsmith's village preacher, the politician will necessarily and properly practise 'to fawn, or seek for power, By doctrines fashion'd to the varying hour'; and Chesterton echoed this expectation when he referred to 'all those delicate difficulties, known to politicians, which beset the public defence of a doctrine which one heartily disbelieves.'¹⁶ Dicey noticed these considerations, too, when he wrote that

all kind of preaching, whether religious, moral or political, has a certain tendency to produce cant or unreality, because the preacher, in order to bring his doctrine home to his hearers, rouses himself into a state of strong feeling and emphasizes his beliefs more than perhaps represents his ordinary or average feeling. . . .

It is, he added, an oratorical technique like talking more loudly than usual to a large audience and involves 'no real falsity'.¹⁷ So when in 1829

14 Cf. the Marxist distinction between 'agitation' and 'propaganda' as described in R. Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London, 1979), pp. 44-6.

15 J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1881), ii. 371.

16 O. Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village* (1770), ll. 145-6; G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; London, 1920), p. 8. See also G. Watson, *The English Ideology: Studies in the Language of Victorian Politics* (London, 1973), esp. ch. 7 'Political Oratory'.

17 Dicey to Miss A. Fry (29 November 1905), cited in R. S. Rait (ed.), *Memorials of Albert Venn Dicey Being Chiefly Letters and Diaries* (London, 1925), pp. 191-2. Cf.

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O'Connell avowed on the hustings that he was an ardent Benthamite much of what he said 'must be set off as characteristic blarney'.¹⁸ Similarly when Joseph Chamberlain (in the course of expounding his 'unauthorized programme') invoked the necessity of pursuing the greatest happiness of the mass of the people, it might reasonably be asked whether this was to him just a persuasive phrase employed as a device of platform rhetoric merely or whether it involved at least some genuine commitment to the utilitarian paraphernalia even if this was not formally expounded (as, given the occasion, it could hardly be).¹⁹ Again when Lord Rosebery in 1900-1 espoused the cause of national efficiency, did he really accept the bundle of ideas usually involved, or was it to him no more than a popular and timely rallying cry with which to appeal to patriotic men of all parties and of none to give their support to his case for a coalition government?²⁰ Of little significance perhaps in studying the thought of the consciously intellectual political writer, because he will invariably try to explore his presuppositions, this difficulty or consideration arises progressively in examining the active participant in political life. Yet, of course, the review of any ideology is quite incomplete unless this equivocal and perhaps ephemeral dimension of expression is explored. What Cobbett called 'the principles of Pratt, the principles of Yorke' – referring to two lesser lights of the main parties of his day – have to be treated as well as those of 'the divinised heroes' of each faction.²¹ Moreover in examining political ideologies we are dealing not simply with a finished array of ideas but with notions that grow and develop over a period of time; and for this reason alone it would be appropriate to expect a contrariety of themes to emerge. Consequently violence is done to the real diversity of ideas, manner, and attainment involved if these are pressed into the nice conformity of an unchanging system. What is contained within a designated ideological pale is thus not uniform or static and of it can be said what the old Staffordshire poet wrote of fortune: it is always 'full of fresh varietie' and 'Constant in

the comments on Crossman's inconsistency of argument and his unpredictable loyalties, J. Morgan (ed.), *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (London, 1981), intro., pp. 11, 12; also Crossman's own remarks about Aneurin Bevan's 'somersaults', *ibid.*, pp. 613-14, 615-16, 629.

18 O. MacDonagh, *Early Victorian Government, 1830-1870* (London, 1977), p. 35.

19 J. L. Garvin and J. Amery, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1932-69), ii. 67, 77. Cf. the case of Lord R. Churchill discussed at pp. 219-20 below.

20 G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: a Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Oxford, 1971), ch. iv. And for the use of cries such as 'natural selection' and 'the greatest happiness' in the late nineteenth-century debate over school development, see G. Sutherland, *Elementary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1971), p. 37.

21 Cf. Matthew Arnold, 'The Future of Liberalism', *The Nineteenth Century*, viii (1880), p. 1.

nothing but inconstancy.'²² It is not (in a word) monomorphous: it does not – and cannot be expected to – exhibit similarity of form throughout its successive stages of development, its different channels of expression, or in its varying aspects. It is, in the old phrase, a unity in diversity. And the problem of describing and analysing any ideology is one of giving some proper indication of all the varied, even antithetical, aspects of its being and of their connexion.

However, faced with all such dissimilarities of stance and expression, the student of these matters may feel impelled to seek stability amid the chaos by looking for some constant core of ideas which underlies the different versions of theory and policy as, for instance, when L. T. Hobhouse, reviewing the great change in Liberal doctrine that occurred round about the turn of the century, wrote of reaching nevertheless 'the centre and heart', 'the essentials', of the ideology.²³ When achieved, this essence would be taken to constitute a standard of credal identity and purity. Really what is involved in this exercise is a sort of Platonic attempt to transcend the contingency and vagaries of the world of ideological Becoming and to attain the immutable certainty of real Being manifested in the unchanging doctrinal Idea.

But such an enterprise is not without difficulties, problems that, in the end, must lead to a complete rejection of the procedure in view however reasonable it may appear at first sight and however subtle its application. For the truth is that, not only does it prove impossible in practice to achieve an adequate or agreed reduction, any attempt to do so is bound to be misleading. It is found that by no means all the exemplars of the doctrine concerned represent the components of its supposed core in the same way or combination or to the same extent; that it is not easy to reduce to such a denominator the rich variety of personalities and ideas in evidence: too much refuses to fit into the neat pattern of a delimited and unchanging system. Of course, the ideological imprimatur could be refused to those who fail to conform to the established stereotype. But this procedure is all too likely to violate common political usage and to this extent at least to be unsatisfactory. And it would necessarily involve the exaggeration of those aspects of the doctrine insisted on to the damage or denial of other equally important facets of the whole. It is the depiction of a caricature rather than a satisfactory characterization of the ideology in question or, in H. G. Wells's image, like showing a man's skeleton for his portrait.²⁴ Moreover even if it were feasible to separate

22 Richard Barnfield, 'The Shepherd's Content' (1594), *Poems, 1594–1598*, ed. Arber (Westminster, 1896), p.27.

23 L. T. Hobhouse *Liberalism* (1911; Galaxy Books, 1966), p.29.

24 H. G. Wells, *The Research Magnificent* (London, 1915), pp.3–4. Cf. the remarks in Arnold Bennett's letter to H. G. Wells (24 August 1903), in Harris Wilson (ed.), *Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells: a Record of a Personal and a Literary Friendship* (London, 1960), pp.95–6.

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agreed basic themes of a general kind from other, less noumenal, elements in the doctrine, these could not entail any necessary consequences as to issues of detailed policy or action so that in their application (if not in their theoretical statement) a wide diversity of programmatic possibilities must be reintroduced rather than transcended. Consequently, as one modern commentator observed about the doctrine he was studying, 'there is no formula of faith which can be labeled Liberalism at all times and all places.'²⁵ Conservatives, of course, have frequently prided themselves on not possessing a systematic theory of things so they at least might be expected to say 'Amen' to the point here suggested; and the variety of Socialisms available is notorious.

Yet though it is thus inappropriate to look for a crucial nucleus of doctrine, the attempt continues to be made. For instance, in a recent, most subtle analysis of this problem, Dr B. C. Parekh discussed how an ideology may be identified and urged (what is undoubtedly true) that too little attention has been given to examining the logical structure of political doctrines. He went on to suggest, unexceptionably, that an ideology should be seen as having a tripartite structure. First there was 'a more or less well articulated metaphysic, a general view of the universe' intended to provide justification for the second element, 'a specific conception of man and society'; then finally there was 'a programmatic content' to indicate how this conception might be realized.²⁶ It was conceded that the interrelationship of these three components is necessarily contingent; but it was equally urged most strongly that the real identity of an ideology lies in the unchanging view of man and society, the second or central aspect of the threefold structure which thus constitutes its essential character and what distinguishes it from other political creeds. There is here, therefore, a central core of ideas, a set of values and principles, which can be found in all true exponents of the ideology concerned (though they are not exclusively so found).²⁷

The argument is succinctly and cogently put though I think it does not in the end save the case. Of course, it starts by allowing enormous divergence of emphasis and exposition in accepting the possibility of a substantial heterogeneity of metaphysic and programme. But, as well, it is by no means apparent why the focal themes envisaged should themselves be beyond the likelihood of substantial variety, for the supposedly central and common principles will consist of general terms and so can encompass a range of meaning, their cash value being by no means constant. They could cover a very wide diversity of emphasis

25 T. P. Neill, *The Rise and Decline of Liberalism* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1953), p.12.

26 B. C. Parekh (ed.), *The Concept of Socialism* (London, 1975), p.2.

27 *ibid.*, pp.2-6, 11-12. Cf. D. J. Manning, *Liberalism* (London, 1976), pp.13, 143, on the three principles which, he believes, characterize the Liberal tradition as a whole; and *ibid.*, ch. 6 for important qualifications.

indeed. In the case in question, Socialism, the principles concerned are said to embrace: a belief in mankind's inherent sociality, a feeling of human brotherhood, that abilities and powers are a social trust; the view that what is fundamental is not self-help or self-interest but a sense of social responsibility for general well-being; the idea that (in consequence) co-operation must replace competition in all areas of life especially the economic; and finally the opinion that planning is crucial as the expression of man's rational and conscious control of his resources and destiny. Yet might there not be different interpretations of the meaning of 'sociality', 'human brotherhood', or 'social trust'? What is entailed by a sense of 'social responsibility' or 'co-operation'? What exactly is involved in a rejection of 'competition'? What is 'rationality' and how and why is this uniquely associated in this context with 'planning'? And so on. The truth is that a substantial dissimilarity will re-emerge within the presumed core ideas, even were it feasible to separate this essence from other aspects of ideological expression. In addition there is a wealth of implication hidden in the admission that the central principles are not exclusive to Socialist writers. This concession invites recognition of what may be called ideological overlap and the impossibility of distinguishing unambiguously the supposed centre of one doctrine from that of another. To steal a phrase, there may (in this world of ideas) be 'underlying affinities' between the apparently contrasting: the kind of resemblance perhaps that, to take but one example, led the young Aldous Huxley to observe similarities in the opinions of two politicians so incongruously different as George Lansbury and Lord Henry Bentinck.²⁸ And indeed the notion of man and society which Dr Parekh supposes to be essentially Socialist is not uncharacteristic of some Liberal and Conservative writers. It might be said that the latter are, therefore, really Socialists; but what sort of definition is it that secures ideological purity by setting aside personal conviction and common usage? No: to imagine that there is any necessary common denominator to varied forms of ideological expression is an illusion and a mistake. Students of the structure or logical form of political doctrines should not, therefore, try to sustain the possibility of monoideism, that is, the dominance of some intellectual quiddity. Instead they must reckon on and accept multiformity, overlap, divergence, inconsistency, obliquity, and change as features intrinsic to the subject-matter. The basic rule of analysis must be that any ideology is essentially ambivalent in the assumptions, arguments, and aims it

²⁸ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, p. 31; Huxley's letter (November 1917), cited in S. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: a Biography* (London, 1973-4), i. 90. Cf. the many similarities between the Socialism of R. MacDonald and Tawney (on the one hand) and the new Liberalism of Hobhouse or Hobson (on the other), as observed by P. F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Trans. R. Hist. S.*, 5s., xxiv (1974), pp. 171-2.

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encompasses. Yet for some reason or other political observers can writhe with anguish or surprise when they note inter-party plagiarism or similarities of viewpoint. One example is a comment in *The Times* that it is remarkable how some observations made by a Labour Cabinet minister 'could easily be voiced in the context of Conservative philosophy'.²⁹ Similarly a recent academic work on right-wing attitudes and beliefs in British politics, while accepting there is a varied range of opinions involved in Conservative thought and policy, nevertheless insists (somewhat contradictorily) on trying to establish the nuclear elements of a Conservative approach.³⁰ The myth of ideological purity dies hard. But (it must be repeated) there is no single correct version of any political creed and to assume that there is is a bad and a fundamental error of analysis.

There is in Scottish law a procedure called multiplepoinding which is a form of action by the holder of a fund or property to which there are several claimants and which requires the parties concerned to appear and settle their claims in court. The student of an ideology is rather like such a proprietor. He is, as it were, the possessor of intellectual assets for the ownership of which there is a number of suppliants: for naturally the doctrine appears in many guises and exponents of each assert dominion over the entire estate. Indeed all of the litigants in such an interpleading suit have a legitimate claim and each may reasonably distrain upon some part of their multiform ideological heritage. But none of them may impound it entire. And perhaps the only means whereby their mad jostling for doctrinal place may be confined within due limits is to impose on the omnium gatherum the ordered restraint of academic scrutiny. The justice of the student of these matters consists in trying to represent freely every kind of partiality and to do this by giving different views neither a halter nor a halo but simply a voice.³¹ Of course, in the process the ideological expression may well lose something of its immediacy of impact and power to move. But perhaps this is no great sacrifice; and at least what remains should have the virtues of catholicity and quiet understanding and show everything in due condition and proportion: 'Ther were neuer such a company of bedlames driuin wnto ane poyndfauld as wee.'³²

Instead of nuclear designation, therefore, it is necessary to establish

²⁹ R. Butt, 'Shoring Up the Labour Party', *The Times* (23 February 1978), p.16.

³⁰ N. Nugent and R. King (eds), *The British Right: Conservative and Right Wing Politics in Britain* (Farnborough, Hants., 1977), esp. pp. 5-6, 8-10, 13-14, 22-3.

³¹ Cf. G. K. Chesterton's interesting remarks in *Robert Browning* (1903; London, 1919), pp. 170-5.

³² The rueful but apt comment of Captain John Spottiswoode reflecting, under sentence of death, on the traitorous associates he had had, cited in J. Maidment (ed.), *The Spottiswoode Miscellany* (Edinburgh, 1844-5), i. 211.

the character of an ideology by, first, admitting the inevitability of diversity and change and then, secondly, by delimiting this variety through observation of the extreme and opposing manifestations between which the point of view appears to be confined. An ideology is identified by describing the cardinal antitheses of the political disposition it reveals. For Liberalism extends from Spencer and Cobden on the one hand to Lloyd George and the doctrines of the 'Yellow Book' on the other; the concept of Conservatism has to include not only Disraeli and Macmillan but also Lord Hugh Cecil and Sir Keith Joseph, the 'Drys' as well as the 'Wets'; while Socialism has to be seen encompassing the collectivism of the Fabians and the contrasting ideas of the Guildsmen, the Christian moralism of Tawney, and the Trotskyite Marxism of the 'Militant Tendency'. Nor are these major doctrines distinct in the sense of not having common ground.

Fortunately an overall framework of consideration is to hand in the perspective provided by the rise of collectivism and its opposition to libertarianism. The range of reaction to be discerned within each ideology reflects this basic tension of our age. Each doctrine thus nurtures two conflicting or contrasting modes of thought; and the history of modern ideological opinion in Britain is generally 'an oscillation between these extremes.'³³ The following chapters are intended to illustrate this contention. The coverage is not, of course, anything like complete but nor (I like to think) is it untypical of the different forms and levels of ideological thinking involved. And I should perhaps add that no sort of priority is intended in the order of presentation of these doctrines. Because Socialism is reviewed last does not mean I wish to imply it is in any sense a completion or culmination of ideological development: though this is not to deny that it is Socialism of the statist kind which with its 'importunate chink' has for long made the most noise in the political field of modern Britain.

Let us, then, with Malvolio, read politic authors and our tongues tang arguments of state.

33 The phrase cited is J. S. Mill's, taken from a comment on a key intellectual antithesis of his own day, 'Coleridge' (1840), *Collected Works*, ed. J. M. Robson *et al.* (London, 1963ff.), x. 124.

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PART TWO

THE AMBIVALENCE OF LIBERALISM

. . . we fell into a discussion of the changing qualities of Liberalism.
H. G. WELLS, *The New Machiavelli*, 1911, repr. 1946, p.200

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INTRODUCTORY THEMES

No man can be a collectivist alone or an individualist alone. He must be both. . . .

W. S. CHURCHILL, *The People's Rights*, 1909, repr. 1970, p.153

IN HAROLD LASKI's view Liberalism has been, over the last four centuries, 'the outstanding doctrine of Western Civilization'.¹ One sees what he had in mind and, of course, he used the term in a special way; but unless carefully qualified the judgement may be rather misleading not only in terms of the time-scale envisaged but in respect of not giving due acknowledgement to the range of meaning which can be attached to the word. The epithet 'liberal' was indeed in general if ambiguous use for a long while before it acquired a strictly political sense. Thus it might refer approvingly to a certain manner or habit of thought especially that indicative of a spirit of spacious tolerance or generosity, as in the phrases 'a liberal offer' or 'a liberal education'. Chesterton suggested that a liberal-minded man was one who, if he could stop forever the mouths of all the deceivers of mankind simply by waving his hand in a dark room, would not do so.² At the same time, by a kind of linguistic inversion, the word could also express opprobrium suggesting licence, lack of restraint, or some unseemly indulgence, as when Desdemona refers to Iago as 'a most profane and liberal counsellor'.³ A tendency to be captious might also be implied, reproach on this account being not unrelated to that sense of critical open-mindedness invariably taken to be crucial to the liberal attitude. For the stance entailed an inclination to commit for trial any institution or belief brought before it, a willingness to question anything, especially the merely orthodox or conventional, and to assess it only on its apparent merits. All sorts of radical possibilities were thereby

1 H. J. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism: an Essay in Interpretation* (1936; Unwin Books, 1962), p. 5.

2 G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (1903; London, 1919), pp.86-7.

3 *Othello*, II. i. 163-4. Similarly there is a reference in *Much Ado About Nothing*, IV. i. 92-3, to 'a liberal villain' as a ruffian prone to secret and vile encounters; cf. *Hamlet*, IV. vii. 171. There is a like ambivalence about the cognate term 'liberty' which can mean both freedom and licentiousness.

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intimated; and this perhaps negative or sceptical aspect of the liberal point of view was indeed long dominant. In this sense there was always (in G. M. Young's phrase) 'something rather explosive' about it.⁴

However, a specific political meaning appears not to have emerged in this country until the early nineteenth century. 'Liberal' seems first to have been current as an adjective in France after the Revolution to refer to open and unstinting principles of politics and was certainly used in this sense by Napoleon himself on the occasion of his *coup d'état* on 18 Brumaire. Subsequently it indicated those who supported the radical spirit of the day. However the substantive (with a definite party or factional reference) did not appear for another decade and in another country: it was employed in Cadiz towards the end of 1810 or the beginning of the following year to describe, probably pejoratively, those members of the Cortes and their supporters who were in favour of liberty of the press and more widely of the proposed anti-clerical constitution modelled on the revolutionary French system of 1791. From the outset, therefore, the association of the political term with reformist views, popular liberty, and the overthrow of established privilege was clear. It was probably introduced into the British political vocabulary a few years later and (as in Spain) was initially used in a polemical way, in this case to refer to the more extreme members of the Whig opposition. The Spanish or French form of the word was usually employed to suggest an exotic and undesirable connexion with extreme revolutionary tendencies. But because of the conventionally laudatory associations of the term (and the existence of another word 'radical' to refer to the less desirable propensity) the description was adopted without much difficulty or rancour by those thus denominated; and in due course (by the late 1840s) it had become the official designation of an entire party.⁵

Naturally, although the name was new in this sense, the constellation of political themes presented was not. The ideology was woven of diverse but related strands of thought, many of them long-standing and drawn from a number of sources and contexts.⁶ Nor could Liberalism be a static

4 Cf. L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (1911; Galaxy Books, 1966), p.14; H. G. Wells, 'The Past and the Great State', Lady Warwick *et al.*, *The Great State: Essays in Construction* (London, 1912), p.14. For G. M. Young's remark, see his 'The Liberal Mind in Victorian England', H. Grisewood *et al.*, *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: an Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (1949; Dutton, 1966), p.335.

5 The best account of the origins of the term is J. Marichal, 'España y las raíces semánticas del liberalismo', *Cuadernos* (Congreso por la libertad de la cultura; March–April 1955), pp. 53–60. See also: OED; T. P. Neill, *The Rise and Decline of Liberalism* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1953), p.7; and E. Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (1913–46; 2nd trans. edn, London, 1961), ii. 81 and n. 3; *ibid.*, iii. 180 n. 1. Examples of the early use of the word are cited in Ramsay Muir's article on the 'Liberal Party' in *Ency. Brit.*, 14th edn (Chicago, 1947), xiii.999.

6 There is a most admirable survey of these matters with ample exemplification in E. K.

and unchanging doctrine. And in fact it has in this country passed through two main phases in a development which nicely reflects the antithesis between libertarianism and collectivism, between two contrasting views of freedom, personal fulfilment, and the proper place of government in society.

The first of these phases, during which the so-called 'classical' form of the doctrine prevailed, is one easily compatible with the conventional significance of the term liberal as already described. It clave to a view of the individual as ideally subject to as little external restraint as possible whether this derived from custom or from the overt action of public authority in either church or state. It is a creed distrustful of the powers of government because their use might become arbitrary, partial, or overweening; and to prevent the preponderance of privilege and sinister interest, substantial change is thus urged in the law governing traditional and established forms in both the secular and the ecclesiastical spheres. It is believed, too, that progress and the general welfare depend substantially on private initiative. To achieve the optimum in this regard, while it may be necessary for the state to create a framework of security within which commercial and other energies should find their full release, in economic life generally the principle is to sustain so far as possible free trade at home and abroad. Thus the main purpose of classical Liberalism was the emancipation of the individual from public control; and the corollary of this basic tenet was a repudiation of any authority, person, procedure, or institution which seemed to obstruct its implementation.⁷

This position was supported by various sorts of argument which may briefly be exemplified as follows.

There was first a certain picture of British constitutional development, a view that underlay much of the so-called Whig interpretation of history. It rested on the belief that the political system of this country derived from the institutions of our Saxon or Gothic ancestors, a mixed polity in which the power of the executive was always strictly limited. It was held, too, that in all essentials this ancient constitution of the realm had continued in being ever since those distant days surviving even the impact of the Norman Conquest. It had also withstood the assaults of unscrupulous monarchs (such as King John and Charles I) who had wished to undermine it in the interests of a royalist predominance; and its principles and liberties had from time to time been reasserted as in

Bramsted and K. J. Melhuish (eds), *Western Liberalism: a History in Documents from Locke to Croce* (London, 1978). A brief official acknowledgement of these eclectic origins is to be found in the report of the Liberal Party Commission, *Liberals Look Ahead* (London, n.d. [1969]), p. 9.

⁷ Cf. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, p. 22; and his 'The Decline of Liberalism' (1940), pp. 7-10, in *Hobhouse Memorial Lectures, 1930-1940* (London, 1948).

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Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and, climactically, the revolution settlement of the late seventeenth century. In the following years these ideas survived strongly in certain circles and were still being deployed after 1800 to sustain hostility to the Crown and its executive government and to support reform proposals of various kinds designed to complete, extend, or restore traditional freedoms.⁸ When in the crisis of 1848 *The Economist* wrote 'Thank God we are Saxons!' it was this array of political ideas and virtues that was invoked; as similarly in 1855 when the doctrine of the ancient constitution was used in its propaganda by the Administrative Reform Association.⁹

Two of the themes crucial to this point of view – the concept of a fundamental constitutional law and a stress on the traditional rights of Englishmen – often assumed a more general form, appearing (and this indicates the second type of argument) in the abstract guise of a doctrine of natural law and natural rights. For the modern world John Locke presented a paradigmatic statement of this theory in his second treatise *Of Civil Government*. Drawing on the Stoic-medieval notion of the eternal law of God which was also the law of reason, a theme powerfully exemplified by the works of St Thomas Aquinas and of the Elizabethan divine Richard Hooker, Locke postulated such a 'law of nature' as the main source of moral guidance in respect of human affairs. It was the foundation of man's rights to life, liberty, and property for the better protection of which civil society and government were created. It followed that the executive arm was neither absolute in its power nor unlimited in its scope but restricted to those purposes concerning the maintenance of these basic claims for which it was originally established; and if it transgressed these limits or frustrated those ends it might properly be cashiered. Locke's analysis of these ideas is not indeed without ambiguity or hiatus; but through his substantial influence they

8 For the genesis and development of these notions, see Professor J. G. A. Pocock's definitive *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1957); also his 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: a Problem in the History of Ideas' (1960), in *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1972), ch. 6. For the later manifestations, see also S. Klinger, *The Goths in England: a Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 101–6; C. Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), *passim*; J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), *passim*.

9 *The Economist* (28 April 1848), p. 447, cited in Halévy, *op. cit.*, iv. 244 n. 3; O. Anderson, 'The Janus Face of Mid-Nineteenth-Century English Radicalism: The Administrative Reform Association of 1855', *Victorian Studies*, viii (1964–5), pp. 232, 240.

were majestically transmitted to later generations, joining in this regard those classical authorities (such as Cicero, Livy, and Tacitus) who had always been associated with hostility to absolute or arbitrary power.¹⁰ The idea of natural rights as a limitation on established authority in society was indeed powerfully reinforced by such pamphleteers as Paine and by manifestoes like the US Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.¹¹ Thus in an extreme statement of the case Paine argued that government was a negative thing, required simply because man was capable of being wicked or vicious: its existence was 'the badge of lost innocence', and, even in its best form, it was merely 'a necessary evil'.¹² Consequently it must always be confined, as by the forms of a written constitution designed, like society itself, to sustain the equal rights of man against its depredations.¹³

Thirdly, a concept of natural or divine harmony was involved. It was widely believed that, in economic affairs in particular, optimum progress could be achieved only by letting rational individuals pursue their own ends as untrammelled as may be by official rules and interference. After all they knew their own interests better than anyone else and would seek them more ardently and skilfully. Moreover intervention entailed the disutilities of taxation and compulsion.¹⁴ A related consideration was simply the manifest corruption and incompetence of the public agencies of the day: if they did intervene it would only be to some venal or partisan end or with inefficient and untoward result. But in terms of theoretical rationalization the most important factor in this context was that it was broadly accepted that God had so arranged the world that the best collective advantage was attained by leaving people alone, allowing their purposes and initiatives to proceed under the benevolent guidance of the tutelary deity or natural order. Shaw later summarized the idea by saying that in England Liberalism conquered the traditional autocracy 'and then left industry to make what it could of the new political conditions by the unregulated action of competition between individuals.' 'Briefly', he went on, 'the Liberal Plan was to cut off the King's head, and leave the

¹⁰ See Z. S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans: an Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth Century England* (1945; 2nd edn, [Evanston, Ill.], 1962), for an account of these influences. Halévy, *op. cit.*, iv.209, suggests their effect on two outstanding Liberal figures of the mid-century, Lord John Russell and Macaulay.

¹¹ For such subsequent statements, see Bramsted and Melhuish *op. cit.*, pp.9-12, 146-62.

¹² T. Paine, *Common Sense* (1776; Penguin, 1976), p.65.

¹³ T. Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (1791-2; Thinker's Library, 1944), pp.29ff.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Viner, 'Bentham and J. S. Mill: the Utilitarian Background', *American Economic Review*, xxxix (1949), p.370.

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rest to Nature, which was supposed to gravitate towards economic harmonies when not restrained by tyrannical governments.¹⁵

There were many expressions of these topics or themes during the eighteenth century, that of Adam Smith being the most well-known. His statement in various works was intended to constitute a complete system of thought, the understanding of economic life and the proper office of government being an important part of this whole.¹⁶ So far as human conduct is concerned Smith's assumption is a kind of self-preference principle. As he said in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, every man is by nature 'first and principally recommended to his own care'.¹⁷ But it so happens, fortunately for mankind, that as the individual thus follows his own purposes he is under the protection of a 'great, benevolent, and all-wise Being' who sustains in the universe at all times 'the greatest possible quantity of happiness'.¹⁸ In so satisfying his own wants and seeking his own gain, a man is thus 'led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention'.¹⁹ And Smith is clear that the general interest is thus more effectively achieved, albeit indirectly, than by its specific pursuit. 'I have never', he says sarcastically, 'known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.'²⁰ Given, then, Smith's belief in a natural order of this kind, watched over by a power of beneficent omnipotence, it is hardly surprising that he was so often an opponent of state regulation or provision. He held that, save in the rare case of something that cannot be secured by the market mechanism – such as defence, justice, the provision of roads, bridges, and canals – intervention can only cause harm.

The uniform, constant and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which public and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived, is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things towards improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government, and of the greatest errors of administration.²¹

Of course, the belief in what S. G. Checkland once called 'the optimism

15 G. B. Shaw *et al.*, *Fabian Essays* (1889; Jubilee edn, London, 1950), 'Preface to the 1908 Reprint', p. xxix.

16 For a short, recent account of the overall design, see B. A. Reisman, *Adam Smith's Sociological Economics* (London, 1976).

17 A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; ed. Bohn, London, 1853), vi.ii.1, p. 321.

18 *ibid.*, vi.ii.3, p. 345.

19 A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776; World's Classics, 1904), iv.ii, p. 33). Cf. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, iv.i.1, pp. 264–5.

20 Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, *ibid.*

21 *ibid.*, ii.iii (vol. i, p. 383).

of automatic equilibrium' was never complete.²² As was noted in the previous volume, each economist in the so-called classical school made various qualifications to the pure doctrine; and they differed among themselves about its application.²³ As for Smith in particular, Harold Laski once commented that there was much less of *laissez faire* in *The Wealth of Nations* than one was tempted to assume. Nevertheless progress and achievement were, by and large, attributed in the Smithian mode just described to the unhindered activity of self-seeking individuals: as Keynes once put it, 'free competition built London.'²⁴ This belief that collective interference would inhibit the natural process of self-regulation and so progress itself is reflected in the growing use of the term *laissez faire* after it first appeared in 1751. As intimated, the association was not wholly accurate or just, but the idea became fixed in the general mind as a cardinal truth of classical political economy and for a long time was accepted as such by Liberals.²⁵ Bentham urged this view in what became typical terms:

The practical questions, therefore, are . . . how far the end in view is best promoted by individuals acting for themselves? and in what cases these ends may be promoted by the hands of government? . . .

With the view of causing an increase to take place in the mass of national wealth, or with a view to increase of the means either of subsistence or enjoyment, without some special reason, the general rule is, that nothing ought to be done or attempted by government. The motto, or watchword of government, on these occasions, ought to be – *Be quiet*. . . . The art, therefore, is reduced within a small compass The request which agriculture, manufactures, and commerce present to governments, is modest and reasonable as that which Diogenes made to Alexander: '*Stand out of my sunshine*.'²⁶

After the great symbolic victory of Corn Law repeal in 1846, *laissez faire* assumed for Liberals (as with others) the form almost of a religion, what Halévy christened 'Nonconformist Neo-Liberalism'.²⁷ The domestic ideal was non-intervention, the international goal an extending free trade. Above all perhaps the development of mutual commercial dependence would (it was hoped) eliminate even war itself so that in this

22 S. G. Checkland, 'The Ricardo Years', *TLS* (27 May 1977), p.654.

23 See *The Rise of Collectivism*, pp.124–7.

24 Laski to Holmes (25 February 1922), M. de W. Howe (ed.), *Holmes-Laski Letters: the Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Harold J. Laski, 1916–1935* (London, 1953), i. 407; J. M. Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire* (London, 1926), p. 14.

25 Keynes, *op. cit.*, pp.18–19, 21–5.

26 J. Bentham, 'A Manual of Political Economy' (1798), J. Bowring (ed.), *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* (1838–43; New York, 1962), iii. 33–5, italics in original.

27 Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, iv.184.

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respect the major coercive function of government would wither away. The poetic vision of Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* reflected this Liberal dream of universal peace, when

. . . the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.²⁸

The metaphysical idea of a harmonious order was invariably based on some sort of religious belief which was, therefore, yet another strand in the formation of Liberalism. Of particular significance (as Halévy's phrase, just cited, implied) were the various forms of Protestant dissent. Of course, it is not suggested that no Liberals were Anglicans or Catholics; nor that the Nonconformist propensity was not associated with other political ideologies. It is simply that historically there is a strong association between Liberalism in politics, with its air of toleration and its defence of the civil rights of the individual against the various forms of authority, and the beliefs and moral rigour of the Dissenting churches and sects, in particular their assertion of liberty of conscience and of individual responsibility. Liberals, wrote Gilbert Murray, 'are politically the descendants of the Puritans' for they combine (just as Milton did) 'the search for righteousness and the belief in freedom'; while Chesterton (an ardent Catholic) noted the same characteristic when he referred to Liberalism's 'zest for heresies' and its tendency to carry religious toleration to the point of eccentricity.²⁹ The specific link with radicalism was simply that opposition to Anglican dominance meant also a repudiation of that political and social framework by which the religious establishment was sustained. Herbert Spencer for one took great pride in linking his own anti-authoritarian Liberalism with the pronounced Nonconformity of his ancestors; and it is clear in his case how the religious opinions are related to his hostility to the aristocracy and landed gentry. T. H. Green similarly saw in Liberalism the fulfilment and correction of Puritanism.³⁰ And, on the practical rather than the theoretical level of politics, an example of the connexion is that the traditional strength of Liberalism in Wales was closely linked to a popular repudiation of what was seen as an alien ascendancy in both church and state.

Yet as time wore on free trade and limited government seemed panaceas all too defective, inappropriate to the growing mass of problems being faced in economic and social life. During the late nineteenth

²⁸ Lord Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall', *The Works* (London, 1894), p. 101.

²⁹ G. Murray, 'What Liberalism Stands For', H. L. Nathan and H. H. Williams (eds), *Liberal Points of View* (London, 1927), p. 21; Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, pp. 86, 91, 93.

³⁰ H. Spencer, *An Autobiography* (London, 1904), i. 6-8, 11-13, 41-2; M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and his Age* (London, 1964), p. 41.

century Liberalism began to reveal a change in the hitherto dominant emphasis of its ideas, in particular with respect to the role of political agencies. The state (itself, of course, by then much changed) was increasingly seen less as a necessary evil and more as a vital instrument of reform. Liberalism was still formally concerned with countering tyranny and maintaining freedom but the specific objects involved were being radically transformed. The external restraints which had now to be removed were not the cramping effects of arbitrary authority and outmoded privilege but those conditions which inhibited the full life for the mass of citizens, the poverty and distress brought about by unregulated economic growth and technological change. To the underprivileged majority living in a hostile world, 'peace, retrenchment, and reform' might seem a very empty slogan. Writing in 1881, John Morley said that his biography of Richard Cobden (which came out in that year) appeared at a time when there was a glaring tendency to subject the principles for which Cobden had stood to hostile criticism. A few years later Sidney Webb could refer to the anti-statist views of some Liberals as 'old-fashioned'. And Dicey noted that by the turn of the century Liberalism had 'learned to place no small confidence in the beneficent effects of State control', adding that 'this trust, whether well-founded or not, is utterly foreign to the liberalism of 1832.' And (a final instance) in 1909, Winston Churchill, then a Liberal Cabinet minister, said, 'The whole tendency of civilization is . . . towards the multiplication of the collective functions of society. The ever growing complications of civilization create for us new services which have to be undertaken by the State, and create for us an expansion of the existing services.' And he clearly wanted to see government embark on further novel and adventurous experiments of the same sort.³¹

In the view of this new Liberalism, therefore, government had not merely to provide a framework of legal order and security within which individual advantage might be pursued and the general interest emerge; it had not only to prevent abuse of power by 'sinister interests', to constrain political privilege, and the like. It had to do something more than create the negative conditions for the liberation of individualist forces, to go beyond this to a more positive view of freedom involving increased intervention on its part in the details of social and economic life. It had to ensure that people have (in T. H. Green's phrase) 'a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or

31 J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1881), vol. i, p. [vii]; S. Webb, 'The Basis of Socialism: Historic', Shaw *et al.*, *Fabian Essays*, p. 49; A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law & Public Opinion in England during the Nineteenth Century* (1905; 2nd edn, London, 1920), p. 39; W. S. Churchill, *The People's Rights* (1909; London, 1970), p. 154.

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enjoying'.³² Society had the duty to see, that is, that its citizens were in a social and economic position to take advantage of the opportunities for fulfilment that a reformed political and legal order provided. As D. L. George put it in 1908, the new Liberalism must devote its endeavour to removing 'the immediate causes of discontent'.³³

It is a nice question whether this shift of emphasis involves a betrayal of classical Liberalism or whether it is a wider application and development of its themes. What is witnessed in this change? A decline into statism or a deeper understanding of the needs of individuality? Herbert Spencer contrasted, of course, genuine Liberalism which seeks to extend men's freedom, and its other, perverted, form which, while giving men 'nominal liberties in the shape of votes (which are but a means to an end) is busily decreasing their liberties, both by the multiplication of restraints and commands, and by taking away larger parts of their incomes to be spent not as they individually like, but as public officials like'.³⁴ And in a characteristic passage he contrasted the new statist tendency (which, in his opinion, could only lead to disaster) with the older notions (which were the sole recipe for progress and success):

The average legislator, equally with the average citizen, has no faith whatever in the beneficent working of social forces, notwithstanding the almost infinite illustrations of this beneficent working. He persists in thinking of a society as a manufacture and not as a growth: blind to the fact that the vast and complex organization by which its life is carried on, has resulted from the spontaneous co-operations of men pursuing their private ends. Though, when he asks how the surface of the Earth has been cleared and made fertile, how towns have grown up, how manufactures of all kinds have arisen, how the arts have been developed, how knowledge has been accumulated, how literature has been produced, he is forced to recognize the fact that none of these are of governmental origin, but have many of them suffered from governmental obstruction; yet, ignoring all this, he assumes that if a good is to be achieved or an evil prevented, Parliament must be invoked. He has unlimited faith in the agency which has achieved multitudinous failures, and has no faith in the agency which has achieved multitudinous successes.³⁵

32 T. H. Green, 'Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' (1881), *Works*, ed. Nettleship (London, 1885-8), iii. 371.

33 Speech at Swansea (1 October 1908), in *Better Times* (1910), cited in A. Bullock and M. Shock (eds), *The Liberal Tradition from Fox to Keynes* (1956; Oxford, 1967), p. 212.

34 Spencer, *An Autobiography*, i. 421.

35 Spencer, *The Principles of Ethics* (London, 1892-3), ii. 247.

It was indeed true, as Halévy later observed though less pejoratively, that the new democratic Liberalism of the twentieth century had little in common with the Liberalism of Gladstone.³⁶ Of course, this antithesis in Liberal ideology has long been remarked. For instance, in 1940 in his Hobhouse Memorial Lecture on the decline of Liberalism, Laski commented on the extraordinary complexity of the doctrine's roots and suggested that what he saw as its contemporary eclipse was associated with just such an internal contradiction.³⁷ This had indeed been present from the beginning, being signalled, for instance, by the apparently inconsistent emphasis in the thought of John Locke between the rights and freedom of the individual on the one hand and the emphasis on the other that he gives to the consideration of the 'public good' which might legitimately override the more specific claims and interests.³⁸

What immediately follows is a more or less detailed review within this general context of the major aspects or forms of Liberalism so that its full range of character may be discerned. Richard Cobden and Herbert Spencer are taken to embody two versions of extreme classical Liberalism; John Stuart Mill and T. H. Green are then discussed as showing (in their varied ways) the beginning of the shift in Liberal thought from individuality to collectivism; finally the end of *laissez faire* is signalled by reference to a range of subsequent and more recent Liberal utterance of one kind or another.

36 Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, vi.287.

37 Laski, 'The Decline of Liberalism', loc. cit., pp.6-7.

38 See e.g. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), II.3, 37, 131; and on the problem of consent involved, *ibid.*, II.95, 138, 140, 193. For commentary cf. W. Kendall, *John Locke and the Doctrine of Majority-Rule* (1941; 2nd edn, Urbana, Ill., 1959).

COBDEN AND SPENCER VERSUS THE STATE

... there has always been an element in the Liberal party which has regarded with deep-rooted suspicion every measure involving State interference with industry as an invasion of liberty. This element has sometimes been very powerful. . . .

R. MUIR, *Politics and Progress*, 1923, p. 99

PERFECT LIBERTY

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure,
Still to ourselves in every place consign'd,
Our own felicity we make or find: . . .

O. GOLDSMITH, 'The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society', 1765, *ad fin.*

IN THE speech he made in 1847 on Fielden's Factories Bill, Joseph Hume was characteristically blunt. The principles of political economy, he said, were quite clear that 'Government should interfere as little as possible' and that such action was never justified except 'to remove prohibitions and protections.' If the best interests of the community were to be properly regarded, Parliament had no right to meddle 'either with labour or capital'. For his part, he concluded, 'he was prepared to sweep away every restriction that now remained, and to let one general and uniform principle of perfect liberty pervade our legislation.'¹ It is a view (or vision) that was widely shared and (as later chapters of this volume will show) not only by Liberals. Two among a multitude of possible instances must suffice to confirm the stance involved. Consider, for example, the conclusion of Macaulay's essay of 1830 on Southey's *Colloquies*. It is true that Macaulay was not always so unambiguous but he does in this context offer a very clear statement of the libertarian attitude; and it is one which was much quoted, later in the century, by supporters of *laissez faire*. Southey had defended, in Tory terms, the patriarchal role of government and this Macaulay repudiates:

¹ 89 Parl. Deb. 3s., 10 February 1847, cols 1074-80.

It is not by the intermeddling of Mr. Southey's idol, the omniscient and omnipotent State, but by the prudence and energy of the people, that England has hitherto been carried forward in civilisation; and it is to the same prudence and the same energy that we now look with comfort and good hope. Our rulers will best promote the improvement of the nation by strictly confining themselves to their own legitimate duties, by leaving capital to find its most lucrative course, commodities their fair price, industry and intelligence their natural reward, idleness and folly their natural punishment, by maintaining peace, by defending property, by diminishing the price of law, and by observing strict economy in every department of the state. Let the Government do this: the People will assuredly do the rest.²

The second example is the famous opening passage of *Self-Help*, the most celebrated work of 'that modern Plutarch, Mr. Samuel Smiles'.³ It is a typical and one of the most well-known reflections of the major themes at issue:

'Heaven helps those who help themselves' is a well-trying maxim, embodying in a small compass the results of vast human experience. The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual; and, exhibited in the lives of many, it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects, but help from within invariably invigorates. Whatever is done *for* men or classes, to a certain extent takes away the stimulus and necessity of doing for themselves; and where men are subjected to over-guidance or over-government, the inevitable tendency is to render them comparatively helpless.

Even the best institutions can give to man no active help [and] the value of legislation as an agent in human advancement has usually been much over-estimated. . . . Moreover, it is every day becoming more clearly understood, that the function of Government is negative and restrictive, rather than positive and active; being resolvable, principally into protection – protection of life, liberty, and property. . . .

National progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness, and

² Lord Macaulay, *Essays* (London, 1889), p.122. For the contrasting emphasis, see Macaulay's speech on the Ten Hours Bill in 1846 in which he stressed that while intervention could never be accepted for economic reasons it might be very necessary on social grounds, *The Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches* (London, 1889), pp.719–20.

³ The description is Shaw's: see G. B. Shaw *et al.*, *Fabian Essays* (1889; Jubilee edn, London, 1950), p.9.

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vice. . . . The highest patriotism and philanthropy consist, not so much in altering laws and modifying institutions, as in helping and stimulating men to elevate and improve themselves by their own free and independent individual action.⁴

As with Macaulay, Smiles was nevertheless prepared to accept state action in certain fields such as public health.⁵ He was aware, too, of the baser aspects of economic competition; and he always stressed duty, character, and knowledge rather than mere material success.⁶ But the emphasis of opinions like those cited is clear and it entailed a hostility to over-legislation, officialism, the growth of public expenditure, militancy in external policy, and all the other bugbears of those who adhered to the classical Liberal doctrine.

The notion of limited and economical government was a commonplace ideal, then. However, I must here be content with giving a detailed account of only a couple of the many Liberal statements of the creed, though these are in fact most important exemplars and show, in their different form and manner, a good part of what the stance involved. One instance is Richard Cobden, a markedly independent and influential politician, who has reasonably been described as the real author of the middle-class Liberalism which dominated Britain for more than a generation.⁷ The other is Herbert Spencer, a writer whose work constituted not simply a very full and extreme version of this kind of Liberalism but also (as I have come to believe) one of the ablest intellectual achievements in British thought and letters of the Victorian age. The chapter concludes with a fragmentary survey of some of the subsequent expressions of Liberal opposition to the collectivist state.

COBDEN AND THE MANCHESTER SCHOOL

. . . the unquestionably greatest Englishman whom the present century has produced. . . .

J. TOULMIN SMITH's tribute in *The Parliamentary Remembrancer*, vii, 1865, p.61

In Smiles's *Self-Help* there are only a couple of brief references to Richard Cobden but his early career embodies many of the qualities that book

4 S. Smiles, *Self-Help with Illustrations of Conduct and Perserverance* (1859; 4th edn, London, 1908), pp.1-3, italics in original.

5 S. Smiles, *Thrift* (1875; London, 1897), pp.337ff.

6 Smiles, *Self-Help*, preface, pp.vii-viii. Cf. K. Fielden, 'Samuel Smiles and Self-Help', *Victorian Studies*, xii (1968-9), pp.155-76. For the general background to Smiles's ideas, see J. F. C. Harrison, 'The Victorian Gospel of Success', *ibid.*, i (1957-8), pp.155-64.

7 W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (1910-20; rev. edn, London, 1929), i.503.

was written to praise. Born in Sussex in 1804 into an impoverished family of yeomen farmers and starting thus from pretty well nothing, he built up in time a prosperous textile firm so that to a notable degree he was the completely self-made man basing success on his energy and confidence in his own abilities. He was, too, largely self-educated: he learned little at school but much more later from very wide reading and the lessons of his own experience and travels. And quite early he established a consistent attitude to affairs and realized he had done so, with the result that he was easily able subsequently to absorb within this intellectual and moral framework all the facts and ideas he later acquired and with it to confront the problems he faced in both economic and political life. By his death in 1865 he had become, on one modern judgement, 'the complete democratic Radical'.⁸ And if his main concern was with the international harmony to be anticipated from the spread of free trade and disarmament, he did not hesitate to draw out the domestic implications of his opinions. These made him a powerful and influential exponent of a point of view hostile to extensive state intervention in economic and social affairs. A later Liberal (and then Unionist) politician, Joseph Chamberlain, whose ideas differed markedly from those of Cobden, summed up the latter's beliefs in this way:

The doctrine of Mr. Cobden was a consistent doctrine. His view was that there should be no interference by the State in our domestic concerns. He believed that individuals should be left to themselves to make the best of their abilities and circumstances, and that there should be no attempt to equalise the conditions of life and happiness. To him, accordingly, protection of labour was quite as bad as protection of trade. To him a trade union was worse than a landlord. To him all factory legislation was as bad as the institution of tariffs.⁹

What follows now is an indication of the way in which Cobden worked out and justified this position and then, more briefly, an account of the so-called Manchester School of thought that emerged on a similar basis.

The principles of free exchange

Cobden came from traditional rural England and always said that, had there been any choice, he would have preferred its 'pastoral charms' to the environment of cotton-mill and manufactory; and indeed after the triumph of the anti-Corn Law campaign in 1846 he returned to live in the Sussex countryside. But for the nation as a whole he believed there was no option: the great fact of the age was the development and spread of

8 D. Read, *Cobden and Bright: a Victorian Political Partnership* (London, 1967), p. ix.

9 C. W. Boyd (ed.), *Mr. Chamberlain's Speeches* (London, 1914), ii. 258-9.

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industrialism and the question to be faced was both how to mitigate its evil consequences and to take advantage of the prosperity and opportunities for progress which it offered.¹⁰ In this unprecedented situation, brought about by the growth of towns and factories, conventional views and policies were inappropriate and new criteria of action were demanded: 'at certain periods in the history of a nation, it becomes necessary to review its principles of domestic policy, for the purpose of adapting the government to the changing and improving condition of its people'.¹¹ So Cobden sought to establish a range of consistent general themes appropriate to the new circumstances and issues faced.

In examining these beliefs it is important to recognize that Cobden had deep religious feelings which underpinned his political and economic arguments and infused them with a high degree of moral zeal. His biographer John Morley (perhaps because he was himself an agnostic) did not adequately credit the importance of this kind of motivation and he has been followed by others in this; thus more recently Dr Kitson Clark seemed to feel that Cobden's religious fervour was perhaps a rather contrived aspect of his political propaganda.¹² But this judgement is both odd and unfair, one which gives too little weight to views so often expressed in both public and private life and which were so clearly compatible with the common predisposition of the day. There can be no doubt, for instance, that in Cobden's opinion protective legislation (such as that establishing duties on corn and other imports) was not simply inexpedient but sinful and contrary to God's Law and Order.¹³ The Corn Laws imposed an unjust tax on the poor, they unnaturally limited the supply of food, and they prevented the nations of the world from developing through free exchange the particular resources with which God through nature had endowed them. Sir Louis Mallet, who worked as Cobden's assistant during the French treaty negotiations in 1860 and who knew him well, stressed his master's belief in the moral as well as the empirical truth of economic laws and his understanding that the advance of civilization depended on a dutiful obedience to their dictates.¹⁴ In a speech he made in 1843 Cobden denied the Corn Laws could bring any prosperity to either agriculture or industry because they were 'unnatural'

10 F. W. Chesson (ed.), *The Political Writings of Richard Cobden* (1867; 4th edn, London, 1903), i. 108-9.

11 *ibid.*, i. 122.

12 J. Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London, 1881); G. K. Clark, 'The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Politics of the Forties', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, iv (1951-2), pp. 5-6.

13 Cf. Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-2.

14 Sir Louis Mallet, 'The Political Opinions of Richard Cobden', *North British Review* (1867) repr. in *Political Writings*, vol. i, p. xxiv. And see the justification in religious terms of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest in Cobden's *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy*, ed. J. Bright and J. E. T. Rogers (London, 1878), p. 198.

and interfered 'with the wisdom of the Divine Providence' substituting 'the law of wicked men for the law of nature'.¹⁵ There is no evidence that such sentiments were mere platform religiosity; and much indeed to the contrary. In addition probably the main secular inspiration of Cobden's ideas about universal moral law was a book called *The Constitution of Man* published in 1828. Its author was George Combe, the phrenologist and writer on ethics, whom Cobden knew well: they corresponded on these matters for many years. The main theme of Combe's extremely popular work was that natural laws reflect a benevolent design and embody a retributive power; the importance of self-help was stressed, as was the need for personal and social flexibility of response; and the pseudo-scientific basis of the analysis provided an important link between conventional religious morality and the idea of material improvement. These notions, so hostile to human legislation, influenced a range of opinion and were an important part of the intellectual armament of the contemporary *avant-garde*. Nor was this sort of attitudes new, being found, for instance, in the writings of Bentham and Hodgskin.¹⁶ But, of course, presuppositions of this sort, although crucial, were liable to be cast in general and abstract terms; and they needed to be filled out with the detail of concrete argument to clarify their bearing on particular practical issues. This applicative elaboration was Cobden's task.

The case assumes that man is placed on earth by God to possess and subdue it. To fulfil this destiny, indeed to live, he must labour (though advances of science and industry may lighten the task enormously). Thus the law of labour lies at the root of human life, its rights are sacred and must be safeguarded. The argument is very like that of Locke or Adam Smith, and Cobden probably derived it from the latter. For instance, on one occasion he cited *The Wealth of Nations* to urge that

'The property which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands, and to hinder him from employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper without injury to his neighbour, is a plain violation of the most sacred property. It is a manifest encroachment upon the just liberty both of the workman and of those who might be disposed to employ him.'¹⁷

15 Speech of 28 September 1843, cited in C. R. Fay, *Life and Labour in the Nineteenth Century* (1920; 2nd edn, Cambridge, 1933), p. 153.

16 See e.g. the discussion in E. Halévy, *Thomas Hodgskin* (1903; trans. edn, London, 1956), pp. 50-5.

17 *Speeches*, p. 45 citing, accurately, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, I. x. II (World's Classics, 1904, I. 137).

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Hence the rights of labour include the right of personal liberty (which implies the free use of a man's powers and faculties) and the right of property (an inalienable title to the products of his labour in use or exchange).¹⁸ Where these rights are violated or suppressed there is injustice and inhumanity. As with Locke or Smith, the doctrine does not imply any notion of egalitarian levelling but it does embrace the idea that some inequalities that actually exist are unnecessary or unnatural. These arise where laws or social arrangements infringe the basic rights of possession and freedom. Cobden particularized all this by an attack on exclusiveness, monopoly, and restriction, wherever and in whatever form this occurred, as being incompatible with a genuine moral liberty. Specifically he was hostile to merely traditional privilege, to what he often described as the 'feudal' elements in government and economic life. Instead of rule by an aristocracy there should be the 'antagonist principle' of constitutionalism; and in place of restriction there should be 'Free Exchange', a principle through which the apparently divergent interests of individuals and nations become identified in accordance with the dictates of morality. Under this aegis peaceful rivalry would prove to be the way to progress and civilization. 'The more I reflect on such matters', he wrote to John Bright during the Crimean War, 'the greater importance do I attach to that principle of competition which God has set up in this wicked world as the silent arbiter of our fate, rewarding the industrious, frugal, and honest, and punishing . . . the wasteful and the wicked.' He added that 'this law operates in nations as well as individuals.'¹⁹

In one way Cobden was always concerned above all with relations between the peoples of the world. The doctrine of free trade was in this respect crucial to him both as means to and portent of international peace. And he denied that his assertion of this principle was merely a matter of the economic advantages it would bring; its basic appeal lay clearly in the ethical progress that would ensue from its recognition and implementation:

. . . I have been accused of looking too much to material interests. Nevertheless I can say that I have taken as large and great a view of the effects of this mighty principle as ever did any man who dreamt over it in his own study. I believe that the physical gain will be the smallest gain to humanity from the success of this principle. I look farther; I see in the Free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe, – drawing men together,

¹⁸ *Speeches*, p.181; Mallett, in *Political Writings*, vol.i., pp.xxvi–xxvii. Cf. the passage cited in Read, *op. cit.*, pp.24–5; also E. Wallace, 'The Political Ideas of the Manchester School', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, xxix (1959–60), p.126.

¹⁹ Cited in Read, *op. cit.*, p.114.

thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace.²⁰

Of course, with the advantages of hindsight Cobden might be accused of naïvety, of failing to recognize that increased commercial intercourse on the international scale could lead rather to trade rivalry and thus to war than to the outcome he envisaged: but this is not to deny his fervour and sincerity.²¹

Within this moral framework he made a detailed economic case for the abolition of protective tariffs, greater international specialization, and so on. It was not the most complete case of the kind possible – that of his French associate and disciple, Frédéric Bastiat, was, for example, notably more systematic.²² But in his fashion Cobden expounded most effectively the belief that free trade would stimulate commerce and domestic industry alike, lower the cost of living, reduce unemployment, free resources for further development, and in many other ways bring economic and social improvement. There would also be specific political advantages not least in respect of the limitation of armaments and so the reduction of military expenditure. Cobden was never a pacifist and accepted that appropriate measures of defence were proper. But equally he never condoned adventurism in foreign policy, the pursuit of the balance of power, or the maintenance of the force such objectives might entail; and he completely rejected colonialism as involving an artificial system of trade that had to be expensively protected and sustained. Commerce, he believed, was ‘the grand panacea’ that would inoculate all the nations of the world against these follies.²³ Referring in one place to ‘the desire and the motive for large and mighty empires’, ‘for gigantic armies and great navies’, indeed for all ‘those materials which are used for the destruction of life and the desolation of the rewards of labour’, he said he believed that ‘such things will cease to be necessary, or to be used, when man becomes one family, and freely exchanges the fruits of his labour with his brother man.’²⁴ These diplomatic and military changes would themselves have a substantial domestic effect: the reduction that would become possible in taxation and the national debt would sustain a more useful deployment of resources and stimulate economic effort. This in turn would create a framework of affairs in which a lasting improvement might prove possible in respect of such matters as

20 *Speeches*, p. 187. Cf. the similar passages, *ibid.*, pp. 201, 234, and those cited in Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 146.

21 Cf. the comments in G. L. Dickinson, *Letters from John Chinaman* (London, 1901), p. 15.

22 e.g. Bastiat’s *Economic Sophisms* (1845, 1848; trans. edn, New York, 1964).

23 *Political Writings*, i. 36.

24 *Speeches*, p. 187. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 343; also Cobden’s first pamphlet, *England, Ireland and America* (1835) on the need to cut back military expenditure.

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education, temperance, criminal reform, health care, and the like. All this was of major significance in the decline of militancy.²⁵

This, then, is the broad context of ideas and policies in which Cobden's views about specifically domestic issues are to be seen, in particular his attack on economic and political privilege and his general opinion of government intervention. For he was the foe of both the traditional aristocracy and gentry and the paternalistic attitude with which they approached contemporary problems.

He was, of course, a leading figure in the campaign against the Corn Laws, a commitment which revealed not merely the class interest with which he associated himself but also his stance on the broadest issues arising from the condition of England question.²⁶ He saw this legislation as constituting a restrictive economic monopoly that ought to be 'utterly extirpated' like the similar privileges of Tudor and Stuart times.²⁷ The Corn Laws dated from the Middle Ages and so were not new; but they had latterly acquired a fresh significance which is why in 1815 they had been strengthened. The contemporary growth in population meant an increased need for food; but, although domestic agricultural production was increasing, it could not meet the intensifying demand. Hence the importation of corn from abroad much of it coming at that time from Prussia and Poland. However, the landlord and farming interests dominated the unreformed House of Commons and, of course, the upper chamber as well and were thus able to resist proposals to facilitate a larger inflow of foreign produce. In times of economic stress the consequences of this restriction were particularly hard. These matters were, of course, the focus of the well-known agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League, ultimately successful in 1846 when a repealing statute was passed. As Morley said, this was not just a battle about a customs duty but rather a political and social conflict of a fundamental kind between traditional landed interests and the new industrial and commercial forces. It was even more than the symbol of a new spirit of self-assertion in a great social order: in Cobden's eyes it was a moral crusade.²⁸

Nor was the attack on the Corn Laws the only reflection of his hostility to the traditional feudal classes. He also believed that the concentration of land ownership in a few hands was one of the great evils contributing to national impoverishment, making it imperative to liberate the land by subjecting it to economic principle: there should be free trade in land as in corn. This goal could be approached, for instance, by repealing the laws which kept land off the market (those concerning entail, settlement, transfer, and so on) and in particular by abolishing the system of

25 e.g. Cobden to G. Combe (14 July 1846), cited in *Life*, i.410-11.

26 On the admission of the distinct class interest involved, see *Speeches*, p.49.

27 *ibid.*, pp.58-9.

28 *Life*, i. 141-3, 187. Cf. *ibid.*, ii.396-7, 481-2.

primogeniture.²⁹ Short of confiscation – which he never advocated – this was the only way to break up the great estates and spread ownership more widely. Similarly Cobden's activity in the campaign to secure the incorporation of Manchester is best seen as a repudiation of what he regarded as the outdated and ineffective feudal rule of the manorial Court leet.³⁰ Again, his criticism of excessive military expenditure and warlike foreign policies is a rejection of the pre-eminence in these spheres of the members and manner of the traditional aristocracy, embodied for him most of all perhaps in the person of Lord Palmerston. Like Herbert Spencer, Cobden was much concerned with the apparent development of militarism and war spirit in the 1850s which he felt could only foster aristocratic dominance.³¹ His usual attitude to the existing political system was reflected in a letter he wrote to his brother in 1838 where he referred (in almost Bentham-like phrases) to 'that great juggle of the "*English Constitution*" – a thing of monopolies, and Church-craft, and sinecures, armorial hocus-pocus, primogeniture, and Pageantry!'³²

Cobden also objected on the whole to the paternalism involved in attempts at legislative or other public supervision of economic and social life. And though his expressions of opinion about this invariably emerged as judgements on particular issues, the general theme is also clearly stated. Thus he asserted in 1846 that it was essential to leave the industry and intelligence of the people to develop as they will:

If you attempt by legislation to give any direction to trade or industry, it is a thousand to one that you are doing wrong; and if you happen to be right, it is a work of supererogation, for the parties for whom you legislate would go right without you, and better than with you.³³

And two years later, in a debate on monetary policy, he urged that 'it was a most dangerous doctrine to advance, that it was the duty of the Government, under all circumstances, to find employment for all who were able to work, and of good character.'³⁴ He believed, too, it was quite impossible effectively to control wages and prices by legislation and that the attempt to do this would only create on the one hand an artificial

²⁹ *ibid.*, ii. 215–16, 456; *Speeches*, p. 493.

³⁰ See *Speeches*, p. 348. Cobden's part in the agitation in Manchester is described in detail by J. A. Williams, *Manchester and the Manchester School, 1830–1857* (unpublished MA thesis, Leeds University, 1966), ch. xi.

³¹ e.g. *Life*, ii. 114–15, 119–20, 143, 169; *Political Writings*, *passim*. See also the passages cited in E. Hughes, 'The Development of Cobden's Economic Doctrines and His Methods of Propaganda: Some Unpublished Correspondence', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xxii (1938), pp. 405–6, 416–16.

³² R. Cobden to F. Cobden (11 September 1838), cited in *Life*, i. 130.

³³ *Speeches*, p. 197.

³⁴ 101 H.C. Deb. 3s., 29 August 1848, col. 649.

scarcity and on the other a 'monstrous' despotism.³⁵ Quite early in his political career he had developed his position on a cognate theme in a statement issued during his unsuccessful campaign to get elected at Stockport in 1837. A Ten Hour Bill was then under discussion and Cobden published a letter on factory legislation in which he rejected regulation of labour as he did that of markets and commodities. He freely conceded that Parliament might, on medical and physical grounds, forbid the employment in factories of children of thirteen years and under and also regulate the hours of labour of young persons, and he later widened this category, again on medical grounds, to include women workers. But as a matter of principle he believed the 'legislature of a free country' ought not to interfere in such a feudal manner with 'the freedom of adult labour'.³⁶ The improvement of the condition of the working classes, in itself highly desirable, must come not from the law but from their own efforts and self-reliance: 'I say to them, *Look not to Parliament, look only to yourselves.*'³⁷ There might, therefore, be some humanitarian grounds for public action here but only to a limited extent. Cobden was also opposed – it was the subject, in fact, of his last speech in Parliament in July 1864 – to the government undertaking the manufacture of things for its own use that might be purchased elsewhere. He was most perturbed that, while for twenty years the country had in commercial policy 'been acting on the principle of unrestricted competition, believing that that is the only way to secure excellence and stability of production' and while private industry was more than equal to the demands of government, the departments had none the less 'been allowed to raise up these gigantic Government monopolies'. He had in mind in particular the array of ordnance factories that had developed since the Crimean War and the deficient arms situation that had resulted therefrom; though he also instanced the factories set up to make military uniforms, and the royal dockyards which had been spending millions in building valueless wooden vessels.³⁸ In his view the reason these untoward consequences had occurred was the lack of effective Treasury control; and it was no answer to suggest that the legislature should try to supervise the administration more, and in more detail, for instance by committee investigation. The only proper course was to backtrack from the false path which had come to be followed and to adhere scrupulously to the principle that 'the Government should not be allowed to manufacture for itself any article which can be obtained from private producers in a competitive market'.³⁹ And he put his finger on a point that has worried

35 *Speeches*, pp. 11–13, 60–1, 70–1, 176–7; Read, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–5.

36 Cobden to W. C. Hunt (21 October 1836), *Life*, i. 464–5.

37 *ibid.*, i. 297ff., 467, italics in original.

38 *Speeches*, pp. 294–5; for an earlier criticism of public works and manufactories, *ibid.*, pp. 429–32.

39 *ibid.*, p. 295.

anti-collectivists ever since public functions began to expand noticeably. I find, he said, that you can never make the people that run government establishments understand that the capital they handle is 'really money.' 'How should it be real money to them?' he asked: 'It costs them nothing, and, whether they make a profit or a loss, they never find their way into' bankruptcy. The reality comes home 'only to the taxpayers.'⁴⁰

Despite such firm assertions of anti-statist principle, Cobden was, however, prepared to make exceptions where there were special reasons of a technical or humanitarian kind. The former is witnessed by his approval of control of railway construction so as to enforce a standard gauge.⁴¹ The latter is evidenced not only by the example already given about the control of hours of labour but above all by his attitude to state involvement in education. He considered it so important that the people should be properly educated that he supported the establishment of a compulsory national system on a secular basis and financed through the rates. The reason was simply that, given the sectarian and other difficulties involved, the task was only likely to be accomplished in this way.⁴² But, however compelling, this view caused Cobden considerable difficulty with some of his Liberal constituents who favoured a voluntarist solution; and his colleague John Bright, who shared a dislike of state interference with manufacturing, felt it was inconsistent with the principles of individualism for Cobden to accept the idea of state aid in this sphere.⁴³

But apart from these few exceptions, important though they were, the general thrust of Cobden's case was undoubted: that government should never meddle with the productive sphere in which its servants are not competent and its organization not appropriate. And he was confident that under a system of international free trade, prosperity for all would ensue to such an extent indeed that the need or call for such government intervention must diminish.⁴⁴ Equally his continual stress on retrenchment and the reduction of state expenditure was in any case incompatible with the substantial extension of public action.

Manchesterism

It was Disraeli who in 1848 referred to supporters of Cobden's policy as 'the School of Manchester', and the title became generally associated with the belief in free trade, self-interest, and *laissez faire*. The salient

40 *ibid.*, p. 301.

41 But cf. the sarcastic account of legislative meddling in *Political Writings*, i. 93-4.

42 Morley, *Life*, i. 410; *Speeches*, pp. 589-617.

43 N. McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), pp. 97-8; E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (1938; Oxford, 1958), pp. 115-16.

44 Read, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

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doctrine was (as Benjamin Kidd saw it) that if left alone any economic or social evil would cure itself; and the term is still in use to describe such a point of view.⁴⁵ Yet there was not really a school at all in the strict sense of there being a comprehensive theory or consistent set of opinions which received authoritative statement and exemplification. As one adherent freely admitted there was 'plenty of room . . . for differences of opinion on particular questions, and for varieties of degree in the application of the general principles which were held in common.'⁴⁶ Nor is this surprising because in origin the movement consisted of a number of different groups which were united (and then not in every respect) only on the issue of repealing the Corn Laws. This apart, the people concerned had indeed different economic, social, and intellectual interests. There were the businessmen, the humanitarians, those concerned with the prospects of international peace, the economists, the middle-class radicals, and no doubt others: a diverse collection of individuals which, concentrating on the particular political goal, saw no reason on the whole to go beyond the practical campaign to sound a general *laissez faire* note.⁴⁷ At the same time a good number of free-traders undoubtedly shared a rather negative attitude to substantive public action: they were not necessarily hostile to it as such but thought that any particular proposal for intervention had to have a very strong case made out before it could be approved. As Goldwin Smith put it, in one of the best brief summaries of what Manchesterism involved, 'It thought that man having, after centuries of struggle, shaken himself free from the paternal control of autocrats or aristocracy, and got a chance of self-development, ought to be allowed to make what he could of that chance, and not thrust again under a despotic yoke', even if this be that of 'a paternal Government'. As to the specific limits of state action, he went on,

I am not aware that the Manchester School ever attempted exactly to fix them. They must be fixed largely by circumstance, and by the stage of social progress at which any community has arrived. . . . What

45 97 H.C. Deb. 3s., 10 March 1848, col. 417; B. Kidd, *Principles of Western Civilisation: A Sociological Study* (1902; rev. edn, London, 1908), p. 405. For a recent usage, see the reference of Professor M. Friedman, specifically citing Cobden and Bright, in P. H. Douglas and J. E. Powell, *How Big Should Government Be?* (Washington, DC, 1968), p. 211.

46 Goldwin Smith, 'The Manchester School', *The Contemporary Review*, lxxvii (1895), p. 379.

47 W. D. Grampp, *The Manchester School of Economics* (London, 1960), ch. 1. F. W. Hirst (ed.), *Free Trade and Other Fundamental Doctrines of the Manchester School* . . . (London, 1903), intro., pp. xi-xiii. On the varied motives involved, see Grampp, op. cit., ch. 5. The leading members of the School have been listed as Cobden, Bright, W. J. Fox, T. Milner Gibson, L. Mallet, T. B. Potter, Goldwin Smith, H. Ashworth, and A. Prentice: see E. Wallace, 'The Political Ideas of the Manchester School', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, xxix (1959-60), pp. 124-5.

services Government should undertake, whether it should own the railways as well as the high roads, and the telegraph as well as the post; whether it should build in private yards or in yards of its own, is not a question of principle; nor am I aware that the Manchester School ever enunciated any dogma on the subject, though no doubt it always leant decidedly in favour of the spontaneous agencies against the official.

In these terms state assistance for education or in respect of sanitary regulation and other major questions of public health was not ruled out; though the notion that the state has in general 'rights transcending those of the individual citizen' and a 'duty to regulate our industries and lives' is treated with notable suspicion.⁴⁸ On the whole, free-traders were most likely to stress urgently and continuously the need for economy in public spending which certainly implied a diffidence about government intervention.⁴⁹ And it is manifestly true that the subsequent reputation of the School was closely associated with the doctrine of economic freedom and the limited state. Bright at least was consistent in his attitude to state interference: his slogan was always 'Hands Off!' whether the question was one of factory legislation, fixing wages, or temperance reform.⁵⁰

Manchesterism was undoubtedly widespread, the 'philosophy in office' so to say. Its ideas were ventilated in Parliament and were extremely important in official circles.⁵¹ One instance to hand must suffice as specific illustration. Sir Charles Trevelyan was assistant secretary at (that is, permanent head of) the Treasury from 1840 to 1859. He conducted a considerable correspondence much of which survives in his letter-books; and the material concerning the Irish and Scottish famines is particularly relevant here.⁵² A great deal of it consists of what Mrs Hart describes as 'long sermons . . . to government officials and organizers of private charitable funds on the demoralizing effect of getting something for nothing, whether the recipient was a landlord or a peasant.' Trevelyan himself wrote: 'To give to those who are not in want

48 G. Smith, art. cit., pp. 385-6.

49 Hirst, op. cit., pp. ix, xi-xiii. The School's links with the cause of financial reform are described in J. A. Williams, op. cit., ch. ix.

50 A. Briggs, *Victorian People: a Reassessment of Persons and Themes*, 1851-67 (1954; Penguin, 1970), pp. 218-19.

51 A. J. Taylor, *Laissez-faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1972), pp. 30-1 and the references there given.

52 J. Hart, 'Sir Charles Trevelyan at the Treasury', *English Historical Review*, lxxv (1960), p. 99 from which the citations in the text are taken. See also R. D. Edwards and T. D. Williams (eds), *The Great Famine* (Dublin, 1956), esp. pp. 151, 223-4, 257-9. Mrs C. Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* (London, 1962), should only be cited after careful independent check as she was a complete stranger to the canons of exact scholarship: on which see my 'Biography and the "Amateur" Historian: Mrs. Woodham-Smith's *Florence Nightingale*', *Victorian Studies*, iii (1959-60), pp. 190-202.

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must do unmixed harm' (30 March 1847); 'The bolstering and cockering system has been carried to the utmost – people under it have grown worse rather than better' (28 May 1847); dependence on others was a 'moral disease' and must be eradicated (15 January 1848). He seems to have believed that the Irish famine was God's judgement on an undeserving and indolent people that showed too little self-reliance, His way of teaching them a lesson. It followed that the calamity 'must not be too much mitigated'. The lazy and selfish must learn the error of their ways so that they might improve and a better state of affairs arise. Trevelyan thus regarded death by starvation as a painful but necessary 'discipline' essential to secure a greater good (11 February 1848). The tone is positively Spencerian.⁵³ This is also true of his attitude to the poor and to the social system generally.⁵⁴

The flavour of the Manchester doctrine may be further indicated by reference to some expressions of opinion in the press, in particular *The Economist* under the inaugural editorship of James Wilson which, with its circulation of some 3000 copies, was 'the most important vehicle of laissez faire newspaper journalism.'⁵⁵ Wilson had been involved in the public debate about free trade and had brought out a couple of influential pamphlets in 1839 and 1840 to show that not even the landed and agricultural classes benefited from the Corn Laws. He founded *The Economist* in 1843 not as a League paper simply but to expound the 'pure principles' underlying the free-trade cause and to apply them to all the questions of the day. He had a great and basic faith in the beneficent harmony of a free economy and it was this belief that coloured his many journalistic contributions.⁵⁶ With this has to be associated, too, the rather anarchist approach to government of the Ricardian Socialist, Thomas Hodgskin, who also wrote extensively for the paper in its early days, as did Nassau Senior. Herbert Spencer was also on its staff for a few years, serving as sub-editor from 1848 to 1853; and he certainly found the editorial line very congenial even if he contributed little himself.⁵⁷

The pedigree of the paper's themes at that time was by Bastiat out of Adam Smith, the general idea being that the main social lesson to be learned was that 'our greatest social inconveniences, though caused by

53 Cf. Spencer's sentiments as indicated at pp.76–8 below.

54 Hart, art. cit., pp.109–10.

55 S. Gordon, 'The London *Economist* and the High Tide of Laissez Faire', *Journal of Political Economy*, lxxiii (1955), p.462. Cf. Grampp, op. cit., pp.13–14. The following paragraphs are largely based on Gordon, art. cit.

56 Gordon, art. cit., pp. 462–3.

57 *ibid.*, pp. 469–76; J. D. Y. Peel, *Herbert Spencer: the Evolution of a Sociologist* (London, 1971), p.77; D. Wiltshire, *The Social and Political Thought of Herbert Spencer* (Oxford, 1978), pp.47–51. Hodgskin's opinions during his time on *The Economist* are reviewed in Halévy, *Thomas Hodgskin* pp.130ff.

laws, are to be cured only by an utter absence of legislation.'⁵⁸ The approach is also reflected in the following passage:

The *Economist* has long taken in politics a very decided part, founded mainly on the principle 'that self-love and social are the same;' that private interest is the best guide to individual happiness; and that the happiness of the community is nothing but the happiness of the individuals On these principles we have contended for freedom of trade, being convinced that every merchant and dealer, capitalist and artisan, is the best judge of his own interest; and that what he finds . . . to be advantageous to him, will be for the advantage of the state. On these principles we have contended for self government On these principles we have continually insisted that *laissez faire* is the true and only policy Individuals should be freed as much as possible, and as quickly as possible, from any restraints on their actions as individuals Nature has provided for the whole order of society. She has evidently not enabled the most gigantic intellect to accomplish social order by regulations The more we give or allow scope to the free exercise of self-love, the more complete will be the social order.⁵⁹

It is not the let-alone policy which is properly to be described as anarchy but the interference of governments. This view was premeditated partly on the basis of some understanding of what was later to be developed as the theory of perfect competition; but more importantly and fundamentally there was the natural-law faith in the rational order of the universe, an order which, if allowed to prevail, would not only maximize national wealth but also ensure its optimum distribution.⁶⁰ The whole metaphysic of *laissez faire* – it was never merely an economic doctrine – was in fact well summed up in a series of five articles which *The Economist* published in 1846 dealing with the question, Who is to blame for the condition of the people? The answer given is – the people themselves: they have come to rely too much on state aid and have thus eschewed the only possible route to improvement, that is, self-help and the complete acceptance of personal responsibility. The last article sums up the matter as follows:

The state, because it assumes to provide for the welfare of the people . . . makes itself unwisely responsible for it. The collateral and permanent effects of legislation . . . are so very complicated, and very often so much more important than the direct and temporary effects, that to make good laws seems a work fit rather for God than man. One

⁵⁸ *The Economist* (20 April 1844), p.716.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, vi (22 April 1848), pp.451–2.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, vii (1 September 1849), pp.965–6.